

Batland:  
Transmedia Strategy & Videogame Spatiality in Gotham City

Kalervo A. Sinervo

A Thesis  
in  
The Humanities Program

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy (Humanities) at  
Concordia University  
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

October 2018

© Kalervo A. Sinervo, 2018

**CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY**  
**SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES**

This is to certify that the thesis prepared

By: Kalervo A. Sinervo

Entitled: Batland: Transmedia Strategy & Videogame Spatiality in Gotham City

And submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (Humanities)

Complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

Signed by the final examining committee:

\_\_\_\_\_ Chair  
Dr. Haidee Wasson

\_\_\_\_\_ External Examiner  
Dr. Benjamin Woo

\_\_\_\_\_ External to Program  
Dr. Bart Simon

\_\_\_\_\_ Examiner  
Dr. Marc Steinberg

\_\_\_\_\_ Examiner  
Dr. Mia Consalvo

\_\_\_\_\_ Thesis Supervisor  
Dr. Darren Wershler

Approved by \_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Erin Manning, Graduate Program Director

December 13, 2018

\_\_\_\_\_ Dr. André Roy, Dean of Faculty of Arts & Science

# ABSTRACT

## **Batland: Transmedia Strategy & Videogame Spatiality in Gotham City**

**Kalervo A. Sinervo, PhD**  
**Concordia University, 2018**

*Batland: Transmedia Strategy & Videogame Spatiality in Gotham City* is an interdisciplinary study of how transmedia strategy (the construction and management of massively collaborative popular culture franchises) has impacted digital gameworlds, and what these gameworlds can tell us about transmedia protocols. It builds a foundation for critiquing and reshaping transmedia theory through frameworks of media studies, game studies, and philosophies of urban geography. To elaborate this argument, the dissertation focuses on Gotham City. As the hometown of pop culture icon Batman, Gotham has appeared consistently across every conceivable medium and venue for franchising for nearly 80 years. By examining its history of representation across media (particularly videogames) and reading *Batman* media texts as an assemblage produced in a networked transmedia complex, I argue that narrative analysis must expand beyond auteur theory to account for dispersed authorship. A focus on narrative as assemblage will cut through the dialectical tension between transmedia as a narrative storytelling mode, and transmedia as a strategic and tactical business model.

The case studies comprise a historical overview of the commercial and narrative functions Gotham City serves in a range of media including comics, film, and merchandise; an examination of the *Arkham* games series' geographical qualities; and an interrogation of the licensing structures and transmedial techniques of the *Lego Batman* franchise. By examining environment and spatial considerations in the context of transmedia protocol, the thesis demonstrates that transmedia dictates the construction of fictional and virtual spaces by dealing with them in terms of the functions they serve commercially within specific media. It also introduces urban geography theory into the conversation to construct an interdisciplinary argument that transmedia cities form a key structure of interpellation in constructing consumers. In developing its larger argument, the dissertation finds that the nature of transmedia authorship demands that we reshape our consideration of the author-function in broader discourse.

For my Mother, who gave me my first comic book and, whether she'll admit it or not,  
most of what's good about me.

## Acknowledgements

There are many people to whom I owe my deepest gratitude in the formulation of this thesis. To my supervisor Darren Wershler: thank you for talking me into this, your mentorship, and telling me that you're not worried about me. To advisors Mia Consalvo and Marc Steinberg: thank you for taking a risk on me, shaping me, and patiently sitting through all my Batman explainers. To my readers Benjamin Woo and Bart Simon: thank you for the excoriating feedback. To geek girl genius and confidante Gina Hara: thank you for running the world, and for a beautiful friendship. To perennial collaborator and PhD commiserator Jaime Lee Kirtz: thank you for sharing a brain with me. To the people who sat across from me in cafés, bars, and grassy fields, especially Ida, Desirée, and Ceyda: thank you for making me accountable, and making the writing a pleasure.

To Aviva: thank you for being my big sister, and walking this path before me. To Chris: thank you for being my brother, and so gracefully fielding all those questions about labour in the games industry. To Mom: thank you for teaching me to write and love writing, and, y'know, everything. And to Isi: thank you for all of your guidance as I navigated the university system, for showing me the type of man I wanted to be, and for helping me every day to become him.

More than anyone else, to Amanda: you are a far greater editor, friend, inspiration, sounding board, booster, detractor, roommate, playthrough pal, caregiver, turkey, and partner than I could ever have imagined. I couldn't write a word of this without you. Thank you for being the person who you are, for showing me who I am, and for making this thesis a reality with me.

BATLAND was written on unceded Indigenous lands; I recognize The Kanien'kehá:ka Nation as the custodians of Tiohtiá:ke/Montreal, where I composed this work. For as long as I have called this place my home, the diverse Indigenous communities here have helped me understand our shared connections to the past, and I stand in solidarity with them in working to safeguard our present and shape our future.

# Contents

<i>List of Figures</i> .....	viii
<i>Epigraph</i> .....	1
<b>1 Introduction</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>1.1 Prologue: Origin Story</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>1.2 Overview: Batland</b> .....	<b>6</b>
1.2.1 Prompting the Interest .....	8
<b>1.3 Research Questions</b> .....	<b>13</b>
1.3.1 Mode and Business Model .....	15
1.3.2 The Argument .....	20
<b>1.4 Object and Frameworks</b> .....	<b>21</b>
1.4.1 Methodology .....	26
<b>1.5 Contributions</b> .....	<b>34</b>
<b>1.6 Outline</b> .....	<b>36</b>
1.6.1 Literature Review .....	36
1.6.2 Gotham on the Ground: History & Other Media .....	36
1.6.3 Arkham Interactive: Maps, Circulation, and the <i>Arkham</i> Videogame Series .....	37
1.6.4 Brickwork Bat: Lego Batman and the Licensing Network .....	37
1.6.5 Conclusion .....	38
<b>2 Literature Review</b> .....	<b>39</b>
<b>2.1 Introduction</b> .....	<b>39</b>
<b>2.2 Framing Transmedia</b> .....	<b>40</b>
<b>2.3 Framing Batman</b> .....	<b>58</b>
<b>2.4 Media Theory &amp; Game Studies</b> .....	<b>62</b>
2.4.1 Laying out Space in Transmedia and Games .....	69
<b>2.5 Real-World Spatial Practice</b> .....	<b>76</b>
<b>2.6 Concepts from Michel de Certeau</b> .....	<b>84</b>
2.6.1 Mediating the City .....	90
<b>2.7 Conclusion: Everything New is Old Again</b> .....	<b>92</b>
<b>3 Gotham on the Ground: History &amp; Other Media</b> .....	<b>96</b>
<b>3.1 Introduction: <i>Dark Knight</i> Déjà Vu</b> .....	<b>96</b>
<b>3.2 Gotham’s Genesis</b> .....	<b>103</b>
<b>3.3 Drawing the Map</b> .....	<b>113</b>
<b>3.4 Serialising the World</b> .....	<b>121</b>
<b>3.5 Gotham on Television and in Feature Film</b> .....	<b>127</b>
<b>3.6 Transmedia and the Toyetic</b> .....	<b>139</b>
<b>3.7 Designing the “Nolanverse”</b> .....	<b>146</b>
<b>3.8 Conclusion</b> .....	<b>151</b>

<b>4</b>	<b><i>Arkham Interactive: Maps, Circulation, and the Arkham Videogame Series.....</i></b>	<b>155</b>
4.1	<b>Introduction: Bombs .....</b>	<b>155</b>
4.2	<b>Origins of <i>Arkham</i> .....</b>	<b>161</b>
4.3	<b>Interrogating Urban Geography in the Transmedia City .....</b>	<b>167</b>
4.4	<b>Player Circulation.....</b>	<b>176</b>
4.5	<b>Graffiti and Virtual Geography .....</b>	<b>186</b>
4.6	<b>Transmedia Consistency in Cultivating Recent Depictions of Gotham City .....</b>	<b>192</b>
4.7	<b>Exploding the Map .....</b>	<b>196</b>
4.8	<b>Falling Through the World.....</b>	<b>201</b>
4.9	<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>210</b>
<b>5</b>	<b><i>Brickwork Bat: Lego Batman and the Licensing Network .....</i></b>	<b>214</b>
5.1	<b>Introduction: A Visit to the Gotham Zoo .....</b>	<b>214</b>
5.2	<b>Snapping Together Lego’s Story .....</b>	<b>221</b>
5.3	<b>Lego Goes Digital.....</b>	<b>226</b>
5.4	<b>The TT/Lego System of Gameplay.....</b>	<b>231</b>
5.5	<b><i>Lego Batman</i> Game Spaces .....</b>	<b>237</b>
5.6	<b>Different Ways to Skin a Bat.....</b>	<b>254</b>
5.7	<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>262</b>
<b>6</b>	<b><i>Conclusion.....</i></b>	<b>267</b>
6.1	<b>Introduction: Missing Pieces .....</b>	<b>267</b>
6.1.1	Space and Place in <i>Arkham VR</i> .....	271
6.1.2	Other Nodes in the Network.....	273
6.2	<b>Stakes of the Project .....</b>	<b>279</b>
6.3	<b>Contributions and Implications .....</b>	<b>287</b>
6.4	<b>The Difficulties of Escape.....</b>	<b>291</b>
6.5	<b>Future Directions.....</b>	<b>301</b>
	<b><i>Works Cited .....</i></b>	<b>308</b>
	<b><i>Appendix 1: 2017 Bat-family Comics.....</i></b>	<b>324</b>
	<b><i>Appendix 2: Filming Locations.....</i></b>	<b>328</b>
	<b><i>Appendix 3: Games .....</i></b>	<b>337</b>

## List of Figures

<b>Figure 1:</b> Map of Gotham .....	119
<b>Figure 2:</b> Gotham aesthetics on television and in feature film .....	128
<b>Figure 3:</b> Bat-climb .....	131
<b>Figure 4:</b> Hugh Ferriss' <i>The Metropolis of Tomorrow</i> ; Paul Manship's <i>Mankind</i> Figures .....	137
<b>Figure 5:</b> <i>Batman Forever</i> Batcave playset .....	141
<b>Figure 6:</b> Batman playset redeco .....	142
<b>Figure 7:</b> <i>Blade Runner</i> Los Angeles; <i>Batman Begins</i> Gotham City .....	147
<b>Figure 8:</b> SAKE bomb in <i>Arkham Origins</i> .....	156
<b>Figure 9:</b> <i>Arkham City</i> & <i>Arkham Origins</i> maps .....	167
<b>Figure 10:</b> The Sionis Steel Mill.....	178
<b>Figure 11:</b> SAKE bomb comparison.....	187
<b>Figure 12:</b> <i>Arkham City</i> & <i>Arkham Knight</i> maps .....	197
<b>Figure 13:</b> Falling through the world in <i>Arkham Knight</i> .....	206
<b>Figure 14:</b> <i>Lego Batman: The Videogame</i> load screen .....	239
<b>Figure 15:</b> <i>Lego Batman 3: Beyond Gotham</i> load screen .....	239
<b>Figure 16:</b> Traveller's Tales logo.....	240



“Stories have always been transmedial.”

– Radha O’Meara and Alex Bevan, “Transmedia Theory’s Author Discourse and its Limitations”

“‘Crime wave in Gotham!’ Other breaking news: ‘Water, wet.’”

– Perry White, *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice*

# 1 Introduction

“For all the rich encyclopedic and elaborative narrative potential that transmedia stories offer creators and fans, the commercial imperative that underlies their creation and the consumptive demands and creative strictures they place on fans has received little scholarly attention. This has resulted in a conflict between those who claim that transmedia storytelling systems offer fans sophisticated webs of content to explore and enhance and those that see these webs as precisely that: a mode of confining and regulating fannish analysis and textual production.”

– Suzanne Scott, “The Trouble with Transmediation”<sup>1</sup>

“Man is such a temporary thing. He lives. He sins, he dies. But a city can stand a thousand years, and a dream can last forever.”

– *Detective Comics* #641<sup>2</sup>

## 1.1 Prologue: Origin Story

This story begins at 7-Eleven.

As a grade-schooler, I had a hard time completing my schoolwork (or behaving in general, really). I loved to read, however, so my mother and I had a deal: if I went the whole week without getting into trouble, and if I finished all my homework and chores, then on Friday, on the way home from school, we would stop at the convenience store and I could pick *one* comic book from the magazine rack.

Every week, without fail, I would pick an *Archie* digest magazine. More bang for your buck, obviously. When you’re eight years old, quantity is a crucial metric for preference. This went on for months, until my mother actually checked the price of an *Archie* double digest

---

<sup>1</sup> Suzanne Scott, “The Trouble with Transmediation: Fandom’s Negotiation of Transmedia Storytelling Systems,” *Spectator* 30, no. 1 (2010): 30.

<sup>2</sup> Alan Grant and Jim Aparo, *Detective Comics* #641, vol. 1, *Detective Comics* 641 (New York: DC Comics, 1992), 2.

against the price of a single-issue, floppy comic book. “No,” she said. “From now on, you can pick one of *these* ones. The ones with the staples.”

I looked at a single issue of *Archie*. 25 pages, very basic art with hardly any details, light on dialogue. Then I turned to a superhero comic. Rich details, involved storytelling, the same number of pages, but *lots* more text. The economics of consumption in that situation were clear to me. “This one then,” I said, thrusting one of them into her hands. That book was *Detective Comics #668*.<sup>3</sup>

Wait. Hold on. Is that right?

This story begins on videocassette.

Somewhere in the very early 1990s, my family visited our local mom ‘n’ pop videoshop to rent a Friday night video. We all had input, and generally if there was disagreement, maybe one video would be rented for the whole family to watch that evening (something my parents could enjoy), and one would be rented for my sister and me to watch on Saturday afternoon. This particular evening, however, the kids’ pick seemed appealing enough to the adults: a shiny black VHS cassette sleeve with nothing on its front but a canary-yellow oval, containing a stylized bat silhouette. On the side of the sleeve, in block letters: BATMAN.<sup>4</sup>

Looking back, I imagine my parents assumed this tape would trigger all sorts of nostalgia for them. How different could it be from the 1960s Adam West *Batman* TV show?<sup>5</sup> I wonder if they regretted the decision to expose their kids to something as dark and violent as the Michael Keaton version of the character, and even more problematically, the psychotic and creepy Jack Nicholson portrayal of the Joker. It didn’t matter. I was hooked. No nightmares for me that night. Instead, I dreamed of flapping black wings, righteous strength, and dark victory.

---

<sup>3</sup> Chuck Dixon and Graham Nolan, *Detective Comics #668*, vol. 1, *Detective Comics 668* (New York: DC Comics, 1993).

<sup>4</sup> Tim Burton, *Batman* (Burbank: Warner Brothers, 1989).

<sup>5</sup> *Batman* (Los Angeles: 20th Century Fox Television, 1966).

Wait, wait—is that right?

This story begins in Toys “R” Us.

Ours was not a household where you got things just because you asked for them. In our household, if you wanted something, you saved up your own money or waited for your birthday. I’d only had an allowance for about six months, but in exchange for good behavior at home and the performance of a number of domestic tasks, I got a whopping \$1 a week. Those shiny loonies had been burning a hole in my pocket, and so one day I begged my mother to make a special detour to the toy store on the way back home from buying groceries.

I knew exactly what I wanted. I’d been looking closely at the flyers and consumer centre brochures that periodically appeared in our mailbox, and I’d been counting the loonies, and I had my eye on a cool new Batman action figure. Not just any Batman action figure. I wanted Robin. The Robin from *Batman: The Animated Series* with the short sleeves and the fabric cape that snaps right off the shoulders.

Wait. Just one minute.

This story begins with four AA-batteries in a Gameboy.

This story begins with gum and a trading card.

This story begins with a fan art tumblr account.

Everything I’m describing—all of these VHS cassettes, pieces of merchandise, ephemeral literature, videogames, all of it—is part of a larger network built over decades and across continents. This network is called transmedia. The truth is that I don’t remember exactly which valence of *Batman* I first engaged with—it could be any of these or none at all—but each represents an integral node in a rhizome that makes up a transmedia complex, and all are valid entry points to interpellate the consumer (me) into brand recognition and lifelong loyalty. The comic rack at 7-Eleven is more than a point of sale for DC Comics (the publisher that produces

and owns Batman) and its parent company, multinational media conglomerate WarnerMedia LLC (formerly Time Warner Inc., formerly AOL Time Warner Inc., formerly Time-Warner, formerly Warner Communications, Inc., etc. etc.); it's a gateway, one of many. Whether we first read a comic or rent a movie or play with a toy or wear a t-shirt, Batman—like many of the IP-based transmedia complexes in the world today—succeeds because it's atmospheric. It's part of our world before we're old enough to notice it sneaking in. It's ambient.

This interpellation is generational and ineffable. Sitting on the floor playing with Duplo toys with my nephew when he was three years old, I observed that he knew who Batman was. He didn't necessarily know who Bruce Wayne was, but he knew about the Batcave, and he knew enough to make stories where his Duplo Batman minifigure went on adventures with Peter Pan and Captain Hook and Jake of *Jake and the Never Land Pirates*.<sup>6</sup> Who gave him that Duplo Batman toy? Who told him that Batman lives in the Batcave?

It doesn't matter. Trying to figure out when and how this particular intellectual property entered my nephew's life is as circular as the above writing on my own jumbled memories. Each contributed in its own unique way to constructing my identity as a fan, and there's little I would trade in the overall experience. I love Batman. I am a fan of Batman. And *that's* the point in transmedia. Not which version of Batman I love, or the details of my personal relationship to Batman, but that there were so many elemental aspects of Batman floating around in my young life, that it seems a *fait accompli* that I would fall in love. My affect is the strongest commodity the business model of transmedia has. This dissertation is about how that business model of transmedia works across its own network to, on the one hand, produce narrative contradictions in different versions of the IP, and, on the other, efficiently churn out products through reuse,

---

<sup>6</sup> *Jake and the Never Land Pirates* (Burbank: Disney-ABC Domestic Television, 2011).

licensing, and those very personal and canonical contradictions, all in order to interpellate consumers as fans *en masse*.

Batman can be many things. In *Detective Comics* #668, he's a violent psychopath attacking his own sidekick. In the 1989 blockbuster, he's a lonely, quiet obsessive who terrifies with a whisper but still yearns to reconcile his alter ego with his romantic life. In a pack of gum, he's a collectible to be framed or boxed or traded. In a 1992 Gameboy game, he's a 2-dimensional sprite walking stiffly across a green-and-grey screen and swinging from platform to platform. This dissertation is about that as well: the consistencies and inconsistencies of a piece of IP that appears in every media form with a high degree of consistency for nearly eight decades. Over the years, this character not only tries to adapt with the times, but at a certain point also begins to negotiate ongoing attempts to appeal to multiple generations simultaneously.

## 1.2 **Overview: Batland**

As just stated, the focus of this project is transmedia—specifically, spatiality in transmedia. How does a networked media milieu affect the way we form and receive stories? How have the practices and protocols of transmedia shifted how we construct and interpret fictional spaces? How have these practices and protocols transformed representations of urban geography and its aesthetics, and can user bases and publics reclaim them? In this dissertation, I propose that by looking at how transmedia has reshaped fictional geography (particularly urban geography in videogames), we can build a foundation for critiquing and reshaping transmedia theory through various frameworks of game studies, circulation, canonicity, and worldbuilding.

In order to elaborate this argument, I have chosen to focus on Gotham City. As the hometown of pop culture icon Batman, Gotham is a fictional city that has appeared consistently

across every conceivable medium and venue for franchising for more than 75 years. By examining its history of representation across media (with a particular emphasis on videogames), and how reading texts as assemblages produced in a networked transmedia milieu affects those representations, I argue that narrative analysis must move away from studying prolific authors across their works and instead towards examining popular properties across their media representations. I position the *transmedia complex* as a rhizomatic network with two distinct valences: a narrative transmedia *mode* that positions us to consider genre, story, continuity, and canon; and a strategic transmedia *business model* that considers products, labour, assets, and efficiency. A dialectical tension exists between the mode and the business model; frequently, where we encounter contradictions in the various iterations of the mode, we can justify them by explaining those contradictions in terms of the business model.

The transmedia business model is an apparatus of late capitalism within the paradigm of postmodernity. Late capitalism, with its ethos of never-ending expansion, subsumption, and diversification, evolves from the historical finitude and horizontal limitlessness of postmodern culture.<sup>7</sup> In turn, transmedia evolves out of late capitalism to operate as a dominant form of cultural production within pop culture. Transmedia is the successor (or perhaps just another expression) of the franchise. Examining one theme of one transmedia complex (Gotham City within the larger assemblage of Batman media) helps keep the scope of this project under control. This project will be the first extensive exploration of Gotham City through time and across media, as well as a useful work in scholarship on transmedia, arguing in part that it uses space to construct its consumers. Primarily, I focus on representations and experiences of Gotham in videogames, a relatively young and especially profitable arm of transmedia strategy.

---

<sup>7</sup> Katerina Kolozova, *Cut of the Real: Subjectivity in Poststructuralist Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

Spatialization in videogames forms a conceptual allegory for transmedia cultural production and the ideologies that frame it. Writing on the subject, Luke Arnott clarifies part of that allegory as player motivation in the conquest of space, saying, “[t]he conquest of conceptual space is the ultimate goal – the game is only complete when the player has visited, scanned, and mastered every available environment.”<sup>8</sup> Postmodernism presents us with a need to map conceptual space. I propose to come full circle on this drive and apply its conceptual requisites in order to map transmedia space—specifically urban transmedia space.

### 1.2.1 Prompting the Interest

The necessity for this work begins with a fundamental schism between how we describe and discuss the media we consume and how it is actually produced. The concept of transmedia, a framework in vogue in media studies for close to two decades as of this writing, delineates a form of cultural production in which multiple contiguous narratives are dispersed across multiple media channels, with a centralization of authorship to ensure canonical cohesion and fluid continuity.<sup>9</sup> However, in practice, transmedia as a business model has co-opted and gradually supplanted transmedia as a mode. This framework is unconcerned with taking cohesiveness into account, but still publicly focuses rhetorically on story, thematic, and experience.<sup>10 11</sup> Consequently, the actual functioning of transmedia centralizes ownership, not authorship, and prizes profitability far above canonical cohesion. Meanwhile, within the academy, the field of

---

<sup>8</sup> Luke Arnott, “Arkham Epic: Batman Video Games as Totalizing Texts,” in *Contemporary Research on Intertextuality in Video Games*, ed. Christophe Duret and Christian-Marie Pons (Hershey, PA: IGI Global, 2016), 16.

<sup>9</sup> Henry Jenkins, “Transmedia Storytelling and Entertainment: An Annotated Syllabus,” *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 24, no. 6 (2010): 944.

<sup>10</sup> Mark Deuze, *Media Work*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008).

<sup>11</sup> Scott, “The Trouble with Transmediation.”



study dedicated to transmedia frequently reinforces thinking about transmedia objects in terms of authorship—particularly a Romantic, gendered conception of authorship—as well as a gendered model of fandom. In a 2018 article for *M/C Journal*, transmedia scholars Radha O’Meara and Alex Bevan comment that the majority of academic and popular criticism of transmedia storytelling still “reproduces and reinstates narratives of male-centred, individual authorship historically descended from theorizations of the *auteur*”<sup>12</sup> in spite of the fact that actual practice thwarts this notion:

The individual creator is a social construction of scholarship and popular discourse. This imaginary creator bears little relation to the conditions of creation and production of transmedia storyworlds, which are almost always team written and collectively authored. Further, the focus on writing itself elides the significant contributions of many creators such as those in production design. Beyond that, what creative credit do focus groups deserve in shaping transmedia stories and their multi-layered, multi-platformed reaches? Is authorship, or even credit, really the concept we, as scholars, want to invest in when studying these forms of narration and mediation?<sup>13</sup>

Clearly, there is a disconnect between the ways that transmedia texts are produced and the ways they are discursively framed both publicly and in the academy. O’Meara and Bevan go on to describe the gendered feedback loop wherein male-centred author-functions frame male audiences, in turn examined as such in male-centred studies. This cycle, they contend, can be broken by mindful and directed interdisciplinary scholarship. “There are other stories waiting to

---

<sup>12</sup> Radha O’Meara and Alex Bevan, “Transmedia Theory’s Author Discourse and Its Limitations,” *M/C Journal - A Journal of Media and Culture* 21, no. 1 (2018), <http://journal.media-culture.org.au/index.php/mcjournal/article/view/1366>.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

be told and studied through the practices and theories of transmedia,” they write. “These stories might be gender-inclusive and collective in ways that challenge traditional notions of authorship, control, rights, origin, and property.”<sup>14</sup>

In his 2006 book *Convergence Culture*, media scholar and transmedia expert Henry Jenkins tacitly positions transmedia as an aspect of convergence culture, where media forms start to come together and the relationship between producers and consumers begins to operate as part of a continuum rather than a one-way relationship. But, he cautions, the paradigm is young and the work is preliminary, writing, “I don’t think we can meaningfully critique convergence until it is more fully understood; yet if the public doesn’t get some insights into the discussions that are taking place, they will have little to no input into decisions that will dramatically change their relationship to media.”<sup>15</sup> Jenkins’ work in *Convergence Culture* is subsequently cautious but optimistic. However, following O’Meara and Bevan’s clarion call, I take the position in this project that it’s past time to critique transmedia as an apparatus of convergence, because late capitalism has subsumed much of convergence culture under its own protocols and processes; transmedia strategy is a crucial part of this subsumption, because it effectively interpellates audiences, consumers, users and publics, reproducing itself in numerous forms.

In short, the continuity we expect from the symbolic content that we consume is fundamentally at odds with the way collaboratively-produced media texts are actually built. There’s a significant disjuncture between the media we consume and the desire for canon. This may be just as well, since any argument over the desire for continuity in both culture writ large and the field of literature is residual and conflicts with a clear drive for churn, change, and iterative generation in the characters we follow and narrative experiences we pursue within a

---

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 13.

canonically atomized culture. Meanwhile, the actual practice of transmedia narrows the spaces in which most kinds of participatory culture can function. An adjoining concern for this project is where this drive comes from and who it works on most. Transmedia, as contemporary as the term may be, offers a postmodern recapitulation of Joseph Schumpeter's modernist concept of creative destruction.<sup>16</sup> Transmedia makes use of this notion of creative destruction, carrying it into the current moment and reshaping it via *churn*, a collection of practices by which complexes reuse and recycle material and immaterial assets ranging from hand-drawn art to proprietary code. While consolidation and vertical integration through platformization<sup>17</sup> ensure the retention of dominant models of capital, churn allows for simultaneous illusions of familiarity and novelty. This churn is, in essence, *the* mode of cultural production in contemporary culture; transmedia as a phenomenon is one of the sites where churn is most clearly at work.

Therefore, my objective is to use case studies to ask questions about this churn and how it dialogically constructs its own consumers. In order to do so, I will draw on multiple examples of 21<sup>st</sup> Century transmedia practices, but my primary objects will be DC Entertainment property Batman, and his fictional home, Gotham City. Created by Bob Kane and Bill Finger (though at times this issue of provenance has been contentious<sup>18</sup>), and first appearing in *Detective Comics*

---

<sup>16</sup> Joseph A. Schumpeter, "The Process of Creative Destruction," in *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (London: Routledge, 2003).

<sup>17</sup> David Nieborg and Thomas Poell, "The Platformization of Cultural Production: Theorizing the Contingent Cultural Commodity," *New Media & Society* 00, no. 0 (April 2018): 1–18, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444818769694>.

<sup>18</sup> The creation of Batman, as with many other superhero comics properties, has long been a field of debate. Though it seems that Kane and Finger created the character together, for decades only Kane was credited due to the work-for-hire political economy of mainstream comics. Cf. Ian Gordon, "Comics, Creators, and Copyright: On the Ownership of Serial Narratives by Multiple Authors" in *The Companion to Media Authorship* (2013); Daniel Stein, "Superhero Comics and the Authorizing Functions of the Comic Book Paratext" in *From Comic Strips to Graphic Novels: Contributions to the Theory and History of Graphic Narrative* (2013); and Susan Karlin, "Who Really Created Batman?" on *Fastcreate.com* (2014). Advocates and the Finger Estate have long fought to have Finger credited as Batman's co-creator. Recently, DC Entertainment has begun to capitulate to these demands and reconcile their new products with this history: cf. Blair Marnell, "Batman co-creator Bill Finger finally gets credit on *Gotham* and *Batman v Superman*" at *Nerdist.com* (2015) and Rob Salkowitz, "Batman's co-creator Bill Finger finally receives recognition" at *Forbes.com* (2015).

#27 in spring 1939, Batman has brooded and swooped his way through the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and into the 21<sup>st</sup>, enjoying a longevity that few other Western pop culture icons can lay claim to. This near constancy of appearance has been matched by his successful permeation of every channel of expression in the world. And Gotham City so totally defines Batman that it has become a universally-recognized idea along with the hero himself.<sup>19</sup> By examining the world and character in the context of transmedia practices, I will demonstrate how transmedia dictates the construction of fictional and virtual spaces by dealing with them in terms of the functions they serve commercially within specific media. I will also introduce media theory into the conversation to construct an interdisciplinary argument that transmedia cities form a key structure of interpellation in constructing consumers. Finally, I will draw this examination out to argue that the heavily-licensed, massively collaborative, and usually obscured nature of transmedia authorship demands that we reshape how we think of the author-function<sup>20</sup> in broader discourse.

There's much we just don't know about how transmedia functions, largely due to the secretive nature of transmedia political economies and contract structures. Most of this mystery isn't supernatural, but rather the reasonable outcome of systems of capital and production flows which value that secrecy. However, within literature studies, we still approach transmedia objects in terms of traditional narrative structures—especially adaptation. Adaptation can still offer an extremely profitable frame for interpreting these objects,<sup>21 22</sup> but the evidence in this dissertation foreshadows a gradual move away from how adaptation actually functions today,

---

<sup>19</sup> Roberta Pearson, William Uricchio, and Will Brooker, eds., *Many More Lives of the Batman* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

<sup>20</sup> Michel Foucault, "What Is An Author?," in *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*, ed. David H. Richter, trans. Josué Hararai, 3rd ed. (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2007).

<sup>21</sup> Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 1st ed. (London: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>22</sup> Will Brooker, *Hunting the Dark Knight: Twenty-First Century Batman* (London: I. B. Taurus & Co Ltd., 2012), 50.

resulting in a need on our part as scholars to adapt ourselves and our vantage points. Arnott points towards this problematic in the explicit context of Batman media, writing “adaptation theory becomes less useful for considering the narrative texts within the Batman franchise as a whole; when large numbers of Batman texts in all media are being produced simultaneously, exchanging narrative elements within a recognizable but often contradictory fictional ‘universe,’ there no longer appears to be a linear process of adaptation from an original to derivative works.”<sup>23</sup> Put simply, adaptation does not appear adaptable to the rhizomatic nature of transmedia. This dissertation offers an alternative approach that accounts for the larger spectrum of transmedia as an economic process.

### 1.3 Research Questions

This project takes as its first point of inquiry: *What is the nature of the dialectical relationship between transmedia as a mode and transmedia as a business model?*

While much work has been written on transmedia (for example, Freeman et al. 2014,<sup>24</sup> Jenkins 2008,<sup>25</sup> Scott 2010,<sup>26</sup> and Johnson 2013<sup>27</sup>), there seems to be little consensus as to how to approach transmedia objects or how to define transmedia as a practice. Furthermore, the study of transmedia *worlds* is an underdeveloped area of transmedia investigation, as is how videogames play into transmedia networks.<sup>28</sup> In focusing on the worlds of transmedia narratives

---

<sup>23</sup> Arnott, “Arkham Epic,” 6.

<sup>24</sup> Matthew Freeman, Paolo Bertetti, and Carlos Scolari, *Transmedia Archaeology: Storytelling in the Borderlines of Science Fiction, Comics and Pulp Magazines* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

<sup>25</sup> Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*.

<sup>26</sup> Scott, “The Trouble with Transmediation.”

<sup>27</sup> Derek Johnson, *Media Franchising: Creative License and Collaboration in the Culture Industries* (New York: New York University Press, 2013).

<sup>28</sup> For example, all of the authors cited in this sentence have taken vastly different approaches to transmedia. Freeman et al. look at transmedia objects through a historical, archaeological lens; Jenkins defines transmedia precisely as a process for the creation of narrative entertainment experiences, but at other times will discuss it as a

and how they flow into other fields of inquiry, this thesis makes a unique contribution to media scholarship.

In looking at the question of transmedia continuity in the context of both worldbuilding and urban geography, several nested questions arise concerning issues of adaptation, iconic imaginaries, and virtual worlds:

- What are the *politics of form* of the transmedia city? That is, how does transmedia use spatialization expressively, construct consumers and publics, and what kinds of consumers and publics does transmedia space help to produce through spatialized expression?
- What are the *allegorical* qualities of urban space in both transmedia generally and videogames specifically? Do they reflect real-world urbanity or otherwise function metaphorically?
- How do games use embodiment and *space* (particularly urban space) to construct *place* and tell stories, and what functions do these spaces and places serve for transmedia interpellation?
- What can we *decode* about how transmedia spaces are *encoded* by taking a broad view of transmedia complexes as *rhizomatic assemblages* rather than as groups of adapted texts?
- How do the protocols and efficiencies of transmedia production impact the media objects it produces?

At first glance, these questions pull in a number of different directions. An interdisciplinary approach is key to attempting to take them all in, and necessary to developing a useful toolset for addressing them. In the course of answering these questions, the project will produce a number

---

marketing term or distribution strategy capable of opening up room for participatory culture; Scott writes about transmedia in terms of the limitations it can inflict upon participatory culture; and Johnson uses the term in the context of franchise building and empire.

of insights and theoretical takeaways about Batman as IP, and videogames within transmedia. But before that work can begin, it's important to frame some of the key terms in these research questions.

### 1.3.1 **Mode and Business Model**

Picture a group of geeky fans standing around in a comic shop debating the merits of a recent blockbuster superhero movie. It's okay, go ahead and impute whatever qualities on the congregation that spring to mind—maybe they all resemble the portly and taciturn Comic Book Guy from *The Simpsons*.<sup>29</sup> It's a cliché (perhaps an outmoded one considering that today, the crowded discussion forum would probably be more representative than the musty comic shop), but a powerful one, as the types of questions it evokes are easily recognizable: who would win a fight between Superheroes A and B? Why didn't Villain C do this or that in Story D? Which continuity is faulty after Universe Reboot X? The patrons of the shop argue with each other, the proprietor holds court, shutting down anything objectionable to their credentialed sensibilities, and another customer, listening in, interjects when they see an opening. Though the conversations are fundamentally based on discrepancies and disagreements, they still seem to speak to a deep fulfilment for all participants. The argument may determine whether a customer buys Book One or Book Two, or adds Series Three to his or her weekly pull list; but for all the customers, have no doubt they are there to shop, take the products home to consume, and return the next week to resume the discourse.

The point here is that the arguments themselves are cyclical, and part of a larger cycle of purchase and discussion. All that's *actually* important for this cycle is that the customers buy the

---

<sup>29</sup> *The Simpsons* (Los Angeles: 20th Century Fox Television, 1989).

comics (or toys, cards, DVDs, or games), perhaps pull some newcomers into the conversation, and—most important of all—that they return the next week. This scenario points to the two central valences of transmedia: the mode and the business model. It’s crucial to unpack these terms for the sake of clarity moving forward.

As should be clear by this point, transmedia is the largest theoretical touchstone in this work. The concept was first incorporated into scholarship by Marsha Kinder in the early 1990s<sup>30</sup> and largely popularized by Henry Jenkins with his 2006 book *Convergence Culture*.<sup>31</sup> In the most basic semantic sense, transmedia means “across media,” and Jenkins writes that it implies a coordinated relationship among multiple media platforms and practices.<sup>32</sup> There are two main senses in which the term transmedia tends to be employed. One refers to narrative. For Jenkins, transmedia is usually bound up in transmedia storytelling, a process where “integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience.”<sup>33</sup>

Transmedia storytelling stands in contrast with the other sense in which the term is employed: to refer to business practice and strategy.<sup>34</sup> Transmedia is not just one story told across different media; it also refers to any entertainment experience that utilizes multiple communication channels, such as the call-in voting aspect of *American Idol*<sup>35</sup> or the Twitter hashtags visible in the corners of cable news broadcasts, imploring audience participation in another medium<sup>36</sup> (in this way it connects closely to convergence and participatory culture). We

---

<sup>30</sup> Marsha Kinder, *Playing with Power in Movies, Television, and Video Games: From Muppet Babies to Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

<sup>31</sup> Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 8-9.

<sup>32</sup> Jenkins, “Transmedia Storytelling and Entertainment: An Annotated Syllabus,” 943.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Derek Johnson, “A History of Transmedia Entertainment,” *Spreadable Media*, accessed June 27, 2018, <http://spreadablemedia.org/essays/johnson/#.WzPhhNhKgWp>.

<sup>35</sup> Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*.

<sup>36</sup> Anne Zeiser, *Transmedia Marketing: From Film and TV to Games and Digital Media* (New York: Focal Press, 2015).



can see a discrepancy and potential contradiction in the two deployments of this term: the more frequently employed transmedia strategy doesn't account for the narrative cohesion or unified entertainment experiences of transmedia storytelling. Though Jenkins defined transmedia principally in terms of narrative,<sup>37</sup> it is much more often used to describe transmedia strategies,<sup>38 39 40</sup> perhaps largely because most transmedia objects or networks fail to operate within one or more of Jenkins' defining characteristics: narrative cohesion, unification of entertainment experience, coordinated or systematic dispersion, or a single story. Scholarship on the subject largely fails to address this terminological problem.

In this project, I will attempt to resolve the confusion by clearly delineating transmedia as mode and business model. Transmedia *mode* refers to narrative structure or a way of writing. It most closely connects to thinking about transmedia in terms of genre. Transmedia as a mode means transmedia as a way of making art; it is the narrative side of transmedia that has been written about since the term was first created and reproduces discursive frameworks for debate and study. Transmedia *business model* refers to a strategic way of producing culture within late capitalism. It is tied up with the motivations of producers and rights holders, as well as the way they formulate their relationships to consumers. Transmedia as a business model is a strategy of proliferation—it is the more obscured side of massively collaborative and multi-faceted media production.

These two valences form the central dialectical tension that this thesis takes up. Transmedia as a mode is extremely chaotic on its surface, regardless of overall efforts toward a cohesive continuity. It constantly positions fans to try and make sense of its contradictions. But

---

<sup>37</sup> Jenkins, "Transmedia Storytelling and Entertainment: An Annotated Syllabus."

<sup>38</sup> Katie Mills, *The Road Story and the Rebel: Moving Through Film, Fiction, and Television* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2006).

<sup>39</sup> Marc Steinberg, *Anime's Media Mix: Franchising Toys and Characters in Japan* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).

<sup>40</sup> Johnson, *Media Franchising*.

this apparent chaos on the level of transmedia as a mode is resolved on the level of transmedia as a business model, where it is totally and utterly coherent (for the purposes and needs of production-side stakeholders)—it’s just that we (scholars, fans, consumers) have very little access to that level.

This conception follows previous writing on digital culture and life online. In his 2006 book *Protocol*,<sup>41</sup> Alexander Galloway presents a straightforward dialectical argument: the chaos of the Internet as we experience it in terms of content is actually resolved on the plane of protocol. While the Internet is (or at least was) meant to signify total freedom, the higher level of protocol enforces strict regulation and control:

Viewed as a whole, protocol is a distributed management system that allows control to exist within a heterogeneous material milieu. It is common for contemporary critics to describe the Internet as an unpredictable mass of data—rhizomatic and lacking central organization. This position states that since new communication technologies are based on the elimination of centralized command and hierarchical control, it follows that the world is witnessing a general disappearance of control as such. This could not be further from the truth. I argue [ ] that protocol is how technological control exists after decentralization. [“After”] refers to both the historical moment after decentralization has come into existence, but also—and more important—the historical phase *after* decentralization, that is, after it is dead and gone, replaced as the supreme social management style by the diagram of distribution.<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>41</sup> Alexander R. Galloway, *Protocol: How Control Exists after Decentralization* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2006).

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

My argument echoes Galloway's argument, but replaces the digital network of the Internet with the conceptual network of the transmedia assemblage. My goal is to articulate such a diagram of distribution as the one Galloway describes.

Throughout this dissertation, I will frequently argue that one of the key processes of transmedia is what I refer to as *churn*. Churn, which I will unpack in greater detail later on, is essentially a process of necessity for transmedia in which it must constantly produce and iterate new products through further techniques of efficiency, reuse, and coordinated licensing. Churn is the proliferation of objects and products gathered around single IPs and spread across all media formats and areas of life. It is motivated by the need to turn the greatest profit from a copyright and maintain visibility in a number of marketplaces by pushing out new products. This churn constitutes a surface effect that is about a seeming relationship on the level of the symbolic. However, when we discuss it as enterprise, marketing strategy, or efficiency, it makes much more sense within late capitalism. On the level of transmedia as business model, the producer's decisions take on different motivations that adhere to a different logic—a logic that frequently reconciles discrepancies at modal levels and also often makes connections apparent. That is the level where stakeholders assert control and regulate behaviour. That level doesn't care about narrative coherence at all in a zero-sum scenario. Again and again, transmedia as mode becomes the site of contradiction and confusion. What happened to the fluid cohesive experience we were supposed to have?

Theories of adaptation might answer this question by positing that transmedia loosely reproduces the protocols of adaptation based on the needs of different mediums.<sup>43</sup> But transmedia is rhizomatic in structure, and lacks central “tentpole” expressions. Tight control over the profitability of the IP itself is the foundation of a transmedia complex, and various tentpoles

---

<sup>43</sup> Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*.

shift up and down depending on markets, timing, and serendipity. What's fascinating is how *supple* that transmedial rhizome is. For example, the 2018 superhero blockbuster *Black Panther*<sup>44</sup> was not "supposed" to be a tentpole of the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) assemblage, but after it became one of the most successful films of all time at the US box office,<sup>45</sup> Marvel Studios is certainly reassessing its strategy for the next decade, and it should not surprise us if we see King T'Challa become the leader of the New Avengers in the aftermath of the *Infinity War* films of 2018-2019. So perhaps there are tentpoles, but they go up and down based on the needs of the moment. So the rhizome lacks depth, but billows and ripples so that some points peak in movement.

### 1.3.2 The Argument

With these terms clear, it's possible to elaborate fully the core of my argument in this project. The rolling thesis of this dissertation is that *the transmedia business model dictates/governs the form and content of transmedia narratives at the mode level and reconciles any contradictions that arise. This inflects every aspect of a transmedia complex.* Transmedia as a mode (narrative/genre/way of making art) is in a dialectical tension with transmedia as a business model (cultural industry and extension of late capitalism). The chaos we observe on the surface of transmedia (churn, iterations/versions) can't *always* be resolved as a model, but will inevitably lead to novel understandings of a different value system; the needs of transmedia as a business model don't value narrative. Furthermore, any and all attempts we make within transmedia to assert our agency or subvert it fail because they occur *within transmedia*, which is

---

<sup>44</sup> Ryan Coogler, *Black Panther* (Burbank: Marvel Studios, 2018).

<sup>45</sup> Rebecca Rubin, "'Black Panther' Surpasses 'The Avengers' as Highest-Grossing Superhero Movie of All Time in U.S.," *Variety*, March 25, 2018, <https://variety.com/2018/film/box-office/black-panther-surpasses-avengers-highest-grossing-superhero-movie-1202735863/>.

a model structured in such a way that we insert ourselves into it willingly. This is what's behind the apparent chaotic contradictions that we encounter again and again on the symbolic level of transmedia as mode and order on the level of transmedia as business model. This argument is unique, but work like Galloway's writing on the Internet helps to explain it here.

#### 1.4 **Object and Frameworks**

Even in a work of this length, it is impossible to definitively cover all aspects of transmedia. Therefore, as noted, it is necessary to hone the scope of this project in order to make substantive claims. Tackling this mode/model issue is a massive undertaking, but choosing an object on which to test these ideas is even more difficult. Even a single franchise yields simply too much volume, too much material. To that end, this thesis focuses on one area of one transmedia complex, one franchise, and unpacks that area in several contexts. Looking at a fictional *world* in transmedia is excellent for this task, and converging on videogame expressions of the world provides the further benefit of allowing me to contribute to the body of work around virtual spaces. Gotham City has existed nearly as long as Batman himself, and at this point, the city is inextricable from the character in description and theme. Looking at various case studies in the Batman transmedial network reveals and encapsulates many of the strategic and adaptive aspects of transmedia generally. Specifically focusing on Gotham City usefully confines this study in a milieu as massive and long-lived as the Batman transmedia assemblage. In writing about theme parks like Disneyland (itself a part of arguably the largest transmedia complex in the world), Umberto Eco argues that the theme park constitutes a hyperreality, an absolutely realistic space that transports its visitors to a fantastical past.<sup>46</sup> As a fictional island (a world in

---

<sup>46</sup> Umberto Eco, *Travels in Hyperreality: Essays* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986), 43.

miniature), Gotham City is a macabre hyperreality that operates using the same techniques as Disneyland to different ends. Where Disneyland seeks to transport visitors to a wonderful past that never was, where order, cleanliness, and peace reign, Gotham transports visitors to a non-existent mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century city blighted by crime and socioeconomic inequality. The problems of Gotham mirror particular fears and paranoias of the American urban, the same way that Disneyland mirrors the hopes of a particular American cultural imaginary in order to construct nostalgia for a time and place that never existed. Just as Disneyland whitewashes the 20<sup>th</sup> Century history of American culture and life, Gotham City coats that history in a lurid sewage and infuses it with the grotesque.

The question then becomes how to describe a shifting, imaginary urbanity. This issue is resolved by the evolution from the franchise to the transmedia complex, and the growing prevalence of cool media that demand participation.<sup>47</sup> Through its protocols, the transmedia complex renders the imaginary solid, and through interactivity, audiences develop further concrete expectations of what a fictional space is and looks like. As we will see throughout this thesis, in some ways transmedia opens up room for participatory culture, and in others, winnows it down and guides it towards specific focal points. This strategy incurs numerous contradictions at the level of mode.

So what theoretical frameworks can we deploy to address both these contradictions and the broader subject holistically? Because “Gotham City” is so many things over time and (today) all at once, it makes sense to use a nimble methodology to describe and dissect the object. Primary influences on my theoretical approach to the spaces of transmedia are urban geography

---

<sup>47</sup> Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: Routledge Classics, 2001), 25.

and sociology, including Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift<sup>48</sup> and Marc Augé;<sup>49</sup> work that addresses software as metaphor from thinkers like Wendy Hui Kyong Chun<sup>50</sup> and Friedrich Kittler;<sup>51</sup> contemporary research on various publics' understandings of intellectual property from Rosemary Coombe,<sup>52</sup> Laura J. Murray, S. Tina Piper, and Kirsty Robertson;<sup>53</sup> methodological frameworks from Charles Bernstein,<sup>54</sup> Stuart Hall,<sup>55</sup> and Michel de Certeau;<sup>56</sup> and, most importantly, work in game studies that addresses space, including Michael Nitsche,<sup>57</sup> Alison Gazzard,<sup>58</sup> and Bobby Schweizer.<sup>59</sup> Because these spaces are most effectively actualized in immersive digital expressions, my case studies will focus primarily on videogame versions of Gotham and how they connect back to other nodes in the transmedia assemblage and the subject of imaginary worlds.<sup>60</sup>

My project here is largely supposed to focus on *transmedia* spaces and cities, and specifically on Gotham City as a case study. So why disproportionately dedicate so much of this dissertation to looking at Gotham in videogames? The reasoning for this is both simple and multifold: games are the new representations of fictional spaces. As one of the youngest forms of

---

<sup>48</sup> Ash Amin and Nigel J. Thrift, *Cities: Reimagining the Urban* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002).

<sup>49</sup> Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, trans. John Howe (London: Verso, 1995).

<sup>50</sup> Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, *Programmed Visions: Software and Memory* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2011).

<sup>51</sup> Friedrich Kittler and Matthew Griffin, "The City Is a Medium," *New Literary History* 27, no. 4 (1996): 717–29.

<sup>52</sup> Rosemary J. Coombe, *The Cultural Life of Intellectual Properties: Authorship, Appropriation, and the Law* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998).

<sup>53</sup> Laura J. Murray, S. Tina Piper, and Kirsty Robertson, *Putting Intellectual Property in Its Place: Rights Discourses, Creative Labor, and the Everyday* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2014).

<sup>54</sup> Charles Bernstein, "Optimism and Critical Excess (Process)," *Critical Inquiry* 16, no. 4 (1990): 830–56.

<sup>55</sup> Stuart Hall, "Encoding/Decoding," in *Media and Cultural Studies: KeyWorks*, ed. Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2006).

<sup>56</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

<sup>57</sup> Michael Nitsche, *Video Game Spaces: Image, Play, and Structure in 3D Game Worlds* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2008).

<sup>58</sup> Alison Gazzard, "Unlocking the Gameworld: The Rewards of Space and Time in Videogames," *Game Studies: The International Journal of Computer Games Research* 11, no. 1 (2011), [gamestudies.org/1101/articles/gazzard\\_alison](http://gamestudies.org/1101/articles/gazzard_alison).

<sup>59</sup> Bobby Schweizer, "Videogame Cities in Motion" (Dissertation, Georgia Institute of Technology, 2014).

<sup>60</sup> Alberto Manguel and Guadalupi Guadalupi, *The Dictionary of Imaginary Places – Expanded Edition* (Toronto, ON: Lester & Orpen Dennys Ltd., 1987).

media that goes into the industries around transmedia, videogames and their subordinate 3D gameworlds afford opportunities to make new arguments about spatialization, adaptive technologies, and the allegorical powers of storytelling. They also provide interactivity in a way not before imagined or possible. Because of this, they are inhabitable in ways that other media are not. Furthermore, in discussing both space and the experience of the urban, it is extremely useful to give weight to fictional spaces that can be *traversed*.

We can use architectural movements to contextualize versions of Gotham City with each other and the larger world that inspires it; and we can use architectural modes of seeing in order to make sense of how Gotham functions as a space in games. Urban geography theory will give us a unifying sense of how the urban is constituted in both interactive and passive fiction. This will also work back on itself and allow us to take a larger view of how these works attempt to approximate the urban in our imaginations, and the limitations of seeing them as metaphors for the city.

Digital systems are excellent at seemingly coding and managing a total space, and videogames are a deeply spatial medium. Videogames give life to fictional space so that audiences can consider their lives as enacted within fictional space—what Bobby Schweizer refers to as the *experiential* order (building from landscape architect and scholar Douglas Allen’s categories of *constitutional* and *representational* elements of cities<sup>61</sup>). These experiential spaces are essentially virtual geographic environments. Different kinds of virtual geographies<sup>62</sup> produce different kinds of affect, which are in turn connected to genre. For example, we can describe horror games almost entirely in terms of topology: effective hiding places, clear runs for rushed advancement, lighting cues). The same goes for superhero games: effective anchor points, gaps

---

<sup>61</sup> Schweizer, “Videogame Cities in Motion,” 4.

<sup>62</sup> Michael Batty, “Virtual Geography,” *Futures* 29, no. 4 (1997): 337–52.



in skylines, waypoints; shooters: chest-high walls, tight corners, high ground; and racing games: curves, blockades, and lane widths. All of these affects and genres exist in a cyclical continuum. Part of my project is to apply that theory to urban space in games. As the case studies in this work will demonstrate, Gotham as a space is no longer confined to any one genre, even within a single game. So I clarify my own exploration with a triumvirate of terms: *space*, *place*, and *environment*.

*Space* is the broad umbrella under which place and environment huddle. It refers to actionable areas in which the user explores and circulates. While I can deploy this to describe literature or film, space is most suitable as a term to describe interactive media like videogames, augmented reality (AR) or virtual reality (VR). *Place* is what a space becomes when it is recognizable and iconic in the process of colonizing space into power relationships and ownerships structures. This term refers to proper nouns and locations. So a street is a space. But 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue in Manhattan is a place, loaded down with preconceptions, connotations, and specific history. Finally, *environment* is how spaces and places produce affect. It refers to aesthetics and tone. So a street is a space, Saks Fifth Avenue is a place in that space, and the boutique's environment is brightly lit, clean, opulent, and sedate. All three of these terms, space (exploration, occupation, mechanics), place (names, locations, narrative significance), and environment (aesthetics, symbolic signifiers, ambience) work in conjunction with one another in the videogame city, and all three are key to understanding the loci of transmedial impact on fictional worlds.

### 1.4.1 Methodology

Postmodernism's problematic is, in essence, the inadequacy of a single view to reconcile the disjointed experiences of contemporary life in late capitalism. This also maps to a discussion of 3D gameworlds, as it connects to the technique of some videogames to employ multiple types of vision.<sup>63</sup> I additionally invoke the issue here as a way to explain my shifting methodologies, because it means that my methodology must be agile in order to avoid becoming mired in a single myopic view of my object. To this end, there are two overarching frames I use in thinking through method: strategy and tactics, and encoding and decoding. I employ these frames through a diversity of methods for engaging with primary objects and their paratexts, copious cataloguing efforts, and playing and counterplaying the game series that take centre stage in my analysis.

In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, philosopher Michel de Certeau delineates methods in terms of colonialism and occupation. He identifies two ways of approaching conflict: strategies and tactics. A strategy is used by those in power, those with the resources to bend the environment to their will and impose conformity upon their surroundings. Essentially, strategies are the realm of long-term plans.<sup>64</sup> On the other side, those occupying territory owned by someone else (i.e. a powerful entity) must resort to tactics.<sup>65</sup> Tactics are calculated actions determined by the absence of a proper locus; the space of tactics is the space of the other. "Strategies," de Certeau writes, "are able to produce, tabulate, and impose these spaces, when those operations take place, whereas tactics can only use, manipulate, and divert."<sup>66</sup> However, de Certeau notes that although these transverse tactics remain dependent upon the possibilities offered by circumstance, they are under no obligation to obey the law of the place, being neither

---

<sup>63</sup> Arnott, "Arkham Epic," 12.

<sup>64</sup> de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 29-30.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 36-37.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

defined nor identified by it. “In this respect,” he concludes, “they are not any more localizable than the technocratic (and scriptural) *strategies* that seek to create places in conformity with abstract models.”<sup>67</sup>

Not long after the publication of *The Practice of Everyday Life*, poet Charles Bernstein wrote an article that synthesized the methods of strategies and tactics together in poetics. Citing insufficiencies in authoritative poetics that sought to explain its objects rather than address and redress them, Bernstein advocated instead for a poetics “both topical and socially invested: in short, poetic rather than normative.”<sup>68</sup> Such an approach, he stated, would allow for the employment of various paradigms—critics would be able to see where one paradigm would lead them rather than declare it “the way.”<sup>69</sup>

Taking de Certeau and Bernstein together, I can fully articulate my own strategy of tactics methodology. While the academy occupies a position of extreme privilege, it’s not difficult to argue its weaknesses in attempting to observe and analyze non-normative objects. Almost no academic discipline was founded and formulated with networked culture in mind, or with the explosion and atomization of culture and media. The traditional discipline operates in terms of strategies, (privileging static objects and spaces), while tactics approach objects haphazardly but nimbly,<sup>70</sup> making them better suited to address rapidly appearing and disappearing cultural objects.

Gotham City is perfect for a tactical approach: it is an occupied territory, controlled by its rights holders, but belonging to and in the imaginaries of diverse publics in participatory culture. It frequently appears in multiple media simultaneously, and the iterations deemed failures by DC or Warners (or just those forgotten in the shuffle) are relegated to the dustbin until they can

---

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>68</sup> Bernstein, “Optimism and Critical Excess,” 837-838.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 839.

<sup>70</sup> de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 38-39.

become useful again. No records are kept in any public-facing fashion, except those produced and maintained by fans, who must remain wary at all times that they may infringe upon multiple copyrights in their activities. Adhering to any single discipline too strongly in studying Gotham would relinquish a host of other vantage points and miss the point of looking at it as a transmedia object in the first place.

Bernstein notes that this adherence to a single discipline runs the risk that potentiality will be taken for actuality<sup>71</sup>—unlike the established strategic gesture, a strategy of tactics relegates its results to that field of potentiality. This flexibility makes it counterhegemonic: It’s about creating an account, not putting forward an explanation. In short, the strategy of tactics allows me to identify the way I would like to locate myself theoretically and methodologically: as adaptable, based on the object that I attend.

Therefore, my methodology in this project is varied. In the first case study (an overview of Gotham City across time and media), it primarily takes the shape of intensive close reading in order to compare and contrast the different functions “Gotham City” serves in narrative and commercial formats. In terms of comics, this means looking at how different places in Gotham have taken shape over time and the layout of the city has flirted with schematic representation; in terms of film and television, this means looking at shifts in space and environment based on different visions and the affordances of economics, while also cataloguing as many location shoots as possible for different Gotham City productions. In the game case studies, the methodology shifts from archival research to playthrough: for both chapters, my primary method involves playing the games in two different series and closely watching the way the developers manage space and player circulation through that space from instalment to instalment. Overall, my methodology is also concerned with examining the connections and disjunctures between

---

<sup>71</sup> Bernstein, “Optimism and Critical Excess,” 844.

these virtual, fictional cities and real-world urban locales. Gotham City is a territory that I inhabit, but because I lack access to the strategies that shape it, I resort to transverse tactics to articulate it as best I can.

We have to think about how these objects are made, as best we can, even if their production processes are obscured from us by the political economies of media industries. The model of game design based around mechanics, dynamics, and aesthetics (MDA) helps to address this necessity. MDA is a framework introduced by Robin Hunicke, Marc LeBlanc, and Robert Zubek to help developers, scholars, and researchers alike “decompose, study and design a broad class of game designs and game artifacts.”<sup>72</sup> In essence, MDA is the criteria to search for when parsing digital games—we can use it to create a portrait of the factors at play for the creators and speculatively reconstruct their processes. However, MDA as a framework does not operate in a vacuum, and in addressing a given game as an extension of a given transmedia complex, we must additionally account for factors like profitability and oversight. Licensed games start with the license. Is the chief concern of a studio in this situation MDA? Is it capitalizing off the recognition of the IP? Is it a client-oriented process? Is it synergy with another media product, regardless of how well the mechanics map to the other product’s narrative? Studies of game franchises based on licensed IPs that don’t account for the game’s place in the context of the larger transmedia assemblage are missing something crucial. One of my goals is to rectify this, not by ignoring MDA, but by resolving these issues at the level of the business model as well.

Trying to think in these terms leads us to cultural theorist Stuart Hall’s concepts of encoding and decoding.<sup>73</sup> Negotiating the distinction between academic post-structuralist

---

<sup>72</sup> Robin Hunicke, Marc LeBlanc, and Robert Zubek, “MDA: A Formal Approach to Game Design and Game Research,” *AAAI Workshop - Technical Report 1* (2004).

<sup>73</sup> Hall, “Encoding/Decoding,” 117.

concepts of authorship and the more broadly accepted dictionary definitions (like the confusion in the use of the term “transmedia” the mode/model dialectic is designed to address) is similar to Hall’s strategies for navigating hegemonic viewpoints in decoding cultural works, where he distinguishes a ‘negotiated version’ of an object of study where both a widely accepted viewpoint and a more nuanced and exceptional exploration can co-exist.<sup>74</sup> In attempting to parse out critiques of authorship in digital games, it will be helpful to be able to work within a negotiated version of the concept where we can acknowledge both the hegemonic viewpoint of individual originators and the position of author-functions.

Hall’s thinking in this area is also methodologically and theoretically helpful in the notions of encoding and decoding. Encoding and decoding offers a view of cultural production in which producers and users complete a circuit and the act of reception is just as much a productive practice as that of production or dissemination. “If no ‘meaning’ can be taken,” writes Hall, “there can be no ‘consumption.’”<sup>75</sup> As we will see when discussing the actions of players, interpreting decoding as a determinate moment capable of creative contribution to the object of study works well with the thinking of several games scholars on the sovereignty of authorship and the proprietorship of gameplay. This is also in line with Raymond Williams’ ideas of the analysis of form where meaning is determined by the dynamic relationships between authors, products, and users,<sup>76</sup> and James Hamilton’s elaboration of the concept in terms of user production.<sup>77</sup>

Embedding values into our media products is just another way of encoding meaning—and one that’s quite unavoidable. But doing so also necessarily interpellates the end user. What this means practically for the case studies in this dissertation is that I will come to the media

---

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 172.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 164.

<sup>76</sup> Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1977).

<sup>77</sup> James Hamilton, “Historical Forms of User Production,” *Media, Culture & Society* 36, no. 4 (2014): 492.

products in terms of what I naturally decode by dint of engaging with them and then pulling at those threads in order to unravel what was encoded into them. For example, in my chapter studying the *Arkham* games, I pull apart a chance encounter with repeating graffiti pieces in *Arkham Origins* to discover how *Origins* developer WB Games Montréal encoded real virtuality into the game by reproducing art photographed on the streets of Montréal. In my historical overview chapter, I take a chance encounter from the real world—finding myself on a street in Chicago where director Christopher Nolan’s team shot a scene in the 2008 film *The Dark Knight*—to approach the various studio sets, locations, publications, and companies that have been used to encode different Batman media over the years with a powerful but mutable sense of “what Gotham is.” This method takes me to everyday objects, blockbuster films, and archival audio programs nearly lost to the sands of time. Both situations form different kinds of psychogeographies, leading to an experiential methodology.

In all cases, the methods map to sociologist Bruno Latour’s Actor-Network-Theory (ANT) approach to study, in which objects are actors imbued with their own agency to interconnect with one another. This is perfect in a transmedia context, where the rhizomatic structure of the assemblage abandons the idea of a linear “origin point.” In ANT, the relations between different elements are allowed to reveal themselves before the researcher attempts to dictate terms: “Instead of taking a reasonable position and imposing some order beforehand,” writes Latour, “ANT claims to be able to find order much better *after* having let the actors deploy the full range of controversies in which they are immersed.”<sup>78</sup> The task of defining and ordering the social should be left to the actors themselves, allowing the analyst to construct the network conceptually—again, as with the strategy of tactics espoused by Bernstein, the emphasis

---

<sup>78</sup> Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 20-23.

is placed upon creating an account rather than forwarding an argument in the traditional manner, where unmasking defines critique.

Overall, the methods in this project can be explained as comparative consumption that moves outwards. I do not start at any particular point or attempt to take my objects chronologically. Instead, my focus is analytical and experiential. For each medium, this amounted to different methods. For example, in going through comics, I performed a great deal of close reading, but also tried to read at a distance as well. For some of the observations I pulled from comics in this thesis, I had to intensely scrutinize images to catch easily-missed details; for others, I could only realize them by flipping through comics at lightning speed or jumping around through hundreds of archival scans, allowing me to experience firsthand how tropes and motifs replicated themselves.

For screen media like television and film, my methods involved a *lot* of watching and rewatching, looking for the briefest flashes of background or environment. I watched slowly, frequently pausing to take screengrabs and notes, and just as often leaving the object entirely to chase down or cross-reference a specific detail. I sat for hours listening to old-time radio programs, again pausing frequently to take notes. I also sought out information on forums, contacted experts to track down or confirm factual information, and regularly turned to blogs, online geek news outlets, wikis, clickbait articles, and databases. For every movie, TV show, or game I discuss in this thesis, I can also say that I've read the Internet Movie Database trivia page. To keep track of my findings, I created detailed spreadsheets: catalogues of games, films, cross-referenced voice talents, and so forth. Occasionally, I attempted to quantify statistical information through linear regression or formula, with mixed results.

But most important to my methods was how I played the games I discuss in my case study chapters. I played them through multiple times and played *with* them as well, in processing



that might be described as countergaming: playing goal-based games by exploring, trying to push past the limits of the digital spaces, focusing in on details that are meant to be glossed over, seeing if I could *break* the games by doing this or that, and trying to reveal the invisible barriers, obstructions, and objects in a game space. Additionally, I worked on the games through a “swap-play” process, opting to play through multiple games at the same time. What this means is that one day, I would delve into *Arkham Origins*, and the next day, *Arkham City*, and back again. The further I got into the project, the tighter these swaps became: I would be in the middle of playing *Lego Batman 2* and then have to switch to *Lego Batman 3* in order to confirm a suspicion. Once I felt comfortable that I had extracted good findings from playthroughs, I moved outwards to paratextual materials to help me flesh out my connected understanding of how the games acted within a network: credit sequences, reportage, influences, marketing, etc.

I have to note here that my deep pre-existing background of knowledge on the subject was frequently very helpful. If I could methodologically account for a lifetime of voraciously reading comics, playing games, and generally absorbing geek culture, perhaps I would call it “active nerding.” Nonetheless, coming out of the culture served me well in terms of knowing where to look and what recognizing connections I might otherwise have missed. Of course, this background could be a double-edged sword—I occasionally found myself having to check my assumptions in order to see the full picture, and relying too much on a fallible memory can lead to a dead end just as easily as a secret passageway. When this ambient knowledge worked best, it led me to places and insights I never could have imagined—the memory of a specific Batman action figure playset I had as a child brought me to actionable observations on transmedial churn in merchandise; a treasured videogame I played as a teenager forged mental connections for me in the evolution of licensed media development.

Finally, I must additionally note the central pitfall of researching a transmedia complex, regardless of method. The problem of plenitude is very real when studying these kinds of objects—there's just far too much to keep track of. Even in the utterly impossible scenario where I somehow capture *all* the data, I can still never *know* that I've captured it all. So from the outset, I strove to manage comprehensiveness. A strategy of tactics opens the possibility of containing myself to the points that interest me. But here the issue cuts in the other direction as well—trying to capture so much in case it becomes useful later results in a great deal of waste in the process. The number of catalogues I made to never use, linear regressions I tried to model that broke, partial information I could never complete even after spending days following this one point down a rabbit hole—a lot of data was left on the cutting room floor. Perhaps this is just par for the course on any project this size.

## **1.5 Contributions**

By analyzing transmedia in terms of videogame cities, I will make significant contributions to both transmedia studies and game studies. As already mentioned, though much has been written about transmedia as a narrative mode, media mix as business practice, and franchise as a constitutive aspect of contemporary media culture, little synthesis exists that either reconciles terms or addresses the effectiveness of interventional tactics and resistance for fans, users, and various publics. In my work, I will open up new channels of investigation for game studies into the realm of urban geography, and my research into collaborative transmedia production practices will make important inroads into issues of transmedial work in the rapidly growing field of immaterial labour. In addition, by making Gotham City my central case study, I

will add to a rich and broad corpus of work on the history and analysis of an important pop culture property.

In examining Gotham City's protocols and functions as digital space, transmedia narrative, and commodified labour product, I intend to demonstrate how videogame cities allow us to think about networked digital media and mobile navigation technology. By thinking about the structure of the virtual Gotham City allegorically, we can connect our prescribed means of circulating through virtual geographies, their forms and procedural rhetoric, back to how digital technology formulates the contemporary physical world for us, regulating our behaviours and anxieties and stultifying our ability to imagine an outside of the map. The breadth of the implications arising from these findings range from the potential to impact our understandings of how we interact and identify with our media to offering strategies for individual resistance to hegemonic norms of urban life.

Finally, at the end of this project, I should have a list of concepts that I can pull out and place into a theoretical and methodological toolbox. These tools will prove useful for future scholars and publics who want to perform this kind of exercise or thinking. The list of these tools includes the techniques of transmedia production at work in the creation of fictional and virtual urban spaces like Gotham City, such as *churn*, *IP skinning*, and the *space/place/environment* triumvirate. Nitsche's aforementioned book arguably forms the definitive text on video game spaces, but his perspective focuses largely on virtual spaces created primarily (or originally, or exclusively) for games. He fails to account for predefined storymaps and storyworlds generated within transmedia complexes. This work offers a remedy to the gap left by Nitsche's work, accounting for the ways in which transmedia works on virtual worlds and how games importantly figure in transmedia.

## 1.6 **Outline**

This dissertation has a six-chapter structure: *Introduction*, *Literature Review*, *Gotham on the Ground*, *Arkham Interactive*, *Brickwork Bat*, and *Conclusion*.

### 1.6.1 **Literature Review**

In this chapter, I will explain in greater detail the existing body of work on transmedia and gaps that I believe need to be addressed. I will provide an overview of the theoretical considerations I have considered and incorporated into my own framework. I will also summarize the corpus of work that informs the thesis, and offer avenues for synthesized thinking about transmedia and the study of space. Finally, I will additionally provide a broad discussion of how conceptions of transmedia have been expressed in Batman products over the past 75 years, and detail that the contemporary transmedia paradigm is shifting how Batman stories are expressed today.

### 1.6.2 **Gotham on the Ground: History & Other Media**

My first case study chapter will provide a historiographic overview of various versions of Gotham City. Over the course of nearly 80 years, Batman's home city has undergone many changes in terms of architecture, atmosphere, and topography. This chapter demonstrates the rhizomatic nature of the transmedia city, examining how different iterations across media forms borrow from and build on one another. It looks at comics, radio, film, television, fan wikis, and toy sets. The chapter argues that in each medium, Gotham City serves a specific set of functions

used to construct the Batman mythos and interpellate fans. Along the way, it also studies the production cultures and medium-specific affordances that influence how a fictional place is realized, rather than simply as a product of an auteured vision.

### **1.6.3 Arkham Interactive: Maps, Circulation, and the *Arkham* Videogame Series**

From here, the thesis turns towards specific subfranchises of Batman in videogames. *Arkham Interactive* refers to the Gotham City of the Rocksteady/WB Games *Batman: Arkham* game series. This multi-platform series, developed by several studios, constructs a uniquely rhizomatic Gotham City through the reuse of code and engine, and attempts to offer players specific experiences of “being the Batman.” In particular, the chapter argues that the *Arkham* Gotham(s) fail as an allegory for a real city because its management of traversal and player circulation collapses spacetime and constructs a goal-oriented experience, rather than an experience of the urban.

### **1.6.4 Brickwork Bat: Lego Batman and the Licensing Network**

This chapter will address how the games in the *Lego Batman* series negotiate intellectual property concerns, and the questions they raise about how the various *Lego* game series speak to one another and their player base as they also evoke the licensed intellectual property in question. In this context, Lego itself operates as allegory for digital materiality and modular design, and the *Lego Batman* games flow and ebb in terms of which aspects of Batman history and Gotham geography they want to excite in the player’s mind (as well as, presumably, the minds of the player’s parents), while they do little work to elaborate the history and provenance

of the imaginaries they invoke. Consequently, *Lego Batman* games (as well as the 2016 *Lego Batman* movie) exist in an ever-present moment where all history collapses in on itself with limited organizational effort and even less accreditation. I will explore how this state came about (from both DC's desire to be included in a popular Lego game-licensing trend and Lego's necessary move into licensing in the first place), and how developer Traveller's Tales' emergent house style effectively skins various IP over a reused core code and engine to keep up with the demands of churn.

### **1.6.5 Conclusion**

The final chapter will summarize the findings of the chapters of the dissertation and synthesize their arguments. It will briefly describe recent expressions of Gotham City that came to the fore after I had already selected the corpus of work for the thesis, lay out a timeline of shifts in media production, and clarify how focusing on a prominent aspect of transmedia like worldbuilding has implications for the study of contemporary media production writ large. The chapter will clearly and concisely restate the contributions of the case study chapters and the usefulness of the theoretical and methodological takeaways for similar future studies. Finally, it will take time to discuss the implications for transmedia strategy on the interpellation of fans and consumers, and question tactics and strategies users may employ in the future as means of resisting this interpellation.

## 2 Literature Review

“They are already not the history they described, and so it is up to us to find linkages across documents, registers, genres, and problems to give history meaning and intelligibility for ourselves and our readers. To refuse the act of interpretation is to become an instrument of an inchoate world we project back onto our sources; to refuse interpretation is a double *impensé* because it requires an imaginary positivism, or perhaps an equally fantastic transcendental idealism. In the act of interpretation, we think transversally.”

– Jonathan Sterne, “Rearranging the Files: On Interpretation in Media History.”<sup>79</sup>

“...I know now that you can spend your whole life learning Gotham from deep inside...and still know nothing about it at all.”

– Bruce Wayne, *Batman Volume 2 #8* (2012)<sup>80</sup>

### 2.1 Introduction

Taking a narrow disciplinary approach in examining as massive an object as Batman or Gotham City only speaks to the *impossibility* of mapping such an object. Gesturing towards this impossibility is important, because I must acknowledge at the outset that in the context of the networked digital milieu, I can’t capture everything. No matter how rigorous or panoptical the study, some data (likely most data, especially when it comes to globally-recognized icons, popular and prevalent for the better part of a century) will always escape. The nature of media franchise is that it is alive and ever-changing, ever-iterating. The conceit of comprehensiveness lends itself to the fiction of stability, and the reality is that there’s never been a stable moment for a figure like Batman. So sticking to one field of inquiry teaches me very little in this scope. A breadth of approaches unlocks far more; in the realm of the assemblage, one framework may be very useful for one aspect, but fail to glean any profitable knowledge for another aspect.

---

<sup>79</sup> Jonathan Sterne, “Rearranging the Files: On Interpretation in Media History,” *Communication Review* 13, no. 1 (2010), 86.

<sup>80</sup> Scott Snyder and Greg Capullo, *Batman Volume 2 #8*, vol. 2, (New York: DC Comics, 2012).

My theoretical framework is therefore based primarily around flexibility, beginning with foundational communication studies thinking essential for addressing new media, post-structuralist and Marxist theories of cultural production, circulation theory and urban geography, game studies, and various disciplinary approaches to virtual worlds. In addition, it is important to foreground Batman and Gotham City as concepts, transmedia in the context of franchise and adaptation, and useful elements harvested from a number of other fields and subfields.

This chapter will proceed by first framing transmedia as a postmodern concept in relationship to franchise and the media mix; relevant and important scholarship on Batman; important work from media studies and game studies, especially those that closely look at issues of mechanics and space; post-structuralist philosophical considerations of real-world spatiality; and finally, important concepts from Michel de Certeau and a small selection of other thinkers on the city.

## 2.2 **Framing Transmedia**

Our media products do not currently exist in isolation, and in truth they never have. Because of this, it helps a great deal to try to force various methodologies and theoretical thinking to operate in concert with one another as well, developing a nimbler research framework or strategy of tactics. In order to do this, I must first parse the terminological formations from which we derive our conflicting, overlapping, complementary and redundant theories, as well as the diverse range of methodological approaches at my fingertips. The task is not small; in point of fact, it's quite unattainable.

In order to properly get a handle on transmedia for the purposes of *this* project, I have opted to view it from a number of angles, including fandom/convergence culture/participatory



culture, narrative, production culture, authorship, franchise, and the media mix. Why so many valences? Because, as stated earlier, the principal concern of this thesis is to expose the dialectical relationship between transmedia as a *mode* and transmedia as a *business model*.

Before I even get there, though, I have to look further back to literary studies and adaptation theory. While adaptation as a field of inquiry has been elaborated well over the years in a number of directions, Linda Hutcheon offers an excellent synthesis of the arena in her book *A Theory of Adaptation*.<sup>81</sup> In this volume, Hutcheon identifies the affordances of adaptation by way of affect: adaptation offers pleasures of repetition through variation,<sup>82</sup> and multiple versions of a story exist laterally, not vertically.<sup>83</sup> She emphasizes context as a determinate factor in how adapters operate, consciously or not:

An adaptation, like the work it adapts, is always framed in a context—a time and a place, a society and a culture; it does not exist in a vacuum. Fashions, not to mention value systems, are context-dependent. [...] I have been arguing that adaptation—that is, as a *product*—has a kind of “theme and variation” formal structure or repetition with difference. This means not only that change is inevitable but that there will also be multiple possible causes of change in the *process* of adapting made by the demands of form, the individual adapter, the particular audience, and now the contexts of reception and creation. This context is vast and variegated.<sup>84</sup>

While this may seem a rudimentary concept to focus on, I feature it here because it’s a crucial one to keep in mind, both for what it includes and what it omits. Hutcheon pays heed to the

---

<sup>81</sup> Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

importance of materiality and time, and nods towards the vastness of other contextual signifiers. It's important not to take these truisms so for granted that they fade into the background. Knowing that context is important makes it no less essential to closely examine that context. At the same time, Hutcheon employs the language of Romanticism in this passage, referring to adapters as individuals and framing the adaptations as processes of creation and reception. These are not the important stakes of transmedia, where efficiency, political economy, participatory culture, and marketplace are all key contexts, and authorship is rarely performed by an individual in isolation. This is the disconnect between adaptation and transmedia, and suggests the necessities of moving away from a linear thought process (the lateral relationships Hutcheon discusses) and towards a rhizomatic model.

Hutcheon's theories connect to postmodernism and semiotics. She sees adaptation as an extension of the postmodern opening for increased critique through reflective contrast. I find an affinity with this perspective: like de Certeau's points on strategies and tactics, Hutcheon uses postmodern modalities to aid in the critique of postmodernism.<sup>85</sup> Additionally, the claim of adaptation existing laterally (especially in individualized experience) hews closely both to postmodern obliterations of history and the experiential reading of transmedia objects (an exploration Hutcheon's co-author Siobahn O'Flynn takes up explicitly in the second edition of *A Theory of Adaptation*<sup>86</sup>). Meanwhile, literary adaptation from medium to medium is necessarily intertextual. Here, Julia Kristeva's work on the interplay between different systems of signs provides another factor to account for in this project, as the recapitulation of transmedia narratives is always inherently recursive.<sup>87</sup>

---

<sup>85</sup> Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1989), 101.

<sup>86</sup> Linda Hutcheon and Siobhan O'Flynn, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2013).

<sup>87</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, trans. Thomas Gora and Alice Jardine (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980).

However, adaptation as a framework reifies exactly the kind of problematic tautologies I want to move away from. This is primarily because adaptation still implies linearity and emerges from a Romantic notion of authorship. If I want to transition from a theory of adaptation to a theory of transmedia, I have to ask a contentious question: who authors transmedia objects? The reason this question is so potentially volatile is because the matter of who creates transmedia is somewhat at odds with who disseminates and controls the intellectual property that flows from transmedia narratives, and both are often at odds with the rhetorical positioning of authorship in public discourse. Michel Foucault is often viewed as the final word on this subject, as his landmark essay “What is an Author?” unpacks the nature of authorship as a function of power and institution:

Further elaboration would, of course, disclose other characteristics of the ‘author-function,’ but I have limited myself to the four that seemed the most obvious and important. They can be summarized in the following manner: the ‘author-function’ is tied to the legal and institutional systems that circumscribe, determine, and articulate the realm of discourses; it does not operate in a uniform manner in all discourses, at all times, and in any given culture; it is not defined by the spontaneous attribution of a text to its creator, but through a series of precise and complex procedures; it does not refer, purely and simply, to an actual individual insofar as it simultaneously gives rise to a variety of egos and to a series of subjective positions that individuals of any class may come to occupy.<sup>88</sup>

---

<sup>88</sup> Foucault, “What Is An Author?,” 910.

Foucault is particularly useful because he thinks in terms of creation and power at once, and in this project, I'll try to work along parallel lines. Despite the widespread acceptance of Foucault's conception of authorship as an institutional power function within many schools of literary criticism and media theory, it may be hard to reconcile this revolutionary thought process with both law and general understanding; freely accessible dictionary definitions make no mention of constructs and several mentions of individuals, positioning the author in literature as a person who composes a literary work, the author in computers as the writer of a software program, and the author generally as the maker, creator, or originator of anything.<sup>89</sup> So clearly there's a deep discrepancy between the way that authorship is theorized academically and how it's understood publicly. For the purposes of this project, it's best to begin with a view of the concept that takes both ends of the spectrum into account, mindful of the contradiction between how an author is considered in detail and how it's deployed in the rhetoric of the everyday.

This mindfulness is indispensable for thinking about creation within the culture industries. In proposing the concept of the Culture Industry, critical theorists Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer presupposed that all culture had become fully integrated into the dynamics of capitalism, and that most popular culture operated like a factory producing standardized cultural goods.<sup>90</sup> But in reexamining the idea, scholars like Bernard Miège and Terry Flew tell us that this Frankfurt School reading of the culture industry is too broad and blunt, leading them to the more plural terms cultural and creative *industries*.<sup>91</sup> <sup>92</sup> Furthermore, Miège claims that

---

<sup>89</sup> From dictionary.com, definitions of author in the noun form include: "1. A person who writes a novel, poem, essay, etc.; the composer of a literary work, as distinguished from a compiler, translator, editor, or copyist.[...]3. The maker of anything; creator; originator [...] 4. *Computers*. The writer of a software program, especially a hypertext or multimedia application." In the verb form, to author is either "to write; be the author of" or "to originate; create a design for."

<sup>90</sup> Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 98.

<sup>91</sup> Bernard Miège, *Les Industries du Contenu Face à L'Ordre Informationnel* (Grenoble, France: Presses Universitaires de Grenoble, 2000).

<sup>92</sup> Terry Flew, *The Creative Industries: Culture and Policy* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2012).

cultural industries often enable *new art*,<sup>93</sup> especially when they pass their creations to workers in the creative industries. This idea is backed by Mark Deuze, who claims that the media industries are, paradoxically, at once responsible for many forms of new innovation, and the homogenization of culture that follows.<sup>94</sup> The basic difference between cultural industries and creative industries is that cultural industries produce our culture and the technologies we use in creation, while the term creative industries speaks to other aspects of society not explicitly concerned with culture, such as design or writing. Both can be captured under the concept of transmedia complexes, which concern themselves with the production of objects and content for a broad public.

In the North American and Western context, theories of transmedia and convergence are dominant in considerations of comparable media phenomena and the products of media industries, while in Japanese scholarship specifically, the concept of the media mix is generally used to describe and discuss such object networks. As mentioned in the introduction, Marsha Kinder coined the term transmedia in 1991 with her book *Playing with Power in Movies, Television, and Video Games*,<sup>95</sup> and Henry Jenkins developed it further in terms of mode with his 2006 book *Convergence Culture*.<sup>96</sup> Jenkins' use of the term refers more to narrative, while Kinder's use speaks more to strategy and business model. Discussing "transmedia ecosystems," Kinder ties transmedia as a concept to postmodernism:

[T]he particular conventions of American commercial television, with its blatant emphasis on intertextuality, segmentation, and flow and with its pervasive popularity worldwide, have led subjects to see themselves as highly adaptable transformers or

---

<sup>93</sup> Miège, *Les Industries du Contenu Face à L'Ordre Informationnel*.

<sup>94</sup> Deuze, *Media Work*.

<sup>95</sup> Kinder, *Playing with Power*.

<sup>96</sup> Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*.

sliding signifiers—that is, to perceive their imaginary signifier as marked by an idealized protean malleability rather than by an idealized unity as in the Lacanian matrix. [...] This process of reproducing the postmodernist subject and its dynamic of commercial empowerment is now being intensified and accelerated in home video games, in commercial transmedia supersystems constructed around figure like Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, and in multinational corporate mergers like Sony’s recent takeover of Columbia Pictures and Matsushita’s acquisition of MCA/Universal. In these expanding networks of synergy, collectability, restructuring, new world orders (and other postmodernist buzzwords), children, corporations, and countries are learning that transmedia intertextuality is a powerful strategy for survival.<sup>97</sup>

Kinder identifies the interpellation processes of late 20<sup>th</sup> Century transmedia complexes, marking their protocols (especially those relating to intertextuality) in terms of Althusserian Ideological State Apparatuses. Rather than repressing them, capitalism works through transmedia to construct the identities of its subjects through softer institutions that the subject opts into. However, writing in the early 1990s, Kinder can’t account for the impacts of digital networks and the atomization of culture from mass media to online life. Working 15 years later, Henry Jenkins both zooms in on the refinements of transmedia complexes in terms of intertextuality and zooms out to contextualize them with convergence culture. Jenkins identifies transmedia storytelling, where multiple texts are integrated to create such a massive single narrative that it exceeds the boundaries of a single medium’s storytelling capabilities:

---

<sup>97</sup> Kinder, *Playing with Power*, 37-38.

Transmedia storytelling refers to a new aesthetic that has emerged in response to media convergence—one that places new demands on consumers and depends on the active participation of knowledge communities. Transmedia storytelling is the art of world making. To fully experience any fictional world, consumers must assume the role of hunters and gatherers, chasing down bits of the story across media channels, comparing notes with each other via online discussion groups, and collaborating to ensure that everyone who invests time and effort will come away with a richer entertainment experience.<sup>98</sup>

Transmedia storytelling not only places new demands on consumers, it also places even larger demands on storytellers due to the increased coordination called for. In writing about transmedia storytelling in *Convergence Culture*, Jenkins focuses on the narrative assemblage of *The Matrix*.<sup>99</sup> But this particular complex is an outlier in the larger transmedia milieu, as the Wachowskis produced an extremely auteured body of work: they not only directed the film trilogy, but wrote and directed the videogame *Enter the Matrix*;<sup>100</sup> hand-picked the cartoonists who produced the *Matrix* webcomics;<sup>101</sup> and contributed story elements to several of the segments in the direct-to-video animated anthology *The Animatrix*.<sup>102</sup> The vast majority of transmedia storytelling is far less coordinated, and therefore far less distilled. This means that the increased demands placed on consumers to coordinate knowledge and clarify storylines lacks a payoff; the bluff of most transmedia storytelling is that there is any final solution or “full story”.

---

<sup>98</sup> Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 20-21.

<sup>99</sup> Lana Wachowski and Lilly Wachowski, *The Matrix* (Burbank: Warner Brothers, 1999).

<sup>100</sup> Lana Wachowski and Lilly Wachowski, *Enter the Matrix*, Playstation 2 (Laguna Beach, CA: Shiny Entertainment, 2003).

<sup>101</sup> Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 95.

<sup>102</sup> Kōji Morimoto et al., *The Animatrix* (Burbank: Warner Brothers, 2003).

The coordination of knowledge is an important part of Jenkin's contributions to the field. Contemporary transmedia relies heavily on participatory culture to function properly, both as a product and a process. As a product, transmedia needs multiple delivery channels and word-of-mouth buzz to properly disseminate objects to audiences, and robust online conversation and debate to cultivate brand loyalty and fandom. As a process, transmedia makes excellent use of the products fandom generates itself, using online wikis as story bibles and asset resources. Jenkins praises the advent and development of online fandom as contributing to a richer culture where more voices can be heard, and he's right; however, *Convergence Culture* doesn't properly caution against the rise of *toxic* fandom cultures. I will take up both of these issues further down, but I hope to contribute to the conversation in terms of how participation and interaction with transmedia products operates and interpellates consumers in game spaces. If transmedia supersystems are about postmodern synergy and transmedia storytelling is about making worlds, then my project is to discuss the construction of the postmodern subject *within* those worlds.

Jenkins placed transmedia as one of the crown jewels of convergence culture, a concept developed to describe how media is produced and consumed in the digitally networked milieu of new media and the globalized world. Convergence here has the double duties of denoting both the coming-together of production and consumption and the tendency to bring different media users and audiences together to share in single stories. Unfortunately, by placing emphasis on the utopian possibilities of transmedia and convergence culture, Jenkins failed to foresee how both would be employed in the years following the publication of *Convergence Culture*. Participatory culture has already, in less than a decade, been co-opted, adopted, and subsumed by multinationals and state institutions, muddying the waters of communal harmony and



user/audience power that Jenkins envisioned.<sup>103</sup> His work itself has become gradually repoliticized, as the utopian media ecosystem he envisioned has given way to our current state, and his recent offering *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture* (co-authored with Sam Ford and Joshua Green and published in 2013), reads more like a handbook for marketers than as a tool for savvy media consumption or academic insight. In this text,<sup>104</sup> Jenkins turns away from transmedia as an independent concept and adopts the corporate producer's side of the discussion, introducing a term that can usefully describe transmedia as strategy: spreadability. Spreadability merges transmedia strategy with virality to put a friendly face on both;<sup>105</sup> consequently, the book registers easily as a strategy guide for turning participatory culture into audience engagement and brand loyalty. Jenkins is one of the foundational thinkers in transmedia theory, so his involvement in the production of the book, and the text's conflation of transmedia and virality, speak powerfully to the need for media scholars to focus their critical attentions on the production culture and ideological undercurrents of networked new media narratives.

These issues are not new even if our perception of them is. In their book *Transmedia Archaeology*, media scholars Matthew Freeman, Paolo Bertetti, and Carlos Scolari observe that not only is transmedia itself contingent upon the alignment of multiple fields of media production (given how common it has become to theorize transmedia as part of the structures

---

<sup>103</sup> Jenkins' own recent work is a tacit acknowledgement of the decline of this utopian ideological outlook: his book *Spreadable Media* (2013, co-authored with Sam Ford and Joshua Green), turns away from the idea of transmedia storytelling and towards the efficacy of multiplatform marketing. In this media ecosystem, narrative cohesion and unified experiences take a backseat to ease of dissemination and holistic market access; Jenkins et. al even attempt to reclaim the notion of "viral" media by supplanting it with the more docile idea of "spreadability." It should be noted, however, that Jenkins' following book *Participatory Culture in a Networked Era* (2015, co-authored with Mizuko Ito and danah boyd) again speaks to issues of participatory culture from an end-user, publics-focused perspective.

<sup>104</sup> Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green, *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture* (New York: NYU Press, 2013), 7.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

and organizational systems of the corporately converged and integrated media conglomerate<sup>106</sup>), but that such practices and requisites have been in place in popular culture since the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century—the difference now being that we’ve moved from tightly serializing episodes day-by-day to longer and looser serializations of stories (allowed for by the ease with which we can now review older instalments through windowing practices,<sup>107</sup> digital rentals, binge-watching, etc.<sup>108</sup>).

Derek Johnson’s book on franchise theory in popular culture<sup>109</sup> is also useful to this project. Johnson writes that audiences and consumers pursue franchises for the pleasures of divergence that they offer, rather than the pleasures of totalization offered by convergence.<sup>110</sup> This is a key distinction that marks franchise theory as different from transmedia theory, and it is possible to consider transmedia in terms of *strategy* (praxis), and franchise in terms of *structure* (form). Of course, as explained in the introduction chapter, transmedia is not just one story told across different media; it also refers to any entertainment experience that utilizes multiple communication channels, such as Facebook Live videos, production vlogs, comment sections, and hashtags embedded in the corner of a television broadcast petitioning viewers to talk back online. As mentioned already, the majority of transmedia objects lack one or more of Jenkins’ defining characteristics of transmedia storytelling: narrative cohesion, unification of entertainment experience, coordinated or systematic dispersion, or single story.

Mapping such fields is even more difficult when their production is not only collaborative, but also secret. While the rise of DVD-extras, online wikis and databases, and

---

<sup>106</sup> Freeman et al., *Transmedia Archaeology*, 40.

<sup>107</sup> Elissa Nelson, “Windows Into the Digital World: Distributor Strategies and Consumer Choice in an Era of Connected Viewing,” in *Connected Viewing: Selling, Streaming, & Sharing Media in the Digital Age*, ed. Jennifer Holt and Kevin Sanson (New York: Routledge, 2013), 62–78.

<sup>108</sup> Freeman et al., *Transmedia Archaeology*, 49.

<sup>109</sup> Johnson, *Media Franchising*.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

production blogs have given us excellent optics into the processes of single instalments in transmedia narratives or individual elements of media franchise networks, there are a dearth of *networked* production narratives available for our observation and study. In a 2010 article on transmediation and the tensions inherent in negotiating between the drives of fans and corporate producers, Suzanne Scott observes that the decentralization of large-scale transmedia production promised by owners is a contradiction of the participatory culture Jenkins writes about in *Convergence Culture*:

What does distinguish commercial transmedia narratives from their unofficial, fan-created counterparts is their implicit promise to decentralize authorship and promote collaboration, both between creators in different mediums and creators and fans. While Jenkins stresses the decentralized or collaborative model of authorship these systems foster, he offers an important qualification that ‘the most successful transmedia franchises have emerged when a single creator or creative unit maintains control,’ thus problematizing a reading of these systems as democratizing creative ownership.<sup>111</sup>

It’s definitely hard to justify transmedia as democratizing when even Jenkins acknowledges that it functions most effectively when creative control is centralized. The main question here is: where is the modern transmedia franchise centralized? Who makes the ultimate decisions? Because at some point, a bunch of stakeholders need to sit down at a table and work out a strategy, and in all likelihood, there are more people on the ‘business’ side of the table than there are on the ‘creative’ side. Which is not necessarily a problem—we just need to recategorize and recognize the creative contributions of these new types of authors and authorities. So the political

---

<sup>111</sup> Suzanne Scott, “The Trouble with Transmediation,” 30.

economies and licensing structures of conglomerated media actively work to obfuscate the strategies of producers. So how *should* we approach them?

This leads us to another key aspect of transmedia and this project: fan and audience studies. Scott is an important scholar here, because her work explains some of the processes by which transmedia subsumes fandom. In her chapter “Dawn of the Undead Author: Fanboy Auteurism and Zack Snyder’s ‘Vision,’”<sup>112</sup> Scott points to the faith placed in Snyder by audiences and producers alike in his role adapting Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons’ comic *Watchmen*<sup>113</sup> to feature film as situated in an understanding that Snyder occupies the roles of both fan and producer, identifying his position as part of a broader paradox of authorship, “occupying a liminal position between author and audience.”<sup>114</sup>

Snyder’s rhetorical positioning in this liminal space is echoed in other media as well; for example, game developer Bethesda Studios frequently describes and mythologizes its staff as developers who are also big fans of the genres they work in. At times, Bethesda has used this affection as a defensive position on incomplete and buggy releases—because these developers are just fans, they’re fallible like fans, and doing the best they can. The studio also frequently invites players to “co-create” the games through the use of software development kits (SDKs)<sup>115</sup> released with many of their games. Of course, the terms of service accompanying the games and SDKs tell a different story of who maintains a creator’s rights to any mods the players produce. Blurring the line between professionals and publics in ways like these is a central concern in fan and audience studies as related to transmedia, as well as player studies within games scholarship.

---

<sup>112</sup> Suzanne Scott, “Dawn of the Undead Author: Fanboy Auteurism and Zack Snyder’s ‘Vision,’” in *A Companion to Media Authorship*, ed. Jonathan Gray and Derek Johnson (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 440-462.

<sup>113</sup> Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons, *Watchmen* (New York: DC Comics, 1986).

<sup>114</sup> Scott, “Dawn of the Undead Author,” 440.

<sup>115</sup> Carolyn Jong, Rob Gallagher, and Kalervo A. Sinervo, “Who Wrote the Elder Scrolls? Modders, Developers, and the Mythology of Bethesda Softworks,” *Loading...* 10, no. 16 (2017), <http://journals.sfu.ca/loading/index.php/loading/article/view/169>.

The rhetoric of creator as fan works backwards to encourage fans to produce excess in their use of media products, frequently through aspirational consumption like prosumerism or gamified asset creation like playbour.<sup>116</sup>

It is now more important than ever to consider how transmedia plays into issues of transaction, marketing, and deep continuity structures. At a 2017 San Diego Comic-Con (SDCC) panel, DC publisher Jim Lee said that the comic industry was “on the brink of collapse.”<sup>117</sup> Regardless of the conceit here that American superheroes alone constitute the entirety of the comic industry (as opposed to a more nuanced view that might elaborate multiple and multivalent “comic industries”), Lee’s words are worth heeding in terms of the precarity of *comic books*. While superheroes have never been more popular across a diversity of demographics as they are right now, sales of mainstream American comic books account for only a small revenue share of the “superhero business.”

Since 2011, the DC Universe has relaunched three times and rebooted various titles with new Number One issues multiple more times. This is a direct byproduct of the desire by publishers to boost sales in a given month. Whatever the benefits these reboots conferred upon the publisher and the cognitive complexities with which they saddled fans, the necessity of them can’t be ignored. When *DC: Rebirth* launched in 2016, it was a Hail Mary pass for the publisher, whose sales were flagging at the end of 2015. DC’s biggest perceived competitor, Marvel Comics, has employed this tactic an absurd seven times in the same time frame. Journalist Heidi MacDonald points out that publishers make these moves to temporarily spike sales, but

---

<sup>116</sup> Renée Jackson, William Robinson, and Bart Simon, “Gleaning Strategies for Knowledge Sharing and Collective Assessment in the Art Classroom from the Videogame, *Little Big Planet’s* Creator Spotlights,” in *Educational, Psychological, and Behavioral Considerations in Niche Online Communities*, ed. Vivek Venkatesh et al. (Hershey, PA: IGI Global, 2014), 14-32.

<sup>117</sup> Tom Bacon, “SDCC 2017: DC Comics Says Comic Book Industry Is On Verge of Collapse,” *MoviePilot*, July 21, 2017, <https://web.archive.org/web/20170721184214/https://moviepilot.com/p/sdcc-2017-dc-comics-comic-book-industry-collapse/4327814>.

subsequent retail shortfalls result in a vicious cycle where relaunching gives a brief shot of adrenaline that only leads to more exhaustion on the parts of fans.<sup>118</sup>

This calls for a rethinking of how continuity structures function in both comics and transmedia. Are comics becoming more like transmedia strategy, or is transmedia adapting the techniques of comic book publishers and their narrative universes? Early transmedia strategy in pop culture franchising very much took a cue from transmedia storytelling: few contradictions abounded in narrative, and even aesthetics from medium to medium attempted to operate in a complementary fashion.<sup>119</sup> It was frequently incumbent upon viewers to engage with the broader narrative (beyond the “central stream” primary-medium core plot) in order to comprehend the background when engaging with the tributaries. As contemporary scholarship on transmedia demonstrates, this is no longer the case. Instead, as Johnson, Scott, and a host of others note, producers nod towards recursivity, market different media to different demographics, and largely ignore contradictions.

The brilliant trick of transmedia is that it offers the appearance of editorial oversight where none exists. A problematic aspect of this from the perspective of the comic industry itself is the indignity of the inspirational material having to service the interests of more profitable media streams. Controlling interests in the corporate IP of superheroes has fully been transferred to multinationals like Disney and WarnerMedia. In a 2014 *Nerdist Writers Panel Podcast* episode, comics creators Heath Corson, Len Wein, and Adam Beechen discuss the growing tendency of new comics writing to be directed to reflect the most recent successful film, television, or game node in the franchise.<sup>120</sup> Many of the cinematic universes rely upon adapting

---

<sup>118</sup> Heidi MacDonald, “The Not-so-Secret History of Marvel’s Seven Relaunches in Five Years,” *The Beat*, February 20, 2018, <http://www.comicsbeat.com/the-not-so-secret-history-of-marvels-seven-relaunches-in-five-years/>.

<sup>119</sup> For example, the fluidity of design between the first and second *Matrix* films and the Shiny Entertainment game *Enter the Matrix* (released the same month as *The Matrix Reloaded*).

<sup>120</sup> Len Wein et al., “Nerdist Comics Panel #71: Year in Review,” *Nerdist Comics Panel*, 2014, <https://nerdist.com/nerdist-comics-panel-71-year-in-review/>.

popular storylines canonized by fans of the 1980s-2000s. In fact, adapting these storylines and representing these incarnations of characters help studios attract both auteur talent (as Scott notes) and provide fan service to ticket purchasers.

However, this means that the studios must find ways of capturing the lasting popularity of the stories of the past while heeding the shifting demographics of the present. The tendency of the MCU and DCEU to replicate older storylines their fanboy auteurs are interested in is one reason that these movies are so entirely driven by white male protagonists and creators. If the films are being adapted from older storylines, and the comics are increasingly directed towards adapting the films, what exciting content will the films be able to harvest from the comics a generation from now? Or will the post-Affleck Batman still be rehashing his complicated identity and growling out lines written by Frank Miller in the 1980s? This connects backwards to Foucault as well: contemporary transmedia takes Foucault's ideas of institutional power flowing from titles of authorship and turns them inwards. In transmedia, the *praxis* of authorship is seen in terms of functionality and power dynamics.

Transmedia involves the adaptation of narratives into not only other versions and media, but also into toys, playsets, and a number of other merchandising streams.<sup>121</sup> This connects us to the media mix, which does a much stronger job of tackling these aspects of franchise and transmedia complex. Media mix may offer a better way to account for transmedia *strategy*. Broadly defined, the media mix refers to the multiple media formations developed across a single franchise. Regardless of where a media property began or how it is expressed across different media, the media mix accounts for all activities that arguably fall under the confines of that property's narrative or image content. In this way, the media mix is less concerned with

---

<sup>121</sup> Mark J. P. Wolf, "Adapting the Death Star into Lego: The Case of Lego Set #10188," in *LEGO Studies: Examining the Building Blocks of a Transmedial Phenomenon*, ed. Mark J. P. Wolf (New York: Routledge, 2014), 15.

story than character, less concerned with plotting than with iconicity. The media mix also allows for highly developed and systematized strategies of property development or totally unstructured permutations and iterations of a character or story. Simply put, the media mix contains the entire phenomenon of transmedia storytelling that Jenkins characterizes in convergence culture, as well as the industrial concerns contained therein, from licensing and merchandising to fan-created content.

While transmedia ostensibly operates on a principle of convergence, the media mix in some cases operates on an almost opposite principle, wherein properties operate through multiplication and divergence. What in the North American context we might refer to as an adaptation, remake, or reboot, is simply another world in the media mix paradigm: perhaps the same narrative retold with major or minor differences; perhaps the same story retold in the same medium with newer production techniques; perhaps a completely different story using one of the same characters or just a significant concept. A key difference here is the loss of hierarchy: the media mix is less concerned with fidelity and originality than it is with novel expression couched in iconic familiarity. So media mix content operates through the multiplication (or divergence) of narratives and the corresponding multiplication of worlds. In his work on the subject, Marc Steinberg turns to Gottfried Leibniz and Gilles Deleuze to develop the multiple worlds concept and its distinction from the convergence of Jenkins' transmedia storytelling.<sup>122</sup> Rather than concerning ourselves with the reconciliation of discrepancies between versions of a story and claims of originality, we can focus on what different versions tell us about different contexts. Rather than worry about continuity and intention, we can think about exploration. Steinberg also

---

<sup>122</sup> Marc Steinberg, "Condensing the Media Mix: Multiple Possible Worlds in The Tatami Galaxy," *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* 21, no. 2 (2012): 71–92.



describes the rise of a “committee system” in Japan during the 1980s based on temporary corporate alliances to finance and manage specific productions:

Even the rise of the production committee system (*seisaku iinkai*) model of financing does not contradict the tendency toward conglomeration but rather adopts it. The committee system is a style of financing that first arose in the 1980s but came to prominence in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The committee system sees a number of companies temporarily band together for the aim of producing a particular film, animation series, or media mix, with each company contributing capital and/or resources to the project. Hence the committee system adopts media integration as its model, albeit on a temporary, project-specific basis (and, for better or worse, with a distributed decision-making system that prevents complete control from being exerted by any single member). This committee-based media integration not only enables the diffusion of a series across a variety of media types but also allows for a synergetic cross-fertilization between texts and the integration of advertising for one media series within another.<sup>123</sup>

Similar endeavours take place at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century in North America, though without a formalized system in place: in comics, Superman meets Spider-Man in the 1976 one-shot *Superman vs. The Amazing Spider-Man*,<sup>124</sup> and the Marvel and DC Universe further duke it out the 1996 *Marvel vs DC/Amalgam* crossover event;<sup>125</sup> in film, for the 1988 Robert Zemeckis film *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?*,<sup>126</sup> producer Steven Spielberg negotiated between Walt Disney

---

<sup>123</sup> Steinberg, *Anime's Media Mix*, 172.

<sup>124</sup> Gerry Conway et al., *Superman vs. The Amazing Spider-Man* (New York: DC Comics/Marvel Comics, 1976).

<sup>125</sup> Ron Marz, Peter David, and Dan Jurgens, *DC versus Marvel Comics* (New York: DC Comics/Marvel Comics, 1996).

<sup>126</sup> Robert Zemeckis, *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* (Burbank: Touchstone Pictures, 1988).

Pictures, Warner Bros., Fleischer Studios, and a number of other stakeholders to create the largest sanctioned gathering of cartoon characters in the history of Western animation. But these temporary arrangements are not a protocol within transmedia. Marvel and DC remain rivals to this day, and *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* never received a sequel, in part because the various IP holders could not come to equitable agreements regarding home video royalties. In transmedia, it's better to forge a more permanent mutually beneficial alliance if the opening salvo is a hit; even better, why not have one stakeholder absorb the other entirely, as WarnerMedia (which owns Batman) did with Traveller's Tales, the producers of the *Lego Batman* series of games? It's imperative to understand all of this in the context of commerce, capitalism, and postmodernity.

### 2.3 Framing Batman

With a better understanding of the transmedial land on which Gotham City is built, I can look past the foundations to discuss how scholarship on the Dark Knight does or does not connect to theories of transmedia. There are many books and articles written about Batman, enough to constitute a subfield all its own. This project differentiates itself from the vast majority of those on several bases: looking at Gotham primarily, looking at videogames primarily, and looking at Batman as a *property* primarily. While many of the preceding academic works on Batman examine him as a pop culture icon,<sup>127</sup> a psychological study,<sup>128</sup> a blockbuster movie hero,<sup>129</sup> or a philosophical metaphor,<sup>130</sup> this dissertation is concerned far less with the narrative

---

<sup>127</sup> Will Brooker, *Batman Unmasked: Analyzing a Cultural Icon* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2001).

<sup>128</sup> Travis Langley, *Batman and Psychology: A Dark and Stormy Knight* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2012).

<sup>129</sup> Eileen Meehan, "'Holy Commodity Fetish, Batman!': The Political Economy of a Commercial Intertext," in *The Many Lives of the Batman: Critical Approaches to a Superhero and His Media*, ed. Roberta Pearson and William Uricchio (New York: Routledge, 1991), 47–67.

<sup>130</sup> Mark D. White and Robert Arp, eds., *Batman and Philosophy: The Dark Knight of the Soul* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2008).

mode of the Dark Knight than the connections that can be drawn between different nodes in a networked transmedia complex. Of course, this doesn't mean that I can't profit from some of the key works on The Caped Crusader and learn valuable lessons from them.

A good deal of the work on Batman comes out of the field of comics studies. Comics studies is an expansive and interdisciplinary field, ranging from treatises on narrative and thematics to poststructuralist Derridean theory that breaks down page structure. Most of the well-known work explicitly on Batman understandably falls into the former category, due in no small part to the characters' richness as an archetype and the vast range of dense and praiseworthy stories created about Batman over the years. Some of the key thinkers here include film scholar Will Brooker, comparative media studies scholar William Uricchio, and film and fan studies scholar Roberta Pearson. Together, Pearson and Uricchio edited one of the seminal academic collections on Batman, *The Many Lives of the Batman*,<sup>131</sup> and Brooker joined them to curate the follow-up *Many More Lives of the Batman*.<sup>132</sup> Several excellent essays appear in this text, some of which even foreshadow my work here. For example, in writing about the commodity fetishism of Batman as a blockbuster hero, Eileen R. Meehan suggests the imperative of looking at entertainment franchises as political economy:

[A]nother dimension must be added to our analyses of media generally and of *Batman* specifically. Namely, economics must be considered if we are fully to understand the texts and intertexts of American mass culture. Most cultural production in the United States is done by private, for-profit corporations. These corporations comprise the entertainment/information sector of the American economy and encompass the industries

---

<sup>131</sup> Roberta Pearson and William Uricchio, eds., *The Many Lives of the Batman: Critical Approaches to a Superhero and His Media* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

<sup>132</sup> Pearson, Uricchio, and Brooker, *Many More Lives of the Batman*.

of publishing, television, film, music, cable and radio. Significantly, American capitalism organises the creation of cultural artefacts as a process of mass production carried out by profit-oriented businesses operating in an industrial context. Profit, not culture, drive show business: no business means no show.<sup>133</sup>

Meehan goes on to describe the processes of recycling utilized in the political economy of media franchises like *Batman*, explaining that the potential for repackaging various assets and IP is essential criteria for judging the suitability of proposed projects. One of my goals in this dissertation is to further develop Meehan's arguments about recycling with the added strata of code and graphics in transmedial videogames. She also deftly gestures towards the production of ideology and interpellation of consumers in transmedia by attempting to separate the affect of texts from their nature as commodities:

[T]he commodification of text, the commodity fetishism of intertext and the management of consumption are obscured behind the 'soft and fuzzies' feeling of experience. The economic logics of profit and cost efficiency suggest that *Batman* is best understood as a multimedia, multimarket sales campaign. Yet, although that campaign's primary purpose is to earn revenues and decrease production costs, it also 'sells' ideologies – visions of the good, the true, the beautiful. Herein lies the contradiction of capitalist media: to understand our mass media, we must be able to understand them as always and simultaneously text and commodity, intertext and product line.<sup>134</sup>

---

<sup>133</sup> Meehan, "Holy Commodity Fetish, Batman!," 70.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

Although Meehan is writing in the context of the early 1990s, and therefore discusses the now-defunct Warner Communications, Inc. (WCI), she adroitly identifies WCI as the authoring power of Batman corporate intertexts, reusing various Batman storylines in other media, adding new valences and audiences. These narratives take on new meaning even before alteration and reuse, simply by positioning WCI as author. Who came up with which ideas is part of what's obfuscated in transmedia authorship, and points towards one of the tensions this project explores: the fissures between how we regulate and theorize transmedia objects and how they actually function.

Though it would be difficult to find an article on Batman that doesn't at least mention his home, relatively little focus is placed on Gotham City in scholarship. However, some exceptions exist. Notably, Uricchio wrote a piece about Gotham in the collection *Comics and the City*, claiming in part that Gotham serves as a generator of specific types of ideologies, looking at the locale as a "generative element in the production of Batman narratives and related ideological value systems, both of which offer an opportunity to rethink urban cartographies as enacted rather than objective spaces." This jibes very well with my own approach to Gotham as a series of game spaces, and though Uricchio looks largely at comics, his frame of enacted performances rather than static object also conforms with a game studies outlook.

Some other scholars have given specific attention to Batman games. Luke Arnott, for example, discusses the *Arkham* series in terms close to my own in his chapter "Arkham Epic: Batman Video Games as Totalizing Texts."<sup>135</sup> He claims that these games speak to the role of ideology within postmodernity, ideological apparatuses by nature that transfer ideas between iterations of an epic. Arnott's statements are compelling in this work for a number of reasons. They align with my positions that adaptation theory is less useful in the simultaneity and churn

---

<sup>135</sup> Arnott, "Arkham Epic."

of transmedia,<sup>136</sup> and Arnott employs postmodernism to describe the endless pastiche and recombination of signification that I see transmedia relying on.

All of this work has been instrumental in shaping my thinking on Batman as character, story, media object, and business. However, it is risky to take my cues entirely from these established works. If I lean too heavily into this body of work, I may become entangled in its arguments and overly focus on the object of this project, rather than the subject. Batman and Gotham are here as a case study, and I selected them based on the criteria I described in the introduction chapter. Many of the works that discuss Batman, for example, take a top-down/bottom-up framework.<sup>137</sup> In this dissertation, I want to think laterally (like Hutcheon) and rhizomatically, connecting nodes as points in a network rather than subordinate benchmarks in an assumed hierarchy.

## 2.4 Media Theory & Game Studies

At the heart of the issue of transmedia franchising is the channeling of the past into the present. When Edmund Carpenter and Marshall McLuhan wrote that each communication channel codifies reality differently,<sup>138</sup> what they meant is that new media are new languages which in themselves do not seek to reproduce the traits of older languages, but instead reach back and bend those languages to their own rules in translation. For example, the written word produced the rules of grammar and pronunciation far more than the spoken word ever did.<sup>139</sup>

---

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>137</sup> Alisa Perren and Laura E. Felschow, “The Bigger Picture: Drawing Intersections between Comics, Fan, and Industry Studies,” in *The Routledge Companion to Media Fandom*, ed. Melissa A. Click and Suzanne Scott (New York: Routledge, 2018), 310.

<sup>138</sup> Edmund Carpenter and Marshall McLuhan, “The New Languages,” *Chicago Review* 10, no. 1 (1956): 49.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 46.

Then the book came along and forced these rules into a structure of extended linearity and the concept of left to right rather than top to bottom, page turns rather than rolling down a scroll, etc.<sup>140</sup> Next, newspapers came along and took the concept of linear written stories and forced them to exist in fields of simultaneity, with multiple stories occupying the same space, and our eyes and brains trained to treat each of them in isolation<sup>141</sup>—so it goes. Carpenter and McLuhan warn us, however, that dominant culture will always strive to force new media to do the work of the old.<sup>142</sup> This caution is key to identifying the pitfalls of analyzing new media: we are excellent at training our minds to look at objects in a specific way, and all the vocabulary that we prefer to use in describing and making use of those objects—even as we attempt to train our minds to observe those objects in a novel way—will tend towards older models that are not necessarily suited to the object in question.

Because games are an emergent medium and deeply immersive and interactive, they may help pick the lock of these thorny issues of recognition and recursiveness. Therefore, it's necessary to elaborate useful lessons from the field before embarking on case studies of specific game franchises. In *Values at Play in Digital Games*, Mary Flanagan and Helen Nissenbaum outline methods by which we can detect ideological distinctions within games.<sup>143</sup> Because this project is bound up with the ideologies of transmedia, tracing the ways in which games transmit values and interpellate players is extremely helpful. Even more important will be framing this ideological transmission in the context of industrial policy. Collections like *Video Game*

---

<sup>140</sup> Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (New York: Signet, 1969), 124.

<sup>141</sup> Carpenter and McLuhan, "The New Languages," 47.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>143</sup> Mary Flanagan and Helen Fay Nissenbaum, *Values at Play in Digital Games* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2014).

*Policy*,<sup>144</sup> *The Video Game Industry*,<sup>145</sup> and *Gaming Globally*<sup>146</sup> parse the production, regulation, and dissemination of videogames as commerce in a transnational milieu. Within such a milieu, game industries don't stand alone at the top of the ideological hierarchy; the nuances of trade, copyright regimes, and state value systems wield influence as well. Adrienne Shaw writes that videogames don't constitute a culture unto themselves; they operate "in culture" rather than "as culture."<sup>147</sup> Using these valences effectively is informative in studying how games fit within established cultural and industrial networks and constitute new ones.

A great deal of excellent ethnographic research has been produced in game studies. However, most of them focus on players and publics, rather than the inner workings of game development studios. In the context of transmedia, these works are more closely aligned with fan and audience studies than production culture and creative industries. So refined understandings of how creative contributions and authorship proceed within larger game studies are elusive. However, Casey O'Donnell identifies these processes in terms of *vision* in his 2014 book *Developer's Dilemma*.<sup>148</sup> Combining several case studies of different game dev production processes and numerous interviews, O'Donnell's book is an excellent resource for thinking about how creative responsibilities are delegated and how authorship roles take shape within game studio spaces. In particular, he identifies this idea of vision as essential to thinking about how collaborative authorship is performed—and how it often gets lost in the mix:

---

<sup>144</sup> Steven Conway and Jennifer deWinter, eds., *Video Game Policy: Production, Distribution, and Consumption* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

<sup>145</sup> Peter Zackariasson and Timothy L. Wilson, eds., *The Video Game Industry: Formation, Present State, and Future* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

<sup>146</sup> Nina Huntemann and Ben Aslinger, eds., *Gaming Globally: Production, Play, and Place* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

<sup>147</sup> Adrienne Shaw, "What Is Video Game Culture? Cultural Studies and Game Studies," *Games & Culture* 5, no. 4 (October 2010): 416.

<sup>148</sup> Casey O'Donnell, *Developer's Dilemma: The Secret World of Videogame Creators* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2014).



When developers talk about what is missing, about the aspect of game development that prevents them from being able to work well, they frequently settle on the highly problematic term “vision.” As they conceptualize it, vision is a clear idea of what you want at the end of a project. Vision is assumed to come (or not come) from somewhere above in the company, delivered by management to help developers understand how to direct their experimental efforts. When a vision is combined with a plan for how that vision can be brought to life, the work can then be scheduled. Unfortunately, because of the constantly changing technological landscape, not only is the vision often missing, but the subsequent “how to implement it” is often absent. [...] Designers thus often desire the very thing that they cannot have. Yet in a work environment where predetermined end products and paths towards them cannot be known, the ability to plan is significantly compromised.<sup>149</sup>

This quote succinctly sums up how difficult it can be to reconcile traditional notions of authorship with what goes on in the highly chaotic and collaborative realm of game creation. As O’Donnell’s interviewees have experienced it, creative control lies in many different hands in a studio, but creative *direction* is often nigh impossible to keep track of or trace back. O’Donnell goes on to relate several incidents of how vision, or rather a lack thereof, contributed to stressful or shaky development processes, and how these issues were characteristic of mainstream game production.<sup>150</sup> Reflecting on the nature of this spurious and almost mystical concept, he writes, “Vision has really become shorthand for the goal that crosses each of the [many] disciplinary boundaries within a game. It represents the idealized notion that having a common goal in mind

---

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 129-130.

will help keep these systems in sync across their numerous fault lines. But even by game developers' own admissions, oftentimes the idea of what a game should be at the beginning is quite different from what it is at the end."<sup>151</sup> Thus, says O'Donnell, the privileging of vision makes for a kind of technological determinist position, though rather than privileging the technological it privileges the vision, ultimately making vision a "kind of false hope for game developers."<sup>152</sup>

We can tease out this idea of vision as a mysterious and almost mystical abstract in game development by turning towards the fields of software and interface studies. If vision is the ineffable x factor for the encoding of videogames, then perhaps the difficulty end user decoders have in attributing authorship to specific games can be adapted from Wendy Chun's idea of 'sourcery.' In her article "On 'Sourcery,' or Code as Fetish," Chun articulates sourcery as a fetishism that clouds the fluctuations of execution and makes the processes of our machines appear magical.<sup>153</sup> Sourcery is the obverse of the user as agent—rather than an oppositional or master-slave relationship between user and machine, Chun places software as the other side of the dynamic, where code and software take on an almost magical aspect. Chun suggests that the very idea of source code creates the fetishism of sourcery, where the average user concludes that there's little point in understanding how software functions, and imbues those who do understand such processes as supernaturally enlightened.<sup>154</sup>

The introduction of multiuser, command line processing—real-time operating systems—necessitates the mystification of processes that seem to operate automatically without user input, breaking the interfaces' "diegesis." What is *not seen* becomes daemonic rather

---

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>153</sup> Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, "On 'Sourcery,' or Code as Fetish," *Configurations* 16, no. 3 (Fall 2008): 300.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 301.

than what is normal, because the user is supposed to be the cause and end of any process. Real-time operating systems, such as UNIX, transform the computer from a machine run by human operators in batch-mode to “alive” personal machines, which respond to users’ commands. [...] These moments of “interactivity” buttress the notion of our computers as transparent. Real-time processes, in other words, make the user the “source” of the action, but only by orphaning those processes without which there could be no user. By making the interface transparent or “rational,” one creates demons.<sup>155</sup>

The logic of sourcery is key to a discussion of material creation and reuse in videogames for two reasons: first, because its relationship to software development reflects on work processes in videogame development fields as well; and second, because if we extend the fetishism of sourcery to completed videogames, the suggested conclusion is that most users of videogames do not consider the extensive development processes of the products they use. Like sourcery, videogames may inhabit a fictional space where the interface seems productively spectral.<sup>156</sup> How deeply does the player of the game understand what goes into the game itself, technically or artistically? Chun sums up this conundrum elegantly, writing that “software as we now know it conflates word with result, logos with action. The goal of software is to conflate an event with a written command.”<sup>157</sup> Software blurs or hides the lines between command and execution, leaving out the huge thing in the middle: process. Elsewhere, Chun also implies that one of the issues in considering such digital media processes is our reliance on a conflation of access and understanding.<sup>158</sup>

---

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 320.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 301.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 303.

<sup>158</sup> Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, “The Enduring Ephemeral, or the Future Is a Memory,” *Critical Inquiry* 35, no. 1 (Autumn 2008): 159.

According to Chun, instead of being a source, source code is a resource used by the (en)coder; it becomes source when it becomes integrated with the transistors comprising a machine's logic gates, when it expands to include software libraries, etc.—namely, after the fact.<sup>159</sup> So it's source by the time we as users get it. But this allows us to ignore the processes it has to go through (which are many) and reduces our understanding of it to 'magic.'

Chun's mention of encoding connects to Stuart Hall here in discussing encoding and decoding,<sup>160</sup> which brings this audit full circle in determining how to study the objects in my case studies. Because the work of production is largely obscured, I interpret in terms of decoding the objects themselves to draw conclusions about the values encoded into them. In so doing, I suggest that it's possible to address, at least in part, the conundrum of 'sourcery:' in decoding the mechanics of games in context with one another, we can begin to understand how code operates *behind* what we see happen on the screen at the encoding stage. Several game scholars have written extensively about designing games subversively from a development perspective, most effectively Mary Flanagan in her book *Critical Play*,<sup>161</sup> where she describes the possibilities for new paradigms of game design that work against dominant tropes of the industry and culture.<sup>162</sup> But she also warns again about unintended ideological input and interpellation,<sup>163</sup> which replaces part of the onus on end users to be critical consumers of digital games. Critical consumption is the lynchpin to the ideological outlook of my own work in this dissertation, and that outlook has been shaped by treatments on subversive forms of play that range from potentially harmful<sup>164</sup> to

---

<sup>159</sup> Chun, "On 'Sourcery,'" 307.

<sup>160</sup> Hall, "Encoding/Decoding."

<sup>161</sup> Mary Flanagan, *Critical Play: Radical Game Design* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2013).

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 223.

<sup>164</sup> Mia Consalvo, *Cheating: Gaining Advantage in Videogames* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2007).

capitalistic<sup>165</sup> to insurgent.<sup>166</sup> With these larger considerations of game studies theory accounted for, I can turn to the works that are germane to the final categorical distinction in this thesis: space.

#### 2.4.1 Laying out Space in Transmedia and Games

Mapping fictional space is in no way a new phenomenon: Tolkien included maps of Middle Earth as an appendix for *The Hobbit*;<sup>167</sup> John Bunyan heavily textured *The Pilgrim's Progress*<sup>168</sup> with geographical intersections in a novel where spatial narratives function allegorically; and even the original publication of Thomas More's *Utopia*<sup>169</sup> contained illustrations and engravings of maps depicting the geography of the island More created. A rich history of paratextual artefacts exists that speaks to a cartographic drive on behalf of those who produce fictional narrative worlds. In the 1980s, author Alberto Manguel and artist Gianni Guadalupi took note of this drive and produced *The Dictionary of Imaginary Places*,<sup>170</sup> a book whose production effectively reoriented the field of fantasy geography. At that time, *Dungeons and Dragons* had risen to prominence as a popular game with fantasy fans; Manguel and Guadalupi's gesture of organizing fantasy spaces into a reference text was a move toward

---

<sup>165</sup> T. L. Taylor, *Raising the Stakes: E-Sports and the Professionalization of Computer Gaming* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2012).

<sup>166</sup> Alexander R. Galloway, *Gaming: Essays on Algorithmic Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

<sup>167</sup> J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit, or, There and Back Again* (1936), 75th ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012).

<sup>168</sup> John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678) (Mineola: Dover Publications, 2003).

<sup>169</sup> Thomas More, *Utopia* (1516), (Mineola: Dover Publications, 1997).

<sup>170</sup> For more on the history of mapping fictional places, cf. Alberto Manguel and Gianni Guadalupi's *The Dictionary of Imaginary Places* (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys Ltd., 1987). While Gotham City (as well as many other fictional environments) did not make the final cut to secure inclusion in the book, I am confident that the city's fantastical architecture, rich history, and incredible sights would meet with Manguel and Guadalupi's criteria of a geographical stand-in that has transcended the realm of possibility, drifting "out of its confinement and becom[ing] forevermore a symbol of something undefined" (ii).

homogenizing the heterogeneous. This shifted the genre and placed further emphasis on mapping as an integral element of worldbuilding.

Today, mapping is a given in fantasy writing. It's almost unthinkable for a fantasy author to produce a series without mapping that series' world—even HBO's *Game of Thrones*,<sup>171</sup> based on George R.R. Martin's *Song of Ice and Fire* series,<sup>172</sup> opens each episode with a series of maps indicating for viewers the locales in Westeros the episode will feature. The concept of a “designed environment” is important here: it's specifically because of the spatial considerations and interactivity of a designed environment that videogames exist in a totally different aesthetic paradigm than texts or films. For example, architecture and design scholar Greg Whistance-Smith points out that because designing the way the user *disrupts* the space is important to game design (following concepts of procedurality and persuasive rhetoric set down by Ian Bogost<sup>173</sup>), games share multiple qualities with architecture, sculpture, and installation art.<sup>174</sup>

Several thinkers in particular are exemplary for working with videogame spaces—whether the elemental building blocks of space in games, representations of the urban, or how the game landscape reveals itself through circulation and reward. Michael Nitsche has arguably written *the* book on spatiality in games, *Video Game Spaces*.<sup>175</sup> Usefully, Nitsche ties space in games inextricably to narrative. In his introduction to the book, Nitsche warns that interactive media and “their most prominent and diverse representations, video games,” have deeply unsettled traditional media theory;<sup>176</sup> this perspective aligns with my own. Nitsche sees this disruption at its most pronounced in the environments of 3D gameworlds, where games “stage

---

<sup>171</sup> *Game of Thrones* (Los Angeles: HBO, 2011).

<sup>172</sup> George R. R. Martin, *A Game of Thrones: Book One of a Song of Ice and Fire* (London: Harper Voyager, 1996).

<sup>173</sup> Ian Bogost, *Persuasive Games: The Expressive Power of Videogames* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2007).

<sup>174</sup> Greg Whistance-Smith, “Selective Spatiality: The Affordances of Architectural Drawing Types in Two Dimension Videogames” (Conference presentation, May 31, 2017).

<sup>175</sup> Nitsche, *Video Game Spaces*.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

our dreams and nightmares and seem to get better at it each year.” In what follows in the book, Nitsche makes a case that the fundamental quality of these environments is their ability to evoke narrative:

The argument here is that game spaces evoke narratives because the player is making sense of them in order to engage with them. Through a comprehension of signs and interaction with them, the player generates new meaning. The elements that are implemented in the game world to assist in the comprehension will be called “evocative narrative elements,” because they do not contain a story themselves but trigger important parts of the narrative process in the player. These processes can lead to the generation of a form of narrative.<sup>177</sup>

Nitsche’s project is to explore the new universe opened up by the introduction of the third dimension to games, and his book lays out a collected understanding of how video game spaces function. He argues that the players of 3D games piece together large and small elements of the game narrative by inhabiting and interacting with the virtual spaces. But charting the growth and future of videogame spaces by centralizing focus on player experience and generated narratives is a monumental task, on par with constructing a portrait of any real-world city from trace evidence (like the impossibility of collaging *fin de siècle* urban life in Paris from archival materials, theoretical observations, and cultural commentary demonstrated by Walter Benjamin’s unfinished *The Arcades Project*<sup>178</sup>). Ultimately, Nitsche employs a variety of metaphors to articulate videogame space, including sandboxes, gardens, and urban planning:

---

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 3-4.

<sup>178</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).

[G]ardens offer a conceptual filter through which one might experience space differently. They are individualistic pieces of art. The resulting spaces are often described as prime examples of ‘places’[...] The garden and sandbox metaphors might not be very precise, but they are far from empty. Two elements of gardens are the completeness of their microcosms within given boundaries—which parallels the restrictions of a game world; and the gradual revelation of their specific quality through exploration—which resembles the exploration of a game level. Gardens become the door into the introduction of architectural structure and debate about the analysis of game space. Another door would be urban planning, for example. Both suggest specific uses of space and point to the value of spatial structuring, but they do not suggest any precise spatial format.<sup>179</sup>

Nitsche makes a salient insight here, though I might add to this that while neither gardens nor urban planning prescribe *precise* spatial formats, the specific uses of space do prescribe some general spatial formatting restrictions based on the needs of, for example, exposure (for gardens) or circulation (for cities). In any event, because my interest in this project lies with cities, I take his point well and it redoubles back as a metaphor: games that take place in gardens (e.g. multiple levels of *The Witness*<sup>180</sup>) or cities (e.g. *Grand Theft Auto IV*<sup>181</sup>) demonstrate how abstracted structural thinking can also influence symbolic representation.

Bobby Schweizer elaborates these ideas in explicit discussions of videogame *cities* in his dissertation *Videogame Cities in Motion*,<sup>182</sup> a project that’s useful here in terms of thinking about urban space in games as symbolic content. Schweizer argues that videogame cities are comprised

---

<sup>179</sup> Nitsche, *Video Game Spaces*, 172.

<sup>180</sup> Jonathan Blow, *The Witness*, Playstation 4 (Berkeley: Thekla, Inc., 2016).

<sup>181</sup> Leslie Benzies et al., *Grand Theft Auto IV*, Playstation 3 (Edinburgh, Scotland: Rockstar North Limited, 2008).

<sup>182</sup> Schweizer, “Videogame Cities in Motion.”



of three ordering principles: the constitutional (compositional elements), the representational (symbolic elements), and the experiential (lived elements).<sup>183</sup> The central distinction for Schweizer between the videogame city and the real-world city are the specificities of affordance.<sup>184</sup> Where real cities are built with myriad inhabitants in mind whose needs change over the course of generations, all the directives of a videogame city connect to one another for a single assumed user. Though it is important to note here that the assumed user is almost always a subordinate product of the same assumptions that shape much other media: gaze, ableism, systemic white supremacy, and a host of other privileging frames.

Schweizer's work is extremely beneficial to my own for a number of reasons. He justifies in detail the significance of studying digital urban space, provides throughlines from other areas of urban geography and phenomenology, and clarifies a number of terms. The ordering principles are especially appropriate to ordering thinking in this project's case studies: the Gotham City history chapter is largely about representational elements, while the two videogame case studies are largely about experiential elements of the games. Throughout, constitutional elements abound in the background and foreground, considering how Gotham is not only represented and experienced, but built as well.

As to exploring how the gameworlds are experienced, I draw heavily on Alison Gazzard's work. Gazzard's article, "Unlocking the Gameworld: The Rewards of Space and Time in Videogames,"<sup>185</sup> considers the affordances of circulation through game space. Gazzard argues that mastering the spatial layout of a gameworld is a function of goals and reward structures, whether those rewards fall along axes of socialization, access, or power:

---

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>185</sup> Gazzard, "Unlocking the Gameworld."

It is possible for players to explore a wide area of the game without completing set missions within the game. But, it is these missions that reward the player with further environments, filling in extra narrative and unlocking areas on the map. Due to the size of the game, the game-map is a vital navigation tool, both in-game as a GPS style device and out of the game as a top-down two-dimensional representation of the streets of the gameworld depicting key locations, such as shops and save points. It is through viewing the map that the player is reminded of the reward of environment.<sup>186</sup>

As will become clear when I turn towards Michel de Certeau's work on maps and tours, Gazzard here points to the exact same kind of theoretical framework I find integral to sorting out space in games. She not only connects conceptions of map views to promises of power, but also observes that nearly all spatial exploration and observation in games is instrumental and directive—a point even more powerful when contrasted with work on circulation in the real world by scholars like Will Straw,<sup>187</sup> Dilip Gaonkar, and Elizabeth Povinelli,<sup>188</sup> precisely because of the disconnections with these pieces. Like Schweizer, Gazzard points towards the specificity of affordance in game space, and the discrepancies between how one moves through and accesses privileged space in the digital city and how the same is achieved in the physical city are telling.

Finally, Luke Arnett is once more helpful in ordering thinking about how postmodernity relates to *space* in games specifically, invoking David Harvey's observations that postmodern capitalism annihilates space in order to ensure its own reproduction:

---

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> Will Straw, "The Circulatory Turn," in *The Wireless Spectrum: The Politics, Practices, and Poetics of Mobile Media*, ed. Barbara Crow, Michael Longford, and Kim Sawchuck (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2010).

<sup>188</sup> Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar and Elizabeth A. Povinelli, "Technologies of Public Forms: Circulation, Transfiguration, Recognition," *Public Culture* 15, no. 3 (2003): 385–97.

If postmodernity, following David Harvey, is characterized by the annihilation of space through time, here, perhaps, is a template for the virtual annihilation of space across all time. The postmodern epic is concerned with the representation of space as a totality, but it must always fall short when compared with the cosmos of the real world. This is particularly so in video games, especially “open-world” games, in which technological and practical limitations necessarily limit the theoretically infinite space of virtual worlds. It often falls to clever design practices to keep the player within the designated bounds of these finite spaces without revealing the artificial barriers to exploration; Terry Harpold calls this process “recapture,” and, as Tom Bissell points out, the *Zelda* series has long been successful at utilizing these tricks to make limited gamespace seem larger than it is. But with recent entries such as *Skyward Sword*, the *Zelda* series revisits the same spaces again and again across infinite time, and by doing so makes the space of its gameworld infinite too.<sup>189</sup>

When exploring and describing the Gotham(s) of this dissertation, it will be helpful to keep in mind the extreme limitations of these virtual cities. Their appearances make it difficult to think past them as digital constructs—the verisimilitude of their environments is frequently quite convincing, especially when the mind is occupied with the directives and goals of the game’s narrative. But they are most decidedly *not* like real-world cities. And we can demonstrate as much by accounting for ideas like Arnott’s comparison within a postmodern framework, Harpold’s recapture, and Gazzard’s reward-based circulatory systems.

---

<sup>189</sup> Luke Arnott, *Totally Epic Tales Across Time and Space*, 2019, 352.

## 2.5 Real-World Spatial Practice

There's a reason I separate out the thinking on *videogame* space from thinking on *real-world* space: it's because the two seldom overlap explicitly. To a certain degree, this is appropriate: just as it is problematic to think about contemporary transmedia production as emerging from Romantic notions of authorship, it is similarly precarious to think about space in videogames primarily as an extension, expression, or adaptation of real-world space. Nonetheless, part of my project in this dissertation is to draw explicit lines of connection and study the corollaries and disjunctures between how we understand our inhabited physical spaces and our immersive virtual spaces. Therefore, I need to draw on literature from urban geography, supermodernity, and philosophy about spatial practice.

The representation of urban space in videogames is ubiquitous: from open-world action games like *Assassin's Creed* and *Grand Theft Auto* to first-person shooters like *Splatoon* and *Halo*, many recent, popular game franchises demonstrate a preoccupation with real and imagined urban spaces, and the attendant topologies and methods of traversal that those spaces make available to players. Urban geography is a diverse field, but the work of the past century delineates two central schools of thought; we can use these streams to contrast how videogame cities are developed and function. The two distinct perspectives that generate so many of the key ideas in the field are the Chicago School and the L.A. School, so named for the respective cities in which the disciplines emerged. Broadly speaking, chief thinkers from the Chicago School such as Robert Park, Ernest Burgess, and R. D. McKenzie have developed an understanding that sees cities growing from the centre outward as a series of concentric zones.<sup>190</sup> In this model,

---

<sup>190</sup> Robert E. Park, Ernest Burgess, and R. D. McKenzie, *The City: Suggestions for Investigations of Human Behavior in the Urban Environment* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1925), 51.

urban planners work to build shortcuts from the borders to the centre while still keeping those border areas accessible and circulable. Consequently, in trying to understand how the city functions and interpellates us as inhabitants, we can think in terms of this centre and these concentric zones. Conversely, the L.A. School takes the opposite approach and views newer, 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Century cities as growing from the periphery inwards. As Michael Dear and J. Dallas Dishman note in their introduction to *From Chicago to L.A.: Making Sense of Urban Theory*, “It is no longer the center that organizes the hinterland but hinterland that determines what remains of the center.”<sup>191</sup> What principally distinguishes The Chicago School from the L.A. School is that the Chicago School believes that centrality is primary to urban development, while the L.A. School believes that the centre is constructed from the convergence of edges seeping in, so the centre is the place where “it all comes together”<sup>192</sup> rather than the place from which all else emerges. To a certain extent, both schools derive from capitalist viewpoints of investment and progress as deterministic in the conceptual construction of the city, with the younger L.A. School claiming a shift to postmodernity as partial explanation for their convergence model, illustrating and synthesizing the “dynamics of capitalist spatialization”<sup>193</sup> in relationship to the annihilation of space within the postmodern.

However, neither of these schools fit seamlessly for the transmedia city, because little long-term planning goes into such a world. Producers are constantly dynamiting each other’s plans and building spaces, places, and environments that fit the needs of story and market. In transmedia, urban space is always encountered as a product of capitalism. And an interactive videogame city is concerned with circulation in some of the same ways an urban planner is. But

---

<sup>191</sup> Michael J. Dear and J. Dallas Dishman, eds., *From Chicago to L.A.: Making Sense of Urban Theory* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2001), 3.

<sup>192</sup> Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989), 191.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, 191.

the forms of circulation and the needs of the inhabitants are quite different, far more operational (in the fashions that Schweizer and Gazzard each describe). Has the fictionalized city ever been modern? While the L.A. School describes the postmodern city as the place where “it all comes together,” in the mediated, representational city, capitalist spatialization is actualized on a number of levels through different forms of engagement: instead of routine, explicit narrative goal; instead of place as destination, challenge or mystery as a reward of its own.

In games specifically, the city’s spaces and nodes are transformed into a series of affordances, and across other media, the city is turned into groupings of functions designed to service both story and the larger meta-narrative of worldbuilding and brand-building. Friedrich Kittler and Matthew Griffin write that the city is a medium<sup>194</sup> (more on this later), but it is also a crucial part of a structure of interpellation (following Louis Althusser<sup>195</sup>). Once again, Gotham City is an especially useful case study: across its nearly 80 years of representation, it’s served innumerable functions ideologically, economically, and experientially. So how is the transmedia city developed in terms of location in movement: does it derive from a sense of permanent centrality,<sup>196</sup> does it grow from the periphery,<sup>197</sup> or is completeness illusory and centrality mutable?<sup>198</sup> Certainly in gameplay, perspective and fast-travel mechanics follow Henri Lefebvre’s claim that urban space-time revolves around the possibility that any point can become central at any time.<sup>199</sup> It’s critical to consider these notions in terms of both production (how the city is conceived of and built up) and experience (questioning if the transmedia city has any

---

<sup>194</sup> Kittler and Griffin, “The City Is a Medium.”

<sup>195</sup> Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971).

<sup>196</sup> Park, Burgess, and McKenzie, *The City*.

<sup>197</sup> Allen John Scott and Edward W. Soja, eds., *The City: Los Angeles and Urban Theory at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

<sup>198</sup> Amin and Thrift, *Cities*.

<sup>199</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 130.

concept of completeness or fixed points,<sup>200</sup> and, if so, how they may be transferred to game versions).

So the language of urban geography fails to account for the constituent elements of transmedia or videogame cities. However, the ideas of urban geography can still be helpful analogically. The transmedia city draws on the symbols and signifiers of the real-world city constantly. Even more helpful will be the phenomenological language of the urban, including de Certeau, Lefebvre, and Marc Augé. Thinking about how to augment the lessons of urban geography for transmedia and virtual space leads me to anthropologist Augé's book *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*.<sup>201</sup> In this text, Augé not only gives name to our contemporary mode of being in culture—the epoch he calls supermodernity—but also identifies some of new environments of this era, environmental paradigms we can extrapolate to apply to gameworlds, and in turn identify some of the aporias of current scholarship on the subject. Augé positions supermodernity as an aspect of the contemporary and the inheritor of postmodernity. This era is essentially characterized by overabundance:

This need to give a meaning to the present, if not the past, is the price we pay for the overabundance of events corresponding to a situation we could call 'supermodern' to express its essential quality: excess... We could say of supermodernity that it is the face of a coin whose obverse represents postmodernity: the positive of a negative. From the viewpoint of supermodernity, difficulty of thinking about time stems from the overabundance of events in the contemporary world.<sup>202</sup>

---

<sup>200</sup> Amin and Thrift, *Cities*, 8.

<sup>201</sup> Augé, *Non-Places*.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, 29-30.

Augé breaks down this characterization into three primary causes: overabundance of events, spatial overabundance and the individualization of references.<sup>203</sup> The concept of supermodernity helps us to reconcile the vast, networked digital milieus that define our media landscape today, and names the shifts in cultural production and consumption we've undergone, shifts which simultaneously create new spaces for us to explore and demand new forms of approaching them. Augé says that this very expansion and shifting of spatial parameters creates what he terms *non-places*, expressions of the overabundance of space in the present.<sup>204</sup>

Non-places are the liminal abstracted spaces of supermodernity: the grocery stores, highways, and sidewalks where we lose grasp of our sense of identity by focusing on the task at hand. Consequently, non-places designate two complementary but distinct realities: spaces formed in relation to certain ends, and the relations that individuals have with these spaces:

[T]he real non-places of supermodernity – the ones we inhabit when we are driving down the motorway, wandering through the supermarket or sitting in an airport lounge waiting for the next flight to London or Marseille – have the peculiarity that they are defined partly by the words and texts they offer us: their ‘instructions for use’, which may be prescriptive (‘Take right-hand lane’), prohibitive (‘No smoking’) or informative (‘You are now entering the Beaujolais region’). Sometimes these are couched in more or less explicit and codified ideograms (on road signs, maps and tourist guides), sometimes in ordinary language.<sup>205</sup>

---

<sup>203</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., 96.



So what then are the real non-places of a fictional world? Does it tend to have such spaces? In literature or film, these may be the unimportant spaces of the background, or the simple descriptions of characters walking down a sidewalk. In virtual worlds—that is, gameworlds—the matter may be somewhat more complicated. On the code level, a game’s non-places may be load screens or start menus; on the procedural level, they may be the hallways players speed through as they move from one important room to the next (for contemporary games, these are the equivalent of load screens—they offer both a respite from action to the player and some cleverly disguised time to the engine while the game’s processors load and render the next open space). Certainly some gameworlds are arguably made up *mostly* of non-places: Internet game spaces like Blizzard’s MMORPG *World of Warcraft (WoW)*<sup>206</sup> or Bungie’s online-only FPS *Destiny*<sup>207</sup> involve so much grinding that in some ways, huge swaths of their worlds are made up of non-places where no identity is enacted (save that of a drone performing a repetitive task), and the space is optimized to afford both the fulfilment of specific ends and challenges to and distractions from completing those ends. Introducing the concept of non-places to digital worlds raises numerous questions, and offers a potential new take on the socialization that occurs in many online game spaces.

While much has been said about the revolutionizing possibilities of connection in virtual worlds like *WoW*, as they become richer and more detailed, we might heed Augé’s warnings about the effects of supermodernity on places. “This plurality of places,” he observes, “the demands it makes on the powers of observation and description (the impossibility of seeing everything or saying everything), and the resulting feeling of ‘disorientation,’ causes a break or discontinuity between the spectator-traveller and the space of the landscape he is contemplating

---

<sup>206</sup> Rob Pardo, Jeff Kaplan, and Tom Chilton, *World of Warcraft*, PC (Irvine, CA: Blizzard Entertainment, Inc., 2004).

<sup>207</sup> James McQuillan, *Destiny*, Playstation 4 (Bellevue, WA: Bungie, Inc., 2014).

or rushing through.”<sup>208</sup> Being in non-places requires an abandonment of deeper reflective identity and self-identification processes; you are so much about the task at hand that you’re relieved of other issues and aspects of yourself. In this mode, you neither preoccupy yourself with your own identity, nor do you relate to others; instead, you experience a surfeit of solitude and similitude.<sup>209</sup>

This is no different in the real world than in virtual spaces and travels. As players, we often totally disconnect from our games as we move towards goals and interactions—consider all the design work put into the spaces and environments of games like *Destiny* or *WoW* that are simply hurried through because the player doesn’t want to hold up the group or find herself wandering unnecessarily. Even more telling is the fact that in such worlds, certain developers have been charged with putting tons of micro-details into designing the environment, while others have been tasked with populating them with periodically respawning enemies, so that at times it becomes extremely impractical for the player to ever stop and take in the view.

Indeed, in the case of online-only gameworlds, taking in the view is often potentially extremely confusing, because the next time you log on you may not recognize the space you’re inhabiting. This is because the world may have been remapped while you were offline, certain features added or discarded for whatever (obvious or unrevealed) reason the developers have determined is optimal. This fleetingness might even relegate all online worlds to non-places in Augé’s view, as ephemerality and fluidity of identity are key features in his descriptions of non-places:

---

<sup>208</sup> Augé, *Non-Places*, 84.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

The hypothesis advanced here is that supermodernity produces non-places, meaning spaces which are not themselves anthropological places and which, unlike Baudelairean modernity, do not integrate the earlier places [...] a world thus surrendered to solitary individuality, to the fleeting, the temporary and ephemeral, offers the anthropologist (and others) a new object, whose unprecedented dimensions might usefully be measured before we start wondering to what sort of gaze it may be amenable. Place and non-place are rather like opposed polarities: the first is never completely erased, the second never totally completed; they are like palimpsests on which the scrambled game of identity and relations is ceaselessly rewritten.<sup>210</sup>

However, there is no wandering through the supermarket or sitting in traffic in the videogame city, and in other media, such activities tend overwhelmingly to appear as plot device or setting. These types of non-places are non-existent in fiction—something important *will* happen there. Nonetheless, they remain representationally, and are replaced functionally with other spaces. Identifying the liminality of a space entirely designed for consumption and directed goals will be extremely useful in drawing analogies and comparisons between the digital narrative environments we inhabit and our own supermodern urbanity. It's my contention that videogames are rife with non-places: not only are there myriad liminal corners in the videogame city, but the processing spaces of digital games qualify as well, from loading screens to save pages to lobbies.

I further contend that videogames evoke non-places as well—some of which are representational of real-world non-places, and some of which are the non-places of the algorithmic technologies themselves. Aspects of the game engines and platforms can be described as non-places for the player sitting in her living room, which itself fades into the

---

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., 78-79.

background as the player immerses herself into the gameworld. However, broadening the issue out to transmedia in general proves problematic. It may be that detecting non-places in transmedia, whether conceptual or physical, is unachievable. We can stretch the issue and describe it in terms of consumption—identifying the movie theatre lineup on opening day for a hotly anticipated blockbuster, or the digital pre-order placeholder of an upcoming product—but these may be reaching, and somewhat outside the selected purview of my project.

## **2.6 Concepts from Michel de Certeau**

Perhaps the most important writer in formulating this project both methodologically and theoretically has been philosopher Michel de Certeau, especially his writings on the practice of everyday life.<sup>211</sup> De Certeau writes that everyday life is teeming with unconscious process and praxis characterized by repetition.<sup>212</sup> Like supermodernity, this dovetails nicely with both perspectives on transmedia, and the exploration of videogame cities: in the former, transmedia relies heavily on our active and enthusiastic engagement with narratives, as well as our unconscious identification with brands through our purchasing and consumption habits; in the latter, our habituation to videogame environments is characterized by myriad forms of unconscious recognition and repetition, from the aforementioned topological aspects of genre to the physical vocabulary and dexterity necessary to pick up a game controller at one end of the room and embody a character appearing on a screen at the other end of the room.

In his writing on maps, tours, and walking in the city, de Certeau also outlines a key philosophical throughline that I adapt here to discussing inhabiting both virtual and physical

---

<sup>211</sup> de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*, 96-97.

spaces. While this will be elaborated fully in the argumentation of the case study chapter on the *Batman: Arkham* game series, I will foreshadow the dialectic here for the purposes of the literature review.

“The desire to see the city preceded the means of satisfying it,”<sup>213</sup> de Certeau writes, adding that the desire itself is “to realize the transformation of the urban *fact* into the *concept* of a city.”<sup>214</sup> This urge gives birth to the map, a plane projection that totalizes observation. De Certeau contrasts the map with the idea of the tour, which, rather than claiming the total knowledge of a God’s-eye view, itinerizes the city as a discursive series of operations.<sup>215</sup> De Certeau’s antidote to combatting the false knowledge of the map is realized through walking, the best way to perform a tour of an environment, which selectively actualizes potentialities effectively:

[T]he walker transforms each spatial signifier into something else. And if on the one hand he actualizes only a few of the possibilities fixed by the constructed order (he goes only here and not there), on the other he increases the number of possibilities (for example, he forbids himself to take paths generally considered accessible or even obligatory). He thus makes a selection. The user of a city picks out certain fragments of the statement in order to actualize them in secret.<sup>216</sup>

This concept of the tour is an effective and revealing way of exploring and analyzing gameworlds. The virtual and fictional map is usually devoid of those names that mean the most for real-world navigation, that is, the names of streets and intersections. A videogame map

---

<sup>213</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid., 98.

organizes the player spatially in terms of landmarks and waypoints, opportunities for interaction, and directional markers. A real-world map organizes the traveller in terms of street signs and one-way arrows, traffic lights and roundabouts. In terms of the tour, the real-world pedestrian or motorist relies far less on landmarks than on house numbers and street signs; without these types of features, they would be entirely lost. Even in the age of GPS, this holds true, and the tour view of a mobile app like Google Maps is still a negotiation between the device that (sometimes incorrectly) locates the user, and the user's comfort in her physical surroundings and confirmation of the displayed data's veracity. The player, on the other hand, couldn't care less about the absence of a street sign on every corner; both her forms of navigation and circulation and her goals are completely different (in some ways, touring urban game space is like being *inside* the device). This is in perfect harmony with de Certeau's views on subversive approaches to urban spaces, where study of the minutia of the environment helps counter the all-consuming strategic view of the map:

Rather than remaining within the field of a discourse that upholds its privilege by inverting its content, one can analyze the microbe-like, singular and plural practices which an urbanistic system was supposed to administer or suppress, but which have outlived its decay. One can follow the swarming activity of these procedures that, far from being regulated or eliminated by panoptic administration, have reinforced themselves in a proliferating illegitimacy, developed and insinuated themselves into the networks of surveillance, and combined in accord with unreadable but stable tactics to the point constituting everyday regulations and surreptitious creativities that are merely concealed by the frantic mechanisms and discourses of the observational organization.<sup>217</sup>

---

<sup>217</sup> Ibid., 96.

But what do videogame tours look like? Certainly they cannot be identified as playthroughs or walkthroughs (those paratexts found at sites like Twitch or YouTube)—these objects focus largely on non-spatial actions and purposes. Does this then mean that increased mastery over a space (which most games afford to the player as they progress through activities and increase in power by leveling up) call for different sets or types of directions and directives? Maps have come to obscure the processes by which they are produced; stories about spaces (tours), on the other hand, describe the operations that allow them.<sup>218</sup> This is true in fictional spaces as well: think of the opening up of the map in an *Assassin's Creed* game. While climbing a tower to reach a waypoint then clarifies the observed territory on the map, nothing remains afterwards to exhibit the tasks you undertook to reveal those spaces.

This is an opportune point at which to introduce the Situationist concept of the *dérive*, an activity that allows for novel explorations of seemingly familiar geographies. “A *derive*,” Guy Debord writes, “is a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances. *Dérives* involve playful-constructive behavior and awareness of psychogeographical effects, and are thus quite different from the classic notions of journey or stroll.”<sup>219</sup> So *dérives* constitute activities that can transform place into space—this is where the user’s *use* of a digital world impacts upon the already constructed reality planned by developers. Debord cautions that chance is *not* the underlying principle of the *dérive*. Instead, it’s about using the environment to augment and guide your movements, so that the contours of the space become more apparent. How do geography and design work on us psychologically? What are the principles of design in space that not only regulate, but also subtly suggest, invite, and cajole various types of circulation?<sup>220</sup>

If we choose to apply this practice to digital worlds, we can reveal multiple insights about

---

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>219</sup> Guy Debord, “Theory of the *Dérive*,” in *Situationist International Anthology*, ed. Ken Knabb (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006), 62.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

how these places are constructed and how exactly we transform them into spaces as users. For example, Debord maintains that a *dérive* is less powerful when performed individually—it is at its strongest when practiced collaboratively.<sup>221</sup> What does this say about the possibilities of *dérives* through virtual spaces, which are frequently single-user experiences? What about a *dérive* of a *Minecraft* server, where several people can move together, but more importantly where the world is procedurally generated? In these spaces, everyone is an architect and a builder, but they're not necessarily working together, and probably not regulated by rules about the types of building they can perform or how they design the spaces together. Already, we can see the strong potentials of taking Situationist practices designed for the real world and applying them to games, as well as to the multitude of vagaries and idiosyncrasies different kinds of gameworlds afford. Lefebvre defines space as a product of social interaction,<sup>222</sup> but there can be no social interaction in a single-user virtual world. However, a consolidated theory of *transmedia* space might account for this aporia by approaching “social interactions” in terms of the intermingling of previous iterations in the formation of a new one.

Finally, de Certeau offers a few key terms to discussions of space that I've taken up and augmented for the dissertation. As noted in the introduction, throughout this project, I will frequently deploy a few terms related to spatiality in Gotham City as both a transmedia assemblage and a collection of gameworlds: space, place, environment, and non-place. I go over this again here because it is key to establish the meanings behind these terms as I'll use them in the thesis. In writing about spatial stories, de Certeau identifies a useful dichotomy between these two words:

---

<sup>221</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>222</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 1992).



A place [ ] is the order (of whatever kind) in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence. It thus excludes the possibility of two things being in the same location. [...] A place is thus an instantaneous configuration of positions. It implies an indication of stability. A *space* exists when one takes into consideration vectors of direction, velocities, and time variables. Thus space is composed of intersections of mobile elements. It is in a sense actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it.<sup>223</sup>

What this means is that space is tied up with circulation, with the subjective view centred and prioritized. It is an open field, the use of which can be determined. A space is for use, for moving through. A place, on the other hand, is tied up with institution. It is a landmark, a proper noun that *occupies*. A place is for identification and wayfinding, for recognition and naming. A space can be transformed into a place through repeated use, or by becoming an important locus for a historical moment. A field is a space. The field where the Battle of Gettysburg was fought, however, is a place.

To these two terms I add the modifier *environment*. Throughout this project, environment will be a term used to refer to the aesthetics, visual and tactile design of spaces and places. It refers to architecture, emotional resonance, tone, and so forth. The qualification is important, because aspects like architecture actively shape space and circulation through it—even when that architecture is almost purely representational or digital. Greg Whistance-Smith writes of the importance of architectural representation in games specifically, “Architects use a range of 2D drawing techniques to represent buildings, and each one emphasizes some aspects of 3D space while masking others...Because of this selective representation, each drawing type has its own

---

<sup>223</sup> de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 117.

spatiality, and by relying on these conventions to represent their worlds, 2D videogames inherit the qualities of space that each drawing type affords.”<sup>224</sup> What gets played out spatially in the game from this is another aspect of transmedia cultural production as well, where what I’m talking about is sectors of the economy instead of physical spaces. The spatial exploration element of this dissertation will serve again as an allegory for how transmedia itself works. To review through example again: a field is a space; the field where the Battle of Gettysburg was fought is a place; and its environmental qualities may be grassy, windy, or rain-slicked.

### **2.6.1 Mediating the City**

Clearly, the introduction of concepts like *dérives*, tours, and maps opens up many questions and possibilities for studies of virtual worlds. When we add to this exploration a view of city itself as medium, we can find even more concordance with the city as mediated through digital technology. In their article “The City is a Medium,” media scholars Friedrich Kittler and Matthew Griffin identify the metropolis as allegorical for computational technologies on a number of levels, all of which reduce the processes of the urban environment to knowledge exchanges:

What strikes the eye of the passerby as a growth or entropy is technology, that is, information. Since cities no longer lie within the panopticon of the cathedral or castle and can no longer be enclosed by walls or fortifications, a network made up of intersecting networks dissects and connects the city—in particular its fringes, peripheries, and tangents, regardless of whether these networks transmit information (telephone, radio,

---

<sup>224</sup> Whistance-Smith, “Selective Spatiality.”

television) or energy (water supply, electricity, highway), they all represent forms of information.<sup>225</sup>

Taken in this way, all cities are already primed for application to their fictional counterparts. For example, Kittler and Griffin equate railway stations and addresses with data that allow other data to appear. We can draw a parallel between these real-world insights and the nature of fast-travel points or warp tunnels in games: they locate and determine formats of exchange, serving as that very data which allows other data to appear. Fast-travel points also serve both the purposes and practices of railways and addresses: once the player (or citizen) enters them as a command, she is directed to a new named point on the map and in the meantime held in a sort of stasis, carried along by the data (railway cars) in limbo. This is another connection: underneath all considerations lies the importance of circulation. In an entire essay ostensibly on cities, Kittler and Griffin primarily focus on transportation and circulation. Circulation is *key* to the city—both the city inhabited by real people in the physical world and the fictional city of gamespace. Circulation defines cities, just as it complicates cities.<sup>226</sup> However: does this go in both directions? Are mediated videogame cities allegorical for real-world cities? This is an important question that the dissertation will take up explicitly in the chapter on the *Arkham* series.

Michel Foucault adds to this rich and complex mix with his writing on heterotopias. In his essay “Of Other Spaces,” Foucault says that the contemporary era is defined by the same notions of space that de Certeau writes about as delineated from place:

The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of

---

<sup>225</sup> Kittler and Griffin, “The City Is a Medium,” 718.

<sup>226</sup> Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” 22.

simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are at a moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein.<sup>227</sup>

Foucault's belief that contemporary space is perhaps not still entirely desanctified grounds his descriptions of heterotopias, spaces that have more layers of meaning or relationships to other places than immediately meet the eye. They are those spaces of both liminality and crisis, somewhat akin to the non-places described by Augé, but different in that they are not necessarily spaces that call for us to ignore our own identities. Indeed, heterotopias can actively call for deeper examinations of ourselves and the world around us, as they include places like old-age homes and cemeteries, which call to mind issues like the sacred and mortality.<sup>228</sup>

So what then are the heterotopias of digital worlds? On one level, all digital worlds are essentially heterotopias, as their representations bely their status as code constructs. Perhaps those symbolic levels of games are well-suited to thinking in terms of heterotopia—for example, areas of a map in an instalment of a game series that may conjure up the relationship that game has to other episodes in the franchise or nodes in the transmedia complex.

## 2.7 **Conclusion: Everything New is Old Again**

It's clear that many new areas of inquiry become available in the investigation of digital worlds through a dextrous theoretical approach adroit at adapting itself to the objects it attends.

---

<sup>227</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid., 26.

Allowing the objects to lead where they may and avoiding the myopia of a traditional overarching theoretical framework also pulls us in new conceptual directions when trying to locate the operations and potential insights of a fictional geographical plane. Extremely rich observations certainly derive from the treatment of digital worlds as the urban playgrounds of cyberspace and contemporary culture. The trend thus far identified in schematizing digital worlds returns again and again to conceptions of novelty and familiarity—either the seeking out or avoidance of one or the other.

In his book *Organs without Bodies*, Marxist philosopher Slavoj Žižek offers a commentary on the dialectical relationship with the Old that allows for the production of the New. In Žižek’s view (and indeed in the view of all Marxists, Žižek tells us), the only “New” things are the things that have been dragged out of the past and given a new materialism.<sup>229</sup> This concept of a dialectical relationship between the Old and the New echoes thoughts expressed by Augé in *Non-Places* about how one of the conditions of supermodernity is the presence of the past in a present that supersedes it but still lays claim to it.<sup>230</sup> Supermodernity involves a catching up of history to the present, where the old is made into a specific spectacle (something supermodernity does with all exoticism and all local particularity).<sup>231</sup> Putting these two observations in context with one another problematizes the acceleration of history, while also interrogating just how old the elements of the past composing the new truly are.

Both this catching up of history and this production of the new by recapitulating the old are effective for a study of transmedia, which seeks to play on both nostalgia and novelty in all its executions. As we hasten towards hyped-up new release dates for games and films that promise both fidelity to the decades-old stories and properties they derive from and

---

<sup>229</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *Organs Without Bodies: On Deleuze and Consequences* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 101.

<sup>230</sup> Augé, *Non-Places*, 75.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

representational and technological innovations to bring in new audiences under a principle of radical inclusivity, it's crystal clear how everything old is new again before it even has the chance to grow old naturally. This connects again to the ephemerality of the online virtual world, where an evening offline may see the player wake up and log on to a new day where the maps have literally been redrawn.

This, in essence, is the very nature of contemporary media production in the excess of supermodernity. In *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*, economist Joseph Schumpeter distinguishes that the fundamental mode of late capitalism is one that creates through obliteration: "The process of industrial mutation—if I may use that biological term," he writes, "incessantly revolutionizes the economic structure *from within*, incessantly destroying the old one, incessantly creating a new one. This process of Creative Destruction is the essential fact about capitalism."<sup>232</sup> So modes of capitalism are constantly being destroyed by newer modes of capitalism. Does this mean that the one marker of capitalism is that it has to favour centralization rather than diversification? If so, the democratizing promises of transmedia are almost certainly a bluff, and the outlook on the persistence of any given corporately-controlled digital environment (which is most of them) is decidedly bleak.

In any event, the relevance to my project is that it functions the same way that modern transmedia does. The preoccupation with continuity is a residual trace of our old obsessions. The new form of transmedial life is characterized by processes in which explicit markers of the old are discarded for (or at best coexist with) the new. The "primary" text is whichever is currently selling best, and continuity's and canonicity's importance is rapidly on the decline. This is part of the urgency of developing new ways to read media texts. Our history is hastening towards us as we actively work to deconstruct it, and in the meantime entire worlds rise and fall, unnoticed

---

<sup>232</sup> Joseph A. Schumpeter, "The Process of Creative Destruction," 83.

and unstudied. What's left for posterity is frequently incomplete, calling for the kind of media approaches described by Jonathan Sterne in one of the epigraphs opening this chapter.

My goal in using the material detailed in this chapter is to apply this thinking about history to objects still alive and in circulation, so that I can always find myself on the map. These are the kinds of questions I will take up in the chapters that follow. With the framework of the literature review in place, I move on to the case studies, beginning with an overview of how Gotham City has been realized and spatialized in various media productions over the past 80-plus years.

### 3 Gotham on the Ground: History & Other Media

“Were one to image Gotham through the narrative actions of its characters, we might find it to be an accumulation of enacted spaces, of landmarks and buildings and streets brought to life through action, event and reference”

– William Uricchio, “The Batman’s Gotham City™: Story, Ideology, Performance”<sup>233</sup>

“I’m here to see some of the wildlife in Gotham City.”

– Vicki Vale, *Batman*<sup>234</sup>

#### 3.1 Introduction: *Dark Knight Déjà Vu*

I’m walking down a street in Chicago with my wife, Amanda. We’re in town visiting family and attending a conference at which I’m giving a presentation. We have dinner plans, but it’s only mid-afternoon, so we’re really just wandering the streets. The conference hotel is right in the Loop, and we need to wind our way to Wicker Park, so we’re vaguely heading northwest, really going wherever looks interesting and open. It’s *flânerie* with all the leisure afforded two millennials on vacation.

We’re walking under the El and we’ve just turned north onto Franklin when it happens. I’m suddenly gripped by a sense of *déjà vu*—I’ve been here before. I know it. This isn’t necessarily out of the question: it’s hardly my first time in the Windy City and I am frequently given to aimless wandering in a new place anyway. But it’s not that. I recognize this place, with certainty. Something important happened here.

“Ah!” I exclaim, stopping short and startling Amanda.

---

<sup>233</sup> William Uricchio, “The Batman’s Gotham City™: Story, Ideology, Performance,” in *Comics and the City: Urban Space in Print, Picture, and Sequence*, ed. Jörn Ahrens and Arno Meteling (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Ltd., 2010), 119-132.

<sup>234</sup> Burton, *Batman*.



“What? What is it?” she asks.

I smile in satisfaction of having figured it out. “This is where Bruce Wayne crashed his Lamborghini that one time.”

This is a telling moment (and not just in that my partner obviously married a nerd). Sure enough, when we returned to our lodging for the evening, I looked up the relevant scene in the 2008 film *The Dark Knight*,<sup>235</sup> and Bruce Wayne did indeed speed his Lambo down Franklin Street as he raced through Gotham City. However, he also attended a Gotham charity ball at the Palace Theatre in Los Angeles in the 2012 follow-up *The Dark Knight Rises*.<sup>236</sup> In the same film, he also chased Bane from the Gotham City Stock Exchange, located in the real world at the JP Morgan Building on Wall Street in New York. And argued with Alfred in the staircase of Wayne Manor, just a few thousand miles east in Osterley Park, England. Meanwhile, if we look at Batman’s brief cameo in 2016’s *Suicide Squad*,<sup>237</sup> he jumps onto the roof of Joker and Harley Quinn’s car near Yonge and Dundas Square in Toronto. Moments later, Joker drives the car off the end of a pier at Queen’s Quay. That’s about a ten-minute drive at speed, assuming zero traffic.

This is reminiscent of a story Lawrence Lessig tells in *The Future of Ideas*,<sup>238</sup> in which the producers of *Batman Forever* opted to shoot a chase scene in a public square. An architect named Andrew Leicester had designed the courtyard in question, and filed suit against the production for copyright infringement following the release of the film. Leicester’s suit was ultimately unsuccessful,<sup>239</sup> but the irony in this context is that his lawsuit specifically pertained

---

<sup>235</sup> Christopher Nolan, *The Dark Knight* (Burbank: Warner Brothers, 2008).

<sup>236</sup> Christopher Nolan, *The Dark Knight Rises* (Burbank: Warner Brothers, 2012).

<sup>237</sup> David Ayer, *Suicide Squad* (Burbank: Warner Brothers, 2016).

<sup>238</sup> Lawrence Lessig, *The Future of Ideas: The Fate of the Commons in a Connected World* (New York: Random House, 2001).

<sup>239</sup> Janet Shprintz, “Judge Dismisses Case of ‘Batman’ Sculptures,” *Variety*, June 4, 1998, <https://variety.com/1998/biz/news/judge-dismisses-case-of-batman-sculptures-1117471543/>.

to a public work depicting the history of the city of *Los Angeles*, so the case not only caused some deal of frustration for Warner Bros., but also pointed to the cracks in the hyperreality of *Batman Forever's* setting. One then wonders about the symbolic significance bound up in each of these locations for locals: while I stood on a corner on Franklin Street and saw Gotham City, a Chicagoan might have watched *The Dark Knight* and seen her hometown. How many of these spaces and places repeat from production to production, or franchise to franchise? In what other cultural and legal contexts are those images of space and place bound up?

For the (assumed) viewer, it's all part of the process of "movie magic." Multiple locations in multiple cities in multiple countries can be stitched together and still produce a final product that exudes a cohesiveness and rationale of space and place. But multiple visions employed with the same multiple dispersion over multiple decades may fail to yield the same cohesion. And so Gotham is a city of imposing glass and steel skyscrapers and friendly, brightly-coloured brownstones. Its sidewalks are brightly lit and gleaming clean, and also cracked with decay and crowded by pimps and drug dealers. It is coastal and Midwestern. Sprawling and compact. Contemporary and classic. Faceless and iconic. Decimated by seismic catastrophe and ambitious in its architectural feats of gaudy statue sculpture. It has a pro team for every sport, a cultured theatre district, several Ivy League universities, and some of the most dangerous and crime-ridden streets in America. It has industry. Tech startups. Street festivals. Terror attacks. Total corruption.

Its rooftops are populated by water towers and littered with giant typewriters.

Historically speaking, when it comes to officially mapping a fictional world cartographically, a masterminding author usually provides the schematic, or at the very least, consistency reigns in drawing the map. In the first editions of the *Lord of the Rings* series, for example, Tolkien included maps of Middle Earth so that readers could follow the trajectory of

the Fellowship's journey.<sup>240</sup> L. Frank Baum's world of Oz, though expansive and expanding, always fits its new fantastical locales in relation to those areas of Oz that readers have already visited. And even the shifting, convoluted island of *Lost* is represented by a definitive map within the television series and in its many paratexts.<sup>241</sup>

This has not usually been the case for comic books. The reason for this is probably a mix of the work-for-hire political economy of mainstream comics publishers and the speed with which most comics are churned out. At the close of 2017, the Wikipedia entry describing Batman comics listed 93 titles in the "Ongoing Series" subheading, with 12 still in publication going into 2018.<sup>242</sup> This list only accounts for those titles starring Batman or a member of the "Bat-Family" and/or titles taking place explicitly and consistently in Gotham City. It does not count one-shots, limited series, or specials. Between the 12 titles, 189 issues were printed for the year, with 88 different writers and pencillers named. Of the 88 creators, 60 unique names appear as pencillers (some pencillers worked on more than one title). So in one year, upwards of 60 different hands are credited as having drawn Gotham City (to say nothing of the many more inkers and colorists named).<sup>243</sup>

Some of these 189 stories from 2017 take place exclusively in Gotham City. Some extricate Batman or his allies from Gotham and see them travel far and wide. Some only refer to Gotham, explicitly or implicitly. But all are invariably tied to this fictional urbanity by decades of the strong association between it and Batman and his derivatives.

---

<sup>240</sup> J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring: Being the First Part of The Lord of the Rings* (Boston: Mariner Books/Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012).

<sup>241</sup> *Lost* (Burbank: ABC Studios, 2004).

<sup>242</sup> Wikipedia, "List of Batman Comics," *Wikipedia*, accessed December 30, 2017, [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=List\\_of\\_Batman\\_comics&oldid=847804013](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=List_of_Batman_comics&oldid=847804013).

<sup>243</sup> These findings are the product of personal research, and a simple table of writers and artists for Bat-Family titles in 2017 is provided in Appendix 1.

I offer this quantification to demonstrate that superhero comics are not generally auteured products. They favour the churn that a factory studio model makes possible. Furthermore, this is typical of an industry where a cluster of properties are cultivated over decades and diluted through spinoffs, relaunches, and “event storylines” in which all titles occasionally converge for a period of a few months.<sup>244</sup> This multiplicity of voices and creative directions has long been the standard in mainstream English-language (read: superhero) comics production. This comics entertainment industry has commonly used a work-for-hire production process, with writers and artists rarely holding any intellectual property rights over their work; ultimate creative control instead lies in the hands of an editorial process more invested in output than consistency.<sup>245</sup>

As a business model, transmedia also favours churn, and modern transmedia complexes have sometimes taken lessons from superhero comics in cultivating synergy and consumer anticipation. So even when we see Batman films auteured by the likes of Tim Burton, Christopher Nolan, and Zack Snyder, we can expect no consistency either—all follow their own visions.<sup>246</sup>

However, transmedia as a narrative mode favours consistency, or, at the very least, recognition and identification. Today, it appears that transmedia model approaches to comics properties are beginning to work within the system of churn in interesting ways, as the comics industry itself has gradually come to rhetorically embrace auteurism to market celebrated

---

<sup>244</sup> There is no clear origin for the trope of event storylines. If the litmus test is a crossover, the “Silver Age” of superhero comics had many crossovers, as early as the X-Men attending the wedding of Reed Richards and Susan Storm in *Fantastic Four Annual* #3 (1965). In the “Modern Age,” the first major crossover event storyline was ostensibly the 1984-1985 Marvel *Secret Wars* limited series (1985), followed shortly by the DC crossover event and universe reboot story *Crisis on Infinite Earths* (1985-1986). By now, crossover events are an annual tradition at the Big Two publishers, and usually tend to last three to four months.

<sup>245</sup> Cf. John Molinaro, “Who owns Captain America? Contested authorship, work-for-hire, and termination of rights under the copyright act of 1976,” *Georgia State Law Review* 21.2, 2004.

<sup>246</sup> Cf. Scott, “Dawn of the Undead Author.”

creators on its corporately owned titles.<sup>247</sup> From a certain perspective, it seems that the layouts of fictional urban spaces like Batman's hometown are beginning to build consistency in the pursuit of a canon that allows readers, users, and audiences to cut across media without losing their sense of place.

From another vantage point, it seems that different media representations are diverging in their representations at will, leaving little consistency not only between different media, but even between instalments in specific series. An overview can reveal that the aggregated truth lies somewhere in between. Due to the privacy protocols of transmedia production, it's impossible to decode exactly the degrees of coordination and editorial oversight across iterations of Gotham City. Certainly, the exigencies of franchised media networks mean that highly articulated coordination would involve slower production as well as increased labour and communication outlays, all for somewhat diminishing returns from increasingly diversified audiences. The key for transmedia strategy is clearly finding a middle ground. Transmedia has to go to work on fictional spaces, because locales and worldbuilding are key to marketability and the establishment of canon and differentiation. But they must also churn out narrative products at a breakneck pace. Amidst these tactics, it may appear that, across the franchise, consistency is increasing. In some cases, this is true. It may also look at times like consistency is being thrown out the window—certainly, this is a monumental task with many productions occurring simultaneously.

As I indicated in the introductory chapter, Batman can (obviously) be many things. As the character survived through the years, DC and its licensees looked to make the character

---

<sup>247</sup> It should be noted that this process both expands and contracts as time passes. The late 1990s-early 2000s saw the rise of celebrated auteurs in mainstream comics such as Grant Morrison, Brian Michael Bendis, and Geoff Johns; but in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, many of them were absorbed into editorial. Their young, inevitably male successors are less superstars than faithful fanboy soldiers, who in editorials and interviews speak with the rhetoric of honouring legacies rather than disrupting paradigms.

appeal to different audiences over time, across media, and eventually across generations (to differing degrees of success, but surely any franchise spanning eight decades is bound to have both hits and misses along the way). But how does the character come to be so inexorably linked to place? Is Gotham City just as mutable as Batman himself, or might it instead be an anchor point, serving to establish that absent consistency?

In what follows, I will sketch out how and why Gotham City has traditionally defied notions of consistent geography and design sense, as well as an overview of the history of those representations across media forms, including comics, radio, television, toys, film, and earlier videogames. The logic behind presenting this history is twofold: first, it will provide a useful shorthand for engaging with subsequent objects of study that this dissertation takes up; more importantly, however, in all instances, Gotham City demonstrates itself not so much as a place as an array of means to ends. Seen from a Foucauldian vantage point of power dynamics, these arrays serve as an allegory for de Certeau's continuum of tactics and strategies. The ends are simply not what we think they are if we view the issue from the symbolic plane.

For each medium in which it appears, Gotham serves a distinctive set of functions, some of which are dictated by the medium itself, some of which are dictated by the necessities of story, and some of which are dictated by commercial interests. In the transmedial mode, space and place are built to serve functions. Those functions, expressed through the media in question, themselves serve needs of signaling to specific audiences, augment the requisites of synergy, or convey mythos. And in videogames, place signifies the broader intellectual property in order to bring and hold players within the game, while space acts as an interlocutor of the needs of genre, consequently telling us a great deal about how and why videogame genres affect videogame environments. Throughout, I will demonstrate the *functions* that Gotham City serves, and the

ways that it accretes certain representational qualities and discards others only to pick them up again later.

### 3.2 Gotham's Genesis

With the 1940 publication of *Batman* #4,<sup>248</sup> the fictional Gotham City was introduced as a largely nondescript and faceless American metropolis to serve as a locale for Batman's adventures. Batman creators Bob Kane and Bill Finger were first going to call Bruce Wayne's hometown Civic City:

[Civic City] seemed a bit dull, so we tried Capital City, then Coast City. Then, I flipped through the phone book and spotted the name Gotham Jewelers and said, 'That's it,' Gotham City. We didn't call it New York because we wanted anybody in any city to identify with it. Of course, Gotham is another name for New York.<sup>249</sup>

Kane, Finger, and the offices of *Batman* publisher National Allied Publications<sup>250</sup> all resided in New York at the time, so it's little surprise that though Gotham continued to develop as an environment all its own, it customarily retained many geographical and aesthetic resemblances to

---

<sup>248</sup> Bill Finger and Bob Kane, *Batman* volume 1 #4, December 1940.

<sup>249</sup> Bill Finger quoted in Edwin Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), xiv.

<sup>250</sup> While the history of this publisher could fill many books (and has), a brief timeline: National Allied Publications was founded in 1934; in 1937, Detective Comics, Inc. was formed by National founder Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson and partner Harry Donnenfeld, which purchased National Allied in 1938; the companies officially merged into National Comics Publications in 1946, which shortly became National Periodical Publications; this company was purchased by Kinney National Company in 1967; Kinney also later purchased Warner Bros.-Seven Arts and became Warner Communications Inc. in 1972; Warner Communications Merged with Time Inc. in 1989, forming Time Warner; and most recently, AT&T has reached a deal to purchase Time Warner (a transaction that has yet to be approved in the US as of this writing in late 2018), and the latter company has rechristened itself WarnerMedia LLC.

NYC. Many Batman stories involve the ocean, so it's clearly a coastal city, and its dense urban population, clustered high-rise buildings, and Eastern weather patterns all also strongly suggest Gotham is a surrogate for New York City. Other creators in Batman's 79-year history have also compared Gotham to NYC: both Frank Miller and John Byrne have been paraphrased calling Gotham "New York at Night,"<sup>251</sup> and writer/editor Dennis O'Neil has said that Gotham is "New York's mirror-world counterpart...Manhattan below 14<sup>th</sup> Street at eleven minutes past midnight on the coldest night in November."<sup>252</sup> At times, the real world has seeped in and blurred the line between Gotham City as fiction as New York City as reality, such as when the World Trade Center inexplicably appears in Gotham City in *Batman* #441 (1989) as Two-Face contemplates blowing up the Twin Towers to lure Batman to his death (a flip of the coin ultimately stops Two-Face from going through with his plans<sup>253</sup>). For the most part though, real-world landmarks and places only enter Gotham through analogy. For example, many iterations of Gotham have a Statue of Liberty stand-in (in the 1960s show, a "Lady of Freedom" statue; in the 2016 *Arkham Knight* videogame, a "Lady of Gotham" statue; and in the 1997 *Batman & Robin*, a "Statue of Justice"—identical to the Statue of Liberty except for the word "GOTHAM" emblazoned across the crown).

Though the analogy remains, Gotham's status as a fictional city has also allowed its multifold creative teams to add different landmarks and architectural features to the Gotham skyline, giving it a life of its own. That life, however, has historically lacked consistency. If we confine the topic to the culture of comic books, the city has become layered over time rather than schematically graphed: certain landmarks are known to be there, such as the Wayne Enterprises Building, the nightclub My Alibi, Wonder Tower, and Crime Alley. However, the looks,

---

<sup>251</sup> Frank Miller qtd. in Vic O'Sullivan, "Manhattan Unmasked," *The Sunday Times*, July 17 2016.

<sup>252</sup> Dennis O'Neil, *Knightfall: A Novel* (New York: Bantam Books, 1994), 344.

<sup>253</sup> Marv Wolfman and George Perez, *Batman* #441 (New York: DC Comics, 1989), 2.



locations, and spatial organizations of these landmarks change considerably from creative team to creative team.

Take for example Crime Alley, the inner-city locale where Thomas and Martha Wayne were gunned down before young Bruce's eyes. A depiction of Crime Alley is essential to any retelling of Batman's origin story, and consequently, it appears innumerable times in Batman comics (according to comic book wiki *Comic Vine*, Crime Alley shows up in 166 issues as of early 2018).<sup>254</sup> In one of the most well-known Batman stories ever told, *Batman: the Dark Knight Returns* (1986), Crime Alley is depicted as an open space foregrounded in front of chain-link fences.<sup>255</sup> Only a year later, however, in *Batman #409* (1987), the same spot sits in front of a brownstone walkup stoop and appears surrounded by tightly-packed buildings on all sides.<sup>256</sup> Only the streetlight remains to retain a sense of visual consistency. Meanwhile, in more recent comics depictions of Crime Alley, the locale lives up to its name, portrayed as an actual back alley behind the Monarch Theatre.<sup>257</sup>

Crime Alley is so integral to the mythos of Batman that some creators have produced comics especially focused on exploring its function within Batman stories. In the 48-page one-shot special *Planetary/Batman: Night on Earth* (2003), writer Warren Ellis and artist John Cassaday took advantage of the crossover trope to explode the veneer of Crime Alley as place and instead examine it, and Batman himself, as utilities of creative control and narrative mutability.

---

<sup>254</sup> Comic Vine, "Crime Alley," *Comic Vine*, accessed January 20, 2016, <http://comicvine.gamespot.com/crime-alley/4020-55715/>.

<sup>255</sup> Frank Miller, *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* (New York: DC Comics, 1986), 13.

<sup>256</sup> Max Allan Collins, Ross Andru, and Dick Giordano, *Batman #409* (New York: DC Comics, 1987), 1.

<sup>257</sup> See for example *Batman #29* by Scott Snyder and Greg Capullo (March 2014) or *Detective Comics #6* by Tony Daniel (April 2012).

As the story opens, the Planetary team (self-styled “archaeologists of the impossible” intent on learning the world’s secret history<sup>258</sup>) land their helicopter on a Gotham rooftop, eliciting group leader Elijah Snow to remark, “Here we are, children. Old as New York, founded on the East Coast and originally designed by English masons on opium...exacerbated by absinthe-fiend local architects in the twenties, basically not suitable for human habitation...Gotham City.”<sup>259</sup> They’ve come to this loathsome place in search of a man named John Black who’s capable of collapsing multiverses into each other, one city block at a time. Their target was last sighted in the Finger District, a formerly “wild place” where sex workers used to congregate.<sup>260</sup> The team corner Black in Crime Alley, just off Finger Street, when he involuntarily sets off a “multiversal collapsing wave” that shifts himself and the Planetary team into a different version of Gotham City. At this point, Batman shows up and everyone starts fighting.

John Black himself is a kind of transmedia allegory: a man who collapses multiverses into each other. Symbolically, this is chaotic: Black is insane. But as a pivot for plot—as an asset for a writer—he allows for a story that speaks to various publics. The rest of the standalone story sees John Black collapse multiversal possibilities into one another again and again, all in a metaphorical exercise meant to explore what Batman and Gotham are and how they signify. While the first version of the hero is indeterminate but certainly contemporary, as reality shifts, we also encounter the Bob Kane/Bill Finger original, the Adam West 1966 TV version, Neal Adams’ Silver Age Portrayal, and Frank Miller’s versions from *Batman: Year One* and *Batman:*

---

<sup>258</sup> It’s worth mentioning here that Ellis and Cassaday’s book takes in histories of pulp, kaiju movie monsters, and superhero comics, and the thrust of the overall plot asks the question of “What if the Fantastic Four were evil?” It’s interesting to consider what this series might have looked like in a world without copyright, where Ellis and Cassaday were able to describe the Fantastic Four and other IP without disguising them—like the model taken in Alan Moore and Kevin O’Neill’s *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* series, which builds a universe out of public domain properties thrown together.

<sup>259</sup> Warren Ellis and John Cassaday, *Planetary/Batman: Night on Earth* (New York: DC Comics, 2003), 2.

<sup>260</sup> Perhaps a tongue-in-cheek reference to the work-for-hire political economy that denied Batman co-creator Bill Finger any royalties or accreditation for decades—more on this naming trope shortly.

*The Dark Knight Returns*. As Batman changes, so too does Crime Alley and Gotham. For the 1966 TV Batman, his city is rendered lime green by colourist David Baron. For *The Dark Knight Returns*, ashen grey. For *Batman: Year One*, earth tones. For the Silver Age, bright-hued blue. In the final pages, we're confronted with a clear-eyed and realistically-drawn Caped Crusader framed against a sparkling and futuristic Gotham. This version is heavily based on the way artist Alex Ross has portrayed the Caped Crusader, notably in the 1996 limited series *Kingdom Come*<sup>261</sup> and the 1999 prestige one-shot *Batman: War on Crime*.<sup>262</sup>

It's easy to think of Batman as a universal character. Here, Ellis, Cassaday, and colorist David Baron demonstrate that this character is instead multiversal. The multiverse is the central diegetic principle that permits contradictory stories, timelines, and characters in superhero comics continuity. Like so many ideas in comics, the concept of the multiverse is borrowed from theoretical physics and reduced down to digestible pseudo-science. Beyond enriching the world of superhero comics and allowing for a wider range of stories to be told, it also serves as a mode of continuity management, and at times continuity evasion—essential apparatuses in the toolbox of transmedia strategy. It essentially claims that multiple parallel universes exist, so whenever you're confronted with contradictory visions of your favourite character, they can be explained away as either non-canon or within the structure of multiversality.

For DC Comics, multiversality was a tool used in several stories from the 1940s-1980s—employed sometimes in the context of science fiction, sometimes in the context of fantasy, but always for the purpose of telling stories in which characters could meet “alternate reality” versions of themselves.<sup>263</sup> However, it was hardly considered necessary, or used as an escape hatch. Instead, contradictory plotlines seemed to pose no storytelling challenge for the publisher.

---

<sup>261</sup> Mark Waid and Alex Ross, *Kingdom Come* (New York: DC Comics, 1996).

<sup>262</sup> Alex Ross and Paul Dini, *Batman: War On Crime* (New York: DC Comics, 1999).

<sup>263</sup> Karin Kukkonen, “Navigating Infinite Earths: Readers, Mental Models, and the Multiverse of Superhero Comics,” *StoryWorlds: A Journal of Narrative Studies* 2, no. 1 (2010): 39–58, <https://doi.org/10.1353/stw.0.0009>.

Earlier in this timeline, it was not necessarily a tactic contributing to a greater strategy (e.g. an end in and of itself), but a byproduct of haphazard storytelling and IP management. But as readers aged and continued to read in the 1960s and 1970s, editorial at the company began relying more heavily on deep continuity to maintain its fanbase. By the mid-1980s, however, DC continuity was a tangled mess of dropped storylines and convoluted character development. At this point, the publisher considered that the difficult canon of the universe was proving inaccessible for new readers. So DC decided to reboot the entire universe in the 1985-86 limited series *Crisis on Infinite Earths*.<sup>264</sup> In so doing, DC rendered multiversality a crucial superhero trope and canonical element.

Since then, multiversality has been an effective continuity management tool at DC, as well as a way to reconcile the industry's tendency to frequently relaunch characters and the universe in order to boost sales with writers' needs to exercise creative freedom and draw from the publisher's stable of IP. However, the *Planetary/Batman* crossover reveals a number of the kinds of concerns that govern narrative within transmedia complexes, both representationally and in terms of political economy. Representationally, the alterations to the colour palette and architectural styles remind readers of some of the many ways Gotham has been drawn. Crime Alley tightens and widens, and the ground becomes clean and then filthy, indicating the varying tones Batman stories have set over the decades. The final version we see is a nod towards both science fiction elements of Batman media and the future incarnations of Gotham yet unseen.

Meanwhile, the very fact of the special one-shot's existence tells a story about corporate consolidation and the rhetoric of fandom within pop culture. *Planetary* was a series created by Warren Ellis and John Cassaday for WildStorm, an imprint of DC—and it's worth noting here

---

<sup>264</sup> Marv Wolfman et. al, *Crisis on Infinite Earths* (New York: DC Comics, 1986).

the symbolism of tangled ownership that ensues with such a crossover. To begin with, Ellis holds the copyright to the series jointly with DC,<sup>265</sup> while Batman (credited in the original edition of the special as “created by Bob Kane”<sup>266</sup>) is wholly owned by DC.<sup>267</sup> At the same time, the book is “inspired by the creative visions of Neal Adams, Dick Giordano, Carmine Infantino, Bob Kane, Jerry Robinson, and Alex Ross”<sup>268</sup>—leaving off the clear inspirational material harvested from Dick Sprang, Lorenzo Semple Jr., William Dozier, and arguably several others. WildStorm itself is a studio founded by Jim Lee and Brandon Choi in the early 1990s as part of Image Comics, a company formed by Lee and several other artists from the “Big Two” (Marvel and DC Comics) in an effort to reassert creators’ rights and own the properties they created. Within a few years of establishing Image Comics, the founders became fractious and began replicating the work-for-hire political economy of the Big Two, and in 1998 Lee sold WildStorm to DC (it should be noted, months after the creation and launch of *Planetary*). Eventually, Lee would climb to the position of Co-Publisher at DC.

This is not a new story for pop culture: an auteur cloaked in the rhetoric of creators’ rights rises through the ranks to become head of a creative corporation and replicates the conditions of the same corporate paradigms they initially rebelled against. Only Ellis’ superstar creator status allowed for him to make demands such as rights retention and co-ownership, but the details of royalties and editorial oversight in initial and subsequent printings of the one-shot

---

<sup>265</sup> Jochen Ecke, “Warren Ellis: Performing the Transnational Author in the American Comics Mainstream,” *Transnational Perspectives on Graphic Narratives: Comics at the Crossroads*, ed. Shane Denson, Christina Meyer, and Daniel Stein (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 175.

<sup>266</sup> Ellis and Cassaday, *Planetary/Batman*, i.

<sup>267</sup> Under current copyright law, Batman is ostensibly set to enter the public domain at the end of 2034. However, if DC appeals to the creator clause, they could make the case for extending copyright to 2068 (70 years after the death of co-creator Bob Kane). However, due to the continuing appearance of the character, it’s quite probable that both initial appearance and the creator clause are moot, and Batman, like most other corporately-owned superheroes created in work-for-hire conditions, will simply never enter the public domain. Cf. Francis Nevins, “Copyright + Character = Catastrophe,” *Journal of the Copyright Society of the U.S.A.* 39, no. 4 (1992): 303-344; and Heather Schubert, “It’s Elementary: Why We Need a New Copyright Standard, with Statutory Guidance, for Characters in a Series,” *Rutgers Journal of Law & Public Policy* 12, no. 2 (2015): 216-251.

<sup>268</sup> Ellis and Cassaday, ii.

are not openly available for public scrutiny. Outwardly, the crossover itself plays on strong rhetorical traditions within transmedia and pop culture franchising: how exciting and interesting to see different creations play in the same sandbox! Inherent to this is the reasoning behind the consolidation of media properties: the more IP gathered under one umbrella, the more opportunities for worlds to collide.

It's important to note that this is neither bad nor deceptive—in fact, it satisfies a very real and powerful pre-existing audience desire. As I noted earlier, the fannish fantasy to bring beloved characters together is one inherent to fandom and much older than transmedia proper. Nonetheless, in practice, this kind of consolidation also lends itself to increased opportunities for synergy and cross-promotion. So in one 48-page special, all the stakes of transmedia are laid bare: obfuscated creative contribution, corporate synergy, fan service, and layered representations of iconic fictional worlds through multiversality. These are the kinds of concerns that govern such narratives.

The *Planetary/Batman* crossover is notable in one more respect. In its numerous incarnations of Gotham, it speaks to the grounding function that Gotham City serves for its franchise. The one-shot puts a point on the fact that worldbuilding is an integral element in maintaining consistency for a transmedia complex that relies on multiple valences simultaneously. While Batman stories can signify in a number of different ways, Gotham City serves as a constant that allows for signification of its own. This much is demonstrated by the number of titles in various media that utilize Gotham as setting. For Batman, Gotham City and its locales offer audiences a consistency regardless of the tone of the story. Outside of stories in which Batman takes centre stage, however, Gotham has, over time, built up its own set of genre distinctions that tell audiences what kind of stories they're in for.

These stories tend towards noir. While Batman stories are obviously superhero stories, Gotham City stories are not necessarily so clear-cut. Noir exerts a powerful gravitational pull for tales told in this setting. However, noir is not so easy to define on its own: Slavoj Žižek, for example, has noted that noir only realizes its subgenre by way of infusion with other genres like science fiction or the occult.<sup>269</sup> Therefore, Gotham City noir stories usually map to three genres: crime, mystery, and horror. *Gotham Central*,<sup>270</sup> for example, is a comic book police procedural that harkens back to the Silver Age era of cops-and-robbers crime comics while also embedding in contemporary cop shows like *Law & Order*<sup>271</sup> or *The Wire*.<sup>272</sup> The Fox series *Gotham*<sup>273</sup> takes this one step further by appearing in the same medium as such programs, while also tying itself to mystery and horror through Gotham's mythology, and to nostalgia by featuring over-the-top storylines and performances in the camp vein of the 1966 ABC network *Batman* show<sup>274</sup> (this time with a gothic tinge). *Gotham Academy*<sup>275</sup> also fuels its narratives by drawing on Gotham's occult mythology, while simultaneously appealing to teen-drama fans and drawing on traditions of teen detective stories. Even a game title like *Gotham City Impostors*<sup>276</sup> brands its own genre distinctions (in this case, multiplayer FPS) based on the familiarity of crime and gang warfare on the streets of the city, while building familiar arenas for battles. The game's five maps are Amusement Mile, Ace Chemical, Docks, Crime Alley, and Gotham Power—all borrowed from other media. Clearly, one function the city serves across all media is to work as an anchoring point in terms of character, genre, or both. But it also serves more particular functions within

---

<sup>269</sup> Slavoj Žižek, “‘The Thing That Thinks:’ The Kantian Background of the Noir Subject,” in *Shades of Noir*, ed. Joan Copjec (London: Verso, 1993), 200.

<sup>270</sup> Ed Brubaker et al., *Gotham Central. Book One: In the Line of Duty* (New York: DC Comics, 2008).

<sup>271</sup> Dick Wolf, *Law & Order* (New York: NBCUniversal Television Distribution, 1990).

<sup>272</sup> *The Wire* (Los Angeles: HBO, 2002).

<sup>273</sup> *Gotham* (Los Angeles: Fox Broadcasting Company, 2014).

<sup>274</sup> *Batman*, 1966.

<sup>275</sup> Becky Cloonan et al., *Gotham Academy Volume 1: Welcome to Gotham Academy* (New York: DC Comics, 2015).

<sup>276</sup> Monolith Productions, *Gotham City Impostors*, PC (Kirkland WA: Monolith Productions, 2012).

transmedia strategies of fan service and synergy. Looking at a few examples will help to establish patterns in this regard—a task we will take up shortly.

But while Gotham, its neighbourhoods and landmarks are certainly anchor points, Gotham City itself is also what we can describe as a recombinant city. In comics, this is a concept explored in detail in the 1983-1990 series *Mister X*<sup>277</sup> by Dean Motter. The comic takes place in a sprawling metropolis called Radiant City, an urban landscape rumoured to have been designed by a legendary figure known only as Mister X. But Radiant City literally changes and shifts overnight from day to day, and the entire point of the comic's storyline *is* these changes—every time the reader grasps some semblance of who Mister X is, he changes along with the city, transforming from brilliant scientist to madman to desperate fugitive. He himself maintains no control over the expanse he designed—instead, he hides like a rat in its alleyways and sewers. The series' creation and production mirrors its core theme; over the course of seven years, *Mister X* was written and drawn by a plethora of creators playing with Motter's original concept. The story's meaning is incoherence—Mister X and *Mister X* never resolve. Importantly, the characters in the story took this urban planner's ideas and found them agreeable, building a mad, impossible urban sprawl.

This is a clear precursor to the recombinant city of Gotham in later *Batman* comics, where the city is also revealed to have been planned by various madmen and secret societies depending on the version.<sup>278</sup> In *Batman: Death by Design*,<sup>279</sup> Bruce Wayne's campaign to protect Gotham is reframed in terms of architectural history and cultural value: at one point, a character directly asks Wayne to “defend the city” by preserving a crumbling train station that, though in

---

<sup>277</sup> Dean Motter et al., *Mister X: The Archives* (Milwaukie, OR: Dark Horse Books, 2017).

<sup>278</sup> Most notably Cyrus Pinkney, a character introduced in 1992 in *Batman: Legends of the Dark Knight* #27.

*Batman: Arkham Origins* contains a side mission where the player scours the city looking for plaques referencing Pinkney's work, and is rewarded by receiving diary entries from Pinkney himself, detailing his descent into insanity.

<sup>279</sup> Chip Kidd and Dave Taylor, *Batman: Death by Design* (New York: DC Comics, 2012).



disrepair, represents one of the “best examples of patri-monumental modernist architecture in America.”<sup>280</sup> Here, Batman’s mission to stand up for a decaying city is literal: the city is seen as the physical brick and mortar of its buildings, and its soul is seen as deeply tied to architectural traditions.

*Death by Design* insinuates that the recombinatory nature of Gotham that we see in overview as media iterations is the result of a madman’s sinister plot, and thereby metaphorically argues for a traditionalist interpretation of Batman and his world (further indicated by the slender, tall-eared depiction of Batman himself, hearkening back to his early appearances). “Doing good” in this book is to fight against recombination, but the book itself is a variation of both Batman and Gotham City, revealing a paradox in its morality. Aesthetic contradictions like the ones we see in *Death by Design* in particular and the larger recombinatory Gotham City in general yet again reveal the transmedia dialectic at play, where the products speak allegorically to the transmedia business model.

### 3.3 **Drawing the Map**

In a tendency that is perhaps the most familiar toponymical trope in the franchise, tribute has been paid to iconic creators of the past by naming locales in Gotham City after them. For decades, writers of various Bat-titles have been naming Gotham City landmarks after their authorial predecessors. For example, in the first issue of the *Batman: Year One*<sup>281</sup> story arc (serialized in *Batman* #404-407, January-May 1987), Bruce Wayne makes his way into one of the sleazier areas of the city as he narrates his journey on foot: “I was sized up like a piece of

---

<sup>280</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>281</sup> Frank Miller and David Mazzuchelli, *Batman: Year One* (New York: DC Comics, 1987).

meat by the leather boys in Robinson Park. I waded through pleas and half-hearted threats from junkies at the Finger Memorial. I stepped across a field of human rubble that lay sleeping in front of the overcrowded Sprang Mission.”<sup>282</sup> The landmarks mentioned here (though not depicted visually) refer to artist Jerry Robinson, Batman co-creator Bill Finger, and artist Dick Sprang.

Looking through other comics, however, will reveal that each of these creator’s names has been used on multiple other occasions to name other Gotham landmarks. Examining the *Batman.wikia.com* entry on Gotham City, one sees reference to Robinson Plaza and Robinson Square, but no Robinson Park; rather than mentioning the Finger Memorial, the entry lists Finger Memorial Park; and while the Sprang Mission is also absent, the entry mentions both a Sprang Bridge and a Sprang River.<sup>283</sup> Turning to competing resource *DC Comics Database*, the Gotham City entry makes no mention of public landmarks related to either Finger or Sprang, but does link to an entry for Robinson Park. The Robinson Park entry mistakenly lists the landmark’s first appearance as *Batman* #404 rather than #405, and offers a list of some four dozen subsequent appearances.<sup>284 285</sup> While we can see from these cases that depictions of Gotham areas largely adhere to a sense of history, they rarely appear concerned with consistency on any deeper level.

So too has it been for the neighbourhoods of Gotham. Over time, certain names have cropped up and become tropes to denote any given locale in which the action may take place: “Burnley,” “Bristol,” “Amusement Mile”—all these and more have been referred to or depicted multiple times in Batman comics over the years, though inconsistently described and drawn. They will be upscale one month, low-rent the next; dilapidated and abandoned in February,

---

<sup>282</sup> Frank Miller and David Mazzuchelli, *Batman* #404 (New York: DC Comics, 1987), 10.

<sup>283</sup> “Gotham City,” *Batman Wiki*, accessed November 20, 2015, [http://batman.wikia.com/wiki/Gotham\\_City](http://batman.wikia.com/wiki/Gotham_City).

<sup>284</sup> “Gotham City,” *DC Comics Database*, accessed November 20, 2015, [http://dc.wikia.com/wiki/Gotham\\_City](http://dc.wikia.com/wiki/Gotham_City).

<sup>285</sup> “Robinson Park/Appearances,” *DC Comics Database*, accessed November 20, 2015, [http://dc.wikia.com/wiki/Category:Robinson\\_Park/Appearances](http://dc.wikia.com/wiki/Category:Robinson_Park/Appearances).

glitzy and vibrant in March. For the comics, the occasional nod to a built-up world has usually been enough to lay claim to narrative cohesion and a sense of realism.

We can also see from these cases another function that worldbuilding serves in transmedia, even (perhaps especially) when that worldbuilding lacks consistent reasoning from one version to the next. In the real world, municipal archives serve to reflect the growth and mutation of the city as a topographic entity: building permits, work orders, zoning maps, changes to street names—all are recorded and held in a symbolic gesture towards the impossible dream of comprehensive knowledge, while offering multiple forms of understanding depending on the priorities of the archivists and the interests motivating access. But archives and databases are also methods of control, limiting access and determining the ideological outlooks of a city's history.

For creative labourers involved in the production of corporately-owned fictional worlds, databases and archives traditionally served the purpose of maintaining consistency and offering resources. Lucasfilm, for example, employed a “continuity database administrator” that policed canon throughout licensed works.<sup>286</sup> This “keeper of the holocron,” Leland Chee, essentially constituted a promise on behalf of Lucasfilm to fans that whenever questions came up, there were answers to be had. But in the late-stage capitalism model of contemporary transmedia, the idea of canon is abandoned in favour of “house styles” and a participatory culture paradigm where the work of record keeping and history is outsourced to fans.

After Disney acquired Lucasfilm in 2012,<sup>287</sup> Chee was assigned to the newly formed Lucasfilm Story Group, ostensibly doing the same job. But newer Star Wars products seem quite comfortable experimenting with multiple continuities simultaneously, and not everyone takes

---

<sup>286</sup> Chris Baker, “Meet Leland Chee, the *Star Wars* Franchise Continuity Cop,” *Wired*, August 18, 2008.

<sup>287</sup> Stacy Cowley, “Disney to Buy Lucasfilm for \$4 Billion,” *CNN*, October 31, 2012, <http://money.cnn.com/2012/10/30/technology/disney-buys-lucasfilm/index.html>.

Chee's word as law. What results in such a milieu is the wiki, a platform on which all fans are given ostensibly equal power to mold the archive.

This has several effects. First of all, it makes more room for the mainstream comics industry focus on ephemerality and "newness" in terms of continuity while simultaneously and paradoxically promoting the idea of *deep* continuity and a never-ending engagement with brands for fans craving comprehensive knowledge. It also allows companies to abdicate responsibility for their own record-keeping. Hardcore fans mobilize themselves (with the encouragement of companies) to build and maintain wikis, increasing their investment in the properties in question.

Meanwhile, because the institutional memory of publishers is so lax, and record-keeping is a full-time job that no fan could hope to keep up with in consideration of the massive output and maintenance required, the net effect for comics culture is a focus only on character and the key components of narrative, rather than the granular details of comics worlds as products or spaces. So when the publisher relaunches tried or tired gimmicks every few years, comics journalism and fandom are easy targets for hype, and have difficulty performing critiques of these products outside of how they work with existing diegetic narratives and fandom. Rather than a meticulously groomed world for which audiences can definitively understand the spatial relationships between places, wikis are geared towards debate and speculation about geographic analogy and positioning (yet another form of brand engagement): Gotham is New York. Gotham is Chicago. Pittsburgh. London. Detroit. Montreal.

In his book *The Big Archive*, Sven Spieker writes about the limits of superintendence within the archive, questioning the possibilities of a "beyond the archive" that escapes the archivist's control.<sup>288</sup> While once brand loyalty in pop culture was tied into a rhetoric of gate-keeping and secret knowledge held by the producers, transmedia geekery is now also tied into a

---

<sup>288</sup> Sven Spieker, *The Big Archive: Art from Bureaucracy* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2008), 3.

rhetoric of responsibility on the part of the geeks. In this way, wikis become the new fan clubs. However, producers can reassert their power as the official archivists at any point, because they possess the keys to hidden “official records.” This positioning is enforced by the concept of the series bible, the official reference guide for all aspects of a collaboratively-produced media product with its own heritage (especially ongoing ones). Many series employ the use of such a guidebook to maintain internal consistency within their fictional worlds, while also determining tone and the kinds of stories their team wishes to tell.<sup>289</sup> These bibles are rarely released for public scrutiny; on the occasions that they are, it’s usually as a method to reinvigorate fan interest. Archives that aspire to comprehensiveness, when they exist, are jealously guarded, and may be in decline under transmedia.

In a 2014 lecture, Will Brooker touched on the same issue as he discussed writing his dissertation on Batman in the late 1990s.<sup>290</sup> During the thesis research process, he wrote to DC about the project, and was rewarded with full access to their extensive archives. A decade later, when working on a follow-up book, Brooker again requested access, and was “immediately” rejected, leading him to speculate that perhaps the archive had been dismantled as the company slowly transitioned its offices from New York to Los Angeles (a move DC Comics itself referred to as “all about convergence”<sup>291</sup>). In transmedia, what responsibility do these companies feel to archival gestures? To the extent that work-for-hire creators seek reference, they can now easily do so online through a wiki. Rights holders safeguard their credibility by keeping only the records that benefit marketing narratives, and create hype by strategically making select materials available at moments that effectively synergize with an event (for example, pushing out

---

<sup>289</sup> Cf. for example James Whitbrook, “Proof That the Creators of *Batman: The Animated Series* Knew What They Were Doing From the Start,” *io9*, January 13 2017.

<sup>290</sup> Will Brooker, “Batman: 75 Years as a Transmedia Text,” Lecture, ARTHEMIS Lecture Series, Montreal, QC, October 2, 2014.

<sup>291</sup> Jevon Phillips, “DC Comics move to Burbank: It’s all about ‘Convergence,’” *L.A. Times*, June 3, 2015.

older comics on ComiXology before the launch of a new event or product, or making related series and movies available on Netflix only for the months around the premiere of the newest feature film).

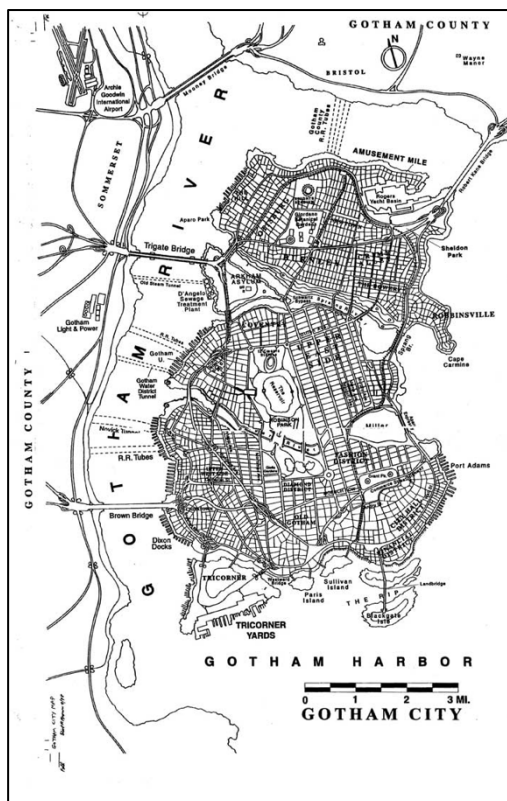
It is worth stopping here briefly to note: wikis are fannish productions that can not only be used by fans, but also creators and academics.<sup>292</sup> In transmedia, official archives are only useful insofar as they comprise products that can be resold, not as a collation of canon and organization of history. In this milieu, wikis become the sole repositories of such archives, and can only do so through allusion and metadata. No real authority exists, except when the IP holder wants the fandom to get out of its way to make room for a commodified product. On such occasions, IP holders are under no obligation to assert the way something *is*—they can simply tell the fans that another way *isn't*. Meanwhile, the wikis themselves lack accountability or the ability to assert sovereignty, leading to instances of cloning entire sites for revenue or even the insidious incursion of malware into downloadable files.<sup>293</sup> When labour is decentralized in this way, it can be taken advantage of or weaponized by any number of stakeholders.

Archival work offloaded from producers and onto consumers is a facet of transmedia complexes where continuity restrictions are loosened, and carelessness is easily forgiven. For the fictional world, this can come into tension with cartographic paratextual materials where city limits are drawn and landmarks are accounted for. While the landmarks of Gotham have changed their looks and locations over time, they *have* retained their narrative significance. And the truth is that Gotham *was* singularly designed at one point for comics, schematized in a map that's been used nearly every time cartographic representation has been called for since its creation. (*fig. 1*)

---

<sup>292</sup> David Annandale, "A Conversation with David Annandale." (Lecture, October 27, 2015).

<sup>293</sup> For example, mod reposting sites like 9minecraft.net, which clone mod content from other modding sites and wikis and keep the ad revenue from visitations.



**Figure 1:** the map of Gotham created for the “Cataclysm” and “No Man’s Land” story arcs by Eliot R. Brown in 1998. Though the story involved the entire city being demolished by an earthquake, this same map is still in use today. Image via eliotrbrown.com.

On this map, canals divide Gotham into three islands—North, Central, and South—connected by multiple bridges. The original design contains multiple place names, from Robinson Park to Tricorner to Old Gotham. Today, searching online for the Gotham City map renders many of those places renamed. Some of these versions also derive from official publications or media products, but just as many are keyed by fans. Throughout, the design of the linework remains, adorned with various colour schemes and typefaces. The design has appeared again and again as canon in the comic series, and sees use in all sorts of other media such as children’s storybooks based on the mid-2000s animated series *The Batman*<sup>294</sup> and briefly

<sup>294</sup> Bill Matheny and Christopher Jones, *The Batman Strikes!: in the clutches of the Penguin* (North Mankato, MN: Capstone Stone Arch Books, 2014), n. pag.

in shots from Fox Network's *Gotham*.<sup>295</sup> It has become a catch-all visual reference for when we need to see Gotham through a totalized view, but no real/specific location need be identified.

The map was produced by illustrator Eliot R. Brown in advance of the 1990s Bat-family crossover event "Cataclysm," an extended story in which a massive earthquake decimates Gotham. The impact of the Cataclysm event was far-reaching and followed by a year-long "No Man's Land" storyline in which the US government declares the city a disaster zone and abandons it. At the end of No Man's Land, Gotham is redesigned, rebuilt, and revitalized. So the irony of this universal map is that it references a Gotham that, within the canon of most of its existence, no longer has any bearing. Brown designed a unified Gotham just in time for it to be torn down.<sup>296</sup> This is ideal for transmedia as both strategy *and* mode—the map can be deployed across multiple media, giving Gotham a concrete nature; meanwhile, the map's redundancy means no story actually has to adhere to it. So in the aftermath of Cataclysm, the map was kept (despite the diegetic contradiction), but none of its reference points were ever to be employed with any consistency. The functionality of the city in this regard is representational and allusory, pointing towards both a built world and a "realness" verified by schematics. On his website, Brown reflects on the process of creating the map for a group of Batman editors in 1998, attempting to imbue Gotham with a sense of all five of the boroughs of New York City.<sup>297</sup> Amongst his many observations on the process, one thought in particular resonates with this current project: "As hard as I might try to follow the word of every writer that has written or artist that has drawn and yea, every editor who has thought about the subject – a new writer will

---

<sup>295</sup> Danny Cannon, "Selina Kyle," *Gotham*, Fox (New York: Fox Network, September 29, 2014).

<sup>296</sup> Jimmy Stamp, "The Cartographer Who Mapped Out Gotham City," *Smithsonian*, accessed August 20, 2015, <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/cartographer-gotham-city-180951594/?no-ist>.

<sup>297</sup> Eliot R. Brown, "DC Comics Gotham City Map Story - Page 1 of 4," *Eliot R. Brown* (blog), accessed July 2, 2018, <http://www.eliotrbrown.com/wp/gotham-city-map.html>.



come along and decide that their way is better yet.”<sup>298</sup> In the next section, we will look at how Gotham has been envisioned in other media, and what functions those visions serve within transmedia strategy.

### 3.4 Serialising the World

From radio and serials through television to feature film, Gotham City has ever been a necessary backdrop for the Caped Crusader’s adventures. In media off the page, Gotham’s look, feel, and nomenclature have depended on particular creative visions (or budgetary constraints) that are largely unfettered by the editorial processes of comics production. Over the years, this has led to an inconsistency in tone and an almost total lack of cohesion in geography. Batman first escaped comics to appear on the silver screen in a 15-chapter 1943 film serial starring Lewis Wilson as Batman and Douglas Croft as Robin. In the serial, Gotham City is built from a series of flimsy sets, studio backlots, and suburban and rural roads (notably the Iverson Movie Ranch, an eventual mainstay of many Western shows in the early days of broadcast television). But the carelessness with which the serial was produced rendered geographical specificity or aesthetic consistency somewhat pointless; if this version of Gotham has any look or feel, it’s cheapness.

And cheapness is not agnostic. It communicates a certain kind of valuation culturally as well, both at the time and down through the years. There are myriad reasons the superhero blockbuster has thrived in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: spreading appeal to larger publics through tone and creative liberty rather than concentrating solely on fan service (which is itself enabled by transmedia milieus where hardcore fans can have their predilections serviced elsewhere); the

---

<sup>298</sup> Eliot R. Brown, “DC Comics Gotham City Map Story - Page 3 of 4,” *Eliot R. Brown* (blog), accessed July 2, 2018, <http://www.eliotrbrown.com/wp/gotham-city-map.html/3>.

involvement of A-list celebrities; advances in special-effects technology narrowing the chasm of disbelief; and, of course, effective marketing. But one other reason is that the films themselves look and feel like the creators and studios behind them valued the project and respected the need for quality and a high degree of polish. When the backdrop of a film set visibly shakes on screen, it isn't just a laughable moment and indication of a mistake; it further indicates that no one involved in the production caught the error—or even worse, that they did, and lacked the resources or passion to correct it. As much as transmedia values economic and creative efficiencies, a complex needs the majority of its products to have at least a surface-level sheen of quality, care, and concern. Many of the media releases that came out last year, come out this year, will come out next year, are produced quickly and cheaply—and it shows. But *enough* of them at least *look* like ample resources were poured into them.

Even camera work plays a factor in establishing a grandiosity of scale. For the 1943 serial, where locations are utilized, this is accentuated by the visual framing of the city: nearly everything in the 15 episodes is shot at ground level. Frequently, voiceover narration attempts to characterize locations as far grander than they appear. The first lines of the episode perform this task, as the viewer sees a fuzzy manor house in the distance, framed by foliage: “High atop one of the hills which ring the teeming metropolis of Gotham City, a large house rears its bulk against the dark sky.” This narrator’s voice appears again and again throughout the series, to catch viewers up or tease the next instalment, but sometimes also to establish new locations, a character’s background, or the political stakes of the production. For example, later in the episode, as a camera pans slowly across an empty street and refuse blows down the block, voiceover narration at once helps to set the scene and make the serial’s political stance very clear: “This was part of a foreign land...transplanted bodily to America and known as Little Tokyo. Since a wise government rounded up the shifty-eyed Japs, it has become virtually a ghost

street where only one business survives—eking out a precarious existence on the dimes of curiosity seekers...”<sup>299</sup>

Gotham serves many functions across the four-hour serial, but in this one instance a number of significant points jump out. To begin with, the obvious racist overtones speak to the usefulness of film serials in the 1940s to bolster nationalist rhetoric and support for the war effort. Also important is the language used to describe the neighbourhood. “Transplanted bodily”—this turn of phrase speaks to the perceived invasiveness and malevolence of ethnic neighbourhoods in a xenophobic cultural paradigm, where a built-in otherness makes for easy vilification. At the same time, it invokes an organic analogy, speaking to body horror motifs and evoking the grotesque and uncanny. This is a powerful example of the production of a place, from a cheap, generic space, for political ends. Here, state power drives the process in the background along multiple lines to make propaganda (of course, playing off of nationalist xenophobic fears during wartime is a box office draw for the studio as well, and a motif surely taken up in reviews; later, as late capitalism develops, capital takes the place of the state). The combination of the cheap, ground-level filming style, menacing voiceover, language, and political posturing tells us a great deal about what kind of story this is and in what kind of world it takes place, all in a matter of seconds.

Gotham appears in another film serial in 1949, titled *Batman and Robin*. This production is more or less consistent with the 1943 serial, though, notably, the title roles are recast. The primary function of these serials in the overall transmedia heritage of Batman is to partially lay the groundwork for a far more successful and ultimately memorable branch in the family tree. In the mid-1960s, the 1943 serial was re-released theatrically, much to the enjoyment of an adult audience entertained by the unintentional ridiculousness of the low-budget, B-movie-quality

---

<sup>299</sup> Lambert Hillyer, *Batman*, Film serial (Los Angeles: Columbia Pictures, 1943).

piece. At the same time, screenwriter Lorenzo Semple Jr. was penning the first script for what would become the ABC *Batman* television series. The success of the re-release and the ironic pleasures it provoked in audiences motivated ABC to accelerate production on the *Batman* pilot while also influencing Semple Jr.'s and producer William Dozier's take on the character and his world<sup>300</sup> (more on this world shortly).

For whatever reason, Batman never had his own series on radio. It could be that his adventures weren't wholesome enough for the whole family, or that he just didn't rise to the same level of popularity as some of his superhero contemporaries during the heyday of radio. In 1943, a script was written for an unproduced pilot titled "The Case of the Drowned Seal," and in 1950 a pilot episode of a show titled *The Batman Mystery Club* failed to gain traction.<sup>301</sup> Four decades later, BBC Radio One produced two Batman radio dramas (one in 1989 to celebrate the character's 50<sup>th</sup> birthday<sup>302</sup> and a 1994 adaptation of the "Knightfall" story arc<sup>303</sup>). But the Dynamic Duo's most memorable iterations in audio are their numerous guest appearances on *The Adventures of Superman* radio program. Batman and Superman meet for the first time in a March 1945 episode<sup>304</sup> of the show, though this appearance has been lost. The first instance of Batman on the radio that survives today comes from an episode some months later, and Batman and Superman are described as "old acquaintances."<sup>305</sup>

---

<sup>300</sup> Matt Yockey, *Batman*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2014), 4.

<sup>301</sup> Sage, "Retro Radio Memories #77 - The Batman Mystery Club," *The Retroist* (blog), September 18, 2016, <https://www.retroist.com/2016/09/18/rrm-ep-77-the-batman-mystery-club/>.

<sup>302</sup> *Batman: The Lazarus Syndrome*, Radio broadcast (London: BBC Radio 4, 1989).

<sup>303</sup> *Batman: Knightfall*, Radio Broadcast (London: BBC Worldwide; Australian Broadcasting Corporation (distributor), 1994).

<sup>304</sup> Extensive research has not yielded confirmation of the exact date of Batman's first appearance on *The Adventures of Superman*. Some records have it as early March 1945 while others list early-mid September. Robin first appears in the March 1<sup>st</sup>, 1945 episode "The Mystery of the Waxmen, Part 4," but the majority of that story arc is lost to time. The Caped Crusader's first appearance that we have recordings of is the one described here: the September 10<sup>th</sup>, 1945 episode "Dr. Bly's Confidence Gang, Part 4."

<sup>305</sup> "Doctor Bly's Confidence Gang, Part 4," Radio episode, *The Adventures of Superman*, n.d.

They encounter each other at a carnival in an unnamed city (presumably Metropolis, considering this is Superman's show), each in search of their junior partners (Jimmy Olsen and Robin, naturally). The pair talk to a stereotypically Irish cop and pressgang him into accompanying them on a lazy river-style spook ride called the River of Horrors. As they climb into the boat, the tooting calliope music of the fairground is accompanied by faint splashing and hollow wooden thumping. Once in the ride's tunnel, the listener can hear lapping water, chirping crickets, and burping bullfrogs as Batman describes the environment as "black as the ace of spades." Beyond small ambient sounds like this and the sound effects of footsteps, little of note happens in this episode in terms of environment. Through the rest of the episode, the trio explore the ride and emerge out the other end, spot someone suspicious, and give chase into the hall of mirrors. Thus ends the 10-minute instalment.

This episode in itself offers valuable reminders and prompts interesting questions about the nature of space in transmedial churn, principally because all corporatized franchise media depends on both consistent output and promotable events. While their meeting was advertised in the preceding episode of *The Adventures of Superman*, not much actually happens to Batman and Superman in the first instalment of their team-up. This speaks to the functionality of worldbuilding in serialized radio. Though the broader location is unnamed, here, the world serves two purposes: fleshing out details to assist the listener in creating a picture in her mind, and, from the production side, filling time. By spending time filling the episode with narrative and dialogic descriptions of physical space (as well as attendant sound effects to create ambience), the producers of the program were able to kill some time and tantalize the listener. In effect, these filler descriptions constitute the non-places of radio spatiality. As Augé describes the non-place, it's effectively a space of mindlessness, of auto-pilot, of bland functionality in transit or while waiting for something to happen. In a radio broadcast, spatial description is a

sense-making exercise, but not generally the point in and of itself. The program is titled *The Adventures of Superman*, not *The Experience of Inhabiting a Space with Superman*.

This observation isn't exclusive to licensed old-time radio programs; it is generalizable across the golden age of radio, when fictional storytelling was a cornerstone of the medium. However, it does contrast with the listening habits of today. In 2017, the most downloaded podcasts on iTunes were mainly journalistic or informational rather than fictional; episodic rather than serial. Of the top 20, only one involved any fictional storytelling (*This American Life*), and two involved serialized storytelling (*S-Town* and *Up and Vanished*).<sup>306</sup> Of course, the most downloaded podcast of all time, *Serial*, is both informational and serial.

But podcasting is not a highly utilized part of contemporary transmedia complexes. DC Entertainment only provides two podcasts on iTunes: *The Vertigo Lounge Podcast*<sup>307</sup> and *The New Age of DC Heroes: The Podcast*.<sup>308</sup> The former released six episodes between January 2016 and March 2017; the latter released four episodes between November 2017 and March 2018. Both are interview and commentary shows. From the fan side, hundreds if not thousands of shows just like these two exist, providing criticism and conducting interviews with creatives and insiders. In today's media ecosphere, the important worldbuilding performed in audio is involved with building the broader fan community and culture, not the fictional worlds themselves. Whether this represents an untapped market, or a venue for storytelling that is no longer useful to transmedia empires like DC, is impossible to tell.

Finally—perhaps obviously—the lack of such programs today speaks to the changing nature of our media consumption habits, as impacted by digital platforms. Attempting to binge

---

<sup>306</sup> iTunes. Accessed May 21, 2018.

<https://search.itunes.apple.com/WebObjects/MZContentLink.woa/wa/link?mt=2&path=podcasts%2fPodcasts2017>

<sup>307</sup> Paul Malmont, *The Vertigo Lounge Podcast*, Podcast (Burbank: DC Entertainment, 2016),

<https://www.vertigocomics.com/blog/2016/01/25/enter-the-vertigo-lounge>.

<sup>308</sup> Dan DiDio, *The New Age of DC Heroes: The Podcast*, Podcast (Burbank: DC Entertainment, 2017),

<https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/the-new-age-of-dc-heroes-the-podcast/id1306298720?mt=2>.

episodes of *The Adventures of Superman* yields a great deal of repetition, largely due to the announcer's periodic recaps of previous episodes and teases of the next episode. The description of surroundings and, therefore, the consistent reification of the world, is less necessary in binge formats, meaning both that the world fades more into the background and that either other forms of filler or longer stories are necessary to hold listener attention. In binge consumption, filler may be even more necessary for churn, but it's certainly less desirable for consumers. The non-places of bingeable media spacetime must work harder to conceal themselves.

### 3.5 Gotham on Television and in Feature Film

Though Batman's appearances on radio and in film serial have fallen to the wayside of history, the character has consistently enjoyed memorable representation in two of the dominant media of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: television and film (those represented in *figure 2* below only constitute a small selection). At times, the franchise has in fact been haunted by some of the missteps in these representations, but it should be noted that in the current transmedia moment, even embarrassments are potential profit centres that can be recaptured by a corporate vision. In transmedia, every part of the animal is used, from ear to tail. This is certainly true for the 1960s *Batman* TV show: t-shirts, DVD sales, toys—all were and are profitable for DC, and, since 2013, the publisher has told numerous original stories taking place in that version of Gotham in *Batman '66*<sup>309</sup> and a number of crossover mini-series (*Batman '66 Meets the Green Hornet*,<sup>310</sup> *Batman '66 Meets Wonder Woman '77*,<sup>311</sup> etc.). This is a natural part of the inherent drive of

---

<sup>309</sup> Jeff Parker, Richard Case, and Mike Allred, *Batman '66 Volume 1* (New York: DC Comics, 2014).

<sup>310</sup> Kevin Smith and Ralph Garman, *Batman '66 Meets the Green Hornet* (New York: DC Comics, 2015).

<sup>311</sup> Marc Andreyko et al., *Batman '66 Meets Wonder Woman '77* (New York: DC Comics, 2016).

transmedia complexes to recursively repackage not only core IP concepts, but also individual iterations themselves through a combination of nostalgia and irony<sup>312</sup>—all packaged through techniques of recombinant assembly and motivated by different powerful institutions.



**Figure 2:** Gotham as it has appeared on television and in the cinema of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Clockwise from top left: *Batman* (1966), *Batman* (1989), *Batman: The Animated Series* (1992), *Batman Returns* (1992), *Batman Forever* (1995), and *Batman & Robin* (1997). All images via Google.

What primary functions did the bright, clean, cartoonish world of 1960s Gotham City serve for the television program itself? The show’s budget called for filming to take place largely on studio backlots and interior sets in Hollywood, mostly at Desilu Studios in Culver City and

<sup>312</sup> Andrew Ross, “Uses of Camp,” in *No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture*, (New York: Routledge, 1989), 135-170.



20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox Studios in Los Angeles. Because of this, issues of geographical consistency and human circulation within the city were largely elided. However, the producers still endeavored to depict Gotham as New York—just New York in daylight during the summertime. Establishing shots usually used stock footage of recognizable NYC locations like Central Park or the Flatiron Building, and the show even featured a “Queen of Freedom” statue in one episode,<sup>313</sup> clearly in tribute to the Statue of Liberty. The only two prominent L.A. exterior locations from the television production are the Wayne Manor façade (actually a house in Pasadena)<sup>314</sup> and the Batcave entrance (a corner of Griffith Park in Los Angeles),<sup>315</sup> and even these two are only remembered because they appeared in nearly every episode of the program. However, in the accompanying 1966 film *Batman: The Movie*,<sup>316</sup> more L.A. exterior locations were used, as well as a surfing sequence, exposing the production’s West Coast situation. Meanwhile, the look and feel of Gotham was geared towards bright colours and cartoonish interior design to accentuate the camp tone of the program. The show’s style aptly illustrates an entire approach to Gotham City, in which the city’s location and appearance is a tertiary consideration at best, following the needs of the story (which itself closely followed the needs of the production). In approaches like this, Gotham really is Anytown, USA.

One of the more important functions Gotham City serves for this television show is only apparent in context, and therefore relates to the ephemerality of synergy within networked media efforts. In his book on the ABC program, Matt Yockey writes extensively about the second season “Bat-climb” device (*fig. 3*), in which Batman and Robin would scale the side of a

---

<sup>313</sup> Tom Gries, “When the Rat’s Away, the Mice Will Play,” *Batman* (New York: WABC New York, February 17, 1966).

<sup>314</sup> “Good Manors,” *Movie Locations*, accessed December 15, 2015, <http://www.movie-locations.com/features/001/wayne-manor.html#.VrozGd-rSHp>.

<sup>315</sup> “Bronson Cave in Griffith Park,” *hikespeak*, December 14, 2015, accessed January 15, 2016, <http://www.hikespeak.com/trails/bronson-cave/>.

<sup>316</sup> Leslie H. Martinson, *Batman: The Movie*, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, 1966.

building at some point in the episode, interrupted during their task by a brief cameo by a celebrity poking his or her head out a window and chatting with the pair:

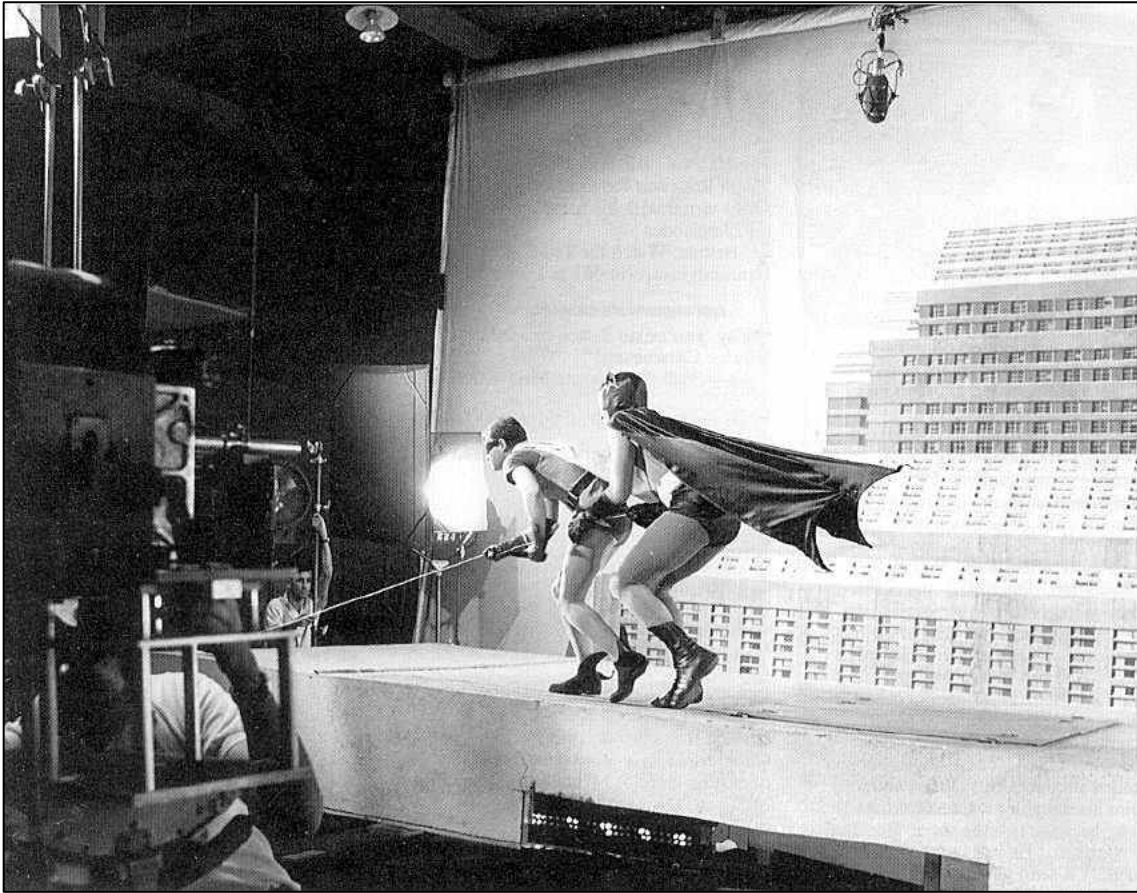
The gap between West and Ward as television celebrities, obscured by their characters' overwhelming iconicity, and the show's guest stars was conveyed by a regular device of the show's second season, the "Bat-climb" window cameos by celebrities usually appearing as themselves. According to casting director Michael McLean, *Batman* "was the 'in' thing at the time, and everyone wanted to be a part of it, which is why we invented the Bat-climbs." As Batman and Robin climbed up or down the side of a building, a window would open and a celebrity would have a brief exchange with the Dynamic Duo. Stars who appeared this way included Jerry Lewis, Dick Clark, Art Linkletter, Sammy Davis, Jr., Don Ho, and Edward G. Robinson.<sup>317</sup>

Here, we see two of the most important aspects of Gotham City at play: its nature as a bustling, living metropolis teeming with skyscrapers, and Batman's ability to master that complex and intimidating environment. Nothing characterizes Gotham more, across its many iterations, than its ability to overwhelm through scale, and the fact that Batman conquers that scale at all levels. But here, it's used to comedic effect: Batman and Robin struggle their way up the sides of buildings slowly, painstakingly huffing and grunting with each movement forward. If it always took this long for Batman to climb a tower, he'd never catch any criminals. In this version, Gotham City is used as space to ironically poke fun at its stars. Meanwhile, the matte backdrop (used for all the Bat-climb cameos) depicts a clean and impressive environment that moves up

---

<sup>317</sup> Yockey, *Batman*, 83-84.

from brownstones and water towers to more massive skyscrapers, all framed against a perpetually clear and cloudless sky.



**Figure 3:** Batman and Robin “ascend.” In all 14 celebrity cameos, the same window and backdrop was used (though for several of them, the scene took place at night and lights were projected through the matte). Via bat-mania.co.uk.

More importantly, the city here is clearly part of a pop culture ecosystem. In their use of celebrity cameos, the Bat-climbs borrowed from a tradition of variety television that came before and would continue long after.<sup>318</sup> McLean’s comments about celebrities “wanting to be a part of it” notwithstanding (though certainly true), going down the list of the 14 Bat-climb cameos, a pattern emerges: stars with something to promote. Sammy Davis Jr., for example, guest-starred

<sup>318</sup> For example, surprise celebrities opening up panels on *Rowan & Martin’s Laugh-In*’s “joke wall” or Ben Affleck’s surprise appearance in a 2008 episode of *Jimmy Kimmel Live* poking fun at friend Matt Damon in a segment titled “I’m F\*\*king Ben Affleck.”

in an episode of *The Wild Wild West* that aired just two days after his *Batman* cameo;<sup>319</sup> Jerry Lewis had a movie coming out when he appeared in the 20 April 1966 episode “The Bookworm Turns;”<sup>320</sup> and singer Don Ho’s song “Tiny Bubbles” was charting on the Billboard 100 when he appeared in the 15 December 1966 episode “The Bat’s Kow Tow.”<sup>321</sup> Additionally, several of the cameos featured not the celebrities but the characters they were known for—some of whom were in programs also airing on the ABC network. Dick Clark hosted *American Bandstand* for ABC; Van Williams and Bruce Lee, appearing as their characters the Green Hornet and Kato, were stars of ABC’s *The Green Hornet*; Howard Duff cameoed as Sergeant Sam Stone from ABC’s *Felony Squad*; even Ted Cassidy, portraying the Addams Family’s beloved butler Lurch, stuck his head out the window—another ABC star.

Some of these characters and programs retain their legacy to this day, but others speak to the importance of timeliness and the dependency of pop culture complexes on fleeting recognition. A child watching 20 years ago might still recognize Dick Clark and why his appearance on the program was fun and funny, but his face is less recognizable with each passing year. The paradigm steeped itself deeper when celebrity gossip itself became the object of exploration in cameo. The penultimate bat-climb cameo featured Aileen Mehle, better known as gossip columnist Suzy Knickerbocker:

One of the most interesting cameos was one of the last: gossip columnist Suzy Knickerbocker, who appeared in “King Tut’s Coup” (8 March 1967) near the end of Season 2. Asked by a surprised Batman what she is doing in Gotham City, Knickerbocker replies, “I go where the action is, Batman. The Caribbean, the Riviera, the Greek Islands.

---

<sup>319</sup> The *Batman* episode “The Clock King’s Crazy Crimes” aired on 12 October 1966; Davis Jr.’s guest appearance on *The Wild Wild West* was on the October 14, 1966 episode “The Night of the Returning Dead.”

<sup>320</sup> Lewis’ film *Three on a Couch* premiered in March 1966 and received wide release in July 1966.

<sup>321</sup> “Don Ho Chart History,” *Billboard*, <https://www.billboard.com/music/don-ho/chart-history>.

Wherever there's glamour, that's where I am." When Robin advises her that it is "pretty quiet here," she says, "Oh, I don't know, Boy Wonder. I hear millionaire Bruce Wayne is really one of the hippies. All that marvelous money and fantastic Wayne Manor."

"*Stately Wayne Manor*," Batman corrects her. "Mr. Wayne is basically a very serious young man." Recalling the recurring phrase used in Dozier's voice-over to introduce Wayne Manor, West's line plays with the boundary between diegesis and extra-diegesis. Further, by emphasizing the soberness of Bruce Wayne, Batman confirms his own extraordinary status, underlining his embodiment of the intersection between the everyday and the fantastic.<sup>322</sup>

Here, Yockey points to the extra-diegesis at work for the *Batman* show itself, but Knickerbocker's appearance is an almost perfect encapsulation of how celebrity embeds itself in entertainment, and how this aspect of transmedia does not age well. For an *actual* perfect encapsulation, we can turn to the 14<sup>th</sup> and final Bat-climb cameo: Cyril Lord, AKA the Carpet King. Lord was a wealthy British entrepreneur whose Carpet King flooring business was well known at the time through the catchy jingle in its adverts. As the story goes, Lord had furnished Dozier with some Persian rugs, and Dozier repaid him with a last-minute cameo during a Bat-climb. The nakedness of the reference is appropriately awkward, as Lord even refers to himself as the Carpet King by way of explanation. This is an instance where only the deepest amount of research can yield comprehension for a viewer not actively watching television when the episode originally aired. It's one thing to recognize Lurch Addams, or even to be aware of a gossip columnist whose career spanned 50 years. But familiarity with Cyril Lord, even to a new viewer just five years later watching the episode in rerun, poses a substantial challenge.

---

<sup>322</sup> Yockey, *Batman*, 84.

A year after his cameo aired, Lord's carpet empire had crumbled, and his ads had disappeared from view on any medium.<sup>323</sup> Consequently, Lord's strongest lasting imprint on culture was the Bat-climb cameo. Today, seven out of the ten top Google search results for "Cyril Lord Carpet King" mention or revolve around his *Batman* appearance.<sup>324</sup> This is transmedia laid bare before it even exists—ultra momentary, ultra ephemeral, but appealing to an "insider" understanding that emotionally rewards fans who treat it as a lasting work for the ages. Even more importantly, it illustrates that transmedia is capable of subsuming everything that it touches.

The Bat-climb ironically poked fun at celebrity, but it was also a device used to interpellate the show for the paradigms of Hollywood celebrity, as a kind of transmedia precursor. It worked on the basis that stars are recognizable and circulable across different fictional worlds. This is not transmedia proper, but it is based on the same ideas of circulation and synergy, where perhaps all the fictional characters we love might live in the same world and walk the same streets.

This circulation is not only a value of celebrity, but reifies and boosts the celebrity's value overall. The same goes for any IP that can be projected across media forms. Contemporary digital culture has expanded what it means to be recognizable and, consequently, transmedia leaves a space in itself for fan appearances in addition to celebrity cameos (such as the nod towards Star Wars Kid in the closing scene of *The Last Jedi*<sup>325</sup> or the naming of characters on television shows after active forum participants<sup>326</sup>). It's impossible to articulate all the dog whistles in transmedia that gesture towards each audience lens—just another area where

---

<sup>323</sup> *Belfast Telegraph*, "Carpet King's Rise and Fall," <https://www.pressreader.com/uk/belfast-telegraph/20140524/281943130923296>.

<sup>324</sup> Google search result undertaken May 23 2018.

<sup>325</sup> Rian Johnson, *Star Wars: The Last Jedi*, DVD (San Francisco, CA: Lucasfilm Ltd., 2017).

<sup>326</sup> *Connor Ratliff Can Interview Tony Hale On One Condition...*, YouTube Clip, 2016, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=1&v=Q6pnoznL--I](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1&v=Q6pnoznL--I).

transmedia escapes the bounds of comprehensive description. In the ABC television show, the cultural function of the transmedia city is best thought of in terms of celebrity and the hyper-contemporary or ephemeral, and in turn teaches us a valuable lesson about transmedia's value system of existing *right now* rather than gearing itself towards timelessness at any fundamental level.

Moving forward more than 20 years, the next well-known depiction of Gotham is Tim Burton's 1989 *Batman*<sup>327</sup> feature film and its 1992 sequel *Batman Returns*.<sup>328</sup> By this time, the character was a wholly-owned property of the studio financing and producing the film (Kinney International Company purchased DC's parent company in 1967 and Warners in 1972), so the level of investment in portraying the character a certain way was different—Warner Brothers knew it would be advantageous to play off the grim tone that the comics had cultivated in recent years. For these films, production took place almost entirely at Pinewood Studios in England, with almost all location shoots taking place in nearby Hertfordshire. Gotham City was designed for the 1989 film by production designer Anton Furst to look crowded, intentionally hideous, and rife with clashing architectural styles to accentuate Gotham's crime-ridden history. In an interview, Furst described the prevailing aesthetic as an “essay in ugliness.”<sup>329</sup> Chief among these were art deco and art nouveau with gothic features mixed in. It's here that Gotham starts to build up in layers, where the language of urban geography fails us and we need to think aesthetically instead. Far from the inside-out Chicago School or periphery-inwards L.A. School, Gotham is in a transmedia school of the fictional urban, where iterations are blended into one another, the bumps of each previous topography affecting the surface of the next.

---

<sup>327</sup> Burton, *Batman*.

<sup>328</sup> Tim Burton, *Batman Returns* (Burbank: Warner Brothers, 1992).

<sup>329</sup> Anton Furst quoted in Richard Corliss, “The Caped Crusader Flies Again,” *Time* 133, no. 25 (1989): 60.

Interestingly, critics have sometimes compared the Gotham Furst created to the futuristic Los Angeles constructed by production designer Lawrence G. Paull for Ridley Scott's 1982 *Blade Runner*. Colin McArthur has described the former as exemplifying the "comic view," while the latter typifies the "postmodern view."<sup>330</sup> Both views, however, "loosen the hinges which have held cinematic representations of the city in some contact with 'real' cities [...] and reinscribe them into discourse once more, predominantly those discourses about the quality of the natural and the built world through which meaning has been imposed."<sup>331</sup>

For McArthur, the cinematic city comes pre-layered with the discursive frameworks that constructed not only the real built world of the urban environment, but also the aesthetic and practical concerns of film production. In a 1992 *Screen and Sound* article, Peter Wollen describes both films as being fascinated "with the architecture of the modern city, but closer to Expressionism and Surrealism than to Constructivism and Rationalism," creating a landscape "dystopian rather than utopian."<sup>332</sup> In Wollen's view, cinematic cities like *Batman's* Gotham and *Blade Runner's* L.A. are layered not only with the architectural spaces of the 20<sup>th</sup> century metropolis, but also the emotional subconscious of 20<sup>th</sup> century art practices and the illustrations of unrealized visions both expressive and schematic (*fig. 4*):

In many cases these films borrow directly from the never-realized visions of [19]20s architectural illustrators. Thus the Gotham of *Batman Returns* is modelled on Hugh Ferriss' vistas of an imaginary Manhattan and Harvey Wiley Corbett's schemes for a city of multilevel arcades joined by bridges spanning the void between urban cliffs...monstrous Ferriss-style renderings adorned by massive caricatures of Paul

---

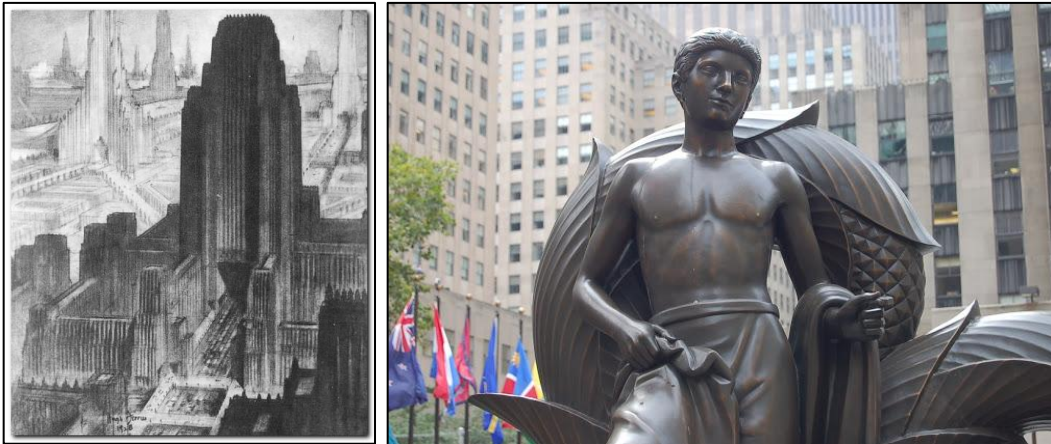
<sup>330</sup> Colin McArthur, "Chinese Boxes and Russian Dolls," *The Cinematic City*, ed. David B. Clarke (London: Routledge, 1997), 33.

<sup>331</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>332</sup> Peter Wollen, "Delirious Projections," *Sight and Sound* 2, no. 4 (1992): 24-27.



Manship and Gaston Lachaise's heroic modern sculptures. Similarly, the central megastructure in *Blade Runner* is the neo-Mayan style heralded in the 20s in Los Angeles by Robert Stacy-Judd and Francisco Mujica. In reality, Stacy-Judd and Mujica built very little, but their grandiose visions were realised in the cinema.<sup>333</sup>



**Figure 4:** Sketch from Hugh Ferriss' *The Metropolis of Tomorrow* (left), and Paul Manship's *Mankind Figures*. Images via Google.

Both *Blade Runner*'s L.A. and Gotham City share a vision of the urban imaginary on film, a vision not of a place that is, but of a place that could have been, inspired by unrealized architectural aspirations. At times, Gotham is just as failed an American experiment in city-building as *Blade Runner*'s L.A. Both presuppose a once-utopian idea of the metropolitan landscape that came to be realized, and then suffered the same processes of decay and decline that earmark postmodernity in America. This is the aesthetic function of the city in *Batman* and *Batman Returns*. The design anchors the viewer to a late Cold War-era sense of oppression and pessimism while tying it back to the postmodern idea that we haven't advanced far past our station just before the Great Depression. Gotham in these films isn't the future of a world in

---

<sup>333</sup> Ibid., 25.

decline; it's an expression of how viewers *felt* about the fallen world they already inhabited. In this way, the tone of Burton's films is in line with the tone already set by the comics for the preceding 15 years. And Gotham City has rarely regained its optimism since.

Furst's "essay in ugliness" approach won him an Academy Award for art direction and set decoration in 1990, but in a sad story telling of the logic of transmedia production cultures, he was barred from working on the sequel, as he was contracted to Columbia and thus unable to come on board the Warners production. So Furst ended up a production designer without a world to design, and his last work was on the flagship Planet Hollywood restaurant before he took his own life in November 1991.<sup>334</sup> Furst was undercompensated for his work on the first *Batman* film, and because of his Columbia contract, unable to capitalize off of the vivid universe he'd constructed for the sequel.<sup>335</sup> Nonetheless, *Batman Returns* production designer Bo Welch largely maintained the look and feel established in the 1989 film, and Furst's designs would deeply affect all Batman media to follow to the present day. Furst's story echoes the story of Bill Finger, Jack Kirby, Joe Shuster—creatives whose work would impact all that followed them, but who lacked some of the power of self-determination that comes with owning your creation. In the logic of transmedia, every aspect, including the environment, is an extension of its capitalist ideologies, where creation and innovation are subordinate to the will of recursiveness and profitable extension.

Case in point: the art deco architectural features and urban imaginaries Furst drew on were kept for the popular 1992-1995 cartoon *Batman: The Animated Series* (*Batman TAS*). Both the films and the cartoon used matte paintings for backgrounds, though while Gotham was largely depicted in ashen greys and blacks in the films, the color palette for the cartoon was

---

<sup>334</sup> Simon Garfield, "When hell burst through the pavement and grew: Anton Furst conjured up *Batman's* Gotham City," *The Independent*, 3 July 1992. <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/when-hell-burst-through-the-pavement-and-grew-anton-furst-conjured-up-batmans-gotham-city-in-england-1531040.html>.

<sup>335</sup> *Ibid.*

warmed up to browns, oranges, and reds. However, the effect was a certain level of consistency—the Gotham of both *Batman Returns* and the animated series were layered with the aesthetic considerations of the 1989 blockbuster, itself inspired in part by the New York architectural concerns of the 1920s and 1930s. Again, the spaces and environments function largely as an anchor point bringing various potential audiences together to one world for different reasons: for slightly older viewers, the elevated walkways, retro cars and uniforms, and art deco style formed a mental throughline from the Burton films to the cartoons. Meanwhile, younger viewers felt more welcomed into the world by the brighter colours. There’s nothing transmedia can’t restructure, repaint, or sanitize, if it can find the right audience.

### 3.6 Transmedia and the Toyetic

Joel Schumacher departed considerably from these aesthetic inclinations when he took over the director’s chair for the 1995 feature *Batman Forever*<sup>336</sup> and its 1997 follow-up *Batman & Robin*.<sup>337</sup> In making these films, Schumacher chose to create a Gotham City inspired by New York architecture of the 1930s and modern-day Tokyo. The resulting designs by production artist Barbara Ling gave life to an architecturally-improbable dayglo and neon playground, where skyscraper-sized statues held up municipal fixtures such as observatories and museums. These visions of Gotham City, inspired in equal parts by the machine age and neon-saturated Tokyo, left the impression of a “World’s Fair on ecstasy”<sup>338</sup> and matched well with the over-the-top characterizations of Batman and his enemies inspired much more by the 1960s TV show than the comics or preceding movies. Interestingly, in the opening action sequence of *Batman Forever*,

---

<sup>336</sup> Joel Schumacher, *Batman Forever* (Burbank: Warner Brothers, 1995).

<sup>337</sup> Joel Schumacher, *Batman & Robin* (Burbank: Warner Brothers, 1997).

<sup>338</sup> Barbara Ling in extras for *Batman & Robin*, DVD, directed by Joel Schumacher (1997; Burbank: Warner Home Video, 2002).

the Caped Crusader flies a helicopter into the Statue of Liberty's face (inexplicably located off the shores of Gotham), symbolically severing the movie's ties to the 1920s New York aesthetic Gotham had cultivated in the preceding films and other media. Still, just like the character portrayals, the Dark Knight's city in Schumacher's vision was built on the aesthetic of the 1960s show—only set at nighttime, with blacklights and neon adding bright splashes of color to every corner and alleyway.

Meanwhile, Ling and Schumacher opted again to keep the Hugh Ferriss and Harvey Wiley Corbett urban imaginary of elevated walkways, as well as the Paul Manship sculptures—and this time, computer-generated imagery allowed for these aspects to become larger and more fantastical than ever. In *Batman Forever*, giant statues overlook a city lit by lasers and neon. In *Batman & Robin*, they impossibly hold aloft places like the Gotham Observatory and allow for high-octane chases across their arms. How these spaces and places are even meant to be accessed is not explained, but the fact of them being built on sculptures changes the relationship of the hero to the world. The giant legs of a titan are far more climbable than the sheer surfaces of skyscrapers, especially when they connect the elevated walkways to the ground. So mastery of the environment works differently for Val Kilmer and George Clooney than it did for Adam West or Michael Keaton.

The city in these movies is then both anchor point (in its architectural visions and unreal sculpture) and radical departure (in its eye-bleeding neon and playground aesthetic). But it also functions within transmedia's needs as a world perfectly suited to merchandising. Here, Gotham joins the various costumes and vehicles in the films in serving as the basis for a variety of toys and playsets to be sold. Schumacher's films, particularly *Batman & Robin*, are toyetic.<sup>339</sup> What this means is that the driving ideology behind many aspects of the film production is to be

---

<sup>339</sup> Cf. Johnson, *Media Franchising*, and Kinder, *Playing with Power*.

adapted as merchandise. This is in part why Batgirl is introduced into the cast, why there are three villains, and why the heroes wear multiple costumes and pilot multiple vehicles—all serve as fodder for additional toys and playsets. And looking at the merchandise connected to the Schumacher films, several points of interest emerge in terms of the way Batman’s environments are utilized.

For example, two versions of the Batcave exist as playsets connected to *Batman Forever*—both of which are large and fairly extravagant. One is a massive, multilevel set that connects three platforms through a series of bridges, moving from Batmobile car port to armory to Batcomputer. (*fig. 5*) The space demanded by this set in the home as well as its intricacy are not to be understated, but more interesting is the fact that it is open on all sides. Set up in a child’s bedroom, it extends the reality of its own world into real-world space, transforming the bedroom into a larger cavern in which Batman has built his base of operations. While I do not seek to imply intentionality on the part of the manufacturers here, the openness of the concept speaks to Gaston Bachelard’s theories of lived experiences and phenomenology as applied to architectural design.<sup>340</sup> Whoever designed this playset designed a piece that appropriately blends real space and fictional space through imagination.



**Figure 5:** the box for one of the *Batman Forever* Batcave playsets. Via [legionsofgotham.org](http://legionsofgotham.org).

<sup>340</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), 43.

Just as interesting is an examination of the other Batcave playset for *Batman Forever*, the “Wayne Manor Batcave Compound.” Much more compact than the other, this playset folds out from a Wayne Manor façade to reveal a Batcave complete with garage, costume wardrobe, and Batcomputer. But this version looks a lot less designed in conjunction with the film. Not that this is out of the ordinary—the compartmentalization of transmedia often means that products branching off from the current “main event” bear little resemblance to the central product. However, this particular set is especially identifiable as a product of transmedial efficiency because it is virtually identical to a “Batcave Command Center” playset released for *Batman TAS*. (fig. 6) In fact, the “Wayne Manor Batcave Compound” is just the “Batcave Command Center” with a different paintjob and appliqué stickers. Further research reveals that the same method was performed in 1997 for the release of *Batman & Robin*, and yet again in 2002 for a “Batman Gotham City Darkstorm Batcave” playset.



**Figure 6:** The *Batman Forever* “Wayne Manor Batcave Compound” (left) contrasted with the “Batcave Command Center” from *Batman: The Animated Series*. Each redress the colour palette to coordinate with the media object from which it derives (green and blue used heavily in *Batman Forever*, brown and orange for *Batman TAS*).

This is noteworthy, but not extraordinary. It is, in fact, the way nearly *all* toy production functions within a transmedia milieu—even across different franchises and individual complexes. Moulds are reused, all characters are the same height, and one head pops off and

another can be attached in its place. This process is called redeco (short for redecoration).<sup>341</sup> The manufacturer for all Batman playsets in the 1990s was Kenner, but its corporate parent Hasbro closed the company down in 2000. Apparently though, Hasbro didn't throw anything away, because many of the toys in the 2002 "Gotham City Darkstorm" line repackaged and rereleased toys and sets from the *Batman TAS* line through efficient redeco processes.

This is one of the benefits of an IP like Batman that frequently goes underdiscussed and undertheorized: the reusability of merchandise. Overstock left at the end of the *Batman TAS* hype was redeco'd for the *Batman Forever* hype, which was in turn redeco'd for the *Batman & Robin* hype, ad infinitum. For a piece of merchandise like a t-shirt, it can be an even simpler process: just change the tag and your eight-year-old child won't care about the difference in whether the bat-signal on the shirt is green or red. Marketing merchandise to adult fans is somewhat trickier, because they tend to form specific emotional bonds to specific iterations. However, if you're an adult with an affinity for a particular node in the Batman transmedia assemblage, you can go to an Old Navy and choose between t-shirts with any number of versions of the Batman IP emblazoned across them, whether the 1960s TV logo, the black and yellow bat-symbol from the Burton films, a Neal Adams cover from the early 1970s, or the stylized bat from the Nolan films. All hang on the same rack, and all are pre-faded to indicate the shirt's recapture of your own nostalgia.

These issues become ever more complicated when we look outside of the North American context, particularly if we think about toys and merchandise in developing nations, where bootlegs are extremely easy to come by. A warped, waxy Batman action figure wearing a cape cut from a hefty bag, illicitly mass-produced, will be the beloved toy of hundreds or thousands of children in another country, while the intersectional privileges of my North

---

<sup>341</sup> Tom Stern, "He-Man," *The Toys That Made Us* (Los Gatos, CA: Netflix, December 22, 2017).

American upbringing means that I was rarely exposed to anything that didn't hang on the rack in Toys "R" Us. However, the child from the developing nation and I can both meet as adults and feel we are connecting to the same nostalgia in conversation. The transnationality of transmedia, and the way that it's produced and consumed differently, is an important factor in understanding how transmedia targets communities in interpellating its consumers.

Just as this drive towards merchandising, the toyetic, and reusability of merchandise advantages the manufacturers, so too does it lay the groundwork for participatory culture, which in turn lays the groundwork for a celebration of media consolidation. When all the licensed toys are the same size and hackable to cobble together in any number of ways, it's only natural to create scenarios in which all characters play together. The *Ghostbusters* firehouse, turned on its side, becomes the underground sewer home of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. The wardrobe in the Batcave is the perfect place for one of the Planetegers to hide from Skeletor. If Batman and Geordi La Forge are similarly sized enough to shake hands, then they can trade tricorder and batarang. Kids don't particularly care which company owns what when they create crossover events in their bedrooms. But the companies do, and corporations like Disney or WarnerMedia would much rather take in all the profit from their products than sort out a complicated royalty structure. Because they played with different toys licensed through the same manufacturers decades ago, a generation of adult fans are primed and ready to see the Simpsons meet Mickey Mouse—and willing to allow Disney to own Fox in order to do so. The question of whether Disney will ever allow fans to make their own crossover stories again is somewhat different, because fans may want to share those stories online now that the tools exist to do so, but the litigiousness of media corporations and the algorithmic nature of copyright enforcement and



demonetization online<sup>342</sup> seems to send the message that fans should keep their stories in the bedroom.

Returning more directly to the issue of Gotham in Schumacher's films, a clear cycle is at work where the look and feel of the world (particularly the colour scheme) lends itself to distinctive toys and apparel. In turn, this gaudy merchandise is eye-grabbing and attaches itself to the Batman brand. For all that they were critically panned, both Schumacher films made their money back at the box office<sup>343</sup> and took in incalculable sums from merchandising and promotional tie-ins. Meanwhile, though not remembered particularly fondly, the Schumacher films did influence Gotham moving forward. *Batman Beyond*, which began airing two years after the release of *Batman & Robin*, was clearly influenced by some aspects of the Schumacher films as well. Specifically, they took some of the colour scheme of the films and their tendencies towards neon and youth culture, and extended those aesthetic choices to a hyper-futuristic cyberpunk place. Meanwhile, the Gotham City of *Batman Beyond* also felt very much like a future version of the Gotham of *Batman TAS*. While *Batman TAS* is set in a city in the past that never was, *Batman Beyond* is set only a generation down that city's timeline, and yet also in a far-flung future. In becoming hyper-futuristic, *Batman Beyond* comes full circle in this little historical overview: it is *Blade Runner*'s L.A. for kids, and *Batman Forever*'s Gotham within the bounds of animation—a medium that lends such a narrative additional credibility and suspension of disbelief.

---

<sup>342</sup> Sarah Jeong, "Fair Use vs. Algorithms: What the Dancing Baby Did to Copyright," *Motherboard*, September 14, 2015, accessed May 24, 2018. [https://motherboard.vice.com/en\\_us/article/mgb85y/fair-use-vs-algorithms-what-the-dancing-baby-did-to-copyright](https://motherboard.vice.com/en_us/article/mgb85y/fair-use-vs-algorithms-what-the-dancing-baby-did-to-copyright).

<sup>343</sup> *Batman Forever*'s box office was \$336.5 million USD against a \$100 million budget; *Batman & Robin* brought in \$238.2 million against a \$125 million budget, which Warners admitted was disappointing, according to a July 1997 article in *Entertainment Weekly* titled, fittingly, "*Batman & Robin* disappointment."

### 3.7 Designing the “Nolanverse”

Schumacher’s vision of Gotham and its hero effectively killed the Batman movie franchise for almost a decade until Christopher Nolan rebooted it in 2005 with *Batman Begins*.<sup>344</sup> Nolan would direct two sequels as well, *The Dark Knight* (2008) and *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012). Studio production for the trilogy took place at both Shepperton and Pinewood Studios; Gotham locations, however, were done primarily in London and Chicago for the first film, Chicago for the second, and Pittsburgh for the third. In each film, the look of Gotham evolved with the state of the narrative: in *Batman Begins* it had a gritty feel of urban blight (with most of the action taking place in slum areas inspired by the now-demolished Kowloon Walled City in Hong Kong); in the following instalments our view of Gotham shifted uptown to large steel-and-glass skyscrapers and old stone buildings—fitting, as in the sequels Gotham is a city on the upswing under Batman’s protection.

For *The Dark Knight* and *The Dark Knight Rises*, Gotham opened up, foregoing the cluttered and cramped alleyways of *Batman Begins* in favour of an enormous, sprawling megalopolis. For these two films, Nolan also did less work to disguise and dress up the real-world locations used for filming, instead modeling Gotham after the cities in which he chose to shoot. In each film, Gotham’s geography played a key role—in *Batman Begins*, for example, the climactic clash involves a battle on a monorail careening toward the Wayne Enterprises building at the heart of the city. However, rarely did aspects of geographical importance overlap from film to film, except perhaps for the fact that each instalment was explicit in situating Gotham as an island (in both sequels, villains blow up bridges to hold the city’s denizens captive, and in *Batman Begins* bridges again play an integral role when the slumlike Narrows neighbourhood is

---

<sup>344</sup> Christopher Nolan, *Batman Begins* (Burbank: Warner Brothers, 2005).

cut off from the rest of the city when the police raise its bridges, positioning it improbably as an island within an island). While Gotham in *The Dark Knight* and *The Dark Knight Rises* were modeled after Chicago and Pittsburgh respectively, Nolan consciously took his initial inspiration for the Gotham of *Batman Begins* from the futuristic Los Angeles of *Blade Runner*,<sup>345</sup> a fact that returns us once again to the notion of the layered city (*fig. 7*) (perhaps he read the same Wollen and McArthur articles mentioned earlier).



**Figure 7:** *Blade Runner*'s (1982) futuristic Los Angeles and *Batman Begins*' (2005) Gotham. Image via [lifelifehighfidelity.wordpress.com](http://lifelifehighfidelity.wordpress.com).

Nolan explicitly wanted to base his Gotham's look and feel on *Blade Runner*'s world because it served as “an interesting lesson in the techniques of exploring and describing a credible universe that doesn't appear to have any boundaries.”<sup>346</sup> But my interests here lie not only with the credibility of *Blade Runner*'s Los Angeles, but also with that fictional city's history as a palimpsest. L.A. in *Blade Runner* is easily identified as the quintessential postmodern city in

<sup>345</sup> Pat Jankiewicz, “Dark Knight Resurrected,” *Starlog*, August 337, (August 2005), n. pag.

<sup>346</sup> Christopher Nolan quoted in Jankiewicz, “Dark Knight Resurrected.”

film (though by now, we might view it more in the vein of 1980s cliché): a world where a science fiction future has come to pass, only to thrust the viewer back in time to experience a 1930s-era noir story, set in a city rife with crime, vice, and alienation. This perfectly encapsulates the way Gotham functions in most 21<sup>st</sup> Century Batman stories: though the problems of the urban world are the same as they ever were (overcrowding, decay and neglect, corruption run rampant), Batman narratives usually place special focus on the futuristic technologies the Dark Knight uses in his war on crime. The modernist utopian promises of technology and capitalism acting as savior, via Billionaire philanthropist Bruce Wayne and his alter ego, frequently fall short as the viewer, reader, or player watches Gotham City grow darker and more corrupt despite the hero's best efforts.

As to how Nolan's vision of Gotham City contributes to the transmedial assemblage, certainly *The Dark Knight* was so iconic that it overshadowed what has thus far followed on the silver screen. This instalment was so well-received that it led to something of a shift in thinking about Gotham City as analogue. While once there was no question that Batman's hometown must be a stand-in for New York City, now Chicago seems to be a contender. Aesthetically, the Windy City is just as well suited as the Big Apple. But in *The Dark Knight Rises*, Nolan didn't attempt to make Gotham into any one city, and shot exterior locations all over the USA and England. In so doing, the city recursively returns to the outcome of the 1960s ABC series—Anytown, USA—just from a more contemporary, and perhaps more realistic, perspective. So the function of Gotham City in the “Nolanverse” (as it's fondly come to be known by fans online) truly is to make that “credible universe” that Nolan discusses.

Unfortunately for DC Entertainment and Warners, the closed loop created by Nolan's trilogy came at the wrong time for both companies. Nolan's interest was clearly in telling a complete story, and therefore he saw fit to go where almost no Batman story had gone before: at

the conclusion of *The Dark Knight Rises*, Bruce Wayne's fortune is decimated, Batman fakes his own death, and the hero retires entirely from crimefighting. But the same year this film was released, Marvel Studios put out *The Avengers*, uniting four different franchises into one massive transmedia event. And it did better with less: *The Dark Knight Rises* had a box office of \$1.085 billion against a \$250 million production budget,<sup>347</sup> while *The Avengers* had a box office of \$1.519 billion against a \$220 million production budget.<sup>348</sup> It was clear the future of blockbuster film had arrived, and Warners was put in the position of starting over from scratch if the company wanted to capitalize on what was clearly a paradigm-shifting model and the ultimate proof of the power of transmedia strategy.

So Gotham relocated one more time from wherever it had been—Chicago, New York, Pittsburgh, London—to Newark. In the 2016 film *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice*,<sup>349</sup> Metropolis and Gotham City are neighbours, visible across a bay from each other. The two cities are so close, the Bat-signal is visible from LexCorp Tower. This would seem to propose a relationship between the cities akin to New York City and Newark—two cities, side by side, yet worlds apart in some senses: different states, different economies, different reputations and prestige. This makes a certain kind of sense: for the earlier-mentioned quote by Dennis O'Neil, the author followed his commentary of characterizing Gotham City as New York in the middle of a November night by describing Metropolis as “Manhattan between Fourteenth and One Hundred and Tenth Streets on the brightest, sunniest July day of the year.”<sup>350</sup> This new universe raises a host of new questions: is Gotham still an island? Can it still be the centre of its own world and the most important city in the region?

---

<sup>347</sup> “The Dark Knight Rises (2012),” *Box Office Mojo*, accessed June 28, 2018, <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=batman3.htm>.

<sup>348</sup> “Marvel's The Avengers (2012),” *Box Office Mojo*, accessed June 28, 2018, <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=avengers11.htm>.

<sup>349</sup> Zack Snyder, *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice* (Burbank: Warner Brothers, 2016).

<sup>350</sup> Dennis O'Neil, *Knightfall: A Novel* (New York: Bantam Books, 1994), 344.

At the same time as we can now think of Metropolis and Gotham as sister cities in this new universe, we must also account for production locations. For the filming of this movie, Detroit served for many principal locations set in both cities. A decaying Wayne Manor was again located in the UK. Instead of the fantastical but credible universe sought by Nolan, *Batman v Superman* director Zack Snyder capitalized on some of the urban contrasts in Detroit to give Gotham the look of a blighted, failed city in ruin, and Metropolis (despite its devastation in the preceding film) a sheen of traditional respectability. Snyder borrowed heavily from Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns* in developing key moments in the movie; Batman's grizzled character and Gotham as a fallen city seems to fall into line with this as well.

Of course, since Warners has begun to develop the DC Extended Universe (DCEU), the fictional cities of the universe seem less important than they did in the past. Batman's primary obsession in both *Batman v Superman* and the 2017 followup *Justice League*<sup>351</sup> is protection of the world far more than the salvation of his own city (a vast majority of the filming took place overseas, according to the IMDB entry for the movie<sup>352</sup>), and in the 2016 film *Suicide Squad*, Toronto stands in for Gotham as well as Midway City (home of Hawkman, Hawkgirl, and the Doom Patrol in comics). Shooting in Toronto is often an indicator of a film's budget and prestige at its own studio—Toronto is a city that can be anywhere but itself, and the films shot there tend to be middle-tier movies.

DCEU films are still finding their footing and struggling to make a cinematic universe work, but as of this writing it seems unlikely they'll ever successfully replicate the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU), Marvel's immensely popular transmedia model. Marvel's television shows also take place within the same world as the films, while most of DC's shows exist in

---

<sup>351</sup> Zack Snyder and Joss Whedon, *Justice League* (Burbank: Warner Brothers, 2017).

<sup>352</sup> IMDB, "Justice League (2017) - Filming & Production," *IMDB*, accessed July 3, 2018, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0974015/locations>.

their own shared universe, often referred to as the “Arrowverse” because the CW show *Arrow* was the first to take place there (or the “Berlanti-verse,” after *Arrow* producer Greg Berlanti). All of these shows take place in different cities but are shot in Vancouver (yet another city that can be anywhere but itself).<sup>353</sup> However, the current Batman-based prequel show *Gotham* exists in a continuity all its own and is broadcast on Fox rather than The CW. Far from wanting the city to appear generic, the producers of *Gotham* shoot in the less glamorous areas of New York (for example, many locations in Staten Island, Chinatown, and back alleys all over the city), and the show frequently uses digital backdrops in establishing shots to add depth and a sense of the city *as a character*.<sup>354</sup>

Given the myriad aesthetics of DC’s shows and how those contrast with DC’s films, where the direction of the DCEU goes from here is anyone’s guess. For now, it appears that the idea of the world can take cues from anywhere and anyone’s vision. For a short while, the world seemed to echo the reverence with which Snyder views comics (particularly the Modern Age comics of the 1980s & 1990s), and the attendant grimness of this postmodern era. But it seems that this grimness lacks the accessibility audiences now expect after the successes of the MCU.

### 3.8 Conclusion

Before the final chapter in the Nolan trilogy was released, Warners rolled out a multi-pronged viral marketing campaign, including a free-to-play browser-based game titled *The Fire Rises*.<sup>355</sup> Released a month before the film, *The Fire Rises* allowed players to take on the role of

---

<sup>353</sup> Jeff Jensen, “This Week’s Cover: CW Superheroes Crossover Revealed,” EW.com, November 9, 2016, <http://ew.com/article/2016/11/09/flash-green-arrow-supergirl-cw-superheroes-crossover-cover/>.

<sup>354</sup> Katie Kilkenny, “*Gotham* Is Gorgeous,” *The Atlantic*, September 29, 2014, <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2014/09/the-obscenely-opulent-grit-of-gotham/380714/>.

<sup>355</sup> Sticky Studios, *The Fire Rises*, browser (Utrecht, NL: Warner Brothers, 2012).

henchmen in Bane's army to commit robberies and take over territory. The game featured a map of Gotham with three interlocking islands, nearly identical to the map designed by Eliot R. Brown. Brown's map was used yet again to establish the layout of Gotham in the 2014 Fox series *Gotham*.<sup>356</sup> In the 2016 game *Arkham Knight*,<sup>357</sup> the layout is different, but Gotham is still divided into three islands. And, as mentioned earlier, almost every time a comic needs to represent Gotham cartographically, it uses the Brown map. So we can see the lasting impact of Brown's model on the rest of the transmedia assemblage. Whether this is done as homage or as a matter of convenience and facility of reuse, only the individual producers know. It could easily be both. But this is what's most important about transmedia as a profitable model: reuse not only saves money and labour, but just as crucially signals to consumers. The idea is that audiences *enjoy* the reuse. It's not a lack of originality—it's a wink to clever insiders who "get" the connection. At the very least, this is the sympathetic reading developed from an interpellated perspective that producers hope for, or congratulate themselves on when they stumble into such readings.

Meanwhile, aesthetically, as this chapter has amply demonstrated, most versions of Gotham City since the 1989 film have borrowed from Furst's concepts. So Gotham retains the urbanity of the imagined early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, replete with the elevated walkways and interconnectedness of Hugh Ferriss and Harvey Wiley Corbett's designs and the art deco sculpture of Paul Manship—all of which fit well with the imposing scale of Bob Kane and Bill Finger's claustrophobic skyscraper canyons and the improbability and randomness of Dick Sprang's giant typewriters.

---

<sup>356</sup> Episode 2 of the series, "Selina Kyle," original airing 29 September 2014.

<sup>357</sup> Sefton Hill, *Batman: Arkham Knight*, Playstation 4 (London: Rocksteady Studios, 2015).



Gotham City sits in many different places and exists in many different modes over the years. At any point in its transmedia history, the most popular iteration sets a tone that bleeds through aesthetically into other forms. But this view is too simple to account for the nuances of how the transmedia city constructs itself palimpsestually. In the case of Gotham, we have an excellent example of how transmedia has ramped up since the late 1980s, because this is the moment when synergy became an explicit watchword for producers, and the moment when Furst's vision of Gotham arrived to affect all iterations to follow. Furst's design of Ferriss and Corbett's elevated walkways and interconnecting arcades with Manship's giant statues, all infused with a tinge of the gothic, laid down a symbolic foundation in the same fashion that Brown's map design has held fast since its design in the 1990s and cemented itself as the point of cartographic signification. Aspects of Furst's vision become unifying aesthetics for Gotham, arguably first realized in film and forever after used across media, including games, television, and comics. In this way, Gotham is not so much frequently identifiable with New York but instead with a city that never was and never could be—an urban imaginary of a shiny future that nonetheless failed.

The giant Manship-style sculptures, Statue of Liberty-scaled figures on every corner, are no less ludicrous than massive pianos or guitars just lying around on rooftops—they are equally ornamental, ostentatious, and unlikely. Here our tour comes full circle back to the entrance, and Gotham becomes a city layered on many levels: topographically (in the sense of multilevel arcades and crowded urban clusters of people living on top of one another in nearly all its incarnations); narratologically (in the sense of the built-up geographical content passed from one set of creative hands to the next in the comics); and sensorially (in the sense of a constructed metropolis layered with the real cities from which it draws inspiration, the imaginary visions of what cities never came to be, and the fictional mythology that creators then pile upon both).

But the protocols of transmedia want to obscure an explicit diegetic conversation in order to both leave it to the modes of participatory culture and move consumers to other products in the transmedia complex. The logic of the transmedia world keeps its object from posing certain kinds of questions and challenging certain kinds of problems, because to do so would reveal the gears of the transmedia machine where overlaps in labour and production are exposed. For now at least, Gotham City has its cornerstones. In the next chapter, we will move more explicitly into an exploration of how the rhizomatic, assemblage transmedia city expresses itself under the affordances, protocols, and development processes of AAA videogames.

## 4 Arkham Interactive:

### Maps, Circulation, and the *Arkham* Videogame Series

“Maps—these schemata so many of us love to create—have their primary value as imaginary construction. Since art is not a fixed subject, it does not have a fixed group or series of objects, such as land masses, to chart. Our critical maps make various possible configurations soon real; it’s almost as if the dynamic, shifting field of the works is frozen by our icy projections onto them. Potentiality is taken for actuality.”

– Charles Bernstein, “Optimism and Critical Excess (Process).”<sup>358</sup>

“Idealists, always looking to walk the straight line. Gotham doesn’t have straight lines; it’s got twists and turns and dead ends.”

– Harvey Bullock, *Gotham* s02e04 “Strike Force”<sup>359</sup>

#### 4.1 Introduction: Bombs

It’s Christmas Eve and a bomb is about to go off.

I’m winging and swinging my way through a blizzard as I race against time and push against my own limitations in a frenzied effort to thwart the plans of multiple supercriminals throughout Gotham City. Owing to the inclement weather, the entire city’s either been evacuated or everyone has just been warned to stay indoors (does it really matter?), so the only Gothamites crazy enough to be out here are desperate petty thugs, psychopaths, and me. I’m Batman.

I’m almost at my next destination, where I’ll inevitably face a barrage of bullets and a gang of no-goods looking to take a piece of me home as their own souvenir, proof that they tangled with The Bat. Grappling over a ledge and gliding up into the snow-swept sky, I catch a curious sight out of the corner of my eye. Confused, I maneuver back around and land on the rooftop by the sight that gave me pause: a wall emblazoned with a graffiti mural reading

<sup>358</sup> Bernstein, “Optimism and Critical Excess,” 844.

<sup>359</sup> T. J. Scott, “Strike Force,” TV episode, *Gotham* (New York: 21st Century Fox Television, October 12, 2015).

“SAKE.” (fig. 8) It’s not the presence of graffiti that’s unnerved me. After all, Gotham City is filthy with crime and vandalism is so rife here that, as misdemeanors go, tagging is well beneath my notice. It’s the particular mural or “bomb” that’s troubling me here. I’ve seen it before—just up the block from my apartment.



**Figure 8:** Montreal graffiti artist SAKE in Gotham City.

It’s actually late October 2013 (much closer to Halloween than Christmas) and I’m sitting on the sofa in my St Henri two-bedroom in Montreal’s Sud-Ouest neighbourhood. I’ve just begun playing the new WB Games Montréal AAA-release *Batman: Arkham Origins*,<sup>360</sup> a prequel to and third instalment in the critically-acclaimed Rocksteady/WB Games/DC Entertainment *Batman: Arkham* series. Though the game was only released yesterday (25 October 2013), the middling reviews have already started to appear online. While the story (narrative mode) is being praised for originality in some outlets,<sup>361</sup> in terms of aesthetics in

<sup>360</sup> Eric Holmes and Benoit Richer, *Batman: Arkham Origins*, Playstation 3 (Montreal: WB Games Montréal Inc., 2013).

<sup>361</sup> Carolyn Petit, “Batman: Arkham Origins Review,” *GameSpot*, October 25, 2013, <https://www.gamespot.com/reviews/batman-arkham-origins-review/1900-6415506/>.

mechanics, *Arkham Origins* expands upon the preceding game in the series incrementally rather than transformatively.<sup>362</sup>

This is an important point of departure as we move from a discussion of Batman and Gotham in transmedia more broadly and hone in on its expression in interactive media: McLuhan would refer to videogames as a cool medium,<sup>363</sup> demanding different types of feedback from its users and shifting value systems and evaluation criteria accordingly. That is to say, the different rhetorics and ideologies embedded in the encoding and decoding of a game demand different theory in order to profitably discuss how games figure into transmedia, because a player values mechanics and interactive challenge in addition to and in conjunction with narrative and aesthetic—even diehard Batman fans may evaluate a Batman *game* as a game first and a Batman story second (just as even a diehard Batman fan may want to evaluate a Batman movie in relationship to film traditions and cinematic standards, rather than in a vacuum in relationship to other Batman movies).

So the mediocre reviews<sup>364</sup> indicate that apparently, *Arkham Origins* fails to build upon the successful innovations of its predecessors, 2009's *Batman: Arkham Asylum*<sup>365</sup> and 2011's *Batman: Arkham City*.<sup>366</sup> In fact, though *Origins* will go on to garner a respectable 76% average score (based on 46 critics) at review aggregating site *Metacritic*,<sup>367</sup> the game will never escape the pull of the legacy surrounding it on both sides of its release timeline (despite problems with

---

<sup>362</sup> Evan Narcisse, "Batman: Arkham Origins: The Kotaku Review," *Kotaku*, October 25, 2013, <https://kotaku.com/batman-arkham-origins-the-kotaku-review-1451970358>.

<sup>363</sup> McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*.

<sup>364</sup> Dan Stapleton, "Batman: Arkham Origins Review," *IGN*, October 25, 2013, <http://www.ign.com/articles/2013/10/25/batman-arkham-origins-review>.

<sup>365</sup> Sefton Hill, *Batman: Arkham Asylum*, PlayStation 3 (London: Rocksteady Studios, 2009).

<sup>366</sup> Sefton Hill, *Batman: Arkham City*, PlayStation 3 (London: Rocksteady Studios, 2011).

<sup>367</sup> "Batman: Arkham Origins for PlayStation 3 Reviews," *Metacritic*, accessed June 27, 2018, <http://www.metacritic.com/game/playstation-3/batman-arkham-origins>.

its PC port,<sup>368</sup> 2015's *Batman: Arkham Knight*<sup>369</sup> did almost as well as *Arkham Asylum* or *Arkham City*; the PS4 version of the game received a score of 87% based on 89 reviews<sup>370</sup>).

But I don't know that in October 2013 as I stare at the graffiti. I haven't read the reviews yet, and I haven't played enough of the game yet to decide that it's overly derivative of *Arkham City*. What I *have* noticed is the magnitude of geographic expansion in this game—its map is at least twice the size of *Arkham City*'s. And though it's been a while since I played *Arkham City*, I've also noticed that since beginning to play *Arkham Origins*, I've been struck by multiple instances of déjà vu. The terrain seems awfully familiar and reminiscent of the previous game, but not repetitive or identical. However, right at this moment both critical *and* immersive considerations of *Arkham Origins* have temporarily faded from my mind as I sit, transfixed, by the impossibility of what I'm seeing. The SAKE bomb<sup>371</sup> is definitely the same one that adorns a brick wall nearby in my neighbourhood. I know because I've passed it many, many times—it's part of my daily walk to work. The artist responsible, Sake, has tags and bombs all over the Sud-Ouest area of Montreal, with some of their work even visible from highways as one drives into the city from Pierre Elliot Trudeau International Airport. These pieces are practically welcome banners for the city. So what, I wonder, is one of them doing on a rooftop in Gotham?

I resolve to account for this, however I can, within the game. For now, no longer Batman on a quest to fight terror and protect Gotham, I'm a kind of street-art surveyor on a scavenger hunt to find and document all the Montreal graffiti I can on the walls of Gotham. It will be a few days before I return to any of the quests of *Origins* (that bomb patiently ticking away all the

---

<sup>368</sup> Allegra Frank, "Batman: Arkham Knight PC Version Circles October for Retail Return," *Polygon*, October 2, 2015, <https://www.polygon.com/2015/10/2/9440611/batman-arkham-knight-pc-version-retail-release-date-return>.

<sup>369</sup> Hill, *Batman: Arkham Knight*.

<sup>370</sup> "Batman: Arkham Knight for PlayStation 4 Reviews," *Metacritic*, accessed June 27, 2018, <http://www.metacritic.com/game/playstation-4/batman-arkham-knight>.

<sup>371</sup> In graffiti terminology, a "bomb" describes both a process and a product. To bomb an area means to invest intensively in covering an area in graffiti; meanwhile, a bomb sits between a tag (a quick scrawl or signature) and a piece (a larger mural with considerable detail) in terms of complexity.

while), and before I do, I'll discover that this same SAKE mural repeats over a dozen times that I can find throughout Gotham, and that it's not alone: a total of six different Sake pieces appear in the game, some more frequently than others. I'll also find that Sake isn't the only Montreal graffiti artist in the game: eight pieces by artist Omen (who mostly works in the trendy Plateau neighbourhood) and five by artist Sino (whose work can be found in the Prefontaine/Frontenac area) repeat across the map as well. In fact, by the time I'm ready to return to actually *playing Batman: Arkham Origins*, I will have reached the unsettling conclusion that the characters of the game can call its locale whatever they choose, but in truth, *this* Gotham City is Montreal.

Historically, Batman games rarely attempt to explicitly add their own voice to the conversation about what makes Batman and what makes Gotham City. In many if not most of them, the surrounding space is a backdrop, or, at best, a vehicle for gameplay, ideally ignored and easily forgotten. However, a close examination of the *Arkham* videogame series shows a different operating principle in action, where the games attempt to draw upon and reconcile huge swaths of Gotham history simultaneously, with *Arkham Origins* as a point on this continuum arguably doing little to offer unique or innovative experiences for its player.

This operating principle maps to both the narrative mode and business model of transmedia. The reconciliation can be connected to both ANT and Marxist criticism: it is an important aspect of what makes the game what John Law would call a punctualization of the network supporting it<sup>372</sup> (here, the transmedia complex); Marxist thinkers in the poststructuralist vein would call the reconciliation a process of totalization, where an imperial authority attempts to annihilate difference to quell arguments about alienation.<sup>373</sup> As discussed in the introduction, both schools are useful for considering transmedia: ANT helps to understand the rhizomatic

---

<sup>372</sup> John Law, "Notes on the Theory of the Actor-Network: Ordering, Strategy, and Heterogeneity," *Systems Practice* 5, no. 4 (1992): 397–393, <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01059830>.

<sup>373</sup> Martin Jay, *Marxism and Totality: The Adventures of a Concept from Lukács to Habermas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

structure of the transmedia assemblage as a network of living actants with agency; meanwhile, Marxism is necessary in formulating a comprehension of the processes of capital that interpellate consumers and manipulate the excess produced by labour within transmedia to profitable ends through reuse and exploitation.

This series models the politics of form in the new transmedia city—an approach in which Gotham as a space shifts from the subconscious, cultural imaginary to a concrete, commodified spatiality in order to construct the kind of users and consumers that transmedia desires. While the last chapter approached Gotham as a transmedia assemblage through historiography, aesthetics, and functionality, this chapter looks at it through principles of geography and circulation, examining Gotham City in the *Arkham* series explicitly as a rhizomatic assemblage. Though it's normal that game franchises build their mechanics through instalments by rote, the *Arkham* series achieves something different: in a reshuffling of the map, the player understands Gotham in shifting points that rise and fall in her broader consciousness of the complex, resulting in a landscape where any given point is familiar in one way and novel in another.

We can formulate new understandings of how the city figures in transmedia by infusing a study of the *Arkham* series Gotham as a broad terrain with peaks and gullies that shift with theories of circulation, spatiality, and virtual geography. To that end, I will look at circulation in terms of how the player moves through the gameworld and is guided by its procedural rhetoric in a process that relies on the player making mental connections between *Arkham Origins* and *Arkham City*; I will articulate the argument by looking at how de Certeau's ideas of the map and tour explain the nuances of gameplay and the evolution from tactical skirmishes to strategic mastery. I will consider spatiality in terms of Alison Gazzard's writing on space and time in game reward structures<sup>374</sup> to explain *Arkham Origins*' fast-travel system and the illusion of space

---

<sup>374</sup> Gazzard, "Unlocking the Gameworld."



in virtual cities—indeed, the illusion that the videogame city *is* a city at all. Virtual geography—a model where the algorithmic systems of the computer combine aspects of real-world geography and fabricated elements to create a recognizable, comfortable space—helps in looking closely at the graffiti bombs placed throughout the *Origins* Gotham and the game’s mise-en-scène. There is much to learn about a virtual world by looking at minutiae like graffiti and positioning Gotham City in Quebec to interpellate specific players—even as on its face, such a claim is tenuous and outlandish.

Finally, because of its success critically and commercially, I will look at how the *Arkham* franchise has reached outward to influence Gotham as a transmedia object over the past decade. Throughout, I will argue that the Gotham City of the *Arkham* series in general and *Arkham Origins* in particular is an illusion of an urban landscape assembled from parts and coded as a single rippling surface. While we can use the language of the real world to describe it, it’s both immaterial and concrete at the same time.

#### 4.2 **Origins of *Arkham***

In exploring the *Arkham* games, it’s useful to begin with a discussion of the 1989 Grant Morrison and Dave McKean graphic novel *Arkham Asylum: A Serious House on Serious Earth*.<sup>375</sup> In the story, Batman has to deal with a riot at the asylum where some of his most iconic enemies (including the Mad Hatter, Killer Croc, Two-Face, and, of course, the Joker) have taken hostages and barricaded themselves inside. In making his way through the asylum, Batman encounters all these enemies and more, as reality slips away into surreal gothic horror. The

---

<sup>375</sup> Grant Morrison and Dave McKean, *Arkham Asylum: A Serious House on Serious Earth* (New York: DC Comics, 1989).

narrative is interspliced with the tragic life story of Amadeus Arkham, the asylum's founder, and the reader learns how the institution came to be established.

Arkham Asylum is an important Gotham City landmark in Batman canon, and even many versions of Batman geared towards small children use it as a recognizable locale and focal point for action. But it's important to note that in this graphic novel, Gotham City is a metaphor for the imaginary. The space is the space inside Amadeus Arkham's head, and the space inside Batman's head. Even the visuals of the book reflect this, as normal panel boundaries fall away and McKean splays his art haphazardly across the page. Spatialization, both formally and in content, becomes about fantasy and the imaginary, as the "serious house" becomes an allegory for another metaphor: a house of cards. Though the game takes its title from that well-known comic, the space in these games is decidedly *not* a house of cards. Far from a space of the imaginary, the spaces in these games are solid. As this chapter will demonstrate, the adaptation of this narrative into the larger model of transmedia strategy attempts to shift Gotham City in *A Serious House on Serious Earth* from a state of mind to a place in the games. It shifts from a cultural imaginary to a (transmedia) cultural commodity—a commodity that is spatialized.

The *Arkham* videogame franchise began in 2009 with *Batman: Arkham Asylum*, a console and PC game in which the Joker has taken over Arkham Island, on which the asylum housing Gotham's worst criminals and madmen stands, and through which Batman must navigate to defeat multiple villains from his rogues gallery (a premise that hearkens back to the Morrison/McKean book). The game was designed by London-based developer Rocksteady Studios Limited, which was subcontracted by license holder Eidos Interactive. Eidos would go on to co-publish the game with Warner Brothers Interactive Entertainment (WBIE); but after Time-Warner acquired a controlling interest in Rocksteady in 2010 (a move likely owing in part

to the resounding success of *Arkham Asylum*<sup>376</sup>), WBIE published the rest of the series alone. While *Batman TAS* co-creator Paul Dini served as head writer for the game, he and the team at Rocksteady borrowed heavily from the Morrison and McKean comic in developing the game's premise and mood,<sup>377</sup> focusing on horror motifs to ground the story's genre. As for gameplay, *Arkham Asylum* firmly slots into action-adventure. While most of the game's action takes place in contained indoor levels, once the player advances far enough she is free to explore the island by grappling and gliding.

The game enjoyed extremely positive reviews, and the stakeholders have capitalized several times over on its success to spawn a large franchise unto itself. As of 2018, that franchise has produced nine titles across 11 platforms by six developers.<sup>378</sup> While several of these games have been supplementary spinoff titles for mobile platforms, this chapter will focus on the four core AAA instalments in the series: *Arkham Asylum*, *Arkham City*, *Arkham Origins*, and *Arkham Knight*.

In 2011's *Batman: Arkham City* (developed by Rocksteady and published by WBIE), several months have passed since the events of *Arkham Asylum*, and now Batman is trapped inside a borough-sized gulag that stands on the remains of a decimated and desolate section of Gotham City. Again, the Dark Knight has to navigate the penitentiary and defeat multiple enemies to bring the prison under control. For this game, Rocksteady opens up the world to the player much earlier in gameplay, and offers far more action in that open-world environment. To

---

<sup>376</sup> Nikki Finke, "Warner Bros. Buys Majority Stake In Batman Video Game's Rocksteady Studios," *Deadline Hollywood*, February 23, 2010, <https://deadline.com/2010/02/warner-bros-buys-majority-stake-in-batman-video-games-rocksteady-studios-26344/>.

<sup>377</sup> Gita Jackson, "Why This Lifelong Batman Fan Doesn't Like the Arkham Games," *Paste Magazine*, June 25, 2015, <https://www.pastemagazine.com/articles/2015/06/why-this-lifelong-batman-fan-doesnt-like-the-arkha.html>.

<sup>378</sup> Those titles are: *Batman: Arkham Asylum* (Rocksteady, 2009); *Batman: Arkham City* (Rocksteady, 2011); *Batman: Arkham City Lockdown* (NetherRealm, 2011); *Batman: Arkham Origins* (WB Games Montréal, 2013); *Batman: Arkham Origins Blackgate* (Armature Studio, 2011); a *Batman: Arkham Origins* mobile game (NetherRealm, 2013); *Batman: Arkham Knight* (Rocksteady, 2015); *Batman: Arkham Underworld* (Turbine Inc., 2016); and *Batman: Arkham VR* (Rocksteady, 2016). Cf. Appendix 3 for details.

compensate for the scaling-up of the gameworld (Arkham City is about four times the size of Arkham Island), Rocksteady incorporated a “glide boost” feature so that Batman could repeatedly launch off structures and glide across great distances without ever landing. While this new mechanic is simple enough and likely there for practical reasons, its addition is significant in that it allows players far greater mastery over the environment—and the sensation of mastery is one that all games in the *Arkham* series have attempted to instill in players.

As mentioned earlier, the *Arkham* franchise is not only commercially successful but critically adored as well. On *Metacritic*, *Arkham Asylum*’s Playstation 3 release holds an average score of 91% based on 70 critics;<sup>379</sup> *Arkham City*’s PS3 version bested this score with 96% average based on 42 critics.<sup>380</sup> *City* also won multiple awards from organizations including the British Academy for Film and Television Arts, the Academy of Interactive Arts & Sciences, the Satellite Awards, and the Spike Video Game Awards.<sup>381</sup> On top of this, it sold two million copies in the first week of its release and became the 10<sup>th</sup> best-selling game of 2011 even though it was released in late October.<sup>382</sup>

I dwell on these accomplishments not to sing *Arkham City*’s praises but to illustrate the legacy it created for the series, and to consider the long shadows such a reputation casts. WBIE was obviously excited to continue capitalizing on the franchise’s success, but Rocksteady required additional time to complete the next sequel, *Arkham Knight*.<sup>383</sup> Not wanting to go too long without releasing a *Batman: Arkham* game, Warners decided that it would be necessary to

---

<sup>379</sup> “Batman: Arkham Asylum for PlayStation 3 Reviews,” *Metacritic*, accessed June 27, 2018, <http://www.metacritic.com/game/playstation-3/batman-arkham-asylum>.

<sup>380</sup> “Batman: Arkham City for PlayStation 3 Reviews,” *Metacritic*, accessed June 27, 2018, <http://www.metacritic.com/game/playstation-3/batman-arkham-city>.

<sup>381</sup> “Batman: Arkham City - Awards,” *IMDB*, accessed June 27, 2018, [https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1568322/awards?ref\\_=tt\\_awd](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1568322/awards?ref_=tt_awd).

<sup>382</sup> Keith Stuart, “Best Selling Games of 2011: Modern Warfare 3 Outguns the Opposition,” *The Guardian*, January 11, 2012, <http://www.theguardian.com/technology/gamesblog/2012/jan/11/best-selling-games-of-2011>.

<sup>383</sup> Bryan Vore, “Rocksteady Studios Comments On Batman: Arkham Origins,” *Game Informer*, March 26, 2014, <https://www.gameinformer.com/b/features/archive/2014/03/26/rocksteady-studios-comments-on-batman-arkham-origins.aspx>.

develop an instalment in the series using another studio. WBIE had recently founded WB Games Montréal in 2010, and directed the energies of the new studio to creating a game for the series. Rocksteady itself had minimal involvement in the development of what would become *Batman: Arkham Origins*, offering only a few unknown story points to be avoided by WB Games Montréal, and the code for Rocksteady's custom Unreal 3 Engine<sup>384</sup> (which Rocksteady had heavily worked on adapting from engine developer Epic Games).

In October 2013, WB Games Montréal released a prequel to the series, *Arkham Origins*. In this game, Bruce Wayne has only been Batman for two years, and faces off against the Joker for the first time as multiple villains converge on Gotham in response to a \$50 million bounty placed on the Caped Crusader's head. During development, the world was once again scaled up: where Arkham City was roughly quadruple the size of Arkham Island, the map of *Arkham Origins* was double of that of Arkham City. However, what's most important for discussion here is not the difference in size between the two games, but the similarity in location. In the story of *Arkham City*, the gulag is a condemned section of Gotham walled off from the rest of the city on one side and water-bound on the others. In the story of *Arkham Origins*, the player is meant to see what that section of Gotham looked like before it was closed off and made into a penitentiary. For the first time in the franchise, the player is able to explore Gotham City proper. The possibility for such exploration, as well as the gesture of tying the topography of the city in with Arkham City, became a major critique of *Arkham Origins*, but also a foundation for many interesting observations about how Gotham City functions in the series.

Between the first two *Arkham* games, a good deal of narrative consistency was maintained (for example, Batman and the Joker were voiced by *Batman TAS* alumni Kevin Conroy and Mark Hamill, respectively; the story points and subplots were direct continuations),

---

<sup>384</sup> Ibid.

with Batman facing many issues in *Arkham City* as direct consequences of events in *Arkham Asylum*. But the sequel called for little geographical consistency: while the action of *Asylum* takes place in a mental facility off the coast of Gotham, the action of *City* occurs in a demilitarized zone of Gotham itself. How the section of the city came to be walled off and reformatted into a prison is explained in a kind of videogame equivalent to liner notes—in-game achievements unlock peripheral textual material that ask the player to temporarily become a reader if she wants all the background. The Gotham of *Arkham City* is a wasteland: dilapidated, half-drowned by flooding, and teeming with criminals. It appears as a diseased part of Gotham that the rest of the city abandoned, where churches are repurposed into triage centres and villains repurpose municipal landmarks like police stations, museums, and courthouses into criminal strongholds.

*Arkham Origins* reveals the greater geography of Gotham City as an added section to what would become the Arkham City makeshift prison: a large bridge connects what constitutes Arkham City to the Southern half of the greater metropolis (perhaps retroactively explaining how it was so easy for Gotham to just amputate its upper half). (fig. 9) From this, we can already see how the Gotham of *Origins* slots into the spaces of the geographical content of *Arkham City*. The ways in which code match or overlap one another is a deeper layer than the aesthetic rhizome the Gotham of *Arkham Origins* represents in terms of other media, so it's then prudent to start on the surface with topographical considerations.



**Figure 9:** the *Arkham City* map (left) roughly matches the north half of the map in *Arkham Origins*.

### 4.3 Interrogating Urban Geography in the Transmedia City

In thinking about how the player experiences a videogame city like the Gotham of *Arkham Origins*, once again, Michel de Certeau comes to our rescue. In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau describes the prevalence of spatial understandings in a study of New York as being based largely around directions:

[D]escription oscillates between the terms of an alternative: either seeing (the knowledge of an order of places) or *going* (spatializing actions). [...] I would like to make use of these New York stories—and other similar stories—to try to specify the relationships between the indicators of “tours” and those of “maps,” where they coexist in a single description. How are *acting* and *seeing* coordinated in this realm of ordinary language in which the former is so obviously dominant? The question ultimately concerns the basis of the everyday narrations, the relation between the itinerary (a discursive series of operations) and the map (a plane projection totalizing observations), that is, between two symbolic and anthropological languages of space. Two poles of experience. It seems that in passing from “ordinary” culture to scientific discourse, one passes from one pole to the other.<sup>385</sup>

de Certeau’s observations about tours being the “obviously dominant” form of understanding space is somewhat dated now, in an age where we all walk around with maps in our pockets at all times, easily reachable for reference and capable of providing travel time, traffic conditions, and the names of notable businesses along a route we may take. I will return to the issue of GPS-enabled smartphones later; for now, datedness notwithstanding, let’s unpack what de Certeau describes in the map and the tour and how they connect to an open-world videogame like *Arkham Origins*. Darren Wershler sharpens de Certeau’s concepts for the digital milieu as exemplified in navigation of *Assassin Creed II*’s<sup>386</sup> vision of 15<sup>th</sup> century Florence. Wershler discusses the player’s tendency to articulate Renaissance-era Italy in terms of both the overhead

---

<sup>385</sup> de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 119.

<sup>386</sup> Patrice Désilets, *Assassin’s Creed II*, Playstation 3 (Montreal: Ubisoft, 2009).



map and the ground-level walking tour, with neither functioning to complete the picture without the other:

de Certeau's second mode of writing and reading the city is from a great height above it. This is a space of privileged knowledge – panoramic views that are only available to gods, city planners and level designers. As opposed to the tour, this is the space of the “map”, which totalizes a space into a single description of a place. It pretends to a total knowledge of a given space, but that knowledge is only possible because of a particular kind of abstraction. The tour – walking – is what makes the construction of maps possible, yet de Certeau describes the process whereby the drafters of maps have gradually erased their connections to the itineraries of individual pedestrians in order to create a device for the planning and administration of the circulations of those same pedestrians.<sup>387</sup>

These ideas are prevalent in *Arkham Origins*, where the player also relies on a coordinated approach to circulating through Gotham City, using the HUD bird's-eye map view, the human-scale third-person view, a working knowledge of the city's layout from the franchise's previous instalment, and the familiar aesthetics and architectural landmarks from Batman's transmedia history. Wershler also parses his view of *Assassin's Creed's* Florence in terms of circulation because (as I will illustrate shortly) circulation considers the materiality of objects as well as people as factors of analysis. “A city,” like a game, Wershler says, “is nothing if not a set of entwined systems of circulation: people, information, objects, architecture.”<sup>388</sup> “Batman's city in

---

<sup>387</sup> Darren Wershler, “Walking in *Assassin's Creed*” (paper presented at Experiencing Stories With/In Digital Games, 24<sup>th</sup> Edition of the Entrepreneurs Jacques Cartier, Concordia University, Montreal, October 2011), 3.

<sup>388</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

*Arkham Origins* uses cultural, aesthetic, and informational signalling to immerse the attentive player in the same credible universe without boundaries that Nolan strove to create in emulating *Blade Runner*'s LA. However, both the tour view and the map view are simulacra—illusions that bear little resemblance to real-world city life or circulation beyond the brickwork aesthetics of the environment.

The designers of the game built *Origins*' Gotham out of the look and feel of the films and the content of the comics. The game makes use of the same enormous statues that appear in the Burton and Schumacher films, as well as the realistic grittiness juxtaposed with uptown glamour Nolan exhibits in his Batman movies. *Origins* even represents the dayglo brightness of the Schumacher films: because the game is set on Christmas Eve, the city glitters with the lights of the season and neon signage adorns the buildings in seedier areas. Additionally, the game depicts the urban imaginaries of 1920s architectural illustration prevalent in all three directors' visions. We believe that the fantastical architectural networks sketched out by Ferriss and Corbett and seen in Fritz Lang's 1927 film *Metropolis*<sup>389</sup> potentially *could* lay out a metropolis, but—as noted in the previous chapter—they're actually abandoned, often impossible ideas of what the urban might have been. We will never have these structures in the real world. In *Arkham Origins*, though the city lacks many multilevel arcades connected by elevated walkways, the buildings in the game are tiered and clustered together, connected instead by large pipes that Batman can climb over—just as fantastical as those other architectural feats.

In terms of geographical content, several of the neighbourhoods in *Origins* have the same names as those areas frequently alluded to or depicted in the comics: Amusement Mile, Park Row, and Burnley are all present, as are comic book Gotham staples like Wonder Tower, Ace Chemicals, and the My Alibi nightclub. Before the player even significantly interacts with the

---

<sup>389</sup> Fritz Lang, *Metropolis* (New York: Kino International, 1927).

Gotham of *Arkham Origins*, she can already see the collected history of almost 80 years of Batman media assembled and working on the topographical surface of the game.

The assembled qualities of the gameworld's content and its doubling of the Arkham City map present an interesting entry point for considerations of urban geography theory. Specifically, making a study of these differently mapped, opened, and explored versions of Gotham pit various schools of thought in urban geography against one another. But by using urban geography theory to study the Gotham of the *Arkham* series in general and *Arkham Origins* in particular, we can learn about how the processes and protocols of city planning in the physical world connect to (or fail to connect to) the design and interpellation of our virtual and fictional worlds as well.

In talking about walking the city, de Certeau tells us that “to plan a city is both to *think the very plurality* of the real and to make that way thinking the plural *effective*; it is to know how to articulate it and be able to do it.”<sup>390</sup> What de Certeau is really describing here is the work of urban planners, who themselves frequently employ the best wisdom from the field of urban geography. These ideas were discussed fully in the literature review, but the core of adapting them to pose questions about a virtual city lies in the issue of development. It's obviously important to note that a videogame city like the *Arkham* Gotham isn't developed slowly, over time, and in the public eye, but rapidly and in secret and all at once, in chunks that coincide with commercial releases. So to the extent that a historiographic perspective of this process is useful, it must be employed in terms of iteration, from one game to the next. Any material records of how sections and neighbourhoods in Gotham were developed for each game are obscured. However, we can make statements by turning to a methodology based on Stuart Hall's ideas of encoding and decoding, looking at the evidence in the game the developers left behind.

---

<sup>390</sup> de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 94.

Doing so reveals the disjuncture between the videogame city and the real city, whether modern or postmodern. Gotham City is not a metaphor for a real city, but rather a transmedia commodity, and the Gotham of the *Arkham* series is furthermore commodified code. In looking at the world of *Arkham Origins* specifically, we find a city that builds neither from the centre nor the periphery. Instead, WB Games Montréal reinscribed the city from the commodified code and a customized game engine that Rocksteady shared with it (as both studios operated in their capacities as WBIE subsidiaries).

This is a specific example, but connects to other videogame cities as well. In writing about videogame cities, Bobby Schweizer indicates that the “city” is “actually a way of thinking about the experience of spatial arrangements and representations of relationships.”<sup>391</sup> “We tend to think of cities as concrete, definable entities,” he writes, “and characterize them as being filled with people who use streets to get between the buildings where they live, work, and shop”—a “network in motion.”<sup>392</sup> Not necessarily so in the *Arkham* games. This is because so much of import takes place *on* the street.

But much more importantly, the street does not actually exist. Instead of actually communicating “cityness,” the videogame city is a series of topographical surfaces painted to *look* like an “indoors” exists. What we’re actually discussing in both indoors and outdoors is the navigation of a complicated surface (we will return to the subject of topology again later in this chapter). Usually when a player moves indoors,<sup>393</sup> an entirely different section of code is loaded and processed, and the player is instead transported somewhere new. From a code perspective, once the player is “in” the building, she’s no longer even in the same world as the open space. Compasses also disappear in these interior spaces because NSEW are meaningless in an area

---

<sup>391</sup> Bobby Schweizer, “Videogame Cities in Motion,” 1.

<sup>392</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>393</sup> Exceptions do exist, especially today when the possibilities of processing are so vast. For example, in *Assassin’s Creed Unity*, Ubisoft integrated indoors to many of the structures of 18<sup>th</sup> Century Paris.

without free exploration. Finally, the fact that the games taking place during an endless night allows developers to disregard the movement of celestial bodies and time; having no daylight means never having to deal with the heavy processing burden of simulating natural light effects and shadows. Furthermore, compasses themselves are somewhat inapt metaphors for spatial relationships in games. It would probably be more accurate for an open-world game's compass system to operate through a clock metaphor (clockwise/counterclockwise, ten o'clock, etc.), as this would be at least somewhat closer to how the software's internal processes function.

Schweizer writes about this in relationship to the cities of the *Grand Theft Auto* series,<sup>394</sup> and the same holds true for all the indoor spaces of the *Arkham* series. Once she engages with both *Arkham City* and *Arkham Origins*, the player may try to compare the maps to better understand where she's located in relationship to places, scale, etcetera. This is because the urban media of the past century has trained our minds to think of space and place in terms of agency—the agency of the audience, and the agency of the city itself. In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, filmmakers like Walter Ruttmann and Roberto Rossellini began making city symphony films such as *Berlin: Symphony of a Metropolis*<sup>395</sup> and *Rome, Open City*.<sup>396</sup> In these films, the city is positioned as protagonist. When videogames transition from 2D to 3D, they slowly move in the same direction that city symphony films took cinema: away from the city as backdrop, and toward the city as character. This commodified code is an extension of those processes under late capitalism, where the city becomes the thing you're selling—a part of the larger package that the drums of transmedia can beat upon in major and minor forms going forward.

If the transmedia city is more commodity than metaphor, and the videogame city operates the same way at the level of code, then we must question the limits of urban geography in sorting

---

<sup>394</sup> Schweizer, "Videogame Cities in Motion."

<sup>395</sup> Walter Ruttmann, *Berlin: Symphony of a Metropolis* (Los Angeles: 20th Century Fox, 1927).

<sup>396</sup> Roberto Rossellini, *Rome, Open City*, DVD (Rome, Italy: Minerva Film SPA, 1945).

them out. At first glance, it seems appropriate that the player could use the language of the Chicago and L.A. Schools to locate herself and find her place in the gameworld. But if the core issue here is centrality, then we can critique both schools by incorporating claims about subjectivity into the discussion. Urban geographers Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift claim that “the city has no completeness, no centre, no fixed parts. Instead, it is an amalgam of often disjointed processes and social heterogeneity, a place of near and far connections, a concatenation of rhythms; always edging in new directions.”<sup>397</sup> This would seem to indicate that the central is at the very least in flux, an idea that extends from Henri Lefebvre’s claim that mutable centrality is the meaning of urban space-time itself.<sup>398</sup>

In the perspective of these games, Batman is always central in the open-world environment: the HUD compass hovering overhead indicates as much, and the nature of the free exploration means that Batman can approach objectives however the player chooses. However, when Batman goes indoors, the game obscures his centrality and relatively disempowers his subjectivity: the HUD compass disappears, there are far fewer options for grappling and gliding, and the player can no longer place custom waypoints on the map. Batman must instead use guesswork to locate himself relative to other points in space. The exception to these observations is *Arkham Asylum*, where the HUD compass and custom waypoints never exist—but then, *Arkham Asylum* is neither a fully open-world game nor does it take place in an urban environment.

This again fits with de Certeau’s map/tour schema and again gives us room to critique urban geography in virtual worlds. While urban geography has to consider the full spectrum of view *and* use, it also accounts for nomenclature and linguistic organization. But the virtual and

---

<sup>397</sup> Amin and Thrift, *Cities*, 8.

<sup>398</sup> Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*, 130.

fictional map is usually devoid of those names that mean the most for navigation; that is, the names of streets and intersections. A videogame map organizes the player spatially in terms of landmarks and waypoints, interaction opportunities and directional markers. A real map organizes the traveler in terms of street signs and one-way arrows, traffic lights and roundabouts. In terms of the tour, the real-world pedestrian or motorist relies far less on landmarks than on house numbers and street signs; without these types of features they would be entirely lost. The player, on the other hand, couldn't care less about the absence of a street sign on every corner; both their forms of navigation and circulation and their goals are completely different.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the videogame Gotham doesn't *behave* like a city. Contemporary urban geography theory is both critical and instrumental—it explains how cities construct citizens and dictate use as much as it suggests sets of best practices for constructing the cities themselves.<sup>399</sup> But Gotham City in *Arkham Origins* (for example) provides the simulacrum of urban practice without reproducing it. When the player crosses the bridge that bifurcates the two islands heading south, she can see highway signs directing straight ahead south to Blackgate Prison, and another directing her southwest to GCPD headquarters. But these roads go nowhere. It's impossible to access Blackgate Prison at any time in the game except when carried there by the main plotline, and the offramp to GCPD ends in a dropoff into an alleyway. Even if the road *was* completed, it would lead right into the face of a building. As before, we see the *Arkham* series Gotham not as an allegory for the city, but as an illusion of urbanity.

---

<sup>399</sup> Scott and Soja, *The City*.

#### 4.4 Player Circulation

Looking at how the game's procedural rhetoric encourages players to interact with the gameworld is extremely useful in decoding the commodified nature of Gotham's code, as well as how the spaces of *Arkham* games evolve. The world of the franchise's first game, *Arkham Asylum*, is limited, and matches the player's linear progression through the game's narrative. The player is only able to view one part of the game map at a time, and the overall design emphasizes indoor environments. While the player needs to move through the open space of Arkham Island's exterior areas to go from building to building, the open space itself contains few important puzzles or fights. Of course, exploration is its own reward, but game goals are scant in these exterior areas, only providing sidelining points of interest and a few small battle encounters. What this means is that the "open" world of *Arkham Asylum* is actually quite small—as already mentioned, "indoors" and "outdoors" are illusions in this game series, and both are actually a series of large surfaces. We can decode that this design is easier to program and puts less strain on processing.

In *Arkham City*, however, the focus shifts from the inside to the outside on the symbolic level, as the developers fill the game with side missions and enemies to face all over the map, as well as some missions that involve following a trail of clues from point to point in the city, or chases that ask the player to traverse great distances over a limited period of time. This would not have worked on the Arkham Island map: the developers built the spaces to be confining and prescriptive, with few areas of the island left uninvestigated over the course of the game and many of them difficult to return to in free exploration.

While the transition from *Arkham Asylum* to *Arkham City* moved the action from inside to outside and asylum to gulag, in *Arkham Origins*, the geography of the game has expanded



rather than relocated. *Origins* takes place before either *Arkham Asylum* or *Arkham City*, when Batman was just a few years into his career. The main problem this creates (besides the issue of relying a bit too much on the content of the game's predecessor) is that there is suddenly just too much city to traverse. Rather than expanding outwards into another concentric zone, the Gotham of *Origins* simply expands south: a bridge (that was collapsed and inaccessible in *Arkham City*) reveals another half of the city on a separate island.

Setting aside the potential charges of laziness on the developers' part that this might engender (it likely had more to do with the extremely compressed timeline of the game's production), it's interesting to see *Origins* strive for certain points of originality by reshuffling the interior locations of the map (those buildings that the player can representationally "enter," rather than those buildings that just serve as impenetrable architectural monoliths). This is an aspect of what reveals Gotham in these games as part of the same rhizome differentiated by the angle of approach. For example, in *Arkham City*, the old Gotham City Police Department (GCPD) headquarters sits on the east side of Amusement Mile. Though in the diegesis of the game, the building was abandoned before that section of Gotham was walled off to create *Arkham City*, in *Origins*, the GCPD headquarters sits at the other end of the map, on the south side of Burnley. Instead, the spot in Amusement Mile taken up by the GCPD in *City* is occupied in *Origins* by the Penguin's boat the Final Offer. Other aspects of the *City* map have been reorganized in *Origins* to add originality as well: the Sionis Steel Mill (Joker's hideout in *City* and Black Mask's in *Origins*) stands in the same spot on both maps. (*fig. 10*) However, opposite sides of the building's interior are accessible in the two games.



**Figure 10:** the Sionis Steel Mill in *Arkham City* (left) and *Arkham Origins*.

Familiar but novel architectural features like these affect the player's circulation through the city as well as her ability to cope with the game's challenges. They do so by combining with the HUD to create a well-known environment for the player by loading familiar landmarks with familiar challenges and juxtaposing them with nearby novel landmarks and challenges.

Returning to the Sionis Steel Mill for a moment, in *City*, the mill is just south of a broken-down Ferris wheel, while in *Origins* the Ferris wheel is gone, and in its place stands a Gotham City Radio tower. In *Arkham City*, a side mission involving detective work and the weaving-in of the larger Batman mythology draws Batman to the Ferris wheel; in *Origins*, the radio tower is a combat challenge location where Batman must defeat multiple enemies to unlock a fast-travel point for the Amusement Mile region (more on fast-travel points shortly). Though the steel mill remains largely the same as it was in *Arkham City*, the game rewards the experienced returning player with the novelty of a new landmark and a different kind of challenge.

Meanwhile, the steel mill not only remains recognizable on the outside, but its exterior acts in the same way as a cluster point for enemies in both games. This makes the player of *Origins* who has already gone through *Arkham City* an instant expert on central points on the map, and it only takes a momentary shift in the HUD for the player to see what lies in wait nearby. Not only is the map itself dotted with the meanings of the previous game, but the

player's experiences are as well: she can expect to find an experience similar to *City* on certain points of the map, but a novel experience just nearby. The resulting sensation is like déjà vu—a sensation intensified if the two games are played back-to-back.

Fast-travel points form additional inscriptions in *Origins*. An addition designed to deal with the vastness of the gameworld, open-world adventure games commonly utilize these warp portals. Retracing steps is a necessity of this genre, where the non-linear playing style sees players begin side quests, tire of them, rejoin the main mission, and later return to the area with the side quest (either to complete it, or perhaps because a new element of the main mission has unlocked in that region, or just to explore). To allow the player to get around large swaths of already trod-upon territories, developers often divide game maps into regions, like the official or informal neighbourhoods and boroughs that make up a city. In a central spot of each region, a fast-travel point will be located that the player can teleport to whenever she chooses, from wherever she chooses, so long as this sudden teleportation doesn't get in the way of the game's other processes (for example, in *Origins*, fast-travel points can't be accessed from interior locations because these are whole new maps loaded from other parts of the game's software).

Different open-world games require different labour from players in order to unlock fast-travel points: Ubisoft's *Assassin's Creed* games, for example, demand that the player finds the best route up tall structures to reach vantage points (taking advantage of both the franchise's core free-running mechanic, and forcing the player to admire the enormity of the environments). On the other hand, Guerrilla Games's *Horizon Zero Dawn* ties fast-travel into both resource management and game progression: while the points in this game are simple ground-level campfires and easy enough to reach, the game requires the player to craft or purchase fast-travel packs to use the campfires as teleportation hubs, and the campfires also serve as savepoints. All

of these techniques tie themselves into the type of experience, expediency, and diegetic comprehension the developers want for their players.

This brings us back to urban geography theory, and we see again the inadequacies of the field in addressing virtual cities. A city with fast-travel points is neither built from the periphery inwards nor from the centre outwards. It's a network with nodes, and the occupant is always at the centre. However, theory from game studies can help us reconcile the issue. In an article on how concepts of space and time connect to rewards in gameworlds, Alison Gazzard asks if game and player goals are intertwined with rewards.<sup>400</sup> She outlines rewards of time (where the player is rewarded with more time to play the game) and rewards of space (where the player gains rewards of access and rewards of exploration that unlock new areas, which in turn enter into a feedback loop with rewards of environment—new obstacles to be overcome in the new areas).<sup>401</sup> So how does fast-travel, which we might define as a reward of spacetime, thread into this discussion? Unlocking a fast-travel point is a reward in and of itself, but it's important to define what kind of reward it is.

Gazzard describes the connection of time-based rewards to arcade games in which the player is encouraged to work towards the game's end goals in order to be rewarded with more play time. This is unlike the rewards of fast-travel in *Arkham Origins*, because the use of fast-travel (a time-saving mechanism) is prohibited in missions involving time-sensitive goals. If the player is racing against a clock (for example, trying to make her way across the city to fight Anarky's minions before they can set off an explosive device), fast-travel is locked and impossible to use until the mission is completed or exited. Fast-travel is not integrated into the parameters of specific missions in *Arkham Origins*, and so using it results in what Gazzard

---

<sup>400</sup> Gazzard, "Unlocking the Gameworld."

<sup>401</sup> Ibid.

defines as “social rewards,” such as increased mastery of the environment and efficiency in completing the overall game in fewer play hours. Therefore, fast-travel is tied to game mastery in a general and social sense, but it’s problematic to say that it helps the player directly in conquering end goals devised by the designers.

It is also arguable that fast-travel points in this game constitute rewards of exploration, because they don’t tend to tie directly to unlocking new areas—they just allow the player to move from one end of the already-explored map to another rapidly. If anything, fast-travel is a reward of permanent access—once unlocked, the player can almost always take advantage of them on the world map. Because of this, it might then be better to think of fast-travel as I first described it: as a way to compensate for the ever-increasing scale of gameworlds, as the affordances of software and hardware memory grow commensurately. They prevent boredom and help the player play more efficiently and make the most out of her gaming time—a reward in itself.

It should be noted, however, that *Arkham Origins* is not necessarily representational of fast-travel in regards to reward in open-world games. In some games, such as instalments of the aforementioned *Assassin’s Creed* series, sometimes unlocking fast-travel points doesn’t just allow the player to teleport to and from that point, but also serves as a choke point to unlock a new area of the map. As Gazzard writes:

The map becomes vital for the player to re-orientate themselves, however, the map is also a teaser for areas that the player can eventually access through completing set goals within the game. Although the whole map is viewable from the start of the game, not all areas are accessible until certain goals are completed. Therefore, the reward of

environment is once again linked to the completion of set missions defined within the game system and the opening up of further paths.<sup>402</sup>

In *Arkham Origins*, fast-travel points are also part of the diegesis of the world, explained away by Batman's high-tech "Batwing" jet. This feature compensates for the circulatory challenges such a large map presents by letting the player move rapidly from region to region, and incorporates a diegetic explanation for the player's ability to safely return to "home base" at a moment's notice: in *Origins*, unlike in *City*, Batman can access the Batcave, a safe haven located far off the map of the rest of Gotham. This fast-travel feature effectively adds further procedural *and* diegetic aspects to the city, and also holds implications for player circulation.

In the virtual world, inconveniences are never accidental or coincidental. If a construction site pops up, it's not because the city needs to close down a part of the street—it's intentionally to keep the player from accessing or passing through that area. A real city is full of roadblocks and traffic snarls and orange cones because of its own infrastructural problems and needs. Designers program a virtual city with a broad user in mind, and the virtual city uses the symbolic language of the real world to guide that user. In this space, everything has a purpose that directly concerns the player. This returns us to de Certeau's observations about how over time, the drafters of maps have gradually erased their connections to the itineraries of individuals circulating throughout the city. The people who design videogame cities have no such issues. Again, the further we scrape away at its surface, the more the virtual city divorces itself from the real city.

All of this—familiar landmarks, fast-travel points, the similarity of maps on the HUD, and the nostalgic aesthetic and contextual qualities of the landscape—combine to make the

---

<sup>402</sup> Ibid.

rhizomatic Gotham City of *Arkham Origins* a world optimized not only for the player's ability to navigate the game and its challenges, but also to allow the player to experience as much as possible what it's like to *be* Batman (or at least one version of what it's like to be Batman). An interesting rub here is that the game's surprises take the player off-guard because the Gotham City of *Origins* is a reshuffled version of the Gotham of *Arkham City*, while they should be taking Batman off-guard because of his relative inexperience in the diegesis of *Origins*. Though the narrative and ludic reasons approach from opposite logics, the result is the same.

But in both cases, nothing precedes these acts of construction. The game says, "This is the authentic experience of being Batman, and we're helping you to inhabit it," while what's actually happening is that the game deploys a set of techniques that create occasions for chains of operations for players, which the players then interpret as what it's like to be Batman. What happens on the level of the symbolic is several steps removed from what happens on the level of the code. It would be anachronistic to project this continuum backwards onto earlier Batman games, as the affordances of programming and processing at the time didn't leave as much room for such identification. It's difficult to imagine that players felt very much like they were Batman as they navigated the awkward isometric spaces of the first 1986 ZX Spectrum *Batman*<sup>403</sup> game, or that they perceived a great deal of specificity in the techniques necessary to master the 1992 Amiga *Batman Returns*<sup>404</sup>—more likely, they felt they were reliving the experience of watching the movie. This is another demonstration that continuity and realism are not priorities for franchise owners and content producers, but a fantasy for which the players provide the closure.

Of course, not all the points in the assemblage are there to be advantageous—some reinscriptions are obviously present just to cover up a hole. As this chapter has repeatedly

---

<sup>403</sup> John Ritman, *Batman*, PC (Ocean Software, 1986).

<sup>404</sup> Denton Designs, *Batman Returns*, Amiga (Gametek, 1992).

argued, the most important consideration of this assemblage rendition of Gotham City is the code. As WB Games Montréal had limited time to produce *Arkham Origins* (rumors persist that they were actually redirected from a different project they had underway and given less than two years to complete the Batman game<sup>405</sup>) and Rocksteady armed the studio with existing code and little guidance,<sup>406</sup> WB Games Montréal was not always able to elegantly design around what remained of Arkham City in crafting Gotham City.

This is most apparent in the middle of the map. Where Hugo Strange's headquarters stood in Arkham City (centre bottom), there is a dead zone in the map of *Arkham Origins*: an L-shaped area that Batman inexplicably cannot grapple or fly over and never enters, most of which consists of the "Gotham City Light & Power" building. The "restricted area" in *Arkham City* is surrounded by high walls and barbed wire, and if the player ever finds a gap in that perimeter, machine gun fire repels Batman back. Geographically, this renders the gulag a horseshoe-shaped environment; the implications of this for circulation are that the player is forced into other sections and can't always take the most efficient or direct approach. In *Origins*, the dead zone doesn't promote exploration or figure into the game's story—it simply impedes movement around the map. This may leave the player wondering why the Light & Power building is neither surmountable nor enterable.

Such a question is not resolvable on the level of content, but can be addressed on the level of business decision and expediency. When Ubisoft designs the world of a massive historical fiction game like *Assassin's Creed II*,<sup>407</sup> they must face a similar issue, in which developers can render a 16<sup>th</sup> Century Florence building like Palazzo Vecchio with such fidelity that the level of detail is too much for the game engine's processors to handle. With the GPU and

---

<sup>405</sup> "State of WB Games Montréal Studio?," *ResetEra*, accessed July 11, 2018, <https://www.resetera.com/threads/state-of-wb-games-montreal-studio.36583/>.

<sup>406</sup> Vore, "Rocksteady Studios Comments On Batman."

<sup>407</sup> Désilets, *Assassin's Creed II*.



CPU affordances of 2009 (when *Assassin's Creed II* was released), digitally representing sites with rich Renaissance intricacies that still stand today is less a matter of care than technological possibility. So if Ubisoft had copied the Palazzo Vecchio right down to the cornice, when the player approached the area containing the building and the edifice began to render, lag could set in, and the game might have ground to a halt. Faced with a conundrum like this, Ubisoft would likely redesign the building with far less detail so the hardware could handle it. Today, customers can go online and watch videos of games like *Assassin's Creed Origins* running at different processor speeds to determine the CPU burden the game will place on the console,<sup>408</sup> to help determine if they can afford to have the more immersive, realistic experience, before they buy.

These are the kinds of considerations that an MDA approach can address, at least in part. Thinking about the balance of mechanics and dynamics as a critic explains aspects of how and why the final aesthetics signify as they do. But more of the picture comes into focus questions of transmedial efficiency inflect that MDA framework. In the case of the Gotham Light & Power building, the player cannot occupy the space because it's *not* a space—it's a void. There was nothing coded there for *Arkham City*, so why would they code something there for *Arkham Origins*—especially considering the time constraints under which the game was developed? The cheapest, most expedient route to take here is to paint a giant fenced building over what at the code level is a wall, stretching from the bedrock of the gameworld to its roof.

Topologically speaking, what results is a giant roadblock that Batman must go *around*—he can't glide over it or grapple to its top and run across it, because it's not even a space. This draws attention to the game's history as a commodity as well as its artificial structure, and how

---

<sup>408</sup> Steve Walton, "Assassin's Creed Origins: How Heavy Is It on Your CPU?," *TechSpot*, November 15, 2017, <https://www.techspot.com/article/1525-assassins-creed-origins-cpu-test/>.

that structure then disciplines play movement. This not only renders the game's commodified nature visible, but also reminds us that "space" in games is largely illusory.

Does the Gotham Light & Power building then become a non-place, or a non-*space*—an area that you literally can't get to? Either way, the anachronism is explained not on the mode level of narrative structure, but as a business decision. Ultimately, these decisions are not based on verisimilitude or game logic. They are practical decisions based on financial considerations and/or long-term strategies. This fact obvious on its face, and yet frequently it gets obscured in the discourses of marketing or consumption. The Light & Power voidspace is a cheap (and therefore profitable) reworking. Sometimes, the attempt to reinscribe over a past version only makes that version easier to detect. While the rhetoric around these games focuses on their authenticity and ability to enthrall the player with realism, cost-effectiveness for the producers will trump any other consideration, nearly every time.

#### **4.5 Graffiti and Virtual Geography**

There is a final aspect to examine in the assemblage Gotham of *Arkham Origins*: the real-world graffiti of Montreal imported into the gameworld. In articulating the gritty look of Gotham City, WB Games Montréal opted to add street art to the game taken from photos of Montreal rather than fabricate wholly new imagery to adorn Gotham's brick walls. In particular, the studio apparently sent out photographers to collect pictures of tags and murals produced by prolific street artists Sake, Sino, and Omen. All three artists are well known to any observant citizen of Montreal: Omen paints large, ghostly faces in buildings all around the city's Plateau neighbourhood; Sino's tags can be found in the Prefontaine/Frontenac area; and Sake's bombs across the St Henri and Little Burgundy neighbourhoods can be found on commercial blocks and

emblazoned across industrial buildings—many of the larger ones visible from the multi-level highways that go into, through, and past the city of Montreal.

The artists may only be notable for interested residents of Montreal, but any player of *Origins* is forced to notice their work on the walls of Gotham, because WB Games Montréal replicated the pieces they used from each artist across the gameworld—unlike real graffiti pieces, each of which is one of a kind, street art in *Arkham Origins* is digitally reproduced. Furthermore, closer inspection and some delicate camerawork reveal that the graffiti is not actually affixed to the wall—it floats just off the surface (yet another palpable node). This exposes the nature of the images as photographs transplanted into the environment—as does one particular repeating Sake piece with a piece of shrubbery in front of it (*fig. 11*).



**Figure 11:** an example of a Sake tag in *Arkham Origins* (left), and the real-world tag found in Côte Saint-Luc in Montreal. Note the shrubbery in both images. Image composite courtesy of Chris Laviolette, original images sourced from IGN and MTLGraff.com.

The inclusion of this shrubbery would seem to indicate that this particular image was actually sourced from a publicly available local graffiti blog rather than photographed by WB Games Montréal employees.<sup>409</sup> This shrubbery raises questions about the provenance of these graffiti images and the legitimacy of their inclusion in the game. Though some rumours exist that

<sup>409</sup> Chris Laviolette, “Montreal Into Gotham: Photographic Evidence of WB Games Montréal Using Real-Life Local Graffiti Tags in the Backgrounds of *Batman: Arkham Origins*,” *Noproblo*, accessed June 27, 2018, <http://noproblo.dayjo.org/ArkhamOriginsGraff/>.

the artists gave permission for their work to be used in the game and that they were compensated by WB Games Montréal,<sup>410</sup> I could find no confirmation of this claim, nor any trace of the artists listed in *Arkham Origins*' 20-minute final credits sequence (I should note, of course, the possibility that the artists are indeed listed in the credits under their real names, but research turned up nothing).

Graffiti occupies as liminal a space in our culture as many of the surfaces upon which artists inscribe it: while the mores of neoliberalism and dogmas of government hold that graffiti is an aspect of the “Broken Window Theory”—where unaddressed vandalism leads to further degradation of a given urban area<sup>411</sup>—tags are expressions of individuality akin to signatures: powerful because they are unique, but useful because they are iterable. Graffiti is often framed as harming a community, but it’s also a carve-out of space in the public square by community members. Art educator Susan Stewart has described graffiti in obverse terms, saying that it “borrows from the repetitions of advertising and commercial culture” to inscribe the “stubborn ghost of individuality and intention in the mass culture, the ironic re-statement of the artist as brand name.”<sup>412</sup> Cultural studies scholar Julian Stallabrass’ develops this further in *Gargantua*, stating that in graffiti, “there is no distinction between the advertisement and what is advertised.”<sup>413</sup>

But this is not so when the graffiti is commodified to sell something else: media critic Vanessa Del Carpio points towards branding campaigns where the artists are ignored or marginalized while the art itself is used to promote images of hipness in media and marketing—

---

<sup>410</sup> Ibid.

<sup>411</sup> Kees Keizer, Siegwart Lindenberg, and Linda Steg, “The Spreading of Disorder,” *Science* 322, no. 5908 (December 12, 2008): 1681–85, <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1161405>, 1681.

<sup>412</sup> Susan Stewart, “Ceci Tuera Cela: Graffiti as Crime and Art,” in *Life after Postmodernism*, ed. John Fekete (London: Macmillan Education UK, 1988), 161–80, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-19097-3\\_7](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-19097-3_7).

<sup>413</sup> Julian Stallabrass, *Gargantua: Manufactured Mass Culture* (London: Verso, 1996).

effectively imbuing graffiti with cultural cachet that's free for companies and media productions to use.<sup>414</sup> While real graffiti is meant to serve as a sign of cultural authenticity, in the case of Gotham City, the digital reinscriptions of the same graffiti pieces repeating over and over again is a kind of tell of *inauthenticity*, and the commodification of the pieces to ostensibly authenticate the griminess of Gotham also gestures more towards the Broken Window Theory than the stubborn ghost of individuality.

So it could be here that the production processes of videogames are echoing the realities of urbanization and its use in commercial culture. Even if the artists were indeed compensated for the use of their pieces, a side-by-side comparison supports blogger Chris Laviolette's suggestion that the image of the bomb with the shrubbery was likely sourced from photographer Kris Murray.<sup>415</sup> One wonders how or if Murray was consulted in this process as well. Again, no publicly visible documentation of this aspect of the game seems to exist, leaving room only for speculation. But the evidence made available through these processes of decoding indicates that the graffiti was incorporated hastily and at a late hour in order to cheaply and quickly imbue Gotham with an aura of gritty realness. This graffiti serves as a model for the player to interpret the world outside the game, consequently cognitively mapping postmodernity for the player.<sup>416</sup>

Regardless of how the images came to be used in the gameworld, incorporating culturally specific features into a fictional environment in this way creates what Michael Batty calls "virtual geography," the combination of real geographical features and invented fictional elements into the algorithmic systems of the computer.<sup>417</sup> Virtual geography is the realization of what urban geography theorist Edward Soja refers to as thirdspace. Soja's postmodern view of

---

<sup>414</sup> Vanessa Del Carpio, "Cannibalizing Couture: Fashion Meets the Politics of Stolen Street Art" (Conference presentation, March 14, 2015).

<sup>415</sup> Laviolette, "Montreal Into Gotham."

<sup>416</sup> Arnott, "Arkham Epic," 11.

<sup>417</sup> Batty, "Virtual Geography," 338.

the urban landscape includes a triad composed of firstspace (real spaces), secondspace (imagined spaces), and thirdspace (real-and-imagined spaces).<sup>418</sup>

In defining virtual geography as a digitized mix of representational references and generated features, Batty takes the concept of thirdspace and folds it back in on itself, approaching from the digital rather than the physical. When I wrote about situating Gotham in live-action screen media by using shooting locations in the last chapter, I was also referring to a form of virtual geography. Though real locations and built physical sets arguably make up a film like *The Dark Knight*, the contemporary use of digital compositing and green screen renders it a form of virtual geography once released to the public. Some audiences will see Chicago with added elements, creating thirdspace. But an establishing shot of the Gotham City skyline, for example, creates a stretching landscape of real and (digitally) constructed buildings on the same horizon line, making a form of virtual geography.

In *Arkham Origins*, this virtual geography situates Gotham in part because of the graffiti's site specificity. The works of Omen, Sino, and Sake are more or less exclusive to Montreal (and certainly exclusive to Montreal in the numbers seen in the game). When combined with the happy coincidence that Montreal, like New York City and Gotham, is an island located on the Eastern Seaboard of North America, this graffiti leaves room to infer that Gotham *is* Montreal in analogy, which in turn leads one to wonder what this says about corruption and danger in Quebec's most populous city. The imbrication of multiple sources and texts in creating an assemblage constructs an unintentional virtual geography for certain players and consequently leaves aporias for unintended decoding—while the vast majority of *Arkham Origins* players

---

<sup>418</sup> Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishing, 1996).

lacked the necessary context, gamers in Montreal might have a difficult time *not* decoding this confluence of elements and questioning the allegory.

But perhaps this is a stretch. Certainly, Gotham City is not Montreal when broader factors are taken into account in examining *Arkham Origins*. What it *does* suggest though is that the regional and cultural specificity is of interest to *some* as they work on the level of content. This is one more way that these assemblages extend their tentacles outward, if only accidentally. When constructing this virtual city, any and all assets the developers can get their hands on are useful, including replications of graffiti. But despite the fact that it's a form of signature (and consequently supposed to be a form of authenticity), here it has no author attached to it. Like my recognition of a Chicago street corner as the setting of key action in *The Dark Knight*, my knowledge is a plays into the techniques and protocols of transmedia in an ancillary way. Some audiences will even consume some media regardless of content because they enjoy seeing representation of places they love in media. In this way, transmedia as a business model connects laterally to other industries like tourism. Innumerable fans of the *Lord of the Rings* film series have made pilgrimages to New Zealand to take tours of Middle Earth, and some have even capitalized on this to make their livelihoods as part of a "Middle Earth" boutique touring industry.<sup>419</sup>

This all combines with the player's experience of "being" Batman in the game to give off a strong sense of what Manuel Castells calls "real virtuality:" the immersive realistic experience of a virtual environment as mitigated by the same symbolic metaphors and frameworks that we use to experience and navigate the "real" world.<sup>420</sup> Real virtuality is a key component in thinking about the Gotham of *Arkham Origins*: it is a city built up of the same formal and geographical

---

<sup>419</sup> "Middle-Earth & Hobbit Tours & Activities," *newzealand.com*, accessed July 11, 2018, <https://www.newzealand.com/ca/feature/middle-earth-activities-and-tours/>.

<sup>420</sup> Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 372.

modes and content that make up the locations of the real city of New York, the architectural illustrations of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the landmarks of the Batman comics, the aesthetics of the Batman films, the layout of *Arkham City*, and the virtual geography created by mixing them all with recognizably Montreal-specific graffiti. Just as for de Certeau, “walking is to the urban system what the speech act is to language,”<sup>421</sup> in the rhizomatic world of *Arkham Origins*, playing is to the game system what walking is to the urban system: an action of articulation that helps constitute the real virtuality of the Gotham landscape.

And so the virtual city is constructed out of all these cheaply and easily available assets that can then be reclaimed as indexical. In the case of the “blockbuster cities” like Toronto or Vancouver that media scholar Aurora Wallace writes about,<sup>422</sup> the prevalence of media productions can be infused with celebrity culture by local tourism boards as an added draw: come to Vancouver. Maybe you’ll see stars. This is integrated into the discourse of the city as a marketable commodity. Meanwhile, transmedia goes on its way, only potentially taking note of such boutique industries if they become large enough to merit subsumption as new profit centres.

#### **4.6 Transmedia Consistency in Cultivating Recent Depictions of Gotham City**

In the wake of *Arkham City*’s massive success in the videogame industry, the Gotham City of the comics began to emulate the game. This is no surprise in the commodification processes of transmedia strategy and marketing: often, the atmosphere or visuals of one successful incarnation of a narrative will work on others in order to capitalize on the one

---

<sup>421</sup> de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 96.

<sup>422</sup> Aurora Wallace, “When the Set Becomes Permanent: The Spatial Reconfiguration of Hollywood North,” in *Taking Place: Location and the Moving Image*, ed. John David Rhodes and Elena Gorfinkel (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).



medium's text by emphatically synergizing across others. For example, after the successful 2000 release of Fox's *X-Men*, the X-Men characters of the comics all received makeovers in black leather,<sup>423 424</sup> though the filmmakers of *X-Men* at least in part outfitted the characters in such a way because the traditional blue and yellow spandex of the comic book versions would have shown up terribly on the film stocks they were using.<sup>425</sup> The decision for the movie was due to the difficulty of contrasting bright and dark primary colours on film, while the production processes of comics continued to work better with high contrast (a telling moment of the affordances of a medium impacting on the overall legacy of an entire franchise), but this did nothing to stop publisher Marvel Comics from capitalizing on the popularity of the Fox film and trading one form of fetishism for another (at least until these kitsch aspects of comics had achieved a widely accepted camp use value and further redoubled back on consumers as nostalgia<sup>426</sup> and new camera technologies caught up—in recent *X-Men* films, the bright primary colours are back).

For Batman, these connections are often just as obvious. The villainous antihero Harley Quinn is perhaps the best example of this. A character created to be the Joker's sidekick for *Batman: The Animated Series*, Quinn was popular enough that she was retconned into the main DC continuity in 1999 (seven years after her first appearance). Even more blatantly, after the

---

<sup>423</sup> Fenton Coulthurst, "The X-Men Franchise: Origins," *Pop Verse* (blog), June 24, 2016, <http://pop-verse.com/2016/06/24/the-x-men-franchise-origins/>.

<sup>424</sup> Grant Morrison and Frank Quitely's popular run on *New X-Men* began in 2001, a year after the film's release. Additionally, in 2001 Mark Millar and Adam Kubert launched a leather-clad mutant team in *Ultimate X-Men* as part of Marvel's Ultimate Imprint in which many of their IPs were re-envisioned with fresh continuity for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, offering a clean jumping-on point for new fans drawn in by Fox's *X-Men* and Sony's *Spider-Man* (2002) without leaving loyal preexisting fans feeling as if they were being tossed overboard.

<sup>425</sup> It's also worth noting here that the reason the X-Men in the comics were originally outfitted in blue and yellow in the first place is tied to material specificity of the medium of comics. In superhero comics, heroes are frequently outfitted in primary colours such as blue and yellow, while villains are differentiated by dressing in secondary colours such as green and purple. While this creates a pleasing contrast, the real reason for these bright primary and secondary colour combinations is the affordances of print technology at the time of their creation.

<sup>426</sup> Ross, *No Respect*, 144-145.

success of *Arkham Asylum*, her entire look in comics (and subsequently film) was altered to match the sexualized Harley of the game.<sup>427 428</sup>

In the case of Gotham City and the popularity of the *Arkham* games, however, the transmedia relationship has been more nuanced. Following the success of *Arkham City*, the comics began to emulate the geography of the game, but they also worked upon the geography of the next instalment in the game series. Case in point: in *Arkham City*, the Penguin (one of the first major boss fights) holds villainous court in a stronghold attached to the Gotham Museum of Natural History called the Iceberg Lounge. Not long after the release of the game, Bat-family comic books began leaning into the same trope and the club began appearing quite frequently, only with the club rechristened the Iceberg Casino and relocated offshore, perhaps to better reflect the “Iceberg” name and accentuate the arctic architectural features of the business. In *Arkham Origins*, the Iceberg Casino is gone, but Penguin’s new hangout has become the Final Offer, a decommissioned ocean liner moored just offshore and featuring a casino.

There seems to be little explanation for the change in venue besides the tendency in transmedia to brand each iteration differently enough to emit the aura of something new but similar; something adapted or reimagined rather than translated or copied. This pattern established, one wonders if the Penguin is soon to set sail in the comics, eschewing a static establishment for one that can move from port to port (though the Final Offer is absent from *Arkham Knight*, enemy Deathstroke mentions it while reminiscing about the fight he had with

---

<sup>427</sup> Kate Ellen Roddy, “Masochist or Machiavel? Reading Harley Quinn in Canon and Fanon,” *Transformative Works and Cultures* 8 (October 4, 2010), <https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2011.0259>.

<sup>428</sup> It should be acknowledged that *Arkham Asylum* came out the year after the 2008 publication of *Joker*, a non-canonical story by Brian Azzarello and Lee Bermejo in which Harley Quinn is not only sexualized but a sex worker performing as a dancer at a strip club. However, it is unlikely that the two products, released so closely in time together, were actively taking cues from one another. Azzarello and Bermejo’s book also features a Joker with scarred cheeks, and was released months after Heath Ledger portrayed the character in *The Dark Knight*—it’s unlikely that the production cycles of the three media forms were explicitly influenced by each other on such a timeline. However, we can observe that the sexualization of Quinn in DC canonical continuity and other media began after the success of *Arkham Asylum*.

Batman there in *Arkham Origins*). In either case, the Penguin of *Arkham Origins* is geographically located in the same region of Gotham as the Penguin of the current comics: just offshore on the eastern side of the city.

More noticeably, a 2012 storyline in the Bat-family title *Nightwing* features a version of Amusement Mile in which the artist visualized it similarly to its depiction in *Arkham City*; meanwhile, the storyline itself focuses on the revitalization of various areas and landmarks seen in the game.<sup>429</sup> The storyline appeared between *Arkham City* and *Arkham Origins*; as if in response to this story, the region in *Origins* appears more prosperous and cleaner. Meanwhile, in *Arkham Knight*, Amusement Mile is absent, but a Ferris wheel can be found at the Newton Fairgrounds—an area that looks a lot like the boardwalk-style Amusement Mile seen in the comics. At this point, so many points in the Gotham City assemblage light up at once, it's difficult to determine their sequence.

There's a final metaphysical aspect to the Gotham City of *Arkham Origins*. Because it serves as a prequel to both *Arkham Asylum* and *Arkham City*, the Gotham of *Origins* is not only assembled from the media history of the Batman narratives that have come before it (as well as all the other cultural influences in question), but also imbued with a sense of its own bleak future, haunted by what has yet to happen in the game franchise's diegesis. For the initiate to the *Batman* world, the game serves as an effective entry point into Gotham and its colourful populace; for the experienced Bat-fan, it not only effectively ties into other media in the Batman universe, but also reflects a depressing worldview in which Batman is fighting a losing battle against crime. For the player who has already finished *Arkham City*, playing *Origins* may seem a rather cynical activity. Strive and struggle as she may to save Gotham in this story, the familiar architecture, geography, and circulation of enemies in the games imply that Batman is doomed to

---

<sup>429</sup> Cf. Kyle Higgins, Eddy Barrows, and Geraldo Borges, *Nightwing* #10 (New York: DC Comics, 2012), 2-12.

fight the same battles in the same locations over and over again in his own narrative timeline, with the only change being decay.

#### 4.7 **Exploding the Map**

In June 2015, the *Arkham* series ostensibly concluded with *Arkham Knight*. I say “ostensibly” because Rocksteady broke this promise just over a year later with the release of *Batman: Arkham VR*,<sup>430</sup> though the virtual reality game only takes a few hours to complete and apparently fits into the *Arkham* franchise canon as a sort of extended dream sequence taking place between *Arkham City* and *Arkham Knight* (dream sequences figure into all the *Arkham* games). Regardless, in terms of narrative, no sequels have been announced for the franchise as of this writing. So for this fourth and “final” instalment, development duties were returned to Rocksteady and a number of new gameplay mechanics were on offer. Chief among the additions was the introduction of the Batmobile as a useable vehicle. On this front, Rocksteady opted to remove the fast-travel system utilized by WB Games Montréal in developing *Origins*, so as to make the player’s use of the Batmobile both more appealing and more necessary.

This is because, as far as spaces go, the Gotham of *Arkham Knight* is *vast*. This world is roughly five times the size of *Arkham City*,<sup>431</sup> making it more than double the size of the *Arkham Origins* Gotham. The city is three islands once again, like in Brown’s map—though instead of being North/Central/South, they triangulate around a small Liberty Island-style monument called “Lady Gotham” (*fig. 12*).

---

<sup>430</sup> Sefton Hill and Adam Doherty, *Batman: Arkham VR*, Playstation 4 (London: Rocksteady Studios, 2016).

<sup>431</sup> Luke Karmali, “Why *Batman: Arkham Knight*’s Gotham is 5 Times Larger than *Arkham City*,” *IGN*, September 30, 2014, accessed June 29, 2015, <http://ca.ign.com/articles/2014/09/30/why-batman-arkham-knights-gotham-is-5-times-larger-than-arkham-city><http://ca.ign.com/articles/2014/09/30/why-batman-arkham-knights-gotham-is-5-times-larger-than-arkham-city>.



**Figure 12:** a side-by-side comparison the *Arkham City* map (left) and the *Arkham Knight* map, roughly to scale.

However, the developers still make use of the Batmobile to cultivate rewards. In *Arkham Knight*, fast-travel is gone, but Gazzard’s rewards of exploration are still present. In order to drop the bridges and give the Batmobile access to another island (goals that connect to mastery and rewards of time), the player must first overcome specific challenges. The game hews somewhat closer to the metaphor of the real-world city than its predecessor, but still mitigates narrative power fantasies with ludic challenges.

In any event, virtually no resemblance to the layout of places in either *City* or *Origins* is evident: in this version of Gotham, Ace Chemicals is located offshore northwest of town (rather than centrally), the GCPD headquarters has shifted closer to the centre of town, and Wonder Tower is nowhere to be found. Even Amusement Mile has disappeared from the map as a named place, though as already mentioned, the Ferris wheel can still be found on the lonely Newton Fairgrounds boardwalk (another Ferris wheel appears in the *Arkham Knight* Batgirl DLC “A

Matter of Family”). Content-wise, all the rhizomatic techniques remain: landmarks speak to the deep fictional history of Gotham City; the three islands making up the municipality are callbacks to comics content with names like Miagani Island and Bleake Island (named for a bat-worshipping Native American Gotham tribe<sup>432</sup> and a prominent figure in Gotham’s history, respectively); and liberal use is made of the same giant statues and neon signage seen in the other *Arkham* games and many of the other nodes in the network of its heritage. For such a large map, it is also quite dense, rife with allusions to relevant Bat-media.

The *Arkham* franchise has deployed a number of taglines in its marketing over the years: *Arkham Asylum* went with “Welcome to the madhouse;”<sup>433</sup> *Arkham City* used “Arkham has moved;”<sup>434</sup> and *Arkham Origins* foreshadowed its own major plot twist with the line “Your enemies will define you...”<sup>435</sup> For *Arkham Knight* and *Arkham VR*, plot seemed to be less important in marketing than the full immersive experience of inhabiting an icon: both games used the tagline “Be the Batman”<sup>436</sup> (*Arkham VR*’s announcement trailer features numerous fans who tried the game at San Diego Comic-Con 2016 reciting the line<sup>437</sup>).

If it took until recently for WBIE to attempt so bold a claim, what then does “being the Batman” entail? As gameplay in all four central instalments primarily present third-person over-

---

<sup>432</sup> Jim Starlin et al., *Batman: The Cult* (New York: DC Comics, 1988).

<sup>433</sup> “Batman: Arkham Asylum (Video Game 2009) - Taglines,” *IMDB*, accessed July 11, 2018, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1282022/taglines>.

<sup>434</sup> “Batman: Arkham City (Video Game 2011) - Taglines,” *IMDB*, accessed July 11, 2018, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1568322/taglines>.

<sup>435</sup> “Batman: Arkham Origins (Video Game 2013) - Taglines,” *IMDB*, accessed July 11, 2018, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt2842418/taglines>.

<sup>436</sup> Again, it’s important to note that there’s no such thing as “being the Batman:” with mutable icons, there’s no single authentic expression. However, as a marketing tool, the idea that different constituencies of fans view their preferred expressions as authentic is helpful insofar as it builds an extremely personal form of brand loyalty. For fans, the “one true Batman” narrative can create toxic hierarchies based around age faults and gender lines. For rights holders, creating different stories allows them to pretend to agnosticism, as if they have no control over how their property is expressed or which version speaks louder than others. However, we are consistently discovering that one of the major protocols of transmedia is to signal authenticity to its subjects, always claiming truth and fidelity regardless of the extremity of the departure.

<sup>437</sup> Batman Arkham, *Official Batman: Arkham VR Trailer - “Wear the Cowl,”* YouTube Clip (YouTube, 2016), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eS4g0py16N8>.

the-shoulder perspective, it seems that inhabiting the Caped Crusader's skin must be tied into abilities and movement—a consideration that returns us to the question of mastery and how the games attempt to encourage the player to feel she has mastered the city without abstracting it. In *Asylum*, it seems to be enough that as Batman, you can grapple and glide—mechanics rarely offered as staple components of most open-world games. In *City*, grappling and gliding isn't enough to simulate mastery over the environment or maintain player attention. What good is soaring through the air if it's no faster than running?

As mentioned earlier, to compensate for the increased size of the map, the developers were forced to add a “grapnel boost” feature. By tapping and holding the run button while grappling, Batman will launch up into the air again, rather than perch on the grappled surface. This boost increases the glide speed, can be coupled with new combo attacks, and allows Batman to traverse great distances in a shorter amount of time. This specific feature was hailed as a brilliant way to address the size of the map by fans.<sup>438</sup> Grapnel boost not only makes getting across the city quicker—it also allows for an aerial tour of urban space. Though constantly moving when airborne, players can sweep the camera around and marvel at the detail of Arkham City. Beyond this, a jolt of power accompanies the performance of grapnel boost through visual, aural, and haptic feedback: the camera perspective rushes by, an intense zipping sound effect is audible, and the controller vibrates. The resulting sensation is a rush for the player, heightening the immersive experience and adding to the sense of dynamism players are meant to feel as Batman.

In *Origins*, the player begins the game with grapnel boost already incorporated, but even this mechanic can't save the player from the immensity of the map. This is partly a design issue

---

<sup>438</sup> “Grapnel Boost - Batman: Arkham City,” *Giant Bomb*, accessed June 27, 2018, <https://www.giantbomb.com/batman-arkham-city/3030-29443/forums/grapnel-boost-520348/>.

of the same class as the massive voidspace dead zone mentioned earlier. The Gotham City of this game is bifurcated by the Gotham Pioneers Bridge, and the territories on either half of the bridge are each approximately the size of Arkham City. Using grapnel boost and glide to travel from one side of either island to the other on the *Origins* map would be adequate to maintain player interest, but travelling from one *island* to the other in this way would be tedious. Additionally, a lack of launchpoints on the water between the two islands means that the bridge is really the only reliable and practical route for crossing.

This means that a player wanting to go from the Northwest corner of Gotham to the Southwest corner (Amusement Mile to the Diamond district) must first travel to the centre of the map in order to cross the bridge. If an urban planner could see this situation, he or she would call it impractical at best. A city built on two islands with only one bridge connecting them forms an obvious chokepoint. Of course, WB Games Montréal had limited time to build its game and no need to concern the designers with traffic congestion issues, but this doesn't mean they didn't see a clear issue with the flow of gameplay. In order to address this, they incorporated the fast-travel mechanic already discussed. This further removes the Gotham City of the game from an allegorical relationship to a real-world city, and demonstrates the coded nature of a videogame city and the commodified nature of a transmedia city. The operative metaphor of fast-travel is digital, not material.

In *Arkham Knight*, as fast-travel disappears in favour of the Batmobile, an interesting divide between understanding and inhabiting the world and understanding and mastering the map becomes apparent. In all the Rocksteady-produced *Arkham* games, one can understand the map, but traversal is reduced to a matter of movement: if you want to go from any point on the map to any other, your only option is to leave the map and either forge your own path to the waypoint on your compass or follow the lights down the most efficient path the game has determined for you.



This is “being” the Batman, however boring or frustrating that may sometimes be. The developers have done their best to offer the player mastery over the world, but the player has to leave the map and inhabit the world to do so.

In *Origins*, however, immersive experience is abandoned to a certain extent. Instead of mastering the world, the player is offered the opportunity to master the *map*. In practice, a certain mastery of the world is necessary in order to master the map, as the game does require the player to complete various challenges in order to unlock fast-travel points. But maintaining a consistent understanding of the world is unnecessary once fast-travel points are unlocked, and fast-travel itself is essentially extra-diegetic. As a mechanic, fast-travel requires cognitive removal from the game, however momentary that removal may be. Even though the feature is justified within the story as the batwing in *Origins*, the player loses control of Batman in order to use it, choosing the destination but dropping out of gameplay for the navigation *and* the tour. In this way, fast-travel automates videogame traversal in a way that trades knowledge of the ground and environment for knowledge of the map—a lived knowledge versus a removed one.

#### 4.8 **Falling Through the World**

Regardless of this trade-off, various rhizomatic qualities remain and impact the evolution of traversal and circulation through the games. In *Origins*, the vague familiarity and sense of a built-up world foregrounds novel gameplay experiences for the user. In *Arkham Knight*, the previously claustrophobic and compact canyon-like streets of the environment have widened to accommodate the handling of the Batmobile, while the buildings have grown in height to allow

for a wider range of movement while gliding, as well as the car's "eject into glide" mechanic.<sup>439</sup> In order to navigate such a vast environment using a mix of air, foot, and vehicular travel, much of the game makes use of flickering direction arrows to light the Dark Knight's path to his next destination. Indeed, if circulation in *Origins* relied on both the map and the tour to move the player elegantly through Gotham, then *Knight* transforms that into the Guided Tour, an innovation tied closely to the locative media of the smartphone age. Seeing the trail laid out in front of you is akin to the angled view of mobile map directions. But what do these navigational innovations tell us about boundedness of the gameworld and how that gameworld connects back to our lived experiences?

As de Certeau delineates between the map and the tour in his writing on spaces, he takes care to stipulate that while walking is a way of experiencing the world, it also constitutes a type of forgetting:

It is true that the operations of walking on can be traced on city maps in such a way as to transcribe their paths (here well-trodden, there very faint) and their trajectories (going this way and not that). But these thick or thin curves only refer, like words, to the absence of what has passed by. Surveys of routes miss what was: the act itself of passing by. [...] The trace left behind is the substitute for the practice. It exhibits the (voracious) property that the geographical system has of being able to transform action into legibility, but in doing so it causes a way of being in the world to be forgotten.<sup>440</sup>

---

<sup>439</sup> Jeff Cork, "The Keys to the Batmobile—Designing Batman's Iconic Vehicle," *Game Informer*, March 7, 2014, accessed October 6, 2016, <http://www.gameinformer.com/b/features/archive/2014/03/07/the-keys-to-the-batmobile-designing-batman-s-iconic-vehicle.aspx>.

<sup>440</sup> de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 97.

Both the Situationists and the Psychogeographers adapt this thinking to discuss the taboo and consequent power of forbidden forms of exploration as the *dérive*.<sup>441</sup> The *dérive* is meant to be a form of free exploration that affords new, potentially subversive ways of seeing. Walkers ignore regulations and formulate their own ways of circulating through the city, purposely avoiding convention. In *Arkham Knight*, all exploration is permitted, and the richly textured topography of Gotham City is on full display between the power of the Batmobile to race from one end of the map to the other and the rush of grapnel boost and gliding. But how does one learn forbidden knowledge in a space where the edges of the world are as binding as any wall?

In *Arkham* games, there is no clear edge of the map, but a procedural threshold exists nonetheless. To begin with, Gotham is an island.<sup>442</sup> As previously discussed, other media productions have frequently made use of the geographic and tactical isolation of an island to accentuate tension in stories. But in the *Arkham* games, limiting the world is less benefit than necessity—in interactive media, environments usually *need* to be closed so at some point the work for the developers can be finished (MMORPGs and *Minecraft* notwithstanding). It's certainly advantageous here for the developers that Gotham is an island. But the developers of all the *Arkham* games have placed other tantalising elements of the Batman world in the distance, including Wayne Manor and sister city Blüdhaven (Nightwing's adoptive home). Additionally, the edge of the map in several of the games include vague details of what's across a sunken bridge or on the coast of the mainland, gesturing again to the fictional world outside the game.

---

<sup>441</sup> Debord, "Theory of the *Dérive*."

<sup>442</sup> As an island, Gotham City draws on the rich literary tradition of the Robinsonade, a genre where islands represent the systems and tensions of the broader world as a device. The island is the world in miniature, and in the Robinsonade the argument this world in miniature makes is economic. *Robinson Crusoe* is a novel about political economy; *The Tempest* is a play about colonialism. Island narratives frequently come back to explicit themes of power relationships and dominance over geographical territory. In this sense, Gotham as an island is quite apt within the ideologies of transmedia.

However, attempting to leave the island proves challenging. In designing the open-world environments of the *Arkham* games, the various developers saw an obvious need to cushion the shoreline with some amount of water. In these games, any time Batman falls into the water, he's seen grappling his way out, landing back on the shore the way he came. But Batman's mastery over the environment and ability to glide lures players to launchpoints from which they can glide for some distance away from the island. So the franchise has frequently used reasonable, narrative explanations to justify the boundedness of the world. The cushion of water can only extend so far before the painted-on walls of the environment are crashed into (much the way Jim Carrey crashes his sailboat into a sky-blue matte set dressing at the climax of *The Truman Show*)—the walls just happen to be procedural rather than visual.

Further, the developers have carefully built in mechanics to prevent the player from approaching those walls through processes of recapture.<sup>443</sup> In *Arkham Asylum*, Batman can't work up enough of a head of steam to glide far off the edge of the island, splashing into the muddy waters just offshore (triggering a brief cinematic of the hero climbing back onto the nearest dock). In *Arkham City*, the player can launch off of tall structures on the shoreline and glide some distance before the game engine takes over and simply turns Batman around. In the other two instalments, a diegetic reasoning is incorporated into recapture: in *Arkham Origins*, once the player has glided far offshore, the fierce winds of the snowstorm appear to blow Batman back; and in *Arkham Knight*, the player is forcibly turned back in the same way, but Batman mutters to himself one of a number of lines about Gotham or his allies still needing his help. Regardless of the reasoning or distance, recapture effectively means there's no recourse for leaving the island in any of the games, and no way to reveal how far the boundaries of the

---

<sup>443</sup> Terry Harpold, "Screw the Grue: Mediality, Metalepsis, Recapture," *Game Studies: The International Journal of Computer Games Research* 7, no. 1 (August 2007), <http://gamestudies.org/0701/articles/harpold>.

gameworld extend—at least, not through regular play. In all cases, even attempting to test these limits results in a momentary loss of control and immersion similar to the fast-travel system in *Origins*. Real and invisible boundaries call us back to Schweizer’s writing on videogame cities:

The constitution of the videogame city involves properties specific to the medium. Boundaries can be established through level geometry and are made permeable through the code that establishes them. Some boundaries are physical: impenetrable walls, heights too tall to reach. Others are the result of mechanical limitations. In one *Vice City* mission the player is supposed to enter a golf course to track down and kill a crooked land developer. [...] In this example, we can see two kinds of boundaries: a physical perimeter around the golf course intended to restrict the player’s body and an algorithm tied to a spatial threshold intended to restrict the extensions of the player’s body in the form of guns that would make the mission easier to accomplish. Boundaries in videogames are at once physical and virtual: they are effectively “real” from the vantage point of the player embodied as a something that can act in the space, and virtual in that they only exist because of programming code that prevents them from being crossed.<sup>444</sup>

Schweizer’s thinking here reminds us of the voidspace of the Light & Power Building, bringing us full circle to the problematic nature of the city metaphor in videogames. All of the videogame city is just topological surface, and not all of its boundaries are visible. The efficiencies of transmedia production logics explain the logical gaps in representation.

Sometimes, however, the invisible boundaries of the map are rendered visible by errors. In all the games in the franchise except *Arkham Asylum*, there are glitches that allow the player

---

<sup>444</sup> Schweizer, “Videogame Cities in Motion,” 74.

to make Batman literally fall through the world. Because these glitches are well-hidden, it's reasonable to assume they are genuine oversights rather than Easter eggs. Regardless of how the player accesses, stumbles into, or seeks them out, the effect of all three is eerie: as Batman falls into a seemingly eternal abyss, the player can sweep the camera view upward and see the entirety of the map at once, in a kind of rapidly receding reverse-aerial perspective. (*fig. 13*) As Gotham becomes more and more distant, lived knowledge and learned knowledge blur into each other as the map and the tour become one. The entirety of the world actually can be experienced—the player just needs to break the game in order to do so.



**Figure 13:** Batman falls through the world in *Arkham Knight*.

However, glitching Gotham does not necessarily confer any real power upon the player. Though part of the Situationist concept of the *dérive* is to find new pathways through the city in order to achieve emotional disorientation, it's hard to characterize falling through the world in the *Arkham* games as holding the potential to lead to such insights. Exploring a videogameworld does not hold the same kind of revolutionary promise, because without the appropriate technical

acumen, it's highly unlikely that the player can affect the world outside of her own experience of it. That is to say, when you purchase a videogame and break it, you've only broken it for yourself. You still purchased the product, and whether or not you consume it in the prescribed fashion, no consumption escapes the grasps of capitalism. Similarly, when you fall through the world, you haven't escaped the boundaries of the game either. You *have* discovered that the world extends *down* as well as from side-to-side and up. But after what may seem like a very extended period of plunging descent, Batman dies and the game returns the player right back to her last save point.

When de Certeau describes a way of forgetting, he also refers to choosing which paths to take, even sometimes ignoring those that are usually obligatory, thus making a selection, and in so doing obliterating certain realities: the walker “condemns certain places to inertia or disappearance and composes with others spatial ‘turns of phrase’ that are ‘rare,’ ‘accidental’ or illegitimate.”<sup>445</sup> But this is another way that the videogame city is planned unlike the physical city: in order to unlock some areas of the game city, you may have to travel to entirely other unrelated areas first. This is because the videogame city is a narrative engine as well, mapped to challenges that may only connect to access of certain areas because they conform to a linear progression in the game story. That is to say, even an open world game isn't totally open. Some geographic areas only become accessible by overcoming obstacles on the other side of the world. What de Certeau describes can be easily threaded into the Situationist ideas of *flânerie*, the *dérive*, and psychogeography, and this demonstrates once again the impossibility of subversive play in the use of game space: a psychogeographer can open up new ways of seeing through trespassing, but the player can't trespass, because an invisible wall of code and mechanics

---

<sup>445</sup> de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 99.

*demands* that the player first move in the most prescribed fashion of all—towards the main mission waypoint highlighted on the HUD and earmarked on the map.

It's this inability to escape the world—only to discover areas of it where you lose your sense of control—that's perhaps most telling about the boundedness of videogame worlds and the allegory they make about our own. There is no “outside” of the map. This is increasingly an eerie echo of our own world, where GPS and smartphone technologies have instilled in us a surveillance paranoia. Surveillance anxieties figure into all of the *Arkham* games, as a significant portion of gameplay involves “predator” encounters, where Batman uses his detective vision to see through walls, count enemies, and avoid detection, as he quietly clears rooms of opponents. Mechanics like this, meeting with plot points like the sonar cell phone surveillance Batman employs in *The Dark Knight*, seem to propose that what we want is not so much freedom from the culture of the panopticon as to be the guard sitting in the central tower. The power fantasy at work here is one where surveillance is flipped on its ear to promote the illusion of mastery—the same way that traversal works in the games.

If we look to the way this fantasy is expressed in other media, it becomes more about spectatorship than control. For example, in *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice*,<sup>446</sup> maps are used to totalize the space and situate the relationships of iconic bodies to one another. In the climax of the film, military personnel monitor the battle between Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman, and Doomsday from a secure bunker, offering context allowing the viewer to make sense of the scale of the battle. This map, briefly seen in just a few shots, concretizes the geographical relationship between Metropolis and Gotham, depicting them as sitting across a bay from one another, with a small uninhabited island in between. Both cities extend beyond the bounds of the map on screen, so it's undeterminable whether either is part of the mainland. It's a

---

<sup>446</sup> Snyder, *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice*.



“blink and you’ll miss it” kind of moment, but for hardcore fans, it stabilizes the world in which DCEU films take place, and creates expectations of canon and continuity moving forward.

But in interactive media, the passivity of spectatorship is only ever an interruption to a system of play that turns players themselves into transmedia allegories. Luke Arnott observes this in his work on the epic of the *Arkham* series, writing, “The player only exerts total control over the avatar’s environment (if at all) once all tasks and side-missions are exhausted, once every villain is defeated. The end of the game’s narrative thereby coincides with the player’s complete freedom to maneuver throughout the designed gamespace.”<sup>447</sup> This reveals the usefulness of connecting space in games to abilities. In open-world games, the city serves a spatial function connected to mastery. Areas of the map can only be unlocked as the player progresses through the game; symbiotically, total mastery in the game is only achieved when the player fully maps and reveals the world. In the *Arkham* games, this connects to traversal through upgrades: as the player progresses through the narrative, her achievements are rewarded with “Waynetech” points, a currency used to purchase new skills for Batman. Several of these skill points are directly related to subjective command of the gameworld, making the Batmobile go faster, allowing Batman to grapple launch further, or connecting travel to combat.

What we’re talking about is a model of mastery. There’s always a narrative of progress where you begin tactically. You’re only able to access certain areas of the map. This proceeds in much the same way as the initial procedural rhetoric of tutorial levels, where players learn the most basic keystrokes (in *Arkham Origins*, you’re walked through several simpler indoor encounters during which you learn all the moves and powers available to you at that point). Spatially, this broadens out to zones of control. In the first hours of gameplay in *Arkham Knight*, the Batmobile can only traverse one island, and the player must advance further before the

---

<sup>447</sup> Arnott, “Arkham Epic,” 10.

bridges are lowered. If the player tries to glide across to the other two islands, she'll quickly learn that there's little profit in it, as engaging enemies on these islands results in disastrous encounters where the player is totally outclassed and overpowered. The player must broaden her zones of control gradually, in prescribed fashions. She can try to play differently if she wants, but the game will punish her at every turn. If she progresses dutifully, by the end of the game she's become a strategic machine. This is similar to Michael Nitsche's writing on game engagement as based on the player articulating a particular kind of relationship to the gameworld,<sup>448</sup> but here, it's crucial to think in terms of power dynamics.

The idea of zones of control can be broadened out to all of transmedia—some points in the assemblage are basic points of entry, while others call for a comprehensive knowledge of deep continuity and an immersion into fandom. Transmedia turns its content into an allegory for itself, and in this way, sets itself as the highest ideal and asks us to model ourselves and our behavior on its protocols, interpellating audiences after the same allegorical fashion.

#### **4.9 Conclusion**

However pessimistic the view of the game's narrative world may be in light of its place in the franchise, *Arkham Origins* makes Gotham feel all the more powerful just by being a prequel. The geography of the game itself contains content and design drawn from 75 years of Batman media and almost a hundred years of architectural history, different elements and locations serving different purposes for different creative teams and audiences, all of it eager to justify itself as part of the Batman universe. Represented here, in a story taking place during the Caped Crusader's early years, these elements of *Arkham Origins'* Gotham City consolidate the

---

<sup>448</sup> Nitsche, *Video Game Spaces*, 221-222.

suburbs of Batman's media history into a municipality with a shared history that has yet to take place, but can now be mapped in terms of space and circulation. Viewed through this lens, *Arkham Origins* is not just a rhizome, but a blueprint, a sketch for greater adventures to come—even if those adventures are fated to become darker for the Dark Knight.

In terms of narrative, the story of *Arkham Knight* is, in many ways, the fulfillment of the ominous promises made in the previous games: while the game's Gotham may be the brightest and shiniest of the series, the game's status as the series' conclusion means that the developers were free to make this the Caped Crusader's bleakest adventure. In this way, the blueprint laid out in *Arkham Origins* has been realized here, and the churn of transmedia connectivity continues. The level to which these transmedia tactics bleed outward to affect other nodes in the Batman media network can never be fully traced; too little is recorded for posterity and too much waits to be catalogued.

Though I stumbled upon the graffiti in *Arkham Origins* and the methodology that followed, what I effectively found myself doing as I searched for these pieces of real-world graffiti was relative cartography of a virtual geography. I mapped the Gotham of *Origins* in relation to the *Arkham* games that preceded it, a lifetime of accreted geek knowledge, and an awareness of the city I live in. In truth, I couldn't not. I was compelled. Interpellated. This chapter compiles what I learned. Such a mapping further reveals the values at play in networked franchise media, as well as those of player traversal in urban 3D gameworlds.

In many ways, this chapter (indeed, this entire project) has argued against theories of adaptation methodologies based on close reading alone. Both concepts imply a depth model of reading media. But networks don't have depth—the surface ripples and billows like a sheet flapping in the wind, but there's nothing underneath the surface. The depth model is a dated metaphor that implies material uncovering, but fails to account for the rhizomatic structure of

contemporary media production. Looking at the literal expansion of the map in *Arkham Origins* demonstrates how *Arkham Origins* doesn't add a new layer on top of *Arkham City*, but rather broadens the single layer of code and protocol running on the same software engines. It's reminiscent of Schweizer's writing on digital and physical infrastructure in cities: "It was not only the rise of computers that led to conception of the city of networked infrastructure," he says. "Lewis Mumford used the term Invisible City to describe the 'dematerialization' of existing institutions in underground cables, electronic transmissions, and radio waves."<sup>449</sup>

Earlier, Kittler and Griffin make the same basic observation when they note that the city is a medium where "networks between cities overlap upon networks between other cities. Beneath, upon, and above the ground, the overloaded nodes make a mockery of every conflation. Time in the city is a function of transfers, turn-ons and turn-offs."<sup>450</sup> In the same article, Kittler and Griffin also write about the importance of addresses (here, fast-travel points) and the centrality of circulation in the city. Kittler and Griffin's description of the city as medium is quite germane to our discussion of the videogame Gotham as an illusion of a city, when in fact it's a series of algorithmic processes in a larger transmedia network.

In the *Arkham* games—in fact, in all videogame versions of Gotham City—the infrastructure of pipes, plumbing, and electrical currents are all replaced by the electronic signals bouncing around the motherboard of a game console. City infrastructure in Batman games is only representational and symbolic, an environmental function of the urban setting. But ultimately, this is another illusion: the sewer carries no waste; the power plant electrifies no grid. This algorithmic infrastructure takes the place of non-places through load screens, cutscenes, and a number of other disguised software processes. It's interesting to consider the representational

---

<sup>449</sup> Schweizer, "Videogame Cities in Motion," 142.

<sup>450</sup> Kittler and Griffin, "The City Is a Medium," 730.

and experiential parts of the city that the *Arkham* games render invisible, and those they render *more* visible. Those invisible aspects include grocery store lineups, waiting rooms, traffic jams, suburbs, pedestrians. The more visible aspects include tenements, urban blight, sewers, utility plants.

In the next chapter, we will turn away from the question of representational fidelity to reality and look at another aspect of how the techniques of developers of Batman games function in and as transmedial churn, through processes of licensing and the skinning of intellectual properties over identical code.

## 5 Brickwork Bat: *Lego Batman* and the Licensing Network

“The slipperiness of new media—the difficulty of engaging it in the present—is also linked to the speed of its dissemination. Neither the aging nor the speed of the digital, however, explains how or why it has become the new or why the yesterday and tomorrow of new media are often the same thing. Consider concepts such as social networking (MUDs to *Second Life*), or hot YouTube videos that are already old and old email messages forever circulated and rediscovered as new. This constant repetition, tied to an inhumanly precise and unrelenting clock, points to a factor far more important than speed—a nonsimultaneousness of the new, which I argue sustains new media as such.”

– Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, “The Enduring Ephemeral, or the Future Is a Memory.”<sup>451</sup>

“Come at me, Gotham!”

– King Kong, *The LEGO Batman Movie*<sup>452</sup>

### 5.1 Introduction: A Visit to the Gotham Zoo

I’m on a mission.

It’s chaos in the streets of Gotham. Panicked people run down the avenues in all directions, so that even pinpointing the source of danger is impossible. Constant, hammering rain buffets the city, but not nearly hard or fast enough to extinguish the fires that engulf nearby buildings. Through the darkness of the night and the storm, a familiar looping orchestral score pounds in my ears, unrelenting for more than a moment. And I’m riding a giraffe.

This is the Gotham City of *Lego Batman 2: DC Super Heroes*,<sup>453</sup> a rare open-world instalment in the larger series of Lego licensed videogames. In the midst of the anarchy and the throbbing, incessant music of this game’s open-world environment, the Gotham City zoo serves as the locale for a few side missions and enemy encounters. An Easter egg coded by developer

---

<sup>451</sup> Chun, “The Enduring Ephemeral,” 148.

<sup>452</sup> Chris McKay, *The Lego Batman Movie* (Burbank: Warner Brothers, 2017).

<sup>453</sup> John Burton, John Hodkinson, and Jonathan Smith, *Lego Batman 2: DC Super Heroes*, Playstation 3 (Knutsford, England: Traveller’s Tales, 2012).

Traveller's Tales allows for avatars to leap onto the backs of the zoo animals and take them for a midnight ride wherever the player pleases. At first blush, there's an aesthetic contradiction at play here. The stormy midnight setting of Gotham and the violent panic of its citizenry seems to be in conflict with the goofiness of both Lego minifigs and Batman riding around on a giraffe's back, bucking bronco style. The aforementioned music also clashes with the scenario: it's a selection from Danny Elfman's score to Tim Burton's 1989 *Batman* film,<sup>454</sup> specifically a section of the resounding title track, "The Batman Theme." The problematic here is fascinating though: do the cutesy, silly Lego aspects of the game clash with the intensity of this darker tonal vocabulary from the Batman lexicon, or merely heighten the absurdity and amusement of the experience for the player?

In writing about dialectics, Slavoj Žižek warns us that there are some dialectics we cannot resolve and in fact aren't meant to resolve. "What if," he writes, "the point is precisely *not* to 'resolve' antagonisms 'in reality,' but just to enact a parallax shift by means of which antagonisms are recognized 'as such' and thereby perceived in their 'positive' role?"<sup>455</sup> For Žižek, the issue of unresolvable dialectic is encountered again and again in tensions that require a third force, from outside the conflict, to cut the Gordian Knot. He writes, "there is no way to resolve the tension between [such dialectics] by means of an 'immanent' dialectical reflection in which the problem itself becomes its own solution. All we can do [in these scenarios] is wait for a contingent breakthrough—only then will it be possible to retroactively reconstruct the logic of the process."<sup>456</sup> In these situations, no positive synthetic result is possible,<sup>457</sup> and so he

---

<sup>454</sup> Burton, *Batman*.

<sup>455</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (New York: Verso, 2012), 403.

<sup>456</sup> *Ibid.*, 907.

<sup>457</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *Absolute Recoil: Towards a New Foundation of Dialectical Materialism* (London: Verso, 2014), 336.

recommends that all dialectics must instead be viewed as a triad with a tie-breaking outside actor.<sup>458</sup>

So perhaps the premise of this affect question itself is faulty, because at this point, Lego is not combined with the lexicon of Batman—it’s part of that lexicon. 2012’s *Lego Batman 2*, and the series in which it appears (either the three-part *Lego Batman* series or the far larger business of Lego videogames developed by Traveller’s Tales Ltd, depending on your attitude), currently form an important branch in the Batman transmedia tree, as well as an integral element of the business for the family-owned Lego Group. As an aspect of transmedia, Lego Batman is currently (as of this writing) the most successful node in Warners’ *Batman* network that shies away from the serious, grim tone of its cousins: *Lego Batman: The Videogame* (2008)<sup>459</sup> holds 80% on Metacritic (PC, based on 15 critics);<sup>460</sup> *Lego Batman 2: DC Superheroes* (2012)<sup>461</sup> holds 81% on Metacritic (PC, based on six critics);<sup>462</sup> and while *Lego Batman 3: Beyond Gotham* (2014)<sup>463</sup> slipped slightly in popularity to receive 74% on Metacritic (Xbox One, based on 25 critics),<sup>464</sup> Batman was the breakout favourite of the 2014 *Lego Movie*,<sup>465</sup> a success that led to him starring in his own movie in 2017, *The Lego Batman Movie*<sup>466</sup>—which currently holds an 81% “fresh” rating on Rotten Tomatoes.<sup>467</sup>

---

<sup>458</sup> Ibid., 391.

<sup>459</sup> Jon Burton, *Lego Batman: The Videogame*, PC (Knutsford, England: Traveller’s Tales, 2008).

<sup>460</sup> “Lego Batman: The Videogame for PC Reviews - Metacritic,” accessed June 25, 2018, <http://www.metacritic.com/game/pc/lego-batman-the-videogame>.

<sup>461</sup> Burton, Hodskinson, and Smith, *Lego Batman 2: DC Super Heroes*.

<sup>462</sup> “Lego Batman 2: DC Super Heroes for PC Reviews - Metacritic,” accessed June 25, 2018, <http://www.metacritic.com/game/pc/lego-batman-2-dc-super-heroes>.

<sup>463</sup> Arthur Parsons, *Lego Batman 3: Beyond Gotham*, Xbox One (Knutsford, England: Traveller’s Tales, 2014).

<sup>464</sup> “Lego Batman 3: Beyond Gotham for Xbox One Reviews - Metacritic,” accessed June 25, 2018, <http://www.metacritic.com/game/xbox-one/lego-batman-3-beyond-gotham>.

<sup>465</sup> Phil Lord and Christopher Miller, *The Lego Movie* (Burbank: Warner Brothers, 2014).

<sup>466</sup> McKay, *The Lego Batman Movie*.

<sup>467</sup> “The Lego Batman Movie (2017),” *Rotten Tomatoes*, accessed June 25, 2018, [https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/the\\_lego\\_batman\\_movie/](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/the_lego_batman_movie/).



However, the successes of these games and movies have not directly translated to the toy aisle. In September 2017, the Lego Group announced that it was cutting 1,400 jobs, due primarily to sluggish sales of its licensed superhero lines—a sector now representing 40% of the company’s US market.<sup>468</sup> Figures like this ever more deeply entrench the Danish company in transmedia dependency: as its toy sales sag, it becomes far more reliant on renting out its brand in other media. Transmedia evolved as a strategy for Lego as their patents expired in the last 20 years of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century—in the world of business, the limited monopoly of a patent is always preferential, but a corporate entity must understand that it’s still *limited*. If the business is to stay supple, it must move on to the next business model *beyond* the limited monopoly. There is no resolution to the dialectic tensions at the symbolic level, nor should there be, because they actually resolve at the level of the business model.

These other media are proving a success not only for Lego, but for its partners as well. While far from the critical juggernauts of Christopher Nolan’s *Dark Knight* trilogy or the *Batman: Arkham* series, the Lego Batman media are beloved by children, enhancing DC’s visibility for young kids in terms of brand recognition—a crucial element in constructing fans.<sup>469</sup> Many products designed for children in the contemporary Western media ecosystem are reliant on also appealing to their parents through tongue-in-cheek humour.

Take, for example, the trailer for *The Lego Batman Movie*.<sup>470</sup> In the initial teaser, Batman broods in Wayne Manor as Alfred tries to motivate him to cheer up and embrace others. The Caped Crusader’s response is to throw a tantrum, rolling all over the floor chanting “No, no, no” to the beat of the ’60s *Batman* theme song by Neal Hefti,<sup>471</sup> eventually abandoning the tantrum

---

<sup>468</sup> Christian Wienberg, “Why Lego Is Snapping Off 1,400 Jobs,” *Bloomberg.Com*, September 5, 2017, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-09-05/lego-cuts-1-400-jobs-on-weak-sales-of-batman-toys>.

<sup>469</sup> Kinder, *Playing with Power*, 56-57.

<sup>470</sup> Warner Bros. Pictures, *The LEGO Batman Movie - Wayne Manor Teaser Trailer [HD]*, YouTube clip, accessed June 25, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LHgQSwgKygk>.

<sup>471</sup> Neal Hefti, *Batman Theme And 11 Hefti Bat Songs* (New York: RCA Victor, 1966).

in favour of transitioning into beatboxing. This single moment combines identifiable slapstick the youngest of children will recognize (he’s rolling on the floor and acting like a baby, but he’s supposed to be an adult) with a reference targeted towards parents (everyone remembers the iconic Hefti theme and many will recall beatboxing’s rise to popularity in the 1980s). This is a moment of elegant combined cross-marketing, rendered more remarkable in its grace by the extremely narrow reference framework immediately preceding it, namely Alfred’s commentary precipitating Batman’s outburst. The butler tells Batman, “I’ve seen you go through similar phases in 2016 and 2012 and 2008 and 2005 and 1997 and 1995 and 1992 and 1989 *and* that weird one 1966,”<sup>472</sup> listing off every live-action Batman film of the preceding 60 years, as well as the Adam West television show.

These references represent a very specific selection of “Batman phases,” designed to appeal to a mainstream audience interested in both nostalgia and irony.<sup>473</sup> While Lego Batman media products are marketed towards an extremely young demographic, part of what makes them successful—an important stipulation in transmedia—is that they give adults tacit permission to enjoy “kids’ stuff” via a series of dog whistles referencing older media. This operates appropriately as metaphor as well, considering that the core mechanic of Lego blocks as toy sets is to fit things together seamlessly.

The Lego Batman games, on the other hand, are somewhat more haphazard in their work to attract players. While the first 40 years of Batman’s adventures were largely daylight adventures, since the early 1970s, his escapades have taken place primarily at night, and the aesthetic of his world has been gothic in most media since the 1990s. So it’s somewhat funny in *Lego Batman 2* that not only can Batman ride a giraffe, but also that he would engage in such a

---

<sup>472</sup> Warner Bros. Pictures, *The LEGO Batman Movie - Wayne Manor Teaser Trailer [HD]*.

<sup>473</sup> Yockey, *Batman*, 1-2.

whimsical activity when Gotham is burning and it's the middle of a dark and stormy night.

Regardless of the intended lightness, there's a disconnect in design here that speaks to the crucial *churn* of transmedia.

As a business model, transmedia relies heavily on constant output and diversification of content gathered around individual IPs, in order to keep profit margins thick. When their products are tied in with brands, it's incumbent upon companies to maintain brand visibility. This results in churn, the state of constantly iterating and releasing across a number of markets and demographics. The central protocols of churn entail expediency, reusability, and symbolic diversity. In the case of Lego Batman, the character first appeared in toy form in 2006, game and home video forms in 2008, and theatrical cinematic form in 2014. In film, Lego Batman has a distinct personality: actor Will Arnett voices him with a gravelly voice, and the character is childish, boastful, and narcissistic, alternating between exalting in his own awesomeness and head-banging to his own heavy metal compositions. This egotism is part of what makes the take on the character appealing and popular to audiences—it's the first time that producers have played up Batman's self-satisfaction with his own "dark" image memorably. But in games, the character is far blander, rolling his eyes or shaking his head at most of the silliness of his enemies and allies alike (Robin's clumsiness serving as a frequent cause for the Dark Knight's facepalming).

For the games, Batman is more of a metaphorical and literal template for both the player's fantasies and a series of costumes bestowing the hero with different specialized abilities. This itself is a metonym or allegory for the way transmedia interpellates people: the malleability of the transmedia character, place, or narrative offer enough recognizable qualities to grab onto, but still leave plenty of room to fill in with your own identity and ideas. The dictates of the transmedia business model demand a certain kind of formal character, where there's a shape or a

costume or even a silhouette, but that character can be occupied by a variety of people and is fungible in and of itself. In the transmedia milieu, an icon can be filled up by any articulation, and is especially useful in that regard for producing different kinds of products for a broad range of consumers. As an expression of transmedia, Lego Batman games are a mish-mish of Batman history, where First Appearance 1939 Batman runs headlong into mid-2000s Christian Bale *Dark Knight* Batman and the two trip over 1950s Dick Sprang-era Batman together. Everything is game, no matter how jarring or contradictory, just so long as it can be sanitized for younger audiences. Whereas in studying the Gotham City of the *Arkham* series, special attention was paid to worldbuilding, in the *Lego Batman* games, it's instead key to think of the process as world-colliding. Unlike the Gotham of the *Arkham* series, this world doesn't curate its version from complementary visions—it smashes all visions together, attempting to explode a certain cutesy “Batman-ness” all over the screen and the player's mind.

Additionally, in discussing these specific 3D-navigable spaces, it's important to recognize that multiple stakeholders determine the commission, design, and production of these games.<sup>474</sup> The specific rideable giraffe in the Gotham City zoo appears to be based on the design of the Lego Duplo Animals line; and when Batman sits atop its back as the Danny Elfman score loops, we are reminded of all of them: DC Entertainment, its parent company WarnerMedia, developer Traveller's Tales (also owned by WarnerMedia back up through the chain of WBIE), and the Lego Group. In order to develop Lego Batman toys, the Lego Group needed to license the Batman IP from DC Entertainment. But then in order to produce a videogame, the Lego Group licensed Lego Batman back to Warners through Traveller's Tales (which, as already mentioned, develops all licensed Lego videogames). So whose needs informs whose work in these games, and how is the player to decode both Batman and his world in them?

---

<sup>474</sup> Nitsche, *Video Game Spaces*, 153.

In the last chapter, I discussed the connectivity apparent between the *Arkham* games internally with each other and externally with the rest of the Batman assemblage. In those games, it was revealing to examine the layout of the city to demonstrate procedural rhetoric in action and how interactivity can function as a mode of franchise. In this chapter, I build upon those observations by looking at the *Lego Batman* games not only in terms of space, license, and algorithm. Because the licensing relationship between the rights holder and the producer isn't one-way in this case (the licensor turning around and re-licensing its registered product back to the licensee), it has the potential to tell us a great deal about transmedia's techniques, especially the protocols and processes of churn.

In essence, *Lego Batman* games are evocative of transmedia on several levels: IP “skinning,” a process in which intellectual property is stretched very obviously and quickly over code; spatialization, the way the strategic needs of transmedia attraction and efficiency determine spatial considerations in games; and the complexities of licensing between stakeholders across transmedia regimes. Just as the existence of *Arkham Origins* speaks to the need of constant iteration in transmedia, all of these elements in *Lego Batman* games are suggestive of the centrality of churn in the transmedia business model strategy.

## **5.2 Snapping Together Lego's Story**

In early 2004, as the Millennium turned over and attentions turned increasingly to computer screens,<sup>475</sup> the Lego Group reported a \$238 million loss for the preceding fiscal year.<sup>476</sup> In a press conference, CEO and owner Kjeld Kirk Kristiansen blamed the losses for a failure on

---

<sup>475</sup> Sarah Herman, *Building a History: The Lego Group* (Barnsley, England: Pen & Swords Books Ltd, 2012), loc. 2259.

<sup>476</sup> BBC, “Lego Tumbles as Toy Sales Slump,” *BBC*, January 8, 2004, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/3380197.stm>.

the part of the company to focus on its core product—namely, interlocking bricks—and instead redirecting to other endeavors such as licensing, computer games, and apparel. “We have been pursuing a strategy, which was based on growth, increase in market shares and growth by focusing on totally new products. This strategy did not give the expected results, and if there is a discrepancy between the map and the terrain, you have to follow the terrain,” said Kristiansen.<sup>477</sup> Several years earlier, the company had foreshadowed this apparent shift in policy in the form of the 1999 introduction of a *Lego: Star Wars* line to coincide with the release of the Lucasfilm prequel trilogy.<sup>478</sup> Less than a week after the press conference, the company released a statement saying that there would in fact be no “radical changes in the company’s strategy.”<sup>479</sup> One wonders how the iconic brand came to such a breaking point, taking losses and “miscommunicating” publicly.<sup>480</sup> But to understand that turning point for the Lego Group, it is informative to briefly sketch its history.

The Lego Group (technically registered as Lego A/S) began life in 1932 when Danish carpenter Ole Kirk Kristiansen began making toys as a way to take in more income during the Great Depression.<sup>481</sup> As the Depression progressed, Kristiansen transitioned into toys as his company’s product focus, and named the company Lego in 1934 (a portmanteau of the Danish phrase “leg godt,” meaning “play well”). With the postwar introduction of plastics to Denmark, Lego began using a plastic injection molding machine to produce some toys.<sup>482</sup> Interlocking bricks, however, were actually first patented by English company Kiddicraft in 1939,<sup>483</sup> an

---

<sup>477</sup> Lego, “Loss of DKK 1.4bn in the LEGO Company in 2003,” *Lego.com*, January 8, 2004, <https://www.lego.com/en-gb/aboutus/news-room/2004/january/loss-of-dkk-1-4bn-in-the-lego-company-in-2003>.

<sup>478</sup> Lars Konzack, “The Cultural History of Lego,” in *LEGO Studies: Examining the Building Blocks of a Transmedial Phenomenon*, ed. Mark J. P. Wolf (New York: Routledge, 2014), 11.

<sup>479</sup> Lego, “MINDSTORMS and Harry Potter Will Continue,” *Lego.com*, January 14, 2004, <https://www.lego.com/en-gb/aboutus/news-room/2004/january/mindstorms-and-harry-potter-will-continue>.

<sup>480</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>481</sup> Herman, *Building a History*, Loc 117.

<sup>482</sup> Konzack, “The Cultural History of Lego,” 7-8.

<sup>483</sup> Herman, *Building a History*.

innovation copied by multiple companies, but first produced by Lego in 1949. As with many other parts of intellectual property history, the protagonist of an invention story is the one that retains longevity, not necessarily the originator.

In any event, although Kiddicraft had first developed the patent for interlocking bricks, Lego soon differentiated itself with its “System of Play” concept in the mid-1950s. The Lego System of Play formed a kind of ethos for the company’s products moving forward and catalyzed the company’s primary focus on interlocking bricks. The system consisted of several desirable qualities for toys: unlimited play potential, suitable for girls and boys of any age, quality and attention to detail, and long hours of play that encourage development, imagination, and creativity.<sup>484</sup> Interlocking bricks and construction sets, with their portability in terms of size and affordances for recombination, fit the bill on all counts.

Between the 1950s and 1970s, the company focused more and more on interlocking blocks until they were synonymous with both the System of Play and Lego’s overall brand.<sup>485</sup> Starting in the 1980s, Lego began heavily theming its playsets as it entered and eventually dominated the US toy market.<sup>486</sup> In this timeframe, variance dominated in the company’s product line: the number of different Lego bricks rose from 3,000 in 1980 to more than 14,000 by the early 2000s, as the number of colours for those pieces rose from six to more than 50.<sup>487</sup> Even before it had moved into other media, Lego was exhibiting the churn of transmedia, as well as the attendant problematic of the finitude of postmodern thinking and limitlessness of late capitalism—a mindset and cultural mode where anything goes.

However, postmodernism is a double-edged sword within late capitalism because outward expansion is a mandate of the latter; and so as the 20<sup>th</sup> Century drew to a close, storm

---

<sup>484</sup> Ibid., Loc. 353.

<sup>485</sup> Ibid.

<sup>486</sup> Ibid.

<sup>487</sup> Konzack, “The Cultural History of Lego,” 11.

clouds gathered on the horizon for the Lego Group: not only was digital culture threatening to shift the focus of toy buyers and shrink Lego's market, but the company also had to contend with the approaching expiration of its US patent in 2011.<sup>488</sup> Looking ahead, the company saw the potential in licensed theme sets: partner with trendy pop culture properties and appeal to multiple markets simultaneously.

And so, in 1999, the Lego Group partnered with Lucasfilm Ltd. in anticipation of *The Phantom Menace* to release several *Lego: Star Wars* sets.<sup>489</sup> This is fitting and significant, as Lucasfilm was one of the first companies to embrace and develop transmedia as a narrative mode, maintaining a coherent continuity across *Star Wars* franchise films, books, and games, and tightly maintaining control of their canon and fandom.<sup>490</sup> Here it is worth pausing to note that though the Lego Group is a privately-owned Danish company in an international marketplace, the conundrum it faced here particularly speaks of the US American ideology of postmodernity as an inherent contradiction: not only is everyone *not* all caught up, but everyone seems vehemently opposed to the idea of the end of history. In this specific case, the company was determined to adapt instead of becoming entrenched, and, in adapting, emerged as a true transmedia company.<sup>491</sup>

This brings us full circle to the early years of Lego's licensing era and the 2004 announcement by Kristiansen. At that moment, the company was at a crossroads, and Kristiansen's statement seems to indicate that its intention was to go back to core principles. But

---

<sup>488</sup> Rob Beschizza, "Expired Patent of the Day: Lego," *Boing Boing*, October 21, 2011, <https://boingboing.net/2011/10/21/expired-patent-of-the-day-lego.html>.

<sup>489</sup> Molly Wood, "Lego, You Are Dead to Me," *CNET*, July 31, 2013, <https://www.cnet.com/news/lego-you-are-dead-to-me/>.

<sup>490</sup> Henry Jenkins and Dan Hassler-Forest, "Foreword: 'I Have a Bad Feeling About This:' A Conversation About *Star Wars* and the History of Transmedia.," in *Star Wars and the History of Transmedia Storytelling*, ed. Sean Guynes and Dan Hassler-Forest (Amsterdam, Netherlands: Amsterdam University Press, 2017), 15-31.

<sup>491</sup> Dan Hunter and Julian Thomas, "Lego and the System of Intellectual Property, 1955-2015," *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2016, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2743140>.



Kristiansen was far from predicting the company's trajectory. Instead, licensing with Lucasfilm opened a floodgate, and by the end of the year Kristiansen was replaced as CEO by Jørgen Vig Knudstorp. The Lego Group was determined to double down on licensing.<sup>492</sup> Since 1999, the company has developed more than 60 licensed themes from some two dozen other companies, ranging from Columbia Pictures and Viacom to Warners and Lamborghini. How many individual copyrights were imbricated in this list is a question too large for this history, akin to asking what exactly the intellectual property stable of the Walt Disney Company contains (Lego has developed more than 20 themes from Disney licenses, many of which contain multiple IPs).

But the two press releases, a week apart, harvested from Lego's press archives amidst a sea of relatively cheery product announcements, reveal the tension the Lego Group experienced in establishing its transmedia credentials and finding its footing post-patent expiration. This represented a paradigm shift for the Lego Group, where the company's top management began considering the Lego brand, rather than its actual products, as its top asset.<sup>493</sup> Lori Landay concisely sums up how the Lego Group took this core recognition and combined it with a corporate culture based around the System of Play:

In the LEGO 'System of Play,' every brick can be used with every other brick; even though they may have different shapes, colors, and other properties, they all click together. [...] As Lego moved from its core of making construction toys into other kinds of toys and onto other media platforms, the System of Play developed into a multiplatform 'supersystem' of transmedia intertextuality with not only brick toys and non-brick toys, but also video games on many platforms, animated television series,

---

<sup>492</sup> Herman, *Building a History*, Loc. 2487.

<sup>493</sup> Maaik Lauwaert, *The Place of Play: Toys and Digital Culture* (Amsterdam, NL: Amsterdam University Press, 2009), 59.

movies, books for a range of reading levels, graphic novels, magazines, websites, trading cards, merchandise, theme parks, board games, and more.<sup>494</sup>

The System of Play mapped perfectly onto a transmedia strategy that was itself based on developing brand associations across properties. And while the 1999 *Star Wars* sets laid the groundwork for the company's focus on transmedial worlds, the strategy was only fully reified once that focus had dealt damage to the rest of the company, which was in crisis management mode by 2004.<sup>495</sup> From this perspective, transmedia ate Lego, subsuming it under its own protocols until the brand was dependent and couldn't function without it. But this perspective lacks the nuance that comes with recognizing that the advent of digital consumer technologies and networked culture play a significant role as well. As we can infer from Landay's observations above, Lego needed to discover how little plastic building bricks fit within immaterial culture.

### 5.3 **Lego Goes Digital**

Lego's introduction of themes into its toy lines addressed some of the issues of limitlessness that postmodern late capitalism brings, because it made the brand no longer dependent on the perfect product, but rather on how the product functions in a hyperreal setting. Writing about the cultural history of Lego, Lars Konzack observes that "each theme has its own concept and it is possible to produce new boxes of Lego bricks within this frame, even when the

---

<sup>494</sup> Lori Landay, "Myth Blocks: How Lego Transmedia Configures and Remixes Mythic Structures in the Ninjago and Chima Themes," in *LEGO Studies: Examining the Building Blocks of a Transmedial Phenomenon*, ed. Mark J. P. Wolf (New York: Routledge, 2014), 56.

<sup>495</sup> Konzack, "The Cultural History of Lego," 11.

Lego patent expired in 1989.”<sup>496</sup> What it didn’t solve for, however, was the external limitlessness of postmodernity: Lego could offer all the options it wanted, but there were also limitless options outside of choosing to engage with the Lego brand in the first place. Because of this, the Lego Group was forced to engage with the biggest new competitor for children’s attention: digital games.

While the brand’s first adventures into software and programmability came in 1989 with the introduction of the Lego Mindstorms series of kits,<sup>497</sup> the first Lego videogame was 1997’s *Lego Island*,<sup>498</sup> developed and published by Mindscape for Microsoft Windows. *Lego Island* was an open-world game with little plot and gameplay based around short challenges (e.g. racing, pizza delivery, etc.) and properly constructing specific vehicles and other objects. Over the next few years, Lego dabbled in digital games, releasing a number of titles on PC.<sup>499</sup> But it was only in 2005, when the toy company partnered with Lucasfilm and British developer Traveller’s Tales (TT) to release *Lego Star Wars: The Video Game*<sup>500</sup> that the Lego Group hit upon a winning strategy.

Traveller’s Tales was a developer accustomed to working with clients on projects: the company was best known for other licensed projects based on properties ranging from Mickey Mouse to Sonic the Hedgehog. But the studio found its fortune working with the Lego Group, creating action-adventure games with simple puzzle mechanics and basic control command structures, fused with popular intellectual properties lampooned by being represented in the

---

<sup>496</sup> Ibid.

<sup>497</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>498</sup> Wes Jenkins, *Lego Island*, PC (Novato, CA: Mindscape, 1997).

<sup>499</sup> In total, between 1997 and 2005, Lego released 21 “original” games and three games licensed from other intellectual property. These titles ranged in genre from the construction and management simulation *Lego Creator: Harry Potter* (Superscape, 2001) to the turn-based tactical *Lego Chess* (Krisalis Software, 1998) and the educational *Lego My Style: Preschool* (Stormfront Studios, 2000). True to transmedial form, the Lego Group was faithfully making multiple small bets in many genres, waiting for a hit.

<sup>500</sup> John Burton, *Lego Star Wars: The Video Game*, Playstation 2 (Knutsford, England: Traveller’s Tales, 2005).

slapstick Lego minifigure form. In creating this style, TT and Lego were able to appeal to multiple audiences at once: various fandoms, parents, and young children. In making a successful movie tie-in game, TT was successful where other, better-funded developers had failed, demonstrating that licensed games could be more than ancillary products.<sup>501</sup> But such a point then begs the question of which license may have been responsible for the success—the *Star Wars* license, or the Lego brand. Regardless, since the release of *Lego Star Wars*, TT (which was acquired by WBIE in 2007<sup>502</sup>) has almost exclusively produced the Lego Group’s videogames, and the toy giant symbiotically represents the studio’s sole client. Similarly, nearly all the subsequent Lego videogames have held onto the winning combination of simple mechanics, basic puzzles, breakable objects, and recognizable icons—with a few variations on other game features.

It’s here that Batman enters the picture. It’s important to note that *Lego Batman* is not the most remarkable license in Lego’s transmedia stable (however important it may be to DC’s transmedia strategy). The first *Lego Batman* construction set came out in 2006,<sup>503</sup> following significant licenses such as *Star Wars* (1999), *Harry Potter* (2001), *Bob the Builder* (2001), *Spider-Man* (2002), *SpongeBob SquarePants* (2006), and *Avatar: The Last Airbender* (2006). Batman has also not been the most quantifiably successful license for the Lego Group, either—that honour belongs to *Star Wars*. So *Lego Batman* is neither first nor best among its peers. What this means is that the property is *typical* of the Lego group’s approach to transmedia and TT’s approach to making Lego games. The advantage of this typicality in the Lego licensing milieu is

---

<sup>501</sup> Jessica Aldred, “(Un)Blocking the Transmedial Character: Digital Abstraction as Franchise Strategy in Traveller’s Tales Lego Games,” in *LEGO Studies: Examining the Building Blocks of a Transmedial Phenomenon*, ed. Mark J. P. Wolf (New York: Routledge, 2014), 106.

<sup>502</sup> Ibid.

<sup>503</sup> Konzack, “The Cultural History of Lego,” 5.

that it allows us to extrapolate observations about how licensing structures in Lego work, and particularly to trace the evolution of TT's Lego games.

To begin with, Lego videogames (and *Lego Batman* games as exemplar) demonstrate the complexities of creation and authorship that arise within a transmedia milieu. These products could not exist without a convoluted network of licensing and contracting arrangements that are vague in their construction and obscure in their structure. As mentioned earlier, almost all Lego videogames are developed by TT, a company that WBIE acquired shortly after the release of the first TT Lego game. In essence, this means that regardless of the company licensing its IP to the Lego Group, the profits of the game are shared with WarnerMedia—interesting, considering that many of these properties are owned by competitors (*Star Wars* is owned by Lucasfilm, itself now a subsidiary of Disney—the same goes for Marvel characters; the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* are owned by Viacom, etc.)

Additionally, the Lego films are all produced by Warner Animation Group (WAG), yet another subsidiary of WarnerMedia. It seems that no matter who the Lego Group licenses from, it trusts Warners to handle media production. In an age of media consolidation, where most media in North America is owned by the same handful of companies,<sup>504</sup> all of which have their own divisions capable of operating through vertical integration to produce games, animated films, or any other number of media products, it's curious that Lego seems to be the outlier brand where all stakeholders are willing to funnel their IP together. The only time this was notably executed in the past was the 1988 film *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?*,<sup>505</sup> an extremely well-

---

<sup>504</sup> WebpageFX, "The 6 Companies That Own (Almost) All Media [Infographic]," *WebpageFX*, July 9, 2015, /data/the-6-companies-that-own-almost-all-media/.

<sup>505</sup> Zemeckis, *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?*

received and profitable film that never saw a sequel due to squabbling between the multiple rights holders about how to divide up merchandising profits and depict their characters.<sup>506</sup>

However, the complexities of the relationships here raise a question of critical description. When the Lego Group first produced a *Star Wars* theme set in 1999, it was licensing-in the properties, using the IP of another entity to produce a specific product.<sup>507</sup> This is simple enough: Company A rents the use of Company B's product to produce Branded Product X. But when Lego then engages TT to produce a videogame or WAG to produce a film, how do we accurately describe the nature of the partnership and the process of license and production?

The confusion is all too apparent when we turn to Lego and Batman specifically. The central questions around authorship and ownership that arise from looking at the Lego licensing situation are related to who commissions whom. Who is the client, and who performs the work for hire? When the Lego Group produces a line of *Lego Batman* toy sets, it's clear that Lego is licensing the Batman IP from DC in order to appeal across markets. This is immensely beneficial to DC in a number of ways. Far from diluting the Batman image, Lego Batman is currently the flagship version of the character for raising a new generation of dedicated Batman fans, attracting very young children and following in the family-friendly tradition of *Batman: The Brave and the Bold* and reruns of the 1960s *Batman* series before it. By default, DC is the client in this relationship: Lego produces the product and DC owns the IP. But when WBIE then develops (through TT) and publishes a *Lego Batman* videogame, whose brand interests are primary? How does the licensing structure actually work? Did DC go to Lego, did Lego go to Warners through TT? How did these companies partner, and who maintains editorial oversight in the event that a conflict of interest arises?

---

<sup>506</sup> Martin Goodman, "Who Screwed Roger Rabbit?," *Animation World Network*, April 3, 2003, <https://www.awn.com/animationworld/who-screwed-roger-rabbit>.

<sup>507</sup> Hunter and Thomas, "Lego and the System of Intellectual Property, 1955-2015," 10.

These thorny questions are typical of the transmedia business model, and frequently impossible to decode from the outside. However opaque the production process, the genesis of these agreements take place far from the public eye and seem to be stories that the corporate stakeholders have no interest in telling. It may be that to those stakeholders, the answers are totally unimportant. And we can see the same exact mode of postmodern cultural production in many elements of *Lego Batman* games, including their spaces. Regardless of the provenance of their conception, TT develops its games quickly and efficiently through a series of techniques that demonstrate the churn of transmedia. Though TT does not engage in an especially open development process, end users can decode many of these techniques by cross-referencing the products across different Lego videogame series and across installments in the *Lego Batman* series.

#### **5.4 The TT/Lego System of Gameplay**

Picture a game based around construction and building. There's no open objective aside from completing projects that you determine for yourself, and everything in the gameworld is composed of uniformly sized cubes that can be connected to one another in order to erect structures.

The game you're picturing is *Minecraft*, Mojang's procedurally-generated and infinitely moddable 2011 sandbox game.<sup>508</sup> *Minecraft* is an astronomically successful videogame, and especially popular with kids. One might consider that a brand like Lego would excel in sandbox games like this, where instructions can be followed, but open creativity rules. One might also then imagine that the massive success of *Minecraft* may have been somewhat sour grapes for the

---

<sup>508</sup> Markus Persson and Jens Bergensten, *Minecraft*, PC (Stockholm: Mojang, 2011).

Lego Group, considering the failure of its past attempts at construction-based videogames to make a splash in both the marketplace and culture, and the fact that *Minecraft* is frequently explained to the public (and especially parents) using Lego as a metaphor<sup>509 510</sup> (in fact, Lego is frequently invoked to put parents' minds at ease about the age-appropriateness of a videogame for their children, with Lego standing in as "the paragon of the virtuous toy"<sup>511</sup>). But the pill can't be *too* bitter: Lego already produces *Minecraft*-themed construction sets.<sup>512</sup> And in terms of videogames, the toy company found its winning strategy with action-adventure and heavy branding before *Minecraft* ever came to market.

Batman games are only unique amongst Lego videogames in that they have original stories (most follow the plotlines of the specific movies they parody). In *Lego Batman: The Videogame*, several of Batman's most dangerous foes have escaped Arkham Asylum, and the Dynamic Duo must chase them through Gotham City in order to defeat them and return them to captivity. In *Lego Batman 2: DC Superheroes*, the Joker teams up with Lex Luthor in order to attack Batman and Superman, and the heroes have to call on the entire Justice League in order to assist them. In *Lego Batman 3: Beyond Gotham*, Brainiac precipitates an alliance between heroes *and* villains in order to combat the alien force. While it's germane to a discussion of these games to briefly identify their plots, doing so is hardly necessary. Lego Batman games aren't about experiencing a narrative, but rather about playing in a world where everything is identifiable in self-parody, beating up blocks, and solving puzzles through tool assembly. To this end, gameplay in *Lego Batman* games (and in the vast majority of Lego videogames) proceeds along

---

<sup>509</sup> Ben Popper, "Why Parents Are Raising Their Kids on Minecraft," *The Verge*, September 15, 2014, <https://www.theverge.com/2014/9/15/6152085/why-parents-love-minecraft>.

<sup>510</sup> Melissa Maypole, "Minecraft Explained From a Mom Who Gets It (Finally!)," *Qustodio*, September 25, 2014, <https://www.qustodio.com/en/blog/2014/09/minecraft-explained-from-a-mom-who-gets-it-finally/>.

<sup>511</sup> Michael Agger, "The Minecraft Parent," *The New Yorker*, September 18, 2014, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/minecraft-parent>.

<sup>512</sup> Amie Cranswick, "LEGO Unveils Three New Minecraft Sets for Summer 2018," *Flickering Myth*, May 21, 2018, <https://www.flickeringmyth.com/2018/05/lego-unveils-three-new-minecraft-sets-for-summer-2018/>.



deceptively simple lines. One or more players control two or more avatars (and can swap between characters) responsible for beating up opponents, breaking objects, exploring, and piecing new objects together (nearly always from a pile of bricks that once constituted multiple other objects) in order to solve puzzles and advance through levels. Different characters have different special abilities required to advance through roadblocks and break up specific types of objects, and Batman and Robin in particular adorn themselves in a variety of special suits to the same end.<sup>513</sup>

*Lego Batman* games may seem like action-adventure games (indeed, they are frequently described this way in terms of genre), but they're more importantly puzzle games, because solving the puzzles on any given screen is always totally necessary to advancement.<sup>514</sup> Even defeating major opponents involves puzzling out a strategy and then assembling the appropriate tools to enact it. But all of this happens in spatial terms, where the objects themselves are the puzzle pieces—which calls back de Certeau's commentary on strategies and tactics. Both the *Arkham* games and all TT Lego games are about tactical moves with strategic payoffs. In the case of *Arkham*, the tactics that unlock power and allow for strategical overview involve conquering territory, piece by piece, so that more of the map becomes accessible and rapid traversal across the world is possible. The player begins like an insurgent, trying to reclaim territory, but once Batman is leveled up enough and owns all the territory, the player can fluidly strategize how most efficiently to tackle broader objectives. In the case of Lego games, the player conquers spatial territory piece by piece, screen by screen, and level by level. The power unlocked is both new characters (with attendant specialized abilities) and free-play modes for

---

<sup>513</sup> Kevin Schut, "The Virtualization of Lego," in *LEGO Studies: Examining the Building Blocks of a Transmedial Phenomenon*, ed. Mark J. P. Wolf (New York: Routledge, 2014), 234-235.

<sup>514</sup> *Ibid.*, 236.

completed stages (more on this shortly). Once again, transmedia interpellates players and asks them to model themselves after it, making tactical moves towards strategic ends.

In adapting to the digital milieu, *Lego* becomes not only theatrical but cinematic. Beyond full cutscenes, in between levels, *Lego Batman* games involve a somewhat attenuated form of player agency in their most exciting moments. When the player successfully solves a puzzle, she often briefly relinquishes control of the avatar, as a brief cinematic demonstrates the successful execution of the action associated with the problem. Batman will successfully assemble an object such as a cannon and target his opponent, and the game will subsequently shift the camera angle and take control of Batman's body to show him successfully firing the cannon before returning agency to the player to rejoin the action. As Jessica Aldred observes, we shift between identification and spectatorship in all our gameplay, and especially when identifying with recognizable characters from other media:

One of the greatest challenges facing characters as they move from film to games [is] that they must function as “doubled avatars,” striking a difficult balance between being effective player surrogates, as well as accurate stand-ins for their cinematic source material. As Bob Rehak observes, our video game character provides us a sense of diegetic embodiment and involvement in the game world, making it the locus of our agency and subjectivity. But since game characters are also graphically represented objects for our scrutiny and contemplation, our relationship with them is fluid, constantly shifting from participant to spectator and back again—at times, even occupying both roles simultaneously.<sup>515</sup>

---

<sup>515</sup> Aldred, “(Un)Blocking the Transmedial Character,” 106.

This is a common trope in other games, and reciprocally points to the types of agency that watchers of film and TV, as well as comics readers, possess. But Aldred here particularly speaks to the tightrope that characters imported from other narratives walk in game form: allow for embodiment and make room for unique mechanical challenges without disrupting the spirit of the icon. It's debatable how well this particular example walks that tightrope in taking agency away from the player and repositioning her subjectivity by triggering a cutscene; because the visual transition from action to inaction is seamless, embodiment in *Lego Batman* games is always in negotiation. And while this particular feature of the game mechanics is quickly integrated into the player's expectations, it is not the only aspect of the game that demands players relinquish control.

In some ways, these games are meant to be played collaboratively, while in others, they are designed for just the opposite. Many of the puzzles in *Lego Batman* games entail using multiple characters and multiple abilities, necessitating that more than one character be used at a time. Furthermore, in all the *Lego Batman* games, there are zero levels where only one character is featured in the action. In single player mode, the other playable characters are NPCs who follow the player around the screen, and the player can simply switch between them. However, it's far more efficient (and arguably far more engaging) to play with a friend so that puzzles can be solved collaboratively.

It's very confusing then that TT did such a poor job of accounting for multiplayer mode spatially. In *Lego Batman: The Videogame*, there is no split-screen option for most of the levels. What happens instead is that as two players move away from one another, the camera pulls out so that both characters can stay on screen (though neither of them will be centred). When the camera reaches the limits of its ability to zoom out, one character is swept in the direction that the other character is pulling the screen. This is extremely counterintuitive—as if the two

characters on screen are connected by an invisible rope and the movements of the camera are constantly trying to resolve that tension. In *Video Game Spaces*, Nitsche writes extensively about cinematic image space in games, following a tradition of film in city symphonies where spatial understandings are dominant to the extent of being a necessary element to support an audience's understanding of the action. In game space, however, the camera is not merely a perspective of what they player sees, but also what she embodies:

If a film audience were to step through the camera and onto the film set they would see a modern film studio. The diegetic film world would be deconstructed as the production studio replaces the fictional world. Instead of a ceiling there would might be a battery of lights; where one would expect the fourth wall, there would be cameras, sound equipment, and a number of technicians working to produce the illusion. The space is not the world of the story but that of the production of the film. The illusion created by the fictional world would be broken. In contrast, it is a defining characteristic of video game spaces that they allow this step into the represented space. The result is a hybrid between architectural navigable and cinematically represented space. On the one hand, the game space is presented by the camera not unlike in film. As the audience steps through the screen into the world behind, they take the camera with them and enter a continuous navigable diegetic world like a film set. The camera remains a narrative device.<sup>516</sup>

Here, Nitsche elaborates the *lack* of diegetic disruption as players take control of the camera in games. In Lego game co-op play, players have the option of a static down-the-middle splitscreen or a dynamic splitscreen that only appears when players move far enough apart. However, in

---

<sup>516</sup> Nitsche, *Video Game Spaces*, 84-85.

either case, the splitscreen mode can obscure the view of important items in a space from the screen. This sometimes results in an awkward push and pull between two players.

Consequently, agency is disrupted for both—especially considering that the player being swept up in the pull of the other may be in the middle of fighting an enemy, selecting a target, or solving a puzzle. If both players run in opposite directions, which character gets swept up seems to be dependent on leverage—the more active player pulls at the inactive player.

In later games in the series, split-screen is introduced as an option for co-op play, giving players the option of a static vertical line down the centre of the screen or a dynamic split-screen that shifts on angles dependent on movement and disappears entirely when players are close enough to one another. But even with the split-screen setting turned on in later games, one player can force a decision on the other. Due to whatever constraints exist at the software level, players can't inhabit two spaces simultaneously. So Player One can be at one end of the area, but when Player Two enters a doorway at the other end, both players will find themselves in a new area (this problem is not unique to Lego games, however). While the *Arkham* games are designed to make the player feel empowered as Batman, the mechanics and code underlying *Lego Batman* games are less targeted in terms of the aesthetic response that they want to evoke. This is because virtually all of the aspects of *Lego Batman* games designed with Batman specifically in mind are on the surface level. The first area where this is evident is in the spatialization of the games.

## 5.5 *Lego Batman* Game Spaces

As mentioned earlier, as much as *Lego Batman* games market themselves as action-adventure games, they are more fundamentally spatial puzzle games. While action is crucial to revealing puzzles, only solving the puzzles allows for advancement. But solving these puzzles is,

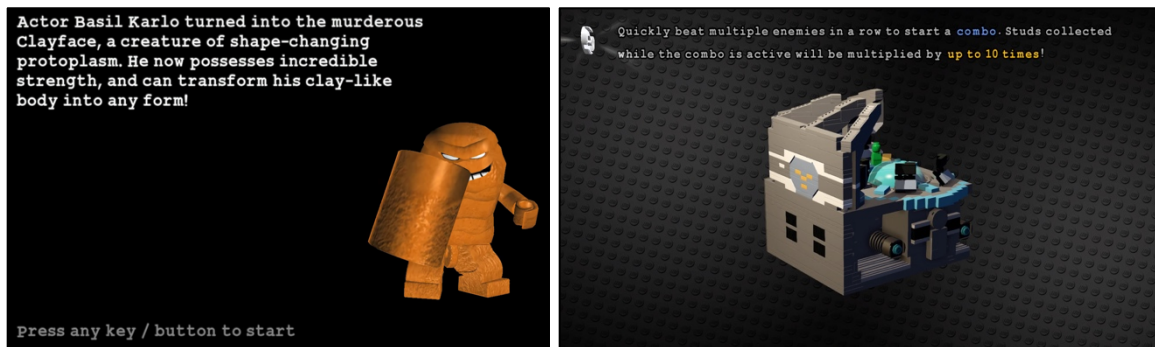
invariably, deeply entwined with spatialization. The truth about the gameplay system in *Lego Batman* games is multiply layered: on the surface, these games market themselves as action-adventure games; below that, they are actually puzzle games; and yet below that, unlocking puzzles is all about exploring the game space of a given screen. This is because in order to reveal the particular bricks that can be reconstituted into a puzzle-solution object, the player needs to break down the objects within the spaces or reveal secret passageways. Again, no advancement is possible in these games without first symbolically mastering the spaces, in this case by interacting with all surfaces. In developing *Lego Bionicle*, one of the Lego Group's first original narrative-based product lines, art director Christian Faber said, "For me, every fantasy story starts not with the characters but the location."<sup>517</sup> This holds true for *Lego videogames* as well. The objects in each location must be totally disassembled, as (aside from very generic hints about what tool might be relevant to you in this moment) they're devoid of procedural rhetoric, so exploration is really the only way to muddle through the spaces without relying on paratexts such as walkthroughs or forums.

To this end, every aspect of the space is imbued with potential, even those that fail to directly attract the attention of players. Returning to Augé, we can find initial evidence of this in the non-places of *Lego Batman* games. The obvious "holding pattern" spaces of *Lego Batman* games are their load screens. In *Lego Batman: The Videogame*, the load screens are true voids. The player stares at a black space, into which emerges a boss opponent from the game (*fig. 14*). As the villain rotates slowly, white courier font plunks across the screen to tell the player about the character's back story while the familiar Danny Elfman theme plays on its familiar loop.

---

<sup>517</sup> Faber quoted in David C. Robertson and Bill Breen, *Brick by Brick: How Lego Rewrote the Rules of Innovation and Conquered the Global Toy Industry* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2013), 163.

In further games in the series, however, the non-places are actually revolving models of playsets (*fig. 15*). These playsets foreshadow upcoming levels, environments that will *not* appear to be constructed entirely of Lego bricks. The environments of *Lego Batman* games are, by and large, built to look more realistic, i.e. a brick wall in the background will look like it's composed of actual aged bricks, rather than Lego pieces. Only actionable items (objects that players can interact with) appear to be made of the same stuff that make up the characters themselves. On a logical level, this is extremely helpful: the procedural rhetoric of the game is clear that players can manipulate items built of Lego bricks. But the metaphor of digitization is powerful. *Lego Batman* videogames deliver you *Lego Batman*, not *Lego Gotham*. Still, they seem to be promising *Lego Gotham* as well in these non-places.



**Figures 14-15:** While the load screens in *Lego Batman: The Videogame* (left) are concerned with narrative by offering character bios, by the time of *Lego Batman 3: Beyond Gotham* (right), the screens instead depict the upcoming level as a Lego playset and offer tips, focusing on its nature as a product and game.

Beyond these load screens exhibiting cute, pared-down Lego-brick versions of playable levels, the openings of the games themselves speak to environments built from Lego pieces. The first thing a player sees upon loading up *Lego Batman 3: Beyond Gotham* is a cinematic featuring the logos of the various stakeholders involved in the production of the game (WB Games, DC Comics, Lego, and Traveller's Tales). This cinematic has a simplified Batwing flying through and past all of the logos, themselves disguised as Lego pieces, as it navigates a

Lego-brick Gotham City. “WB Games” hangs in the sky, while “DC Comics” and “Lego” are hidden amongst the buildings of Gotham. Finally, the shot lifts into an aerial view and zooms out to reveal that the island of Gotham itself is in the shape of the TT logo (*fig. 16*).



**Figure 16:** Gotham as the Traveller’s Tale logo.

Ironic that the opening was designed this way, since *Lego Batman 3* moves away from the open-world model of *Lego Batman 2* in favour of a hub-world system—an issue that this chapter will take up later. Nevertheless, this cinematic relies on the cachet built up by its predecessor. While this moment is definitely TT putting its brand on the Batman world, the immediate point is that the game opens with a promise that the player will inhabit a *Lego* world. This is not how the *Lego Batman* games function. The sprites are Lego minifigures interacting with Lego bricks against the backdrop of an articulated world that vacillates between animation and photo-realism. The schism here between what’s promised and what’s delivered, between Lego-brick objects and animated worlds, is at the heart of the virtualization of Lego.

Kevin Schut writes about this virtualization of Lego bricks, noting that in Lego games, the two major changes wrought upon the blocks are the introduction of goals as they move from toys to games<sup>518</sup> and the broadening of possibilities as they allow for vastly expanded forms of construction.<sup>519</sup> I disagree with Schut’s second observation, at least for licensed Lego games.

<sup>518</sup> Cf. Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman, *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2004).

<sup>519</sup> Schut, “The Virtualization of Lego,” 228.



These products are not about construction at all, but instead the play is, as Schut correctly observes, goal-directed.<sup>520</sup> In fact, these games have scores of restrictions, even for a protocol-based system: camera orientations are locked, play is more about breaking things apart than building (you must destroy before you can create, and finding which parts to destroy is more challenging to seek out than the obvious jumping pieces that signal something to build), you cannot access many corners of the gameworld, the games can be very unforgiving in terms of placing your avatar in the exact right position (i.e. they are not designed intuitively)—the list goes on.

What's really at stake here is the alteration of affordances, as the bricks cease life as plastic and begin life as pixel. One of the central affordances of a Lego piece is that it can be snapped together with (ostensibly) any other Lego piece. In the digital arena, Lego pieces signal an entirely different kind of affordance: they can be acted upon to be smashed or reconstructed. All smashing occurs the same way: hit an object made of Lego bricks enough times, in the right way, and it breaks apart. All reconstruction occurs the same way as well: hold the build button over a group of jumping blocks, and they will automatically reconstitute themselves into a new object. There is no physical or visual relationship between the object before it is smashed, the jumping Lego pieces, and the newly constructed object. Players are constricted not by the self-imposed limits of imagination, but by the precise algorithms governing the code of the game—a code that appears to be more or less consistent across all games in the series.

Physical Lego playsets licensed from blockbuster films adapt specific scenes from those films, specifically spatializing the narratives and focusing on moments of excitement.<sup>521</sup> The consumer follows the instructions, builds the environment, and is then able to use the minifigures

---

<sup>520</sup> Ibid.

<sup>521</sup> Neal Baker, "Middle-Earth and Lego (Re)Creation," in *LEGO Studies: Examining the Building Blocks of a Transmedial Phenomenon*, ed. Mark J. P. Wolf (New York: Routledge, 2014), 41.

to play out the scenes represented. In essence, the consumer uses the affordances of Lego bricks to imagine a fantasy location and narrative. In Lego games, however, the player uses the affordances of code to imagine both the locations and narratives of the licensed properties *and* the affordances of physical Lego pieces themselves.

While it may appear that this argument is a complaint against the virtualization of Lego, let me be clear that it is not. In fact, it is extremely important that the environments of *Lego Batman* games *not* appear to be constructed of Lego bricks. If they were visually undifferentiated from the actionable items in the game, the player would have a much more difficult time deciphering how to progress through levels. Just as much as it would be impractical to have every element of the game be actionable and breakable, it is key to have Lego bricks signal particular affordances to players.

However, the environments of *Lego Batman* games are still somewhat haphazard in their design—a point that re-enforces the transmedial churn of the series. The spaces are as sloppily put together as any churn-based franchise: surfaces that aren't actually surfaces the character will fall right through, rough edges that invisibly jut out from the visible edge of a platform, awkward corners to navigate in and out of, and rushed mechanical design are par for the course. Anything that doesn't actually make progression through the game impossible (i.e. game-breaking) is permissible.

This can mean, for example, that Robin can randomly walk on air (but might just as suddenly plummet to his death), or that the colour palette of an area is muddy enough to make recognizing a target incredibly difficult. This fact contributes to the common approach players take to the games and underlines the core principle behind all Lego videogames: explore a space and smash everything actionable in it in order to reveal the dancing blocks that lead to advancement. Just as Lego construction sets inscribe and reinscribe themselves as a play

system,<sup>522</sup> the design of Lego videogames inscribes and reinscribes itself. Spatial exploration becomes the default in a game series where somewhat inattentive design is the norm, and inattentive design becomes the norm in a system where the prevailing ideology is meeting release dates and constantly producing.

As far as these differentiated spaces go, multiple facets warrant consideration in terms of their connection to the larger Batman transmedia milieu. The first is the differentiation itself. Over time, one of the prevailing urban features of Gotham City is its masonry. Gotham is frequently seen to be a brickwork city, built during the modern era and decaying during postmodernity. While one might think that Lego bricks might signal back to this adorably, they lack the appropriate appearance of disrepair and deterioration in their gleaming newness. You can't make physical Lego bricks look like they belong in Gotham City without scratching them or pasting decals over them, or otherwise artificially wearing away at them.<sup>523</sup> This is another reason that *Lego Batman* backgrounds are so distinct from actionable items in the game space—differentiating them allows both for accentuating the procedural rhetoric of the spaces and embedding the environments within the Batman mythos.

This returns to Aldred's thinking about the alternation between spectatorship and agency in videogames.<sup>524</sup> Aldred observes a kind of “doubled avatar” necessary to characters in licensed videogames—a common requisite of most transmedial game titles:

One of the greatest challenges facing characters that move from films to games is that they must function as “doubled avatars,” striking a difficult balance between being

---

<sup>522</sup> Landay, “Myth Blocks,” 76.

<sup>523</sup> In *The Lego Movie*, for example, while the animation was rendered through CGI rather than stop-action, the world was designed to be artificially aged, complete with nicks, scratches, and fingerprints covering the world, as if these were real pieces used by children. But *The Lego Movie* was as close to an autetailed product as possible, hewing to the visions of directors Phil Lord and Christopher Miller—such attention to detail is antithetical to churn.

<sup>524</sup> Aldred, “(Un)Blocking the Transmedial Character,” 94.

effective player surrogates, as well as accurate stand-ins for their cinematic source material [...] our videogame character provides us a sense of diegetic embodiment and involvement in the game world, making it the locus of agency and subjectivity. But since game characters are also graphically represented objects for our scrutiny and contemplation, our relationship to them is fluid, constantly shifting from participant to spectator and back again—at times, even occupying both roles simultaneously. Game characters licensed from other media further complicated this relationship because they are obligated to serve as highly visible and recognizable franchise IP.<sup>525</sup>

Aldred's central insight here is that game characters transferred from other media need to both serve as identification objects for players *and* seem like their other media counterparts. Due to his iconicity, Batman is an easy character to transfer to games, at least visually. The iconic nature of the character means that at this point his personality is extremely mutable, while his quintessential physical features are extremely basic: pointy ears, plus blue/black/grey dark colour swatches, plus a cape, equals Batman. His world, however, calls for more consistency: all Batman games take place at night, and Gotham is invariably urban and vast.

Owing both to this and the customary level design of Lego games, many levels in the *Lego Batman* games (for example, the first level of *Lego Batman 3: Beyond Gotham*, “Pursuers in the Sewers”) are extremely reminiscent of the larger heritage of Batman videogames: varyingly cavernous and claustrophobic red-and-brown brick spaces. The objects players can interact with largely consist of Lego constructs, but everything about the environment instead reaches for Bat-mythology. However, there's a larger argument here about how Lego games attempt to strike a balance between reminding players that that these are Lego games and

---

<sup>525</sup> Ibid, 106.

reminding players that these are Batman games. For example, the low ceilings of *Lego Batman* games keep the player from experiencing Gotham in the same way as in the *Arkham* series (or most Batman media), but they do lend a certain claustrophobia to the spaces—in this sense, they tie in well with the majority of Batman games.

They also lend themselves very well to the protocols of transmedial churn. Since releasing *Lego Star Wars: The Video Game* in 2005 (the same year Traveller's Tales merged with Giant Interactive to form TT Games), TT has produced 20 games for the Lego Group as of 2018, and has exclusively developed Lego games since 2009. This is extremely prolific for a single studio, and even more impressive when one considers that most of these games were eventually ported from console and PC to handheld. The claustrophobic spaces of a smaller environment lend themselves well to this porting, as handheld games call for closer action in order to be comprehensible on compact screens. Again, in transmedial thinking, it's key to work both ends of a product to signal to marketplaces its individuality while reducing site specificity below the surface.

However, the processes of transmedia workflow are still processes, and we can observe these processes at work in the way the overarching spaces of *Lego Batman* games have shifted from title to title. Over the course of the series, the world opens up and then constricts again. In *Lego Batman: The Videogame*, players are ushered from level to level via non-places like load screens and cinematic intervals like cutscenes. In *Lego Batman 2: DC Superheroes*, players can freely explore an open-world Gotham, and begin levels by entering buildings. TT's idea of what a Lego Gotham City really looks and feels like is most evident in this title, as the open world contains many side missions varyingly recognizable as on-theme for Batman or Lego (case in point: the anecdote about riding a giraffe at the Gotham Zoo that opened this chapter). And this Gotham is arguably as vast as that of any game in the *Arkham* series: players can navigate their

way up the sides of skyscrapers, engage in aerial races using planes or unlockable flying minifigures, tour familiar landmarks like Ace Chemicals or Wayne Tower, or simply wander around beating up henchmen and smashing fire hydrants.

It's curious, then, that the world of *Lego Batman* then contracts in a game titled *Lego Batman 3: Beyond Gotham*. This game sits somewhere between the linearity of *Lego Batman: The Videogame* and the openness of *Lego Batman 2*. Instead of level-by-level progression or an open-world approach, for the third game, TT opted for a hub-world system. What this means is that rather than accessing levels by navigating Gotham, players are instead given the closed world of the JLA Watchtower, a satellite orbiting the earth, capable of teleporting the characters from situation to situation. This tightening of the Batman world into a series of enclosed spaces is a direct result of the needs of transmedia production schedules—the all-important churn. For developers, hub-worlds are far easier to design and manage than open worlds. They also require less processing power, as the game can then throw players to load screens far more frequently without a choppy appearance of lag.<sup>526</sup>

However, this kind of level design can lead to difficulties for the end user, as navigating the level menus in *Lego Batman 3* can be confusing. In each hub-world, an interface is available that displays various levels on a rotating, glowing orb. The locations of the levels on this interface aren't organized by any obvious rubric, so if the player has been away from the game for a long enough time, she may forget how to access a specific hub point that connects to certain levels. Spatial reasoning allows for a different kind of memory: players can navigate a tour to retrace their steps, or mentally associate landmark structures with the levels that take place within. Alternatively, players can more easily access the linearity of the levels by viewing the

---

<sup>526</sup> For example, in *Arkham Origins*, the verisimilitude of the open-world format frequently clashes with the needs of the processor, and as Batman glides from one map section to the other, everything freezes momentarily as the system loads the space ahead.

worldmap, which contains a key indicating which location connects to which point in the game's narrative.

This structure is more in keeping with the style of Lego, not only as digital games, but as toys. The hub-world system of *Lego Batman 3* feels the same way the levels do: that this space is a playset. There's a coziness to this that sits somewhere between the freedom of an open world in *Lego Batman 2* and the straightforwardness of linear level progression in *Lego Batman: The Videogame*. While all *Lego Batman* games allow for exploration through a replay system called "free play" (wherein players can choose from all unlocked characters in the game to progress through the level or solve previously unsolvable side puzzles), only the hubs of *Lego Batman 3* are free of conflict. Players have the opportunity to play in a space without any goals beyond the ones they set for themselves. It's clear from the evolution of world-level spaces in these games that both linearity *and* openness come with attendant constraints.

From the development perspective, we can draw a fairly basic line from the fluctuation of world-level spaces in Lego games to transmedia requiring certain kinds of spaces in order to remake spaces in its own image. It is simply more efficient to develop games with a hub-world model than with an open-world model. It's easy to imagine a battle over this, conducted behind closed doors, with one faction arguing that a larger portion of the market would prefer an open-world model, while another argues that a hub-world approach allows the studio to crank out a \$79.00 game in eight months. And here again we can observe an allegory for transmedia as a business model: the assemblage will open up to all sorts of possibilities for consumer engagement and apparent agency, and then contract as soon as it becomes expedient to do so. As ever, the business model trumps the mode, reshaping our fictions and experiences to suit the bottom line.

As for the level spaces themselves, the *Lego Batman* series seems to evolve over the series not so much in scope as in spectacle. As the series progresses, the layouts of the spaces become more and more tantalizing, and, in some ways, less and less actionable. This is because later *Lego Batman* games are far more preoccupied with the affordances of free play. In *Lego Batman: The Videogame*, the spaces signal to players that certain areas are accessible or certain items are hidden out of view. As mentioned above, players can only access these areas and items during replay. Free play is meant to be a reward, but one that Gazzard would likely fit into the class of *false* rewards, where new opportunities become available, but are not connected to broader game goals:

[I]t is possible to see a type of reward that does not setback or terminate the game, yet at the same time it also does not progress the intended gameplay any further. These can be categorised as false rewards. False rewards help players to learn the rules of the game and gain high-score opportunities, but they do not open up any further opportunities for the player, in terms of new areas to be discovered. Instead, they help the player to recognise areas they have previously completed. This highlights how these now familiar areas may no longer offer the same reward that was once contained in that section of the game.<sup>527</sup>

Whether free play is a false reward or not, few indicators exist within a level of a Lego game to distinguish between those actionable items and accessible areas that are essential or possible for initial playthrough, and those only necessary or available during free play. This can frequently frustrate the player, as the spaces have so few directives in terms of procedural rhetoric.

---

<sup>527</sup> Gazzard, "Unlocking the Gameworld."



By *Lego Batman 3*, these signals are off the charts: in the first space of the first level of the game, there are some half dozen sparkling gold and blue items calling out to players. Gold items can only be acted upon using heat beams, while blue items can only be acted upon using magnetic abilities—neither of which are skills the player will unlock in this space. Instead, the sparkling signifies that there are secrets and collectables hidden in these objects for future free play. For the seasoned user who has played the previous *Lego Batman* games, this is fine—she will quickly come to the realization that she lacks the abilities to engage with those objects, and redirect her attention elsewhere. But new players might waste a great deal of time trying to interact with these objects, understandably imagining them to be the key to some puzzle.

It's also important to note that within the protocols of transmedia, free play must come with caveats. The terms of the “freedom” in free play are that the player must revisit spaces she's traversed before and repeat actions she's already performed. So freedom in the context of the transmedia world of *Lego Batman* is a recursive return—the reuse of commercial properties for small rewards. This reveals a core work ethos of TT *Lego* games: what is the most efficient amount of work that we as developers can do while involving the highest number of play hours for our customers? In the early days of computer gaming, similar results arose from different constrictions: most video games had a “Difficult” mode nearly identical to the standard “Medium” mode, except for the fact all action was sped up in Difficult. But this wasn't a byproduct of wanting to rush substantial games to market—instead, it was a result of the memory allotments of early consoles, such as the 256 bytes of RAM in the Nintendo Entertainment System or the 128 bytes of RAM in the Atari 2600.<sup>528</sup>

---

<sup>528</sup> Cf. Ian Bogost and Nick Montfort, *Racing the Beam: The Atari Video Computer System*, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2009).

Signalling is an extremely important aspect of fluid spatialization in games. Level design and procedural rhetoric are touchstone concepts for both game design and game analysis. As 3D engines allow for richer, vaster, and more deeply textured gameworlds, both level design and procedural rhetoric have established tropes for communicating to players what's actionable and where to go. In animation, foreground and background are usually differentiated for viewers through texture, colour, and the kinetic liveness of movement.<sup>529</sup> While foreground figures and characters are distinguished by heavy lines and solid colours, the unmoving background exhibits more nuance, often appearing in water colour with little line work (there is also, and perhaps more importantly, a labour consideration to this: in cel animation, backgrounds only have to be drawn once, so more effort can be put into them).

In a game, the world usually differentiates itself from actionable items in the same way, using brighter colours to draw the player's eye and indicating to her that she can interact with or act upon the flashy object. One of the iconic examples of this is *Mirror's Edge*, a first-person platformer running game where the player follows a set path to complete missions as she parkours across rooftops in a futuristic city. To avoid being too prescriptive and restrictive, the developers chose to highlight the correct pathway to progression by always marking it in with red objects and surfaces. This concept is further refined as the power of 3D game engines increase, allowing for greater detail in vector shading or polygonal rendering. For example, in 2013's *The Last of Us*,<sup>530</sup> the player is often led through lush overgrowth using colour coding—a yellow patch of the environment distinguishes itself from the rest of the world without becoming extradiegetic, and signals to the player that it constitutes a path, consequently leading players

---

<sup>529</sup> Thomas Lamarre, *The Anime Machine: A Media Theory of Animation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 8-9.

<sup>530</sup> Bruce Straley and Neil Druckmann, *The Last of Us*, Playstation 3 (Santa Monica, CA: Naughty Dog, LLC, 2013).

through otherwise confusing spaces. The more recent 2017 game *Horizon Zero Dawn*<sup>531</sup> does the same with climbing surfaces: main character Aloy occasionally has to scale massive structures with few opportunities to turn back, so yellow surfaces help players avoid jumping at an ungraspable surface.

This tactic is so common that it's been incorporated into the language of games and the common knowledge of players as an aspect of procedural rhetoric. It is, in fact, what Michael Benedikt writes about in discussing principles of transit for cyberspace, a principle that states that "travel between two points in cyberspace should occur phenomenally through all intervening points, no matter how fast (save with infinite speed), and should incur costs to the traveler proportional to some measure of the distance."<sup>532</sup> Benedikt's concept is also germane to thinking about fast-travel in *Arkham Origins*: as I wrote in discussing that game, the player becomes a brief spectator as the possibility of instantaneous travel in cyberspace is realized, collapsing the illusion that the traveler should incur "costs proportional to some measure of the distance" in the act of traversal.

Nitsche adapts this principle into the concepts of tracks and rails, axes and pathways that keep players moving through videogame spaces in prescribed fashions. He observes that those limitations are in fact desirable, noting "the restrictions of track and rails might affect the range of available choices and restrict interactive access to a shadow of its potential, but if the restriction is a meaningful part of the desired experience, then these spatial forms offer valid structural means to the game world."<sup>533</sup>

Guided pathways are a softer version of tracks, in which the player has more free space to roam and *can* move in non-prescribed directions or at a sub-optimal speed. However, markers on

---

<sup>531</sup> Mathijs de Jonge, *Horizon Zero Dawn*, Playstation 4 (Amsterdam, NL: Guerrilla Games, 2017).

<sup>532</sup> Michael Benedikt, *Cyberspace: First Steps* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1991), 168.

<sup>533</sup> Nitsche, *Video Game Spaces*, 176.

the symbolic level can help the player recover her sense of position and return to the goal-oriented aspects of the gameworld. In earlier 3D navigable spaces, the limitations of software could make these spaces tricky: for example, in the 1998 64-bit game *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*,<sup>534</sup> the player can get lost for hours in a pit because the actionable surfaces with vines fail to clearly enough differentiate themselves from unclimbable walls. As time has gone on and videogame spaces have become more and more complex, our visual vocabulary has moved on as well to some extent, meaning that understanding earlier, cruder 3D navigable spaces can be more challenging. For this reason, it can be difficult for younger players to go back to early 3D gameworlds and find their way around, simply because those worlds don't offer the textural shading that contemporary graphics can.

The *Lego Batman* games are attempting to follow the same cardinal rule of level design. However, as noted above, this has just the opposite effect for new players. Lego gameworlds are increasingly reliant on an understanding of the game franchise as a whole. In-game tutorials are generally limited to the basics of mechanics, rather than an education in navigating the spatial idiosyncrasies of the franchise now (unintentionally) associated with the series as a whole. This speaks volumes about how the protocols of franchise impact the development of virtual spaces. Just as technology increasingly relies on types of absorbed, collective knowledge that serve as a baseline for literacy, game studios developing franchises are increasingly realizing that they can dispense with exhaustive refreshers of both ongoing narratives and established mechanics. This observation scales up to contemporary transmedia strategy, where producers more and more assume that audiences and consumers engage with media objects with a narrative and thematic shorthand already in place, and scales down to specifically urban virtual spaces, where understandings of what cities are enmesh with player understandings of how navigation works in

---

<sup>534</sup> Toru Osawa et al., *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*, Nintendo 64 (Kyoto, Japan: Nintendo EAD, 1998).

games. Finally, each Lego game series is a node in the transmedia regime of some other franchise, so it is doubly interesting to see how Lego has drawn upon all of them in order to craft its own transmedia complex.<sup>535</sup>

Returning to Lego Batman specifically, the games also demand that we think aurally about space and how environment and sound are closely tied to one another in the dynamics of atmosphere. In terms of sound, *Lego Batman* games don't appear to have any kind of "off switch": either original or licensed music plays almost constantly (read: obnoxiously), and certain sounds can overlap with each other uncomfortably. For example, when playing as Superman in the open-world spaces of *Lego Batman 2*, initiating flight triggers the 1978 *Superman* film theme by John Williams. The same happens when Wonder Woman initiates flight: the Norman Gimbel and Charles Fox theme from the 1975 *Wonder Woman*<sup>536</sup> TV show plays.

What's missing from the Gotham environment is a sense of urban placement or depth. The constant looping music never fades out or recedes in volume (except briefly between loops), and few standard city audio samples are utilized. Instead, the developers clearly focused on sound effects of bats squeaking, Batman grunting, and the satisfying clatter of Lego bricks that accompanies smashing an object. This combines with the signaling of blinking lights and shining surfaces of actionable items to create an environment of pure amusement park chaos. What results, rather than any sense of order, is a cacophonous soundscape with few opportunities for contemplation. While this might be a common description of real-world metropolises, it's a departure from the organized thinking of urban planning, as well as the way Nitsche suggests the

---

<sup>535</sup> Case in point: the release of *Lego Dimensions* in the year following *The Lego Movie*. In this game, the three protagonists are Batman, Gandalf the Grey, and original *Lego Movie* creation Wyldstyle. While *Lego Dimensions* pulls in dozens of IP, it's telling that all three of these characters are owned by Time-Warner as expressed.

<sup>536</sup> Douglas S. Cramer and Stanley Ralph Ross, *Wonder Woman* (Burbank: Warner Bros. Television, 1975).

concept can be adapted to structural thinking in game design and analysis.<sup>537</sup> *Lego Batman* games are not designed for careful consideration. They are instead designed to keep players *busy*, offering sensory and aesthetic overload. In *Arkham* games, Batman masters the environment. In *Lego Batman* games, a host of heroes and villains work to make sense of it.

This brings us to another element: intertextual overload. As evidenced in the looping themes clashing with each other tonally, *Lego Batman* games are what happens when a developer accesses a stable of various IP assets without a cogent plan for how to deploy them: the unlockable characters, features, Easter eggs, and DLC all play like they were put together in the rush of excitement to be playing in a sandbox full of toys. This is perhaps the most significant consideration of the *Lego Batman* games in terms of their function within transmedia: how TT and the Lego Group skin different IPs over their core mechanics in order to keep producing at a breakneck pace.

## 5.6 Different Ways to Skin a Bat

Speaking of the *Arkham* series, critics noted that the franchise demonstrated a licensed property game could be expansively innovative from game to game.<sup>538</sup> *Lego* games are extremely expansive from game to game, but eschew mechanical reinvention in favour of differentiation through what I call the “IP skinning” of licenses. This is because past their first few instalments, *Lego* games ceased to significantly innovate in terms of gameplay, mechanics, or added features. TT has by now hit a kind of stride, where the options during play can largely be reduced to a basic suite of buttons with a few combinations therein, and additional masking of

---

<sup>537</sup> Nitsche, *Video Game Spaces*, 172.

<sup>538</sup> Andrew Reiner, “Batman: Arkham Asylum: The Best Batman Game Ever Made,” *Game Informer*, September 27, 2009, [https://www.gameinformer.com/games/batman\\_arkham\\_asylum/b/xbox360/archive/2009/09/27/review.aspx](https://www.gameinformer.com/games/batman_arkham_asylum/b/xbox360/archive/2009/09/27/review.aspx).

similar mechanics with new colours and diegetic reasoning. The prevailing logic behind the multiply-licensed games seems to be making various IPs work with existing core code, and stretching any given iconic character over the familiar iconic shape of the minifigure.

Across the Lego Group's various media, the form of the minifigure is key to association with the company, even moreso by now than the brick. While not the original Lego doll, the minifigure has retained its form more or less since 1978.<sup>539</sup> Embellishing the structure of minifigures is essential to Lego's reliance on licensing, so it's interesting to see the further changes digitization has wrought on them. In her writing on the doubled avatar, Aldred hits upon the key difference in considering character in passive narrative media and in games, noting that in contrast to the more richly-developed personas of successful film characters, which are staunchly tied to the ostensibly "realistic" representation of the actor playing them, successful video game characters are "defined first and foremost by their functionality within game spaces."<sup>540</sup> Jesper Juul might tie this to the abstraction of both appearance and action,<sup>541</sup> redirecting us to consider that while players think about functionality, game designers must also think about the labour of coding tied to a given function. *Lego Batman* characters are heavy with meaning in such a theoretical framework.

The franchise serves as an excellent case study in how the logics of transmedia production can extend themselves into the synergies of licensing and franchising. In so many ways, the franchise entails licenses upon licenses upon licenses, all of them calling into question what is being licensed to which. Lego is a powerful brand itself that licenses with other media franchises in order to augment their business model and retain market dominance after the

---

<sup>539</sup> Wolf, "Adapting the Death Star," 19.

<sup>540</sup> Aldred, "(Un)Blocking the Transmedial Character," 110.

<sup>541</sup> Jesper Juul, "A Certain Level of Abstraction," in *Situated Play: DiGRA 2007 Conference Proceedings*, ed. Akira Baba (Tokyo, Japan: DiGRA Japan, 2007), 510–15, <http://www.jesperjuul.net/text/acertainlevel/>.

expiration of their patent; in turn, all Lego games are produced by studio TT; TT is a subsidiary of WarnerMedia, which also of course owns the company that holds the copyright for Batman.

So who is feeding off of whom in this dynamic? Once, again, contradictions encountered when looking at transmedia from the plane of mode are reconciled by the ideologies of transmedia as a business model: the transmedia complex is rhizomatic in form, a form where origin points are meaningless. Though questions about licenses *should* be directed to the transmedia business model rather than the transmedia mode, such questions are inevitably tied into thinking around processes of adaptation—an approach that no longer functions (as the insurmountable nature of the question demonstrates). But from the secretive vantage point of the business strategy, it's unlikely that provenance matters. As I've observed again and again throughout this thesis, origins do not matter if everyone profits.

Regardless, due to the churn required in this system, many levels of skinning are called for. When licensing from a popular property, the Lego Group will skin that property over their core imaginary product, taking exciting brands and rendering them cutesy through minifigures and the subsequent “chibi” effect.<sup>542</sup> However, it stands to reason that the reverse is also true, and the Lego Group is instead skinning itself over the property. For the games, skinning is called for once again: not only are the Lego versions of various properties rendered so copacetic to one another in tone and appearance that they easily lump together in joint ventures such as *The Lego Movie* or the *Lego Dimensions* videogame, but they can also be rendered identically in games in terms of mechanics and spatial logics. All TT Lego games have the same baseline mechanics in their gameplay, recollecting the Lego System of Play: just as all Lego bricks are modular and can

---

<sup>542</sup> Anne Allison, “Portable Monsters and Commodity Cuteness: Pokémon as Japan’s New Global Power,” *Postcolonial Studies* 6, no. 3 (2003): 381–95, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1368879032000162220>.



be swapped across different construction sets, so too is the TT code swappable across various IPs.

This comes into sharp focus when the player switches between games, engaging with multiple TT licensed Lego titles simultaneously. For example, multiple characters within the *Lego Batman* games have the same special abilities: Cyborg, Superman, and Martian Manhunter all shoot lasers and interact with gold surfaces (among other characters), Solomon Grundy and Bane are both brutes who throw chunks of earth, etcetera. While there are 46 unlockable characters in the first *Lego Batman* game, 60 in the second, and an impressive 140 in the third, there are only a few dozen different abilities between all of them across all three games. This stands to reason: within the DC Universe, many abilities repeat themselves amongst characters, so adjusting those superpowers to game form also reasonably results in overlap. Why not program the characters' different abilities with the same underlying code, especially if they serve the same purpose? We can see the same technique in effect in popular game series (for instance, Ken, Ryu, and Dan are all the same fighter with slight differences in appearance in the *Street Fighter* series).

It's rarer, however, to see the same technique blatantly employed across work performed for different, even competing, IP regimes. In *Lego Marvel Superheroes*,<sup>543</sup> the heroes of one transmedia universe are indistinguishable in function from those of another. The stretchy Plastic Man of *Lego Batman 3* uses his stretching powers to solve exactly the same kinds of puzzles as Mr. Fantastic in *Lego Marvel Superheroes*. This is interesting due to its obviousness: in comics, both Mr. Fantastic and Plastic Man are capable of elasticity, but only Plastic Man can reshape himself into any object (a tea kettle, a key, a car, etc.). In the two games, however, both characters solve puzzles involving contorting themselves into the shapes of everyday objects. It's

---

<sup>543</sup> Arthur Parsons, *Lego Marvel Super Heroes*, Playstation 4 (Knutsford, England: Traveller's Tales, 2013).

clear that TT opted for the efficiency of slightly recasting Mr. Fantastic's abilities so that the Plastic Man model and mechanics could be reused. The same goes for Cyborg and Iron Man (both fly, interact with gold objects via lasers, and fire rockets), Solomon Grundy and the Thing (both are slow moving and can hurl large objects), and Alfred and Captain America (both can walk over fire, Captain America using his shield and Alfred using a serving tray), among others.

A pattern begins to emerge. This final case may put the finest point on the issue: it's hard to imagine two characters more divergent in terms of how audiences are meant to view them and their abilities—the faithful, sardonic English butler, and the earnest, All-American super soldier. Of course, one can argue that Alfred *should* be viewed in similar respect to Captain America—after all, his backstory involves a life of adventure in the SAS.<sup>544</sup> But then, only *some* versions of Alfred include this origin, and certainly not the Lego version. The argument itself cuts to the point of the transmedia dialectic rather quickly: a disagreement emerges on the level of the symbolic that can easily be explained on the level of production practices. Designed for pragmatic and practical reasons of production, this aspect of churn is a feature in this game franchise; in others, an apparent bug.

These types of mechanical specializations are again not unique to Lego games. Many genre games have skill archetypes that stretch across titles and studios. Most first-person shooters, for example, have snipers and shotgunners; in multiplayer online battles arenas, you have healers and spellcasters; and in fighting games, you can often choose between speedy lightweight fighters and stronger but slower heavyweights. When applied to these games, however, the question arises of whether Lego games constitute their own kind of meta-genre. Do Lego games transcend brand and aggregate their own class of game? The same question could be

---

<sup>544</sup> As per many renderings of the character, including DC Post-Crisis continuity in the comics, Michael Caine's portrayal in the Nolan films, Sean Pertwee's in *Gotham*, and even the *Batman: The Animated Series* episode "The Lion and the Unicorn."

asked of narrative choice-based point-and-click titles of the kind created by Telltale Games (a studio that added Batman to its stable of licensed games with the 2016 *Batman: The Telltale Series*<sup>545</sup> episodic graphic adventure game). Can a studio become so identified with a suite of mechanics disguised, chameleon-like, by various IP, that it corners the market on its own genre? Can a studio own a genre—or at least, a sub-genre?

Decoding the games as products from an end-user perspective, it would seem that the answer is yes. But it is a difficult question to tackle from an institutional standpoint, and current US copyright law offers few answers. But the skinning of different IP over a core set of coding protocols in Lego games demonstrates the power of churn in transmedia regimes. Just as at one point, all pop culture properties had a companion lunchbox, games now constitute the new territory for rights holders to occupy. Because of this, the only element of *Lego Batman* games that renders them unique is the appearance of the characters and the feel of the surrounding world.

And it's fascinating to see just how much the world plays into this identification. This is partly owing to the fact that Lego games not only employ uniform style, but uniform characterization as well: regardless of the character receiving the TT Lego treatment, they're depicted with identical slapstick irreverence. As Aldred notes, "Lego video games mobilize what Donald Crafton calls a 'figurative' mode of cartoon performance, characterized by its extroverted style, formulaic character types, and recurrent gestures, sayings, and gags. In so doing, Lego avatars serve as recognizable and appealing transmedial characters at the same time as they parody the convergence imperatives that necessitate this service."<sup>546</sup> The joke elements in Lego games (i.e. the extra aspects you can trigger "just for fun," or jokes looping in the

---

<sup>545</sup> Kent Mudle et al., *Batman: The Telltale Series*, Playstation 4 (San Rafael, CA: Telltale Games, 2016).

<sup>546</sup> Aldred, "(Un)Blocking the Transmedial Character," 114.

background of a level) are similar to playing with toys. The games are demonstrating that, much like your relationship to licensed action figures, they can make these characters do whatever they want and mess with this world however they please—even if the results are juxtapositional or contradictory.

Cutscenes end up attempting to shoulder more of the identification, but, as previously mentioned, the obvious narrative aspects of the games play little role in maintaining player interests. Consequently, the environment must step in to help make a *Lego Batman* game a *Batman* game. So while *Lego Batman 2* is similar on many levels to *Lego Marvel Superheroes*, it looks and feels sufficiently different. Brick walls are dirtier and more scratched up in Gotham than in Marvel’s New York City, the weather is inclement, and the entire game takes place at night. It may be that simply being dressed as Batman is enough: if players have the chance to embody the pointy-eared cowl and dark cape, they will see and experience “being Batman,” even if that avatar inhabits the world of *Super Mario Bros.* or *Kirby’s Dreamland* or *Doom*.

However, as discussed in the earlier chapter surveying the history of Batman videogames, we know that character identification doesn’t necessarily stand on its own. The world is the ultimate unifier within transmedia: occupy a consistent and recognizable universe, and fans will instinctively identify with the characters with which it is populated. This is the symbiotic relationship of not only Lego and Batman, but world and narrative in general: the environment plays a key role in constructing the consumer. So just like the modularity of Lego playsets, the modularity of the code in Lego games goes across nodes in the IP and allows for future execution and playability.

As Aldred notes, it’s very complicated to think about both identifying with game characters and seeing them as separate entities in a story when the characters and story are derived from an established narrative in another medium, especially when “the game’s

representational system is strictly obligated to uphold the often highly specific demands of the franchise intellectual property upon which a given character is based.”<sup>547</sup> *Lego Batman* games successfully elide this briar patch, partly owing to the fact that the IP from which they derive is so varied in its representations over time. What’s really interesting is that they’ve also managed to apply the same mechanics to these games that they do to all other Lego games with so little apparent added effort.

This leads us back to Wendy Chun’s idea of sourcery. Chun articulates sourcery as a fetishism that obfuscates the vicissitudes of execution and “makes our machines demonic.”<sup>548</sup> The reason a discussion of sourcery is germane to an examination of the mechanics in TT Lego games is that such clear uniformity effectively flattens out sourcery. Users are left no closer to understanding the labour that goes into building software, but do come away with a better understanding of how code is disguised. The MDA frame is easy to detect when cross-referencing multiple Lego games, but, just as with the *Arkham* franchise, thinking transmedially will help illuminate some of the whys of their development. It then becomes impossible to understand these games without considering the labour that went into them and reflecting on the conditions of their development and design. This in itself is an exercise in media literacy, and players who comprehend the aggregation of labour and code infrastructure across products are able to move past thinking of the mechanics in Lego games as a “house style” and toward considering them as nodes in a network built around churn. In short, a deeper study of the mechanics in Lego games is a form of decoding on the part of players unintended by the developers at TT, and perhaps even more unanticipated by the rights holders licensing their properties out to the Lego Group. It puts the lie to an idea that anything renders pop culture

---

<sup>547</sup> Ibid, 110.

<sup>548</sup> Chun, “On ‘Sourcery,’” 300.

franchises and transmedia complexes unique beyond visual style—a visual style further muted by the rendering of the Lego minifigure.

## 5.7 Conclusion

The overall conflict of *The Lego Movie* involved the distinction between open creativity and following the instructions: in the film, the megalomaniacal Lord Business waged war against a rebellious force of “master builders” (named after the official designation given to Lego artisans who design and construct large sculptures) to control the “Kraggle” (Krazy Glue that Lord Business wants to use to bind all Lego bricks together<sup>549</sup>). In the climax of the film, the struggle between Lord Business and the freedom fighter master builders acts as a metaphor for father-son dynamics of order and freedom, “playing by the rules” and creativity. Instead of reaching an either-or conclusion, *The Lego Movie*’s prevailing message is that free creativity should exist in relationship with, rather than in opposition to, following the instructions.<sup>550</sup> The same philosophy holds for the design of the *Lego Batman* videogames: players are allowed to play through levels with whatever combination of characters and special powers they desire, but they can only do so once they’ve completed the given level in the fashion prescribed by the game. Beyond the ideological contradictions inherent in this, the spatialization of these games also challenges the player’s view of how gameplay ought to work.

This is not a revolutionary observation, as it basically echoes what most Western philosophy after Kant says: freedom is a function of prior constraint. The question then becomes: what are the particular prior constraints that transmedia pushes upon us, and what are the

---

<sup>549</sup> Lord and Miller, *The Lego Movie*.

<sup>550</sup> Derek Johnson, “Chicks with Bricks: Building Creativity Across Industrial Design Cultures and Gendered Construction Play,” in *LEGO Studies: Examining the Building Blocks of a Transmedial Phenomenon*, ed. Mark J. P. Wolf (New York: Routledge, 2014), 81.

conditions under which we then become “free?” As I have already noted, for Lego games, the prior constraints are a matter of inaccessibility and incompleteness, and the conditions under which freedom occurs entails revisitation. When performing the initial perfunctory playthrough of a level, the player is attracted to objects and areas that they simply can’t access, because they’re only reachable using different characters and powers. Because of this, players are taunted and teased to replay, not so that they can master the mechanics or challenges of the games (indeed, the games offer few unique skill or puzzle challenges), but instead so that they can master the *spaces* of the games, revealing and collecting all.

What this leads to is not a release from the strictures of ordered gameplay, but rather a form of overconsumption where games indicate to players that they have not succeeded in mastering the game without multiple replays—similar to visual novels, where the reader/player is encouraged to make her way through all the variations.<sup>551</sup> The terms of freedom in a *Lego Batman* game are revisitation, and the freedom gained is the opportunity to overconsume. Playing these games fully then is a matter of thoroughness and exhaustion disguised as choice—a subject Mia Consalvo touches upon in writing on the game *Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney*. Consalvo observes that in that game, “choices are presented as optional to give players a sense of choice, although all choices must eventually be taken, all avenues explored, for the story to continue.”<sup>552</sup> However, once the player achieves proficiency in closely reading the text, success is guaranteed. Consalvo is clear in explaining that this doesn’t totally negate the opportunities for players to derive pleasure from the game,<sup>553</sup> and my case study here is no different. But it’s important to be clear-eyed about the kinds of fetish and pleasure we derive.

---

<sup>551</sup> Sarah Christina Ganzon, “Sweet Solutions for Female Gamers: Cheritz, Korean Otome Games, and Global Otome Game Players,” in *Digital Love: Romance and Sexuality in Games*, ed. Heidi McDonald (Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press, 2017).

<sup>552</sup> Mia Consalvo, “Persistence Meets Performance: Phoenix Wright, Ace Attorney,” in *Well-Played 1.0: Video Game, Value and Meaning*, ed. Drew Davidson (Pittsburgh, PA: ETC Press, 2009), 154.

<sup>553</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.

In this paradigm, there is no final “win” state; transmedia follows the protocols of late capitalism in encouraging consumers to view themselves as incomplete, their work unfinished. Overconsumption is a key technique within the churn protocol of transmedia strategy that usefully pivots our thinking to participatory culture forms like prosumerism and playbour.<sup>554</sup> Importantly, overconsumption is *not* these. No soft skills are developed or utilized in replaying these levels, and no value is added to the broader community by the player making use of a walkthrough—only by the player creating that walkthrough. So if playbour is a diverse biome in the broader ecosystem of participatory culture, overconsumption indicates that transmedia is again winnowing the space for participatory culture in cultural production and circulation.

This same logic extends to understanding the Batman canon, as realized in the myriad allusions to Batman history present in the games. While film releases such as *The Lego Movie* and *The Lego Batman Movie* similarly fold into one another and their own histories, examining games illustrates how blending the affordances of code with genre distinctions allows Lego to establish their brand in terms of interactivity. There is now such an established “Lego style” in videogames that it won’t be long before other children’s games begin to emulate and imitate the mechanics and puzzles of Lego games. Looking at how space and openness shifts in the *Lego Batman* games demonstrates further the cycle of churn crucial to the ongoing success of the brand. Collating the launch schedule of TT Lego games with the mutability of level- and world-types in those games (and the release dates of the recent slate of Lego-branded films as well) reveals the priorities of the Lego Group in determining how they want their brand to be recognized: not just in terms of yellow minifigures, but also in terms of interactive feel.

---

<sup>554</sup> Julian Kücklich, “Precarious Playbour: Modders and the Digital Games Industry,” *The Fibreculture Journal*, no. 5 (2005), [five.fibreculturejournal.org/fcj-025-precarious-playbour-modders-and-the-digital-games-industry/print/](http://five.fibreculturejournal.org/fcj-025-precarious-playbour-modders-and-the-digital-games-industry/print/).



All of these aspects allow us to craft arguments about how licensing structures themselves shape games in transmedia. Simply put, the games exist because of transmedia business dealings, and the details of the games are affected by the necessities of churn within those networks. The contents of games then become an allegory for how transmedia views a relationship to the world.

When a narrative shifts from one medium to another, one in which both the overhead and the affordances of the medium vastly impact the ways in which stories are expressed and audiences are implicated in the telling of those stories, the needs of the business model will always trump the needs of the mode, thus resolving the contradiction once we move past the level of the symbolic. In this case, we can observe this not only about the narrative and thematic concepts at play in a Batman story, but also of Lego itself, and even more importantly, of the way spatialization occurs with Lego play.

These are essential questions to the study of transmedia, and indeed the necessity for the term itself. In many ways, transmedia as I discuss it in this dissertation is about adaptation. However, as a conceptual framework, adaptation falls short, because it implies a new text adapted from a source text. This isn't what transmedia is. Instead, it's an ongoing dialogue, a networked conversation involving give and take and multilateral exchange across multiple texts simultaneously. Elsewhere, Will Brooker has argued that in transmedia, it's the most popular or profitable iteration of a text that gives all the others their cues in a given moment.<sup>555</sup> I'd add to this that in as complex and multifaceted a tapestry as Batman, with such a deep well of history to draw upon, any node in the network has the potential to rise back up to the top layer at any given moment. This is obvious in the *Lego Batman* games, because these games leave no layer unscrapped and no part of the buffalo unused—they throw everything in, *and* the kitchen sink.

---

<sup>555</sup> Brooker, *Hunting the Dark Knight*.

In Lego playsets, the authoring authority and the act of “creation” is undertaken by the player. Batman’s world can be created in any way the player chooses, and even Batman himself can be swapped around and transposed with different body parts. Once construction is underway or complete, any narrative can be authored by the player. The games, however, reclaim authorship from players due to the nature of their closed system. The openings of participatory creation are narrowed even further when the game sprites are given voices in the sequels, concretizing the characters further and complementing the overconsumption of free play. This addition follows a pattern with the games overall, where possibilities are opened up for users and subsequently winnowed down: just as *Lego Batman 2* progresses from static levels to an open-world system, *Lego Batman 3* closes down the possibilities for exploration with the introduction of the hub-world system. Nevertheless, it’s the world itself that most distinguishes these games as specific to the Batman transmedia network on any level other than visual.

## 6 Conclusion

“To take as one’s object of study the literary or artistic field of a given period and society (the field of Florentine painting in the quattrocento or the field of French literature in the Second Empire) is to set the history of art and literature a task which it never completely performs, because it fails to take it on explicitly, even when it does break out of the routine of monographs which, however interminable, are necessarily inadequate (since the essential explanation of each work lies outside each of them, in the objective relations which constitute this field). The task is that of constructing the space of positions and the space of position-takings in which they are expressed.”

– Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*<sup>556</sup>

“Gotham is a house on fire, and I’m not gonna burn with it.”

– Selina Kyle, *Batman: The Telltale Series* Episode Five<sup>557</sup>

### 6.1 Introduction: Missing Pieces

I’m in a nightmare.

There’s no space to move in this room. Even if there were, my legs are unresponsive. I know who I am: I’m Batman. For hours, I’ve been trying to solve a mystery that seems to unravel more the closer I get to it. Someone has murdered Nightwing, my former ward and first partner. I’ve chased leads from Wayne Manor to the Batcave, to grimy rooftops and macabre morgues, all the way to the dingiest sewer in Gotham City. All along, something’s seemed not quite right. All of my movements feel awkward and janky, and just retrieving my grapnel gun from my utility belt sometimes takes three tries. It’s like my entire body has been numbed with novocaine. Even my reaction to the death of Nightwing seemed off, like I needed to move on too fast. And now, I’ve woken up here, in this claustrophobic space. I’ve travelled a twisted path to

---

<sup>556</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, trans. Randal Johnson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 29-30.

<sup>557</sup> Mudle et al., *Batman: The Telltale Series*.

come to this point: a cell in the Arkham Asylum Intensive Treatment Ward. There's only enough room to stand. On one side, there's a door with a peephole in it. On the adjacent wall, a dirty smeared mirror. The walls are padded, and insane but familiar utterances are clawed into them. "Partner in crime;" "killer;" "ha ha ha." But the setting morphs and warps every time I change perspective. Each time I turn around, more and more of this confused, angry scrawling appears, and the walls themselves disappear and reappear as I turn and spin, replaced periodically by visions of friends and foes alike, cursing me. Pleading with me. Blaming me.

Is there someone else truly in here with me? Am I alone?

As my paranoia mounts into full-blown panic, I begin to throw myself against the wall. How did I end up here? How can I, the World's Greatest Detective, the Caped Crusader, feel so totally powerless? I fling myself into the wall over and over, banging on the door. Suddenly and with sickening clarity I understand. I spin myself around one last time and catch my reflection in the mirror: I killed Nightwing. I'm not Batman. I'm the Joker. Dun dun duuunnnnnnnnn.

The whole world goes dark, and I move to remove my heavy mask. Light floods my eyes and I squint in the middle of a bright room. There's a TV in front of me displaying a fuzzy version of the dark world that I just inhabited a moment ago. What I've been describing here is the ending of *Batman: Arkham VR*, a 2016 virtual reality game developed by Rocksteady Studios and published by WBIE.<sup>558</sup> The reason for my clumsiness, confusion, and myriad embodiment issues can all be explained in the context of the emergent medium of virtual reality games. Because the medium is young, its protocols and affordances are still largely foreign to me. I don't know how to make use of the controller interface fluidly or elegantly; the games are extremely complex to build and play takes a physical toll on the player—consequently, they're far shorter; and though this is the first instalment in the *Arkham* series where I see exclusively

---

<sup>558</sup> Hill and Doherty, *Arkham VR*.

through first-person perspective (a perspective rare across the spectrum of more than 70 *Batman* videogame titles), I've never felt *less* connected to the embodied experience of “being Batman.”

The medium also holds implications for the spatiality of the game. In a talk on VR systems and narrative, games scholar Betsy Brey discusses the difficulties of telling stories using virtual reality, where simply “wandering around” in a space is antithetical to experiencing a story. Brey asks how we can take an environment and events transpiring within it and craft meaning.<sup>559</sup> In another piece addressing the same questions, Ruth Aylett posits that spatiality best hosts non-traditional, emergent forms of storytelling.<sup>560</sup> So spatial concerns are deeply connected to issues of narrative and meaning—that much is clear. It seems that Rocksteady's solution to this quandary is to heavily limit the player's ability to wander. So, though the potentials of perspective open up wildly in a new medium, for now, it means winnowing down the spaces of the game.

Though the list of media objects this dissertation has looked at is quite exhausting, it is in no way exhaustive. The development of this project did not come at anything resembling a lull in the production and release of *Batman* media—indeed, the needs of the transmedia complex creates so much churn that nothing short of economic disaster could slow its whirlwind speed. *Arkham VR* is an important object to consider in discussing Batman, Gotham City, and transmedia, but was only released when the work on this project was well underway. And it's not alone: as of this writing in 2018, the prequel series *Gotham*<sup>561</sup> has been running for four seasons on Fox, the graphic adventure game *Batman: The Telltale Series*<sup>562</sup> has released ten episodes

---

<sup>559</sup> Betsy Brey, “Fact and/or Fiction?: VR Storytelling and Cognitive Narratology” (Conference presentation, June 1, 2017).

<sup>560</sup> Ruth S. Aylett, “Narrative in Virtual Environments: Towards Emergent Narrative” (Papers from the 1999 AAAI Fall Symposium, Technical report FS-99-01, Menlo Park, CA: AAAAI Press, 1999), 83–86.

<sup>561</sup> Heller, *Gotham*.

<sup>562</sup> Mudle et al., *Batman: The Telltale Series*.

over two series; and Gotham has appeared in multiple DCEU blockbusters helmed by several directors.<sup>563 564 565</sup> The expansive transmedia approach is one in which the rights holders make multiple small side bets on everything, and larger bets where the odds are thought to be very, very good. Even my case studies had objects branch off from them that I didn't account for: a filler AAA game like *Arkham Origins* is accompanied by several side bets, such as a turn-based mobile beat 'em up game developed by NetherRealm Studios,<sup>566</sup> a branching narrative prequel comic developed by MadeFire Studios as a "DC<sup>2</sup> Multiverse graphic novel,"<sup>567</sup> and the AAA game's own multiplayer FPS mode, developed by studio Splash Damage in the UK, completely separately from the WB Games Montréal team.

This is the problem of scholarship in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: no terrain is stable enough to map definitively. This final chapter will look toward some of the most recent iterations of Batman and Gotham City to contextualize the challenges and pitfalls of performing this kind of research on this kind of rhizomatic object. It will restate the larger arguments of the thesis through summary and synthesis, and examine some of these recent objects in that context. The chapter will conclude by thinking beyond the issue of Gotham City specifically, and suggest useful takeaways for future similar research on videogame urban spatiality and transmedia networks.

---

<sup>563</sup> Snyder, *Batman v Superman*.

<sup>564</sup> Ayer, *Suicide Squad*.

<sup>565</sup> Snyder and Whedon, *Justice League*.

<sup>566</sup> Jill Scharr, "NYCC: 'Batman: Arkham Origins' - Mobile Version Announced," *Tom's Guide*, October 14, 2013, <https://www.tomsguide.com/us/nycc-batman-arkham-origins-reveals,news-17705.html>.

<sup>567</sup> "Batman Arrives on the App Store in Epic New Interactive Graphic Novel 'Batman: Arkham Origins - A DC2 MultiVerse Graphic Novel,'" *DC Comics Blog*, December 19, 2013, <https://www.dccomics.com/blog/2013/12/19/batman-arrives-on-the-app-store-in-epic-new-interactive-graphic-novel-batman-arkham>.

### 6.1.1 Space and Place in *Arkham VR*

It's difficult to make arguments about a space where no movement *throughout* the space is possible. Such an exercise raises the question of whether these worlds even *qualify* as spaces. But the space that *does* come sharply into consideration in a way no other game discussed in this dissertation contemplates is the space inhabited by the *play*. We need to account for the haptic experiences of the player in consideration of VR games, because the technology is still somewhat nascent. At the time of this writing, playing a game like *Arkham VR* is an involved task in and of itself. The PS VR headset is large and cumbersome, and connected to the console by a thick, heavy cord that the player will do well to stay aware of at all times—playing PS VR games can quickly result in the player wrapping a constrictive cable around her own neck.

The evolution of controllers is a topic already covered extensively in other research,<sup>568 569</sup> but suffice it to say that for well over a decade, the majority of console controllers have been wireless. This has allowed for greater levels of immersion and necessitated larger home spaces to accommodate televisions, seating, and enough open space to fit large drum kit peripherals or two bodies racing each other in place as a gestural gaming camera scans their movements and renders them as avatars onscreen. But the affordances of the VR headset make all the same demands *and* blinds the player to the room itself as they visually inhabit a world that requires them to turn away from the screen entirely. Before, at least all attention and gesture flowed in one direction. Now, all bets are off, and the wise player will attempt to keep in mind her real-world surroundings to avoid tripping over a cord or knocking over a glass. It's something players are still working to get the hang of.

---

<sup>568</sup> Laura U. Marks, *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

<sup>569</sup> Nicolas Nova and Laurent Bolli, *Joypads!: The Design of Game Controllers* (San Bernardino, CA: CreateSpace, 2013).

What results from this combined awareness on the part of the player for the gameworld is a schism between space and place. In *Arkham VR*, the places are Gotham City, Wayne Manor, Arkham Asylum, etcetera. But the only *space* inhabited is in the physical world. Consequently, the immersiveness of this game is at its strongest when the player relinquishes control and takes in the details of the game environment. For example, at a moment early in the game, the player descends on a platform into the massive cavern of the Batcave below Bruce Wayne's foyer. For the player, it can be a breathtaking, exhilarating, and just a little terrifying an experience to suddenly see the expanse of space all around her and realize the floor is gone, and she could be forgiven a moment of panic as she forgets where her body truly is and vertigo takes hold. In her lecture, Brey discusses her somewhat overwhelming first experience playing a VR game and her surprise when she realized early on that she'd been exploring a mere load screen for several minutes. If we connect this to earlier arguments about non-places and load screens in this project, VR proposes interesting complications for our considerations. In VR, both load screens and the actual physical space the player inhabits are non-places: the autopilot process of holding here is a waiting of body, not a waiting of vision. And because the player's vision is completely contained to the visor, there's little to distract from the complete abstractness of this holding pattern.

In her article "Cyberspace and Identity," Sherry Turkle writes that engaging in digital spaces distances us from our bodies, and we become so immersed in the virtual world that we fail to acknowledge the physical presence of others around us.<sup>570</sup> Cyborg researcher Judy Ehrentraut extends this into VR, discussing the critique of the technology that involves being absorbed with a technologically mediated world of "elsewhere."<sup>571</sup> These considerations punctuate the schism between space and place in thinking about VR spatiality, as well as the

---

<sup>570</sup> Sherry Turkle, "Cyberspace and Identity," *Contemporary Sociology* 28, no. 6 (1999): 643–48, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2655534>.

<sup>571</sup> Judy Ehrentraut, "This Is Not Your Body: The Synchronization of Affect in Virtual Reality Gaming" (Conference presentation, June 1, 2017).



thought processes around waiting and non-places. Of course, Maurice Merleau-Ponty tells us in *Phenomenology of Perception* that the body is needed for grounding in immersive experiences; without it, we can't fully relinquish our self-awareness of physical surroundings.<sup>572</sup>

Regardless of how this jibes with the idea of immersion without the body in cyberspace, the central paradox offered by a game like *Arkham VR* is that though the game's promotional materials promised that the player will "be the Batman" through first-person panoramic perspective and physicality, it's precisely the disjuncture between the physicality and the perception that can distract the player while trying to *perform* the Batman. This paradox may just be solved by the eventual evolution of human perception in digital materiality: the affordances of the medium aren't yet intuitive for users. But the suggestion that it will eventually be that *users* will evolve into the affordances of the medium returns us to the allegorical reconciliation of transmedia within late capitalism: the spaces we believe we make for ourselves were always there, waiting for us, on every level.

What this means for the space of VR Gotham is simply that the technology isn't yet at the place where we can explore or interact in anything resembling physicality. The immersiveness is limited to the *look*. These current limitations mean the game space is not navigable anymore. In this way, the future looks a lot like the past, as we adjust to a strategy that molds and interpellates us into its ideal subjects.

### 6.1.2 Other Nodes in the Network

*Arkham VR* is only one of the nodes to recently appear in the Batman transmedia rhizome. On the small screen, the Fox series *Gotham* has arisen as an important consideration in

---

<sup>572</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Donald A. Landes (New York: Routledge, 2012).

examining contradictions at the mode level of the network, and how could a successful television show bearing the name of this dissertation's central interest *not* play a role in the corpus of the work? The show looks at Bruce Wayne's early years, beginning with a focus on James Gordon's struggles within the GCPD to clean up the streets of a city already sliding towards carnivalesque horror, and expanding into an ensemble cast of villains new and old, as we trace Bruce Wayne's evolution into the Dark Knight. *Gotham* is a perfect example of the contemporary transmedia milieu: while it's ostensibly a prequel, it makes few attempts to fit itself into established continuities with any degree of precision. Twenty years ago, the *Star Wars* prequel trilogy arguably tried to nestle itself into a single established canon of works and extrapolate suggestive commentary and dialogue to offer a single traceable, coherent timeline. This is transmedia as it was: multiple media objects creating a unified entertainment experience where factual knowledge is its own reward. Even then, it wasn't enough: many fans complained about perceived contradictions like Obi Wan's commentary in *A New Hope* that Anakin Skywalker was a great pilot when they met, but Anakin was only a child in the prequels (despite his prowess at both pod-racing and fighter-piloting),<sup>573</sup> or that Anakin never left a lightsaber in his will.<sup>574</sup>

Media producers took care to learn the hard lessons of the prequel trilogy's reception, and slowly, transmedia complexes made less effort to build into preexisting mythologies and began to chart their own courses in terms of storyline. *Gotham* is exemplary of that shift. It creates exactly the kind of schisms at the mode level that this project has been addressing, and the rewards of this strategy have been its own mini-complex: in 2016, Fox produced a motion comic titled *Gotham Stories* meant to tie into the series' second season;<sup>575</sup> in 2017, author Jason Starr

---

<sup>573</sup> "What Continuity Error within the Saga Bothers You the Most? • r/StarWars," *reddit*, accessed August 3, 2018, [https://www.reddit.com/r/StarWars/comments/4j97si/what\\_continuity\\_error\\_within\\_the\\_saga\\_bothers\\_you/](https://www.reddit.com/r/StarWars/comments/4j97si/what_continuity_error_within_the_saga_bothers_you/).

<sup>574</sup> Addyson Medley, "5 Complaints About The Star Wars Prequels That Should Retire," *Dorkly*, April 7, 2017, <http://www.dorkly.com/post/82966/5-complaints-about-the-star-wars-prequels-that-should-retire>.

<sup>575</sup> *Gotham Stories* (New York: Fox Broadcasting Company, 2016).

penned a tie-in novel titled *Dawn of Darkness* that acts as a prequel to the prequel;<sup>576</sup> and in 2018, Fox announced that series creator Bruno Heller was working on a spin-off show focusing on Alfred's early days in British intelligence.<sup>577</sup>

So how does the Gotham of *Gotham* play out in terms of transmedia spatiality? In terms of narrative, the series sets its own goals; in terms of environment, it seems to draw in multiple valences of signification from its larger transmedia heritage. It seems to map extremely well to O'Neil's comments about Gotham City being "Manhattan below 14<sup>th</sup> Street at eleven minutes past midnight on the coldest night in November,"<sup>578</sup> even in its first five minutes. The pilot episode opens on the nighttime skyline of a towering city teeming with lights and crowded by skyscrapers. After this establishing shot, we watch Selina Kyle bound across dingy rooftops and descend into a cramped Chinatown, eventually making her way back up to a fire escape overlook of a dark laneway. As she sits in her perch, her breath crystalizing in the early winter air, she witnesses the birth of the Batman mythos, as an adolescent Bruce Wayne and his parents turn into the alley and begin a fateful walk—this is Crime Alley.

*Gotham*'s exteriors are almost entirely shot in New York City; both Chinatown generally and the Crime Alley location (actually Cortland Alley at 23 Cortland Avenue) are well below 14<sup>th</sup> Street in Manhattan.<sup>579</sup> The environment of *Gotham* also frequently features a grey, overcast sky (even in its broad daylight scenes), and the actors dress for cold weather. Just like the earlier 1960s show, the interior sets are extremely over the top and garish, but in a different fashion—instead of candy-coloured and brightly lit, *Gotham*'s interiors are both dripping with velvety opulence and caked in a layer of grime. It's perfect for a city that lacks a moral compass and a

---

<sup>576</sup> Jason Starr, *Gotham: Dawn of Darkness* (London: Titan Books, 2017).

<sup>577</sup> Lesley Goldberg, "'Gotham' Boss Sets New Batman Prequel Series at Epix," *The Hollywood Reporter*, May 16, 2018, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/live-feed/gotham-boss-sets-new-batman-prequel-series-at-epix-1112339>.

<sup>578</sup> Dennis O'Neil, *Knightfall: A Novel* (New York: Bantam Books, 1994).

<sup>579</sup> Christopher Inoa, "NYC Film Locations for TV Show Gotham on FOX," *Untapped Cities*, October 9, 2014, <https://untappedcities.com/2014/10/09/nyc-film-locations-for-tv-show-gotham-on-fox/>.

nuanced sense of taste: here, Gotham is split between the desperation of the destitute and the obliviousness of a tacky upper crust.

Aesthetically, the spaces and environments of *Gotham* seem to jump off from O’Neil’s starting point, and the show takes advantage of its New York-based production to do so (shooting in New York is a rarity for *Batman* screen media, as Appendix 2 of this thesis demonstrates). While *Gotham* offers no end of inconsistencies in its execution of plot within the broader context of the transmedia complex, the design of the show is extremely consistent. In terms of geography and perspective, the show frequently uses establishing shots of a composite city that seems almost procedurally generated in the way it piles architectural features on top of one another, crowding the frame and overstimulating the eye. Much of the action of the program takes place at street level, calling us back to the 1960s series and reminding us of the infrastructural affordances of different media productions. In transmedia, everything connects, intentionally or not. Audiences can decode a connection back to earlier iterations because they’re looking for them, and find discrepancies for the same reason. It would be a no-win scenario for producers, if these imagined connections and schisms weren’t precisely the point of transmedia strategy.

There are other recent *Batman* objects that are easy to connect to the arguments of this thesis as well. Take for example *Batman: The Telltale Series*,<sup>580</sup> a 2016 point-and-click graphic adventure released over five episodes. The developer, Telltale Games, was founded in 2004 and made its name producing episodic adaptations of popular franchises from a variety of other media. One Telltale communications officer described the company as an “interactive TV network and studio,”<sup>581</sup> and this line seems to aptly describe the stylistic focus of the company:

---

<sup>580</sup> Mudle et al., *Batman: The Telltale Series*.

<sup>581</sup> Katharine Byrne, “Telltale on Its ‘Wildly Successful’ Season Pass Discs and What’s Next for Switch,” *MCVUK*, September 28, 2017, <https://web.archive.org/web/20171003093410/http://www.mcvuk.com/news/read/telltale-on-its-wildly-successful-season-pass-discs-and-what-s-next-for-switch/0187333>.

for Telltale, games are an effective form for telling stories, and the majority of its mechanical innovations are geared toward an interest in narrative. Mechanically, virtually nothing tells the Batman Telltale game apart from the Telltale *Walking Dead* series<sup>582</sup> or its line of *Game of Thrones* games.<sup>583</sup> Early in its life, the company developed its own engine (referred to as the Telltale Tool) that the studio has used in every one of its games to date.<sup>584</sup> *Batman: The Telltale Series* serves as another example of the types of transmedia that Traveller's Tales engages in in producing licensed Lego games. It exercises IP skinning in stretching another property over Telltale's signature mechanics, and churn in its episodic release structure. Consequently, the arguments that arise from a close examination of the Telltale Batman game are nearly identical to many of those discussed in the last chapter. However, it is somewhat specific in its expression of space, and allows us to take one last dip into this topic in context.

In both *Arkham VR* and *Batman: The Telltale Series*, spatial exploration is limited to what you can see. Cameras are controlled, and pathways are blocked off. These games are worlds of looking from afar while standing still. Familiar landmarks are utilized similarly as well—in Episode Two of the Telltale series, Bruce explores Crime Alley. The Monarch Theatre can be viewed through the rain, past the dumpsters, and serves as a memento mori. Entry—even approach—is prohibited. It has no tactility, even in simulacrum. And this is emblematic of the game: exterior spaces are built like stage sets that we return to again and again, and just as claustrophobic as any indoor space, because the camera view stays tight on faces and expressions as the player navigates the game's many dialogue trees.

---

<sup>582</sup> Sean Vanaman et al., *The Walking Dead*, Playstation 3 (San Rafael, CA: Telltale Games, 2012).

<sup>583</sup> Martin Montgomery et al., *Game of Thrones*, Playstation 4 (San Rafael, CA: Telltale Games, 2014).

<sup>584</sup> Megan Farokhmanesh, "Toxic Management Cost an Award-Winning Game Studio Its Best Developers," *The Verge*, March 20, 2018, <https://www.theverge.com/2018/3/20/17130056/telltale-games-developer-layoffs-toxic-video-game-industry>.

In the chapter on the *Arkham* series, I described the conceptual “non-space” that dead zones create in gameworlds. The Telltale game is arguably all non-space, because it is entirely aesthetic, with minimal actionability. This is because the vast majority of the game is taken up by dialogue trees and cutscenes; when the player *is* able to roam, she’s contained to a single space at a time and barely needs to utilize the walk function anyway, as the point-and-click mechanics will take her avatar where he needs to go. In the game, environment is for tactical use and interaction, but not exploration. For example, in Episode Two of the series, Batman infiltrates the site of a hostage situation and has to strategize taking out several armed henchmen. Before making any moves, he links each opponent to part of the room—a wall-mounted television, a table, a stage light. Once the player determines her strategy, she must tap specific buttons at specific times to connect this goon’s head with the table, that goon’s head with the TV screen. Environment is to be acted upon, but not spatialized. This is why the majority of the game constitutes non-space: like the non-place provides a basic function and can be explored and exploited for external purposes, the non-space provides the veneer of spatiality, but its purposes are external and beside the point of exploiting that apparent space.

In this way, Telltale offers a spatialized version of the digital, a digital space. All action in *Batman: The Telltale Series* is reduced to a network of decisions. The player doesn’t command space, because it doesn’t exist any more than her game character is a body in space. Everything is flattened down through this, and even the symbolically digital in the game is described in spatial terms. At one point in Episode Four, Batman ally Lucius Fox refers to a “digital battering ram” capable of “knocking down the firewalls of the Batcomputer at any minute.”<sup>585</sup> And multiple times, the game confronts the player with a map of Gotham City represented as a communications network.

---

<sup>585</sup> Mudle et al., *Batman: The Telltale Series*.

Just as the spatial boils down to the digital, the symbolically digital rushes up to claim its status as a type of “space” all its own. This fits nicely with multiple arguments from this dissertation, especially those that touch upon the infrastructure of the digital that disguises and mythologizes the production of code. Lucius Fox describes the digital in spatial terms, just as Kittler and Griffin describe the spatial in digital terms. Additionally, the fetishization of code that Chun discusses is realized in the symbolic sense-making of digital materiality through physical metaphor, and again flattened out by the protocols of transmedia and the techniques of IP skinning.

## **6.2 Stakes of the Project**

Objects like those described in this chapter throw into sharp relief the applicability of the work’s findings, at least until such a time that transmedia undergoes a fundamental paradigm shift. At every turn, in the examination of any contemporary transmedia complex, we see time and time again how transmedia as a mode, as a way of making art, is subordinate to the needs of transmedia as a business model, as political economy and an extension of late capitalism. Much of the chaos we observe on the surface of transmedia can be resolved on the strategic level of commerce.

Because we have no access to this level of coherence, we have to engage in the neverending exercise of making sense through process of decoding. Of course, this is limited. Examining the transmedia complex in the appropriate context of dialectical tension allows us to form ideas of how it functions; but as a method, we’re still far from cracking open the machine and seeing the gears turn. We can conclude, however, that narrative cohesion is a second order

priority for transmedia, a means to an end that can be discarded at the first convenient moment and reclaimed at will whenever—at least rhetorically.

This applies to almost any transmedia complex. Case in point: earlier in this work, I mentioned the *Star Wars* continuity czar Leland Chee, the so-called Lucasfilm “Keeper of the Holocron.” As described, when Disney acquired Lucasfilm in 2012,<sup>586</sup> Chee’s job description changed from Keeper of the Holocron to a creative executive within the newly formed Lucasfilm Story Group. Disney tasked the division with eliminating the franchise’s canon hierarchy and creating a new, cohesive canon. On the surface, it sounds like this Story Group is meant to move the complex back towards Henry Jenkins’ description of a unified entertainment experience. However, if some of the fan response to the new trilogy is any indication, Lucasfilm would do better to fork off into multiple universes and iterations. While the prequel trilogy was critiqued by segments of diehard fans for getting the facts wrong, the new trilogy is criticized for getting the themes wrong. Toxic masculinity has infused itself with identity politics, and “That wouldn’t happen” and “That person wasn’t there” have been replaced by “This shouldn’t happen” and “That person would never do that.” The contemporary transmedia complex has moved fan expectation from ownership over story, chronology, and detail, and birthed a paradigm where fans expect ownership over representation, thematic, and spirit. In truth, the fans own nothing. Disney’s lobbying efforts over the past 40 years has ensured that its entire stable of intellectual property will remain in pocket and out of the public domain for generations.

These tactics and strategies become more and more visible as time goes on and iconic intellectual properties are increasingly consolidated under a small number of corporate umbrellas. Regardless of who feels disadvantaged as a fan or a creative, when everything is vertically (or otherwise) integrated and ownership of so many different media forms and IPs are

---

<sup>586</sup> Cowley, “Disney to Buy Lucasfilm for \$4 Billion.”



consolidated, the producers will gladly take the ire of one segment of fans in order to reach out to a new one. Those angry fans have been so effectively interpellated by the ideologies of transmedia fandom that the vast majority of them will still find *something* to buy. As copyright terms extend longer and longer, producers can continue to exclusively draw on back catalogues of republished material. Hate the new Ben Affleck portrayal of Batman and the current series written by Scott Snyder? No problem: we just rereleased a gorgeously remastered bluray of *Batman Returns* and a recoloured prestige edition of Frank Miller's greatest Dark Knight hits.

However, it is extremely important to account for the limitations of this work. The methods by which I've decoded the objects in this project certainly slip into assumption at times. Just how coordinated and strategic is any of this? How much of what we see is the product of long-term planning? How much of it is reactive to a moment? How much of it is encoded randomly, and conflated with intent? Scholars studying the inner workings of media industries have often wrestled with similar questions. In a piece on industry trade publications, media scholar Alisa Perren notes the difficulties of reconciling different methodologies and sources in trying to decipher the systems at play in these networks:

Whether serving as historical context, foundational knowledge prior to conducting ethnographic research, or discursive sites of analysis, industry trade publications can be valuable resources for a variety of different types of media industry studies researchers. Yet especially in the contemporary moment, when the media industries—and the trades themselves—are so in flux, important issues must be considered when referencing to them for information. The trades' limitations, in turn, underscore the distinctive insights

that production studies methods might provide, and call our attention to different types of information, relationships, and industrial power dynamics.<sup>587</sup>

Here, Perren calls for the integration of numerous methods and frameworks to collate the data from transmedia complexes. This project has not exactly fit itself into either textual analysis or media industry scholarship. It is certainly the poorer for its dearth of ethnographic research. However, one of the difficulties that this thesis means to address is the lack of real transparency in convergence culture. An integral part of transmedia is the cultivation of fandom, so it behooves producers to communicate with audiences and present themselves as open. Instead, the contract structures of these industries effectively render them black boxes throughout the span of production, and well past the point of release. Because of consolidation and integration, the owner of a relatively small-time piece of intellectual property still has extremely deep pockets to litigate against NDA-violating creatives. More importantly, owners do not even need to litigate against creators: they can instead effectively blacklist them from entire sectors of a given media industry. For creators, it's a necessity to sign non-disclosures in order to make a living, and simply not worth the risk to talk out of school about an employment experience. Because of this, the vast majority of official communiqués from productions are promotional, and work within established gendered models and gazes,<sup>588</sup> and those that describe problems are often rendered in the hushed tones of rumor and hearsay. These cones of silence hamper the ability of scholars and laypeople to better understand the media products they consume, and also harm the industry stakeholders themselves. How can producers learn to do their work better in the future without frank, factual work that accurately reflects their practices and protocols?

---

<sup>587</sup> Alisa Perren, "The Trick of the Trades: Media Industry Studies and the American Comic Book Industry," in *Production Studies, the Sequel! Cultural Studies of Global Media Industries*, ed. Miranda Banks, Bridget Conner, and Vicki Mayer (New York: Routledge, 2016), 228.

<sup>588</sup> Scott, "Dawn of the Undead Author."

This question assumes that the industry stakeholders see the potential benefits of such reflective work, which in turn exposes myriad assumptions on my part in writing this project: that all stakeholders are motivated by wanting to do their jobs better; that I understand and can account for the creative contributions of countless below-the-line workers; that these transmedia complexes are ordered at the highest levels and an actual long-term strategy exists; and numerous other tautological leaps. These assumptions are based on the frameworks that I *have* employed in my textual and discursive analyses, where a dialectical tension can be resolved through a shift in perspective from mode to model. In a recent book chapter, Perren and Laura Felschow belie some of my conclusions based on the insider access and ethnographic research that Perren recommends from production studies:

Given DC's corporate structure and investment in brand maintenance, as well as fan expectations bound to the company's characters, creatives are limited in terms of what they can do. Creatives working for DC Comics are usually freelancers assigned to a specific run of one character for a set number of issues. Their positions are precarious and so they must be careful not to engage with fans in ways that the company would deem inappropriate. Further, the conventions of the industry demand that the dictates of the Big Two take priority. This means that the creatives have little stake in the overall publication process; they do not have to worry about procuring advertisements for the issue, for example, or developing marketing strategies for the issue's release. In short, creatives working for DC Comics need not be concerned with the fan to a large extent because it is ultimately the company's responsibility to reach their audience. The companies have designated marketing and social media teams whose job it is to promote their product and

connect with audiences. While creatives are encouraged by DC to engage with fans directly, their behavior is proscribed by well-established industrial and cultural norms.<sup>589</sup>

This passage reflects the disconnect between the tactical work of creation and the strategic work of developing transmedial product diversity. Because many comics stories are based on pitches from freelance creators, there's frequently no direct correlation or consultation between the creator whose work inspired an adaptation in another medium and the creatives working on said adaptation. While participatory culture creates an atmosphere where it seems possible to understand the motives and ideologies permeating transmedia, the apparent truth of the situation is that most scholarship lacks the necessary resources to accurately describe these relationships. For example, even after a great deal of research, I've failed to find a single nuanced description of how the information pipeline functions between a freelance comic creator, the editorial teams at DC Comics, the licensing managers at WBIE, the film executives at Warner Bros. Pictures, and the corporate parents at WarnerMedia, and the various marketing teams of all of them. How are their workflows integrated with one another? Are they? It's rare to hear anyone above the level of creative talk about the details of assignments.

Perren and Felschow do not note, however, the difficult position that this can put creatives in. While they do not have to worry about promotion, it's inaccurate to suggest that they don't need to be concerned with fans. Negative fan reaction to a project may mean a hit to sales or damage control for the publisher, but the creator still takes a great deal of ire from fans online, and the trouble caused by the snafu may result in the publisher choosing to cut the creative loose.

---

<sup>589</sup> Alisa Perren and Laura E. Felschow, "The Bigger Picture: Drawing Intersections between Comics, Fan, and Industry Studies," in *The Routledge Companion to Media Fandom*, ed. Melissa A. Click and Suzanne Scott (New York: Routledge, 2018), 315.

To that point, this project has attempted to describe how both the texts and discourses surrounding them try to reconcile and inadvertently contradict cohesiveness in both the stories told and how they were created. Perren and Felschow's chapter seeks to complicate the "often-monolithic industry-fan (or producer-fan) binary that has dominated many studies of convergence culture."<sup>590</sup> My dissertation seeks to add to that complicated conversation. But, as I have pointed out time and again over the course of the work, it would be extremely easy for production and industry stakeholders to contradict this work, often without even betraying anything significant about the confidential nature of their work. In short, the shape of a transmedia complex that emerges from studying the texts it produces may indicate and constitute a separate object than the "inside story" of that complex. This may be just as problematic as the widely-held (but tenuously proven) belief that comics audiences, for example, are primarily white, male, and between the ages of 18-34.<sup>591</sup> It may be impossible to understand just how much of a transmedia complex's activity constitutes active strategy, and how much is reactive tactic.

In sum, these pieces indicate that all of this may be moot. After concluding an extensive ethnographic project of the inner workings of DC, Perren noted during a 2017 workshop<sup>592</sup> that when it comes to transmedia coordination, there may be no more to it than the IP holder offering the licensee access to materials, occasionally passing essential tidbits of synergistic information down the chain or across the network, or (most frequently) setting hard release dates to keep the network churning. It would be hard to fully know anyways, due to issues of both access and the difficulty of tracking across so many properties, divisions, and people. The only thing we can really tell from all this is the values and interests of individual studios and producers, and their

---

<sup>590</sup> Ibid., 310.

<sup>591</sup> Ibid., 314.

<sup>592</sup> Alisa Perren, "Researching the Media Industries: The Case of the American Comic Book Industry" (Workshop, March 26, 2017).

interpretations of what various markets want. Looking to parse the markers of editorial oversight and involvement in the creative process between creative industries may be pointless, because it could easily be true that none occurs, resulting in a correlation without a corollary. At the very least, such oversight processes are messy and uneven, subject to variables on case-by-case basis such as divisional objectives, individual values, and cultural norms. All of this is further warped by the constant shift of organizational imperative wrought by corporate consolidation and schism.

Batman is mutable—this is a point I’ve stated again and again throughout this work. In narrative identification, a consistent world can greatly compensate for inconsistent characterization. This is another reason that worldbuilding plays such an important role in transmedia. All sorts of genres and tones and lengths of narrative can take place in a given transmedia world, and it magically becomes fluidly, seamlessly integrated into the franchise, by dint of taking place in the same universe. This is part of what is puzzling about DC’s and Warners’ transmedia strategies. The 2011 “New 52” publisher-wide relaunch of the universe not only consolidated the continuity of the DC universe, but also redesigned all the characters under a uniform style overseen by Jim Lee and Cully Hamner.<sup>593</sup> When it came time to attempt an expanded cinematic universe for the publisher, DC attempted to establish a unified grim tone in both thematics and aesthetics. Both these approaches have been more or less abandoned—demonstrating the often reactive nature of the transmedia business model, where strategy falls apart for the powerful land occupier, and they must resort back to tactical fumbling. Again, the pitfalls of thinking about the transmedia business model in terms of strategy make themselves apparent.

---

<sup>593</sup> Chris Evans, “CCI: Jim Lee & Cully Hamner Design the New DC 52,” *CBR*, July 26, 2011, <https://www.cbr.com/cci-jim-lee-cully-hamner-design-the-new-dc-52/>.

### 6.3 Contributions and Implications

I began this project because I noticed overlap in the spatial design of two games, orbiting one franchise, but developed by different studios. The ensuing thought process generated questions about the direct and indirect lines of editorial oversight from the strategies and actions of the highest-level stakeholders through licensing structures and creatives, down to the interpellated behaviours of end users. Though I eventually learned that tracing these lines with certitude is essentially impossible, the evidence I accumulated along the way—to and past this revelation—led me to many findings that constitute concrete contributions to a number of fields of study, including games studies, comics studies, Batman, and especially transmedia studies.

The nature of this work takes shape by engaging the texts first and then researching their backgrounds. For games, this means playing the games and interacting with them as both text and meta-text. I have played and countergamed<sup>594</sup> my way through far more *Batman* games than those described in the project, and it was simply impossible to completely perform the task of describing them all. Researching the television and film representations of Gotham City has resulted in a similar overflow of locations and studio sets, but playing the games is the key to this project, and one of the primary reasons that I targeted games for my case studies. In literature, we can talk to an author or editor; but in franchise, the corporation is the author.

Traditional scholarly approaches to literature are stymied by these political economies and the nature of expanding the gameworlds themselves, and we can frame and communicate this in something as humble as a playthrough, like de Certeau does with walking or eating. In thinking about how iterations flow from one instalment or node in a transmedia complex to another, it's crucial to keep in mind that content-level symbolic consistency is necessary only as

---

<sup>594</sup> Galloway, *Gaming*.

it works within the business model. Had Rocksteady's second *Arkham* game been a puzzle shooter rather than an open-world expansion of the same engines and mechanics utilized for *Arkham Asylum*, it might have disappointed the expectations of fans. Such a move would have been poor tactical action within a strategic frame, as it wouldn't have functioned within the protocols of transmedia, in terms of how you can market yourself, in terms of how you specialize labour to optimize output, and certainly in terms of churn. Having the same labour force start over from scratch and reinvent their own internal paradigms is never useful to transmedia, except once again in terms of mode (such as in the case that the brand suffers a catastrophe—even in these cases, window dressing solutions are far preferable).

As a form of artistic expression, games are like any other medium in terms of their vulnerability to subsumption under models of capitalism. The limitlessness of late capitalism is perfectly aligned to networked digital infrastructures; and games are optimal to both, because their primary creative assets are further abstracted from individual creator identities. Within transmedia, it's ideal that the IP be easily passed from creative to creative with minimal interruption. While an auteured transmedia product like Nolan's *Dark Knight* trilogy is an extremely positive outcome for Warners in the short term, it can lead to difficulties in the long term for a transmedia IP to be overly associated with a single author. So game industries have developed as a remedy to this risk, and it's the studio rather than the author that comes to be identified with style—which in turn is actually a product of association with engines and coding platforms through institutional memory. On an industrial level, this new medium ends up looking much like the old studio system of Hollywood's heyday, where producers reigned supreme and directors held little more prestige than day players.

But this observation doesn't communicate the understood experiences of players, and more work needs to be done to draw the connections between the movements of industrial



stakeholders and how they shape the behaviours of end users. Games scholar Terry Harpold holds that an axiom of videogame studies must be that “*gameplay is the expression of combinations of definite semiotic elements in specific relations to equally definite technical elements.*”<sup>595</sup> This is certainly true, but it tells us nothing about the ideologies that shape both. What this dissertation has sought to demonstrate is how that definitional expression connects to and overlaps with the imaginaries and economic realities of transmedia networks. In looking to spatiality and environmental worldbuilding, we’ve seen how Harpold’s theories of definite and indefinite elements collide with Chun’s theories of sourcery. Interestingly, the real undefined magic is how we form connections between disparate representations, based on a few common iconic elements within systems of signs (this is the real mother tongue of Julia Kristeva’s intertextuality<sup>596</sup>). But the magic we attribute to a game is at the code level: that which we don’t begin to believe we understand, we fetishize on a fundamental level even more than that which we believe ourselves to know intimately. I hope, too, that this project has demonstrated that our ideas of what we “understand,” when it comes to a pop culture franchise such as Batman, is based around assumption and tautology more than anything else. There is no “understanding” Batman as anything other than almost totally mutable—except perhaps as a commodity.

As I wrote above, one of the fields this project contributes to is studies of Batman. Few significant works have expansively tackled Gotham City, or Batman games. One notable exception is Luke Arnett’s writing on the *Arkham* game series, which he contextualizes by discussing transmedia iteration as an expression of epos and epic. “Crucially,” he says, “once an epos is published or otherwise circulates, it then becomes part of the mythos for all works that follow: if it is successful, it becomes a definitive version with which subsequent works must

---

<sup>595</sup> Harpold, “Screw the Grue.”

<sup>596</sup> Kristeva, *Desire in Language*.

come to terms.”<sup>597</sup> This is true, but for me, more useful for what it leaves out—just like Harpold’s definition of gameplay.

Thinking in terms of success and influence is still too reliant on Hutcheon’s ideas of adaptation, those same ideas that Will Brooker applied to Batman media explicitly as transmedia. I don’t argue that popular and successful iterations influence those that follow. But these thought processes act as if this influence connotes value by dint of popularity, and still treat media production in a linear sense. This is problematic for two reasons. First of all, media production is chaotic. Multiple times in my case studies, I observed that it’s unfeasible to determine the corollary relationship between similarities in media products released close together—for example, the big bat-vehicles in *The Lego Batman Movie* and *Justice League*: the former featured a large climbing vehicle called the Scuttler, while the latter introduced viewers to a similarly functional transport called the Knightcrawler. But the films were released so close to one another and built for such disparate audiences, it’s hard to claim that the popular one influenced the subsequent one, except in retrospect. Just because this is another instance where transmedia products are allegorical of transmedia interpellation does not mean that the allegory is intentional.

The second reason this is problematic follows from the first. Audiences do not create their relationships to transmedia complexes in a linear fashion. They engage with different iterations at random, and these personal orderings are a key aspect of interpellation. Adaptation assumes that a full reading calls for the audience member to order her understanding of influence along the same timelines as production. It’s an implied audience. However, it’s important to distinguish the implied audience of a narrative from the actual audience. The implied audience is

---

<sup>597</sup> Arnott, “Arkham Epic,” 4.

a construct of who the text is intended for, but this audience does not actually exist. As an assemblage, transmedia makes this impossible.

However, this does not keep it from profiting from the disagreements that arise through buzz, controversy, or differences in interpreting the epic. Part of the suppleness of transmedia is that if one version of a property has restrictions or inflections put upon it that the consumer doesn't appreciate, there's another version of that same property with different restrictions and inflections that the consumer can turn to. This doesn't happen in a linear progression—it's all at once. A key contribution of this dissertation is exposing the rhizomatic nature of that system at every level, from the rights holders all the way to the consumer. To this end, the project has also contributed a number of tools for recognizing the protocols of transmedia at work. The elaboration of concepts like churn, IP skinning, and guided circulation are meant to be as useful for further study as conceptual arguments about the metaphorical aspects of virtual cities.

#### **6.4 The Difficulties of Escape**

About half the episodes of the old *Batman* 1960s show ended on cliffhangers: the Dynamic Duo trapped inside an oversized hourglass as sand fills the chamber,<sup>598</sup> or tied to a giant spit over a superheated rotisserie grill.<sup>599</sup> As Batman and Robin face an uncertain fate, the announcer asks something along the lines of, "Can Batman & Robin escape this dastardly deathtrap? Tune in for our next episode, same bat-time, same bat-channel!" Of course, they always escaped. But in order to know this, the viewer sacrificed a freedom of her own through a willing return, scheduled by other interests. In some ways, these are the stakes of this project. To

---

<sup>598</sup> James Neilson, "The Clock King's Crazy Crimes," *Batman* (New York: WABC New York, October 12, 1966).

<sup>599</sup> Murray Golden, "The Minstrel's Shakedown," *Batman* (New York: WABC New York, September 21, 1966).

what extent are audiences, players, consumers, and fans subjects capable of exercising free agency? No one forces us to tune in again, same bat-time, same bat-channel. Žižek would recognize this as perfectly representative of postmodern ideology at work on the postmodern subject: a system in which irony allows us to be perfectly aware of what we are doing, and we do it anyway.<sup>600</sup> The choice is manufactured for us, but the effective interpellation of transmedia strategy predetermines our decisions to some extent.

The thesis I've sought to prove throughout this project is that the apparent contradictions of transmedia as a mode are actually resolved by considering the needs of transmedia as a business model. It's a simple axiom, but important to keep in mind, because drifting back into modal considerations is only too easy. Beyond that, if we think about what transmedia does as strategic, we tap into a variety of techniques and tactics it uses to produce particular effects. As fictional worlds are deformed in the interests of transmedia tactics and made more amenable to the needs of transmedia strategy, one of the things that happens as a result is that transmedia products themselves become an allegory for the functioning of transmedia as a business model. We can think about them in that respect because they offer us key insights about how transmedia works, whether in conception or effect.

In light of this argument, earlier arguments in convergence culture that describe the emancipatory effects of fannish tactics—from fan studies, writing on modding, slash fiction, and so on—need to be rethought. This is part of a growing consensus that always existed in some sectors of Marxist cultural studies: your work may not be as subversive as you think it is. Your mod, forum post, or fanfic is actually a more elaborate or refined version of consumerism. While on the symbolic level, we may see transmedia ostensibly opening up the ways we can engage with copyrighted intellectual properties, as a strategy, it winnows our agency. Therefore, we

---

<sup>600</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, (London: Verso, 1989).

need to revisit the canonical works of convergence and transmedia. The landscape has changed to the extent that thinkers we once imagined as critical have, in some cases, been rolled over by the machine they were evidently describing, absorbed into its clockwork (or perhaps, more appropriately, its circuitry).

This dissertation then becomes a refutation of some of the utopian promises Henry Jenkins makes in *Convergence Culture*,<sup>601</sup> and Jenkins' own trajectory as a scholar has mirrored this Marxist counter-perspective: from a pioneer, breaking academic ground into geekdom and fandom, Jenkins' later work is distinctly more aligned with corporate interests, as he himself is to some extent subsumed under the protocols of transmedia strategy. From this perspective, Jenkins' vision has been realized: corporations have woken up to the benefits of leaving room for fan expression. In *Convergence Culture*, Jenkins described the conflicts between fans producing their own works and IP holders serving them with cease-and-desist orders; as mentioned in the Literature Review, in the more recent book *Spreadable Media*, Jenkins and his co-authors Sam Ford and Joshua Green describe how companies can harness fan labour for profitability and brand loyalty so that users are "engaged, not exploited."<sup>602</sup> The hard power of cease-and-desist has given way to the soft power of demonetized videos, their potential profits rerouted to the IP holders lodging a copyright claim.

Both systems are enforced via sophisticated algorithms that scour the Internet, searching for infringement. Produce a video essay on Batman that uses more than a few consecutive seconds of copyrighted footage, and, in the event that the video goes viral, all earnings from the video will be split by YouTube and Warners. This is the difference for the postmodern subject between the pleasurable fantasy and the horror of the real: the same object viewed from two

---

<sup>601</sup> Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*.

<sup>602</sup> Jenkins, Ford, and Green, *Spreadable Media*, 58.

different perspectives reveals that something can be enjoyable and deeply exploitative or oppressive at the same time. In no way have capitalist tendencies given way to forms of sharing and participatory culture—instead, they’ve co-opted them. But in its history, American Communication Studies is instrumental before it’s critical, originally meant to produce people who can be helpful to governments and industries in communicating their messages effectively. The field only becomes critical when the Frankfurt School exiles arrive on North American shores in the 1930s.<sup>603</sup> Jenkins has simply crossed back over this line again, if it ever actually existed.

Fan fiction plays an integral role in early studies of convergence culture. Again, these studies are often couched in the rhetoric of fans claiming agency in the way they consume media and reshape culture. The process of creating fan fiction allows the fan-author to believe that she’s asserted some agency by manipulating these conceptual objects. But why this or that particular television program? Why on this level? How is the fan-author isolating herself from the totality of what people experience around these conceptual objects and their many expressions? As a system, transmedia is *designed* to leave these kinds of spaces in itself. In discussing Kafka’s novel *The Trial*, Žižek observes that the space in the courtroom was always reserved for Josef; he was always going to arrive there, and was always going to be found guilty.<sup>604</sup> This applies perfectly as an analogy for how transmedia handles fandom. What this means is that *where we think we’re asserting agency is a planned space*, but still enveloped by the apparatuses of capital.

Today, most of the time, the complex is structured in this way so that the consumer will insert herself into it willingly. In *The Language of New Media*, Lev Manovich describes how digital media follows a post-industrial logic of individual customization, rather than mass

---

<sup>603</sup> Sheryl Hamilton, “Considering Critical Communication Studies in Canada,” in *Mediascapes: New Patterns in Canadian Communication*, ed. Leslie Regan Shade (Toronto, ON: Nelson Higher Education, 2002).

<sup>604</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2006).

standardization.<sup>605</sup> In contemporary marketing, the key is to frame the mass-produced product in terms of this individualization. Consider what you do when you purchase a new Apple laptop: you customize the tracking speed of the touchpad, set the wallpaper with a picture from a family trip, and arrange the dock on the edge of the screen that you prefer. But go to the café and try to tell your MacBook apart from all the other brushed steel casings. We all buy the same product, and the designers of the product give us just enough personal space to feel we can make it our own.

Transmedia extrapolates this technique into allowing fans the fantasy of autonomy on a content level. We can compose and disseminate fan fiction, we can interact with creators on Twitter, and, in some cases, we can be called in as co-creators to collaboratively construct the movies we will watch and the games we will play,<sup>606</sup> in all instances inserting ourselves and our needs into the text. But: so what? Cynically stated, all we're doing is becoming better consumers. And the ideologies that shape the openings for our participation are heavily biased towards certain kinds of producers, consumers, and critics. The transmedia complex I've described throughout this project is rife with the white male gaze at every turn: on the symbolic strata, on the production side, and even in its theorization. O'Meara and Bevan sum up the situation in transmedia studies succinctly as "dominated by academic men geeking out about how fan men geek out about how male creators write about mostly male characters in stories about...men."<sup>607</sup> Meanwhile, this problematic is just as deeply entrenched in reporting on these networks: even going to the 10<sup>th</sup> page of Google search results, I often failed to find a single journalistic source writing on a Batman object *not* yielded by a caucasian male (even the technological biases of the

---

<sup>605</sup> Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2002), 51.

<sup>606</sup> John Banks, *Co-Creating Videogames* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

<sup>607</sup> O'Meara and Bevan, "Transmedia Theory's Author Discourse and Its Limitations."

Google algorithm<sup>608</sup> holds responsibility here in terms of who can speak and the suppression of the subaltern<sup>609</sup>).

In the Gotham overview history chapter, this problem expresses itself in terms of functionality and the desire of the fan to capture or know everything. In digital culture, there is no more folk tradition as we usually understand it. Records are too comprehensive, even if they fail to be organized in any way that's comprehensible. The closest we get is transmedia, where the signifiers are full of something that we don't quite want to remember fully. The desire to remember fully, then, to catalogue, is a form of fetishism. In fact, the post-truth, post-fact turn to echo chambers in the current moment is, in part, demonstrative of the anxieties that too many facts produce, and the urge to return to a folk tradition. Of course, there are ways in which this would benefit corporate IP holders as well, and many ways in which it would not. But it has ever been true of such entities that they seek to see codes of the law reinforced selectively, at their discretion. A folk tradition cannot exist around a commodified narrative. At best, it operates as participatory, but its agency can be removed at any time.

In the chapters on the *Lego Batman* and *Arkham* games, I discuss this problem in terms of disruptive design issues and glitching the map. Capital is unconcerned with whether or not I break the product or think I'm subverting it through countergaming. I can be a digital psychogeographer all I want, but I'll still never realize the subversive achievements the Situationists suggested were possible in urban space, because the only factor that matters is whether I bought the product in the first place. I can't trespass in a packaged digital space in any way that resists the packaging. Consequently, the metaphor of transmedia cities for real cities disintegrates. The best I can hope for is to better understand the mechanisms of the object.

---

<sup>608</sup> Batya Friedman and Helen Nissenbaum, "Bias in Computer Systems," *ACM Transactions on Information Systems* 14, no. 3 (July 1996): 330–47.

<sup>609</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Chicago, IL: University Illinois Press, 1988).



In *The Grasshopper*, Bernard Suits describes triflers as engaging with the rules of a game, but not to win so much as to examine how the game works—often in the interest of knowing how better to break it next time around, but just as frequently for an aesthetic or pleasurable goal.<sup>610</sup> Suits describes this in the context of chess, but when we export the idea to digital games, the calculus just becomes simpler, because we limit ourselves to the rules of the game not by choice but by necessity. In *Cheating*, Mia Consalvo describes how players can read games against the grain in order to discover exploits and advantage themselves in future playthroughs.<sup>611</sup> But in both the trifling scenario offered by Suits and the exploit scenario offered by Consalvo, the only advantage gained is by one player against another, or, at the very most, one player against a system. The stakeholders who manufacture a chess set or design *Batman: Arkham Knight* stand *outside* the game and understand it differently. Regardless of the goal, triflers and cheaters are still engaging with the institution of the game, never escaping its reach or pushing beyond its boundaries. Disengaging from the programmatic goals of the game only operates on the level of the mode.

“Same bat-time, same bat-channel” is a form of what Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser calls *hailing*. Althusser holds that an individual’s perception of oneself as an autonomous being with agency and beliefs is constructed by social practices. Some of the chief determinants in constructing individuals are what Althusser calls ideological practices, which are constituted by Ideological State Apparatuses: establishments including schools, churches, family units, and other various cultural institutions. These Ideological State Apparatuses inculcate individual subjects with the understanding that they’re free to choose from a range of options

---

<sup>610</sup> Bernard Suits, *The Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1978), 45-46.

<sup>611</sup> Consalvo, *Cheating*, 102.

predetermined by the State. Hailing is what allows the call of ideology to go out to groups in such a way that their identities are constructed around ideas of autonomy and individualism.<sup>612</sup>

This hailing interpellates us and constructs our identities as fans, audiences, consumers. We're each and all addressed directly by the transmedia assemblage to insert ourselves into it willingly, because the hail allows each of us to believe it was meant just for us. This is the greatest tool of transmedia strategy: its ability to hail and therefore interpellate each of us as having a unique relationship to the IP and the complex. Understanding our relationship to transmedia complexes through hailing, subjectivity, and what philosopher Alain Badiou calls the *event* may provide some means of escape, some means of thinking our way outside the complex—if that's truly what we desire.

The nature of transmedia is increasingly bound up in the language of the event. Badiou explains that in a situation, ontology can determine the nature of a constructed situation and situate an individual within it as an inhabitant. But it then falls to the subject to discern her own subjective perspective within the ontologically indiscernible event. Ontology constructs the situation, and the subject names it as the event.<sup>613</sup> Recursively, the subject is constituted by this process of determining the event, and witnesses the event through four domains: love, science, politics, and art. The situation is constructed, the hail goes out, and the subject is interpellated in the process of deciding the nature of the event. Badiou's work here is key in the refutation of apolitical poststructuralist thought, and connects to my present argument because it opens the space for the subject to recast the situation, and for truth to emerge. This could be the key to politicizing our subjectivity within the transmedia complex. Fandom merges love and art, and, according to Badiou, can imbricate politics in the situation of the event as well.

---

<sup>612</sup> Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, 145.

<sup>613</sup> Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham (London: Continuum, 2007), 368.

But the question remains: do we actually want to escape? In the opening pages of this dissertation, I asserted that I love Batman. My own affect, interpellated or not, is something I deeply enjoy, part of my self-perceived identity, and therefore I perceive it as fulfilling. Whether or not I was manipulated by transmedia into this love (and, to be certain, I was), it's not necessarily a particularly abusive relationship, and I don't find that it disrupts my productivity in the world or adversely effects my agency. To call myself exploited would be accurate; to call myself a prisoner may be extreme. I imagine that the same goes for many fans.

However, this doesn't mean we can't or shouldn't critique and try to reshape the objects of our love towards healthier ends. After all, it's easy for me to imagine that "many fans" feel the same as I do, because I occupy a position of extreme privilege. What about those fans who lack the disposable income or affluence to engage in their fandom in the ways they want? What about those fans from marginalized communities who don't see their identities and lives reflected in these worlds they've longed to inhabit since childhood, or, worse, see themselves represented in these fictions as stereotypes or objects of ridicule? What about those female fans drummed out of online discussion by harassment and targeted for doxxing by cultural warriors espousing toxic masculinity?<sup>614</sup> These fans don't necessarily have the luxury of ignoring all the exploitative aspects of transmedia, and their love for Batman may feel indeed like an abusive relationship, in desperate need of reshaping. The importance of this reshaping is to contextualize it with mutual struggle, and avoid slippage into toxic cultural paradigms constructed by established Ideological State Apparatuses. If my interpretation of Suits, Consalvo, and Althusser is correct, and there is no form of resistance, it may help to focus instead on redirection, as indicated by Badiou.

---

<sup>614</sup> Rachel Krishna, "There's An Online Harassment Campaign Underway Against People Advocating For Diversity In Comics Called #Comicsgate," *BuzzFeed News*, March 22, 2018, <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/krishrach/comicsgate>.

The practitioners of participatory culture—fanfic authors, forum posters, modders, etcetera—are certainly breaking some codes in their practices, whether cultural, digital, or legal. Nonetheless, rather than breaking codes within the objects themselves, they’re repurposing the codes in their own interests. The problem noted by Althusser remains (the user continues to engage with the institution, and the indoctrinating pull of the hail is difficult to recognize and even harder to resist), but when we engage in such interventions mindfully, we can parse them more as negotiations than capitulations or compromises. The key, again, is active awareness, and the use of tools and methods to keep this awareness active.

In *Video Game Spaces*, Nitsche talks mostly about the metaphorical spaces of games, but a closer examination of how code shapes those spaces and dictates our capabilities within them is missing (following Chun’s observations about code as magic). In beginning this project, I hoped to address this gap by explicitly examining the digital infrastructure of game spaces. However, Gotham City may have been the wrong videogame space in which to attempt this. This is because Batman games are never released with SDKs, in part because of the nature of transmedia IP control and the need to keep code proprietary. Users are not encouraged to shape or improve the world, and have on occasion been met with reproach or litigiousness upon their attempts to do so. The ability to plan and reshape Gotham is jealously guarded behind gates of branding and locks of professionalization.

Additionally, I lack the technical expertise to hack the finished products apart myself. A stronger grasp of MDA from the design end of the spectrum would certainly have resolved some of the inherent limitations of my venture. But here I see another contribution in my workaround: using the methods I employ and the techniques and the tools I have developed, a user doesn’t need technical expertise or insider access to trace the shape of a black box coded object and how it connects back through different nodes in the network. Instead, she can shift her focus from

notions of authorship and symbolic content to look at mechanics and thinking differentially and rhizomatically.

## 6.5 Future Directions

In *The Field of Cultural Production*, Pierre Bourdieu explains cultural production as a series of position-taking exercises.<sup>615</sup> Derek Johnson writes about how this maps to transmedia explicitly in terms of Lego:

While LEGO's branding outwardly frames creativity as a consumer trait, the study of production within the media industries offers a strong foundation for theorizing creativity, concerned with how producers situate themselves within fields of power by laying claim to specific habituses and professional identities. Pierre Bourdieu saw cultural production as a field of position-takings in which participants claim symbolic capital and struggle to legitimize their work within cultural hierarchies. Creativity, in this sense, is a position taken by cultural producers to imbue work and practice with value. Relatedly, David Hesmondhalgh and Sarah Baker conceive of creative work as labour that generates expressive and symbolic products carrying social meaning. Creative work, in this sense, is that which can produce meaning and thereby can be claimed as meaningful. Moreover, creativity has become a significant site of concern for "cultural studies of film/television production," that consider "the cultures, social organization, work practices, and belief systems of film/video works as an alternative to and extension of traditional political economic analysis and industrial film historical research." Taking

---

<sup>615</sup> Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*.

up this concern for the texts, rituals, practices, and discourses that give meaning and value to the work worlds and labour of cultural production, Vicki Mayer examines cultural hierarchies in television production between “above-the-line” workers rewarded for their perceived creativity and the “below-the-line” craftspeople recognized in terms of their less privileged technical skill. Troubling this distinction, Mayer extends the idea of creativity to below-the-line labour and situates identity work in relation to creativity as central to industrial struggles.<sup>616</sup>

Here, Johnson launches from a discussion of Lego to broader questions of what constitutes meaningful creative contribution in the culture industries. In my work here, I’ve endeavored to search in similar places as those to which Johnson alludes. I believe very much in Mayer’s mission to extend creativity to below-the-line workers and other actors not traditionally considered as authors of cultural products. To that end, there are many future directions for this work. One possibility is to go deeper into those questions of creativity and vision specifically as they relate to the development of videogames.

In particular, two major factors contribute to gaps in how we discuss the production practices of licensed transmedia in games: one, the difficulty in accessing the producers (whether by choice, negligence, or the imposition of a rights holder or legal authority); and two, the dearth of process stories from researchers attempting to reach producers. In both cases, the onus is primarily on the scholar. In the first instance, it is not the responsibility of producers to make themselves available to interviewers, nor to record their own stories in a way that is useful to academics. In the case of the absence of process stories from researchers, this likely has something to do with the stipulations of rigorous methodology espoused by the academy. In

---

<sup>616</sup> Johnson, “Chicks with Bricks,” 83-84.

games scholarship that focuses on interviews or embedded ethnographies with developers and studios, two types of story dominate: either the writer has managed to establish and record interviews, or the writer discusses the difficulty of getting studios to trust them. In both types, generalities abound. Often, when an academic is able to establish a relationship with a studio and conduct interviews, access comes with caveats such as selective NDAs,<sup>617</sup> an embargo against publication until a certain amount of time has passed,<sup>618</sup> or corporate oversight in terms of who will be interviewed and how.<sup>619</sup> These stresses compound when the studio primarily makes AAA games, is publicly traded, operates as a contractor with another interest, or serves as a subsidiary of a larger company. It would appear from the lack of insightful in-depth interviews with large studios either that few have even been attempted, or that the intersectional difficulties faced caused all the stakeholders to walk away from the table before anything productive could be accomplished.

This gives rise to that second type of dominant story, where the writer primarily speaks in generalities about the intense secrecy of game studios, a secrecy allowed for by and perpetuating the lack of organized labour in games industries. The writing then necessarily pivots to a discussion of immaterial labour and exploitation. When the writer is able to go into specifics, it is usually because the interviewee has made a conscious and controversial decision to be straightforward,<sup>620</sup> has moved into another sector,<sup>621</sup> or the entire studio has collapsed, meaning no one remains to take action against the interviewee.<sup>622 623</sup> However, these pieces are outliers.

---

<sup>617</sup> O'Donnell, *Developer's Dilemma*.

<sup>618</sup> Banks, *Co-Creating Videogames*.

<sup>619</sup> Nick Dyer-Witheford and Greig S. de Peuter, "'EA Spouse' and the Crisis of Video Game Labour: Enjoyment, Exclusion, Exploitation, and Exodus," *Canadian Journal of Communication* 31, no. 3 (2006).

<sup>620</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>621</sup> Trevor Barnes and Neil Coe, "Vancouver as Media Cluster: The Case of Video Games and Film/TV," in *Media Clusters: Spatial Agglomeration and Content Capabilities* (Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2011).

<sup>622</sup> Wesley Yin-Poole, "Lionhead: The inside Story," *Euro Gamer*, December 5, 2016, <https://www.eurogamer.net/articles/2016-05-12-lionhead-the-inside-story>.

<sup>623</sup> Banks, *Co-Creating Videogames*.

The majority of the time, when scholarship addresses the inner workings of a AAA game studio, the information given is vague or the discussion is underdeveloped.

I contend that we stand to gain just as much from reading about failed research endeavors as successful ones. It is both theoretically and methodologically profitable for scholars to see what doesn't function, rather than having to read into an absence of work entirely. If a studio has left few traces of its legacy for posterity or scrutiny, that tells us something—whether about the expediencies of closure or the corporate sensibility to brand itself only as strong and forward-thinking. If a potential interviewee won't speak to a researcher or a company is unresponsive to information requests, that too tells us something—likely similar things that those articles on the general secrecy of games industries tell us—but the only way to make it useful is to record it in all its specifics.

Valuable insights can come from these process stories in which scholars show not only what they've found and how, but also what they've pursued and failed to learn and how. Due to this, one potential direction for this work would be a recording of just such a method. In researching this project, I've compiled a database of official Batman games released over the past three decades. As of this writing, the character has featured prominently as protagonist in over 70 videogames; for each game, I attempted to catalogue platform, genre, identifiable developers, and publisher (Appendix 3). In many cases, it was extremely difficult to source documentation on these last two classes of information, and many gaps currently remain. I have also catalogued contact information for many of the named developers and publishers where I could source such data, though I have opted to exclude these findings from the appendix due to privacy concerns.

However, the database represents an opening for performing a new kind of ethnographic research, one based on plumbing the depths of editorial oversight structures in licensed game



creation. I can use this corpus to pursue multiple game studios (some still active, like WB Games Montréal, some now defunct, like original Batman videogame license-holder Ocean Software) for interviews on the specifics of worldbuilding and environmental design in a transmedia context, attempting to chart how creative freedoms and media mix cooperation have shifted and taken shape over the past several decades. These interviews can function in much the same way that I look at the media objects themselves in this project, to parse the same kinds of knowledge. However, I will also explicitly and candidly discuss the processes I took to come to these interviews, as well as those which didn't ultimately come to fruition. Methodologically speaking, I hope that these process stories can serve as signposts for future researchers considering similar projects on what may work and what may not. Theoretically speaking, I will develop these stories into a discussion of the broader context of transmedia production.

Such a project would offer this subject a key context sorely absent in this thesis: political economy. Several times throughout the dissertation I've had to acknowledge that the political economies of transmedia are developed to obscure our understandings of them, but the scope of the project was not such that I could offer a remedy using the methods and frameworks of a political economy reading. As I mentioned in the Literature Review, Eileen Meehan wrote about the Batman franchise as a fetishized commodity operating within specific economic contexts, essentially describing the stakes of a transmedia complex without ever naming it as such. That chapter was written in the 1990s, before the Internet changed much of what we know about global information flows and international entertainment. A decade later, in the opening issue of *Games and Culture*, Toby Miller outlined the possibilities of what a political economics of games studies might look like, calling for studies of product placement, ideological creep, and environmental impact in considerations of games industries.<sup>624</sup> These writings, along with Perren

---

<sup>624</sup> Miller, Toby. "Gaming for Beginners." *Games & Culture* 1, no. 1 (2006), 8-9.

and Felschow's writing on the political economy of the comics industries, encourages me to move in the same direction. The moment we realize that disputes in transmedia at the level of mode are resolved at the level of the business model, we need to turn towards that business model to better articulate its nuances. It is important to remember that cultural intermediaries such as expressions of institutionalized and commodified fandom and promotion are an integral area of transmedia strategy, as are factors like the carbon footprint of transmedia producers, the reshaping of complexes for universal consumption in globally diverse markets, and the working conditions of both creative freelancers and below-the-line critical infrastructure labourers feeding into transmedial churn. Expanding the work in this direction would deeply interrogate the role of copyright regimes, the material histories of merchandise, the circulation of physical products, or the processes of localization workers.

I'll close out by returning again to Radha O'Meara and Alex Bevan's writing on transmedia. The pair closes out their article on the limitations of the transmedia author discourse by suggesting new pathways for scholarship on transmedia complexes:

Transmedia theory focuses disproportionately on authorship. This restricts a comprehensive understanding of transmedia storytelling, limits the lenses we bring to it, obstructs the ways we evaluate transmedia stories, and impedes how we imagine the possibilities for both media and storytelling. Stories have always been transmedial. What changes with the inception of transmedia theory is that men can claim credit for the stories and for all the work that many people do across various sectors and industries. It is questionable whether authorship is important to transmedia, in which creation is most often collective, loosely planned (at best) and diffused across many people, skill sets, and sectors. While Jenkins's work has been pivotal in the development of transmedia theory,

this is a ripe moment for the diversification of theoretical paradigms for understanding stories in the digital era.<sup>625</sup>

This dissertation project was spurred in part by my belief that pop culture franchises must be described and understood in different terms than those used in literary studies to consider auteured works. The traditional methods and frames we use to examine symbolic content lack an appreciation of the broader context of how media is actually produced in networked digital cultural production. At the heart of this is a dialectical tension between the narrative mode and the business model. Overall, this business model is both supple and agile. At the level of model, it can reshape attitudes towards experimentation and flexibility within a studio. And at the level of mode, it results in total chaos. Consequently, truly auteured transmedia narratives are few and far between. This reflects a new dialectical tension that we can examine: no longer what we think the objects mean on their own, but what we think the cultural producers are doing. The questions then become: what position-takings do we want to enact? And what culture do we want to produce?

---

<sup>625</sup> O'Meara and Bevan, "Transmedia Theory's Author Discourse and Its Limitations."

## Works Cited

- Abrams, J.J., Jeffrey Lieber, and Damon Lindelof. *Lost*. Burbank: ABC Studios, 2004.
- Agger, Michael. "The Minecraft Parent." *The New Yorker*, September 18, 2014. Accessed June 25, 2018. <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/minecraft-parent>.
- Aldred, Jessica. "(Un)Blocking the Transmedial Character: Digital Abstraction as Franchise Strategy in Traveller's Tales Lego Games." In *LEGO Studies: Examining the Building Blocks of a Transmedial Phenomenon*, edited by Mark J. P. Wolf, 105–17. New York: Routledge, 2014.
- Allison, Anne. "Portable Monsters and Commodity Cuteness: Pokémon as Japan's New Global Power." *Postcolonial Studies* 6, no. 3 (2003): 381–95. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1368879032000162220>.
- Althusser, Louis. *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays*. Translated by Ben Brewster. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971.
- Amin, Ash, and Nigel J. Thrift. *Cities: Reimagining the Urban*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002.
- Andreyko, Marc, Jeff Parker, David Hahn, Karl Kesel, Bill Williams, and Wes Abbott. *Batman '66 Meets Wonder Woman '77*. New York: DC Comics, 2016.
- Annandale, David. "A Conversation with David Annandale." Lecture, Concordia University, Montréal, October 27, 2015.
- Arnott, Luke. "Arkham Epic: Batman Video Games as Totalizing Texts." In *Contemporary Research on Intertextuality in Video Games*, edited by Christophe Duret and Christian-Marie Pons, 1–21. Hershey: IGI Global, 2016.
- . *Totally Epic Tales Across Time and Space*, 2019.
- Augé, Marc. *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*. Translated by John Howe. London: Verso, 1995.
- Ayer, David. *Suicide Squad*. Burbank: Warner Brothers, 2016.
- Aylett, Ruth S. "Narrative in Virtual Environments: Towards Emergent Narrative," 83–86. Menlo Park: AAAAI Press, 1999.
- Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space*. Translated by Maria Jolas. New York: Penguin Books, 1964.
- Bacon, Tom. "SDCC 2017: DC Comics Says Comic Book Industry Is On Verge of Collapse." *MoviePilot*, July 21, 2017. Accessed June 25, 2018. <https://web.archive.org/web/20170721184214/https://moviepilot.com/p/sdcc-2017-dc-comics-comic-book-industry-collapse/4327814>.
- Badiou, Alain. *Being and Event*. Translated by Oliver Feltham. London: Continuum, 2007.
- Baker, Neal. "Middle-Earth and Lego (Re)Creation." In *LEGO Studies: Examining the Building Blocks of a Transmedial Phenomenon*, edited by Mark J. P. Wolf, 40–54. New York: Routledge, 2014.
- Banks, John. *Co-Creating Videogames*. London: Bloomsbury, 2013.
- Barnes, Trevor, and Neil Coe. "Vancouver as Media Cluster: The Case of Video Games and Film/TV." In *Media Clusters: Spatial Agglomeration and Content Capabilities*, edited by Charlie Karlsson and Robert G. Picard, 251–280. Northampton: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2011.
- Batman*. TV series. Developed by Lorenzo Semple Jr. and William Dozier. Los Angeles: 20th Century Fox Television, 1966.
- . "The Clock King's Crazy Crimes." Directed by James Neilson. Written by Charles Sinclair. WABC New York, October 12, 1966.

- . “The Minstrel’s Shakedown.” Directed by Murray Golden. Written by Francis Cockrell and Marian Cockrell. *Batman*. WABC New York, September 21, 1966.
- . “When the Rat’s Away, the Mice Will Play.” Directed by Tom Gries. Written by Fred De Gorter. WABC New York, February 17, 1966.
- Batman Arkham. “Official Batman: Arkham VR Trailer - ‘Wear the Cowl.’” YouTube Video, 1:54. August 16, 2016. <https://youtu.be/eS4g0py16N8>.
- “Batman: Arkham Asylum for PlayStation 3 Reviews.” *Metacritic*. Accessed June 27, 2018. <http://www.metacritic.com/game/playstation-3/batman-arkham-asylum>.
- “Batman: Arkham Asylum (Video Game 2009) - Taglines.” *IMDB*. Accessed July 11, 2018. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1282022/taglines>.
- “Batman: Arkham City - Awards.” *IMDB*. Accessed June 27, 2018. [https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1568322/awards?ref\\_=tt\\_awd](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1568322/awards?ref_=tt_awd).
- “Batman: Arkham City for PlayStation 3 Reviews.” *Metacritic*. Accessed June 27, 2018. <http://www.metacritic.com/game/playstation-3/batman-arkham-city>.
- “Batman: Arkham City (Video Game 2011) - Taglines.” *IMDB*. Accessed July 11, 2018. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1568322/taglines>.
- “Batman: Arkham Knight for PlayStation 4 Reviews.” *Metacritic*. Accessed June 27, 2018. <http://www.metacritic.com/game/playstation-4/batman-arkham-knight>.
- “Batman: Arkham Origins for PlayStation 3 Reviews.” *Metacritic*. Accessed June 27, 2018. <http://www.metacritic.com/game/playstation-3/batman-arkham-origins>.
- “Batman: Arkham Origins (Video Game 2013) - Taglines.” *IMDB*. Accessed July 11, 2018. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt2842418/taglines>.
- “Batman Arrives on the App Store in Epic New Interactive Graphic Novel ‘Batman: Arkham Origins - A DC2 MultiVerse Graphic Novel.’” *DC Comics Blog*, December 19, 2013. Accessed June 25, 2018. <https://www.dccomics.com/blog/2013/12/19/batman-arrives-on-the-app-store-in-epic-new-interactive-graphic-novel-batman-arkham>.
- Batman: Knightfall*. Radio broadcast. London: BBC Worldwide; Australian Broadcasting Corporation (distributor), 1994.
- Batman: The Lazarus Syndrome*. Radio broadcast. London: BBC Radio 4, 1989.
- Batty, Michael. “Virtual Geography.” *Futures* 29, no. 4 (1997): 337–52.
- Benedikt, Michael. *Cyberspace: First Steps*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1991.
- Benjamin, Walter. *The Arcades Project*. 1st paperback edition. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002.
- Benzies, Leslie, Adam Fowler, Alexander Roger, and Obbe Vermeij. *Grand Theft Auto IV*. Playstation 3. Edinburgh: Rockstar North Limited, 2008.
- Bernstein, Charles. “Optimism and Critical Excess (Process).” *Critical Inquiry* 16, no. 4 (1990): 830–56.
- Beschizza, Rob. “Expired Patent of the Day: Lego.” *Boing Boing*, October 21, 2011. Accessed June 25, 2018. <https://boingboing.net/2011/10/21/expired-patent-of-the-day-lego.html>.
- Blow, Jonathan. *The Witness*. Playstation 4. Berkeley: Thekla, Inc., 2016.
- Bogost, Ian. *Persuasive Games: The Expressive Power of Videogames*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2007.
- Bogost, Ian, and Nick Montfort. *Racing the Beam: The Atari Video Computer System*. Platform Studies. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2009.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*. Translated by Randal Johnson. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993.

- Brey, Betsy. "Fact and/or Fiction?: VR Storytelling and Cognitive Narratology." Conference presentation presented at the Canadian Game Studies Association 2017 Annual Conference, Toronto, June 1, 2017.
- "Bronson Cave in Griffith Park." *hikespeak*. December 15, 2015. Accessed January 15, 2016. <https://www.hikespeak.com/trails/bronson-cave/>.
- Brooker, Will. *Batman Unmasked: Analyzing a Cultural Icon*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2001.
- . *Hunting the Dark Knight: Twenty-First Century Batman*. London: I. B. Taurus & Co Ltd., 2012.
- Brooks, James L., Matt Groening, and Sam Simon. *The Simpsons*. Los Angeles: 20th Century Fox Television, 1989.
- Brown, Eliot R. "DC Comics Gotham City Map Story - Page 1 of 4." *Eliot R. Brown* (blog). Accessed July 2, 2018. <http://www.eliotrbrown.com/wp/gotham-city-map.html>.
- . "DC Comics Gotham City Map Story - Page 3 of 4." *Eliot R. Brown* (blog). Accessed July 2, 2018. <http://www.eliotrbrown.com/wp/gotham-city-map.html/3>.
- Brubaker, Ed, Greg Rucka, Michael Lark, Noelle Giddings, Matt Hollingsworth, Lee Loughridge, and Willie Schubert. *Gotham Central. Book One: In the Line of Duty*. 1st ed. New York: DC Comics, 2008.
- Bunyan, John. *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678). Mineola: Dover Publications, 2003.
- Burrows, Edwin G., and Mike Wallace. *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Burton, Jon. *Lego Star Wars: The Video Game*. Playstation 2. Knutsford: Traveller's Tales, 2005.
- Burton, Jon, John Hodkinson, and Jonathan Smith. *Lego Batman 2: DC Super Heroes*. Playstation 3. Knutsford: Traveller's Tales, 2012.
- Burton, Jon. *Lego Batman: The Videogame*. PC. Knutsford: Traveller's Tales, 2008.
- Burton, Tim. *Batman*. DVD. Burbank: Warner Brothers, 1989.
- . *Batman Returns*. DVD. Burbank: Warner Brothers, 1992.
- Byrne, Katharine. "Telltale on Its 'Wildly Successful' Season Pass Discs and What's Next for Switch." *MCVUK*, September 28, 2017. Accessed July 25, 2018. <https://web.archive.org/web/20171003093410/http://www.mcvuk.com/news/read/telltale-on-its-wildly-successful-season-pass-discs-and-what-s-next-for-switch/0187333>.
- "Carleton University Researchers Awarded Nearly \$8.5 Million for Innovative SSHRC Projects." *Carleton Newsroom Archives*, November 16, 2017. Accessed September 20, 2018. <https://newsroom.carleton.ca/archives/2017/11/16/carleton-university-researchers-awarded-nearly-8-5-million-for-innovative-sshr/>.
- Carpenter, Edmund, and Marshall McLuhan. "The New Languages." *Chicago Review* 10, no. 1 (1956): 46–52.
- Certeau, Michel de. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Translated by Steven Rendall. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.
- The Chris Gethard Show. "Connor Ratliff Can Interview Tony Hale On One Condition..." YouTube Video, 5:46. May 11, 2016. <https://youtu.be/Q6pnoznL--I>.
- Chun, Wendy Hui Kyong. "On 'Sourcery,' or Code as Fetish." *Configurations* 16, no. 3 (Fall 2008): 299–324. <https://doi.org/10.1353/con.0.0064>.
- . *Programmed Visions: Software and Memory*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2011.
- . "The Enduring Ephemeral, or the Future Is a Memory." *Critical Inquiry* 35, no. 1 (Autumn 2008): 148–71.

- Cloonan, Becky, Brenden Fletcher, Karl Kerschl, Helen Chen, Dave McCaig, and Steve Wands. *Gotham Academy Volume 1: Welcome to Gotham Academy*. New York: DC Comics, 2015.
- Consalvo, Mia. *Cheating: Gaining Advantage in Videogames*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2007.
- . “Persistence Meets Performance: Phoenix Wright, Ace Attorney.” In *Well-Played 1.0: Video Game, Value and Meaning*, edited by Drew Davidson, 145-158. Pittsburgh: ETC Press, 2009.
- Conway, Gerry, Ross Andru, Neal Adams, and John Romita Sr. *Superman vs. The Amazing Spider-Man*. New York: DC Comics/Marvel Comics, 1976.
- Conway, Steven, and Jennifer deWinter, eds. *Video Game Policy: Production, Distribution, and Consumption*. New York: Routledge, 2017.
- Coogler, Ryan. *Black Panther*. DVD. Burbank: Marvel Studios, 2018.
- Coombe, Rosemary J. *The Cultural Life of Intellectual Properties: Authorship, Appropriation, and the Law*. Post-Contemporary Interventions. Durham: Duke University Press, 1998.
- Corliss, Richard. “The Caped Crusader Flies Again.” *Time* 133, no. 25, 1989.
- Coulthurst, Fenton. “The X-Men Franchise: Origins.” *Pop Verse*, June 24, 2016. Accessed June 27, 2018. <http://pop-verse.com/2016/06/24/the-x-men-franchise-origins/>.
- Cowley, Stacy. “Disney to Buy Lucasfilm for \$4 Billion.” *CNN*, October 31, 2012. Accessed July 2, 2018. <http://money.cnn.com/2012/10/30/technology/disney-buys-lucasfilm/index.html>.
- Cramer, Douglas S., and Stanley Ralph Ross. *Wonder Woman*. Burbank: Warner Bros. Television, 1975.
- Cranswick, Amie. “LEGO Unveils Three New Minecraft Sets for Summer 2018.” *Flickering Myth*, May 21, 2018. Accessed June 25, 2018. <https://www.flickeringmyth.com/2018/05/lego-unveils-three-new-minecraft-sets-for-summer-2018/>.
- Daniel, Tony. *Detective Comics* vol. 2 #6. New York: DC Comics, 2012.
- Dear, Michael J., and J. Dallas Dishman, eds. *From Chicago to L.A: Making Sense of Urban Theory*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2001.
- Debord, Guy. “Theory of the Dérive.” In *Situationist International Anthology*, edited by Ken Knabb, 62–66. Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006.
- Defoe, Daniel. *Robinson Crusoe* (1719). Mineola: Dover Publications, 1995.
- Del Carpio, Vanessa. “Cannibalizing Couture: Fashion Meets the Politics of Stolen Street Art.” Conference presentation presented at the Re-Originality: Curation, Plagiarism, & Cultures of Appropriation, Concordia University, Montréal, March 14, 2015.
- Denton Designs. *Batman Returns*. Amiga. Miami: GameTek, 1992.
- Désilets, Patrice. *Assassin’s Creed II*. Playstation 3. Montreal: Ubisoft, 2009.
- Deuze, Mark. *Media Work*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008.
- DiDio, Dan. *The New Age of DC Heroes: The Podcast*. Podcast. Burbank: DC Entertainment, 2017. <https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/the-new-age-of-dc-heroes-the-podcast/id1306298720?mt=2>.
- Dixon, Chuck, and Graham Nolan. *Detective Comics #668*. Vol. 1. Detective Comics 668. New York: DC Comics, 1993.
- “Doctor Bly’s Confidence Gang, Part 4.” Radio episode. *The Adventures of Superman*, n.d.
- Dyer-Witford, Nick, and Greig S. de Peuter. “‘EA Spouse’ and the Crisis of Video Game Labour: Enjoyment, Exclusion, Exploitation, and Exodus.” *Canadian Journal of Communication* 31, no. 3 (2006): 599-617.
- Eco, Umberto. *Travels in Hyperreality: Essays*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986.

- Ehrentraut, Judy. "This Is Not Your Body: The Synchronization of Affect in Virtual Reality Gaming." Conference presentation presented at the Canadian Game Studies Association 2017 Annual Conference, Toronto, ON, June 1, 2017.
- Evans, Chris. "CCI: Jim Lee & Cully Hamner Design the New DC 52." *CBR*, July 26, 2011. Accessed August 1, 2018. <https://www.cbr.com/cci-jim-lee-cully-hamner-design-the-new-dc-52/>.
- Farokhmanesh, Megan. "Toxic Management Cost an Award-Winning Game Studio Its Best Developers." *The Verge*, March 20, 2018. Accessed July 25, 2018. <https://www.theverge.com/2018/3/20/17130056/telltale-games-developer-layoffs-toxic-video-game-industry>.
- Finke, Nikki. "Warner Bros Buys Majority Stake In Batman Video Game's Rocksteady Studios." *Deadline Hollywood*, February 23, 2010. July 5, 2018. <https://deadline.com/2010/02/warner-bros-buys-majority-stake-in-batman-video-games-rocksteady-studios-26344/>.
- Flanagan, Mary. *Critical Play: Radical Game Design*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2013.
- Flanagan, Mary, and Helen Fay Nissenbaum. *Values at Play in Digital Games*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2014.
- Flew, Terry. *The Creative Industries: Culture and Policy*. Los Angeles: SAGE, 2012.
- Foucault, Michel. "Of Other Spaces." *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (1986): 22–27.
- . "What Is An Author?" In *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*, edited by David H. Richter, translated by Josué Hararai. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2007.
- Frank, Allegra. "Batman: Arkham Knight PC Version Circles October for Retail Return." *Polygon*, October 2, 2015. Accessed June 27, 2018. <https://www.polygon.com/2015/10/2/9440611/batman-arkham-knight-pc-version-retail-release-date-return>.
- Freeman, Matthew, Paolo Bertetti, and Carlos Scolari. *Transmedia Archaeology: Storytelling in the Borderlines of Science Fiction, Comics and Pulp Magazines*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.
- Friedman, Batya, and Helen Nissenbaum. "Bias in Computer Systems." *ACM Transactions on Information Systems* 14, no. 3 (July 1996): 330–47.
- Galloway, Alexander R. *Gaming: Essays on Algorithmic Culture*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006.
- . *Protocol: How Control Exists after Decentralization*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2006.
- Game of Thrones*. TV series. Developed by David Benioff and D.B. Weiss. Los Angeles: HBO, 2011.
- Gannaway, Roberts. *Jake and the Never Land Pirates*. Burbank: Disney-ABC Domestic Television, 2011.
- Ganzon, Sarah Christina. "Sweet Solutions for Female Gamers: Cheritz, Korean Otome Games, and Global Otome Game Players." In *Digital Love: Romance and Sexuality in Games*, edited by Heidi McDonald. Boca Raton: CRC Press, 2017.
- Gaonkar, Dilip Parameshwar, and Elizabeth A. Povinelli. "Technologies of Public Forms: Circulation, Transfiguration, Recognition." *Public Culture* 15, no. 3 (2003): 385–97.
- Garfield, Simon. "When hell burst through the pavement and grew: Anton Furst conjured up Batman's Gotham City." *The Independent*, July 3, 1992. Accessed September 28, 2018. <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/when-hell-burst-through-the-pavement-and-grew-anton-furst-conjured-up-batmans-gotham-city-in-england-1531040.html>.



- Gazzard, Alison. "Unlocking the Gameworld: The Rewards of Space and Time in Videogames." *Game Studies: The International Journal of Computer Games Research* 11, no. 1 (2011). Accessed June 27, 2018. [gamestudies.org/1101/articles/gazzard\\_alison](http://gamestudies.org/1101/articles/gazzard_alison).
- Goldberg, Lesley. "'Gotham' Boss Sets New Batman Prequel Series at Epix." *The Hollywood Reporter*, May 16, 2018. Accessed August 3, 2018. <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/live-feed/gotham-boss-sets-new-batman-prequel-series-at-epix-1112339>.
- "Good Manors." *Movie Locations*. Accessed December 15, 2015. <http://www.movie-locations.com/features/001/wayne-manor.html#.VrozGd-rSHp>.
- Goodman, Martin. "Who Screwed Roger Rabbit?" *Animation World Network*, April 3, 2003. Accessed June 25, 2018. <https://www.awn.com/animationworld/who-screwed-roger-rabbit>.
- Gordon, Ian. "Comics, Creators, and Copyright: On the Ownership of Serial Narratives by Multiple Authors." In *A Companion to Media Authorship*, edited by Jonathan Gray and Derek Johnson, 221-236. New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013.
- Gotham*. "Selina Kyle." Directed by Danny Cannon. Written by Bruno Heller. Fox, September 29, 2014.
- . "Strike Force." Directed by T.J. Scott. Written by Danny Cannon. Fox, October 12, 2015.
- Gotham Stories*. New York: Fox Broadcasting Company, 2016.
- Grant, Alan, and Jim Aparo. *Detective Comics #641*. New York: DC Comics, 1992.
- "Grapnel Boost - Batman: Arkham City." *Giant Bomb*. Accessed June 27, 2018. <https://www.giantbomb.com/batman-arkham-city/3030-29443/forums/grapnel-boost-520348/>.
- Hall, Stuart. "Encoding/Decoding." In *Media and Cultural Studies: KeyWorks*, edited by Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2006.
- Hamilton, James. "Historical Forms of User Production." *Media, Culture & Society* 36, no. 4 (2014): 491–507.
- Hamilton, Sheryl. "Considering Critical Communication Studies in Canada." In *Mediascapes: New Patterns in Canadian Communication*, edited by Leslie Regan Shade. Toronto: Nelson Higher Education, 2002.
- Harpold, Terry. "Screw the Grue: Mediality, Metalepsis, Recapture." *Game Studies: The International Journal of Computer Games Research* 7, no. 1 (August 2007). <http://gamestudies.org/0701/articles/harpold>.
- Hefti, Neal. *Batman Theme And 11 Hefti Bat Songs*. New York: RCA Victor, 1966.
- Heller, Bruno. *Gotham*. Los Angeles: Fox Broadcasting Company, 2014.
- Herman, Sarah. *Building a History: The Lego Group*. Barnsley: Pen & Swords Books Ltd, 2012.
- Higgins, Kyle, Eddy Barrow, and Geraldo Borges. *Nightwing* vol. 3 #10. New York: DC Comics, December 2011.
- Hill, Sefton. *Batman: Arkham Asylum*. Playstation 3. London: Rocksteady Studios, 2009.
- . *Batman: Arkham City*. Playstation 3. London: Rocksteady Studios, 2011.
- . *Batman: Arkham Knight*. Playstation 4. London: Rocksteady Studios, 2015.
- Hill, Sefton, and Adam Doherty. *Batman: Arkham VR*. Playstation 4. London: Rocksteady Studios, 2016.
- Hillyer, Lambert. *Batman*. Film serial. Los Angeles: Columbia Pictures, 1943.
- Holmes, Eric, and Benoit Richer. *Batman: Arkham Origins*. Playstation 3. Montreal: WB Games Montréal Inc., 2013.

- Horkheimer, Max, and Theodor W. Adorno. *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*. Translated by Edmund Jephcott. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002.
- Hunicke, Robin, Marc LeBlanc, and Robert Zubek. "MDA: A Formal Approach to Game Design and Game Research." *AAAI Workshop - Technical Report 1* (2004).
- Huntemann, Nina, and Ben Aslinger, eds. *Gaming Globally: Production, Play, and Place*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.
- Hunter, Dan, and Julian Thomas. "Lego and the System of Intellectual Property, 1955-2015." *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2016. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2743140>.
- Hutcheon, Linda. *A Theory of Adaptation*. 1st ed. London: Routledge, 2006.
- . *The Politics of Postmodernism*. London: Routledge, 1989.
- Hutcheon, Linda, and Siobhan O'Flynn. *A Theory of Adaptation*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge, 2013.
- Inoa, Christopher. "NYC Film Locations for TV Show Gotham on FOX." *Untapped Cities*, October 9, 2014. Accessed August 3, 2018. <https://untappedcities.com/2014/10/09/nyc-film-locations-for-tv-show-gotham-on-fox/>.
- Jackson, Gita. "Why This Lifelong Batman Fan Doesn't Like the Arkham Games." *Paste Magazine*, June 25, 2015. Accessed July 5, 2018. <https://www.pastemagazine.com/articles/2015/06/why-this-lifelong-batman-fan-doesnt-like-the-arkha.html>.
- Jackson, Renée, William Robinson, and Bart Simon. "Gleaning Strategies for Knowledge Sharing and Collective Assessment in the Art Classroom from the Videogame, 'Little Big Planet's Creator Spotlights.'" In *Educational, Psychological, and Behavioral Considerations in Niche Online Communities*, edited by Vivek Venkatesh, Jason Wallin, Juan Carlos Castro, and Jason Edward Lewis. Hershey: IGI Global, 2014.
- Jankiewicz, Pat. "Dark Knight Resurrected." *Starlog*, August 2005.
- Jay, Martin. *Marxism and Totality: The Adventures of a Concept from Lukács to Habermas*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.
- Jenkins, Henry. *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York: New York University Press, 2006.
- . "Transmedia Storytelling and Entertainment: An Annotated Syllabus." *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 24, no. 6 (2010): 943–58.
- Jenkins, Henry, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green. *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture*. New York: New York University Press, 2013.
- Jenkins, Henry, and Dan Hassler-Forest. "Foreword: 'I Have a Bad Feeling About This:' A Conversation About Star Wars and the History of Transmedia." In *Star Wars and the History of Transmedia Storytelling*, edited by Sean Guynes and Dan Hassler-Forest. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017.
- Jenkins, Henry, Mizuko Ito, and danah boyd. *Participatory Culture in a Networked Era*. Cambridge: Polity, 2015.
- Jenkins, Wes. *Lego Island*. PC. Novato: Mindscape, 1997.
- Jensen, Jeff. "This Week's Cover: CW Superheroes Crossover Revealed." *EW.com*, November 9, 2016. Accessed June 27, 2018. <http://ew.com/article/2016/11/09/flash-green-arrow-supergirl-cw-superheroes-crossover-cover/>.
- Jeong, Sarah. "Fair Use vs. Algorithms: What the Dancing Baby Did to Copyright." *Motherboard*. September 14, 2015. Accessed May 24, 2018. [https://motherboard.vice.com/en\\_us/article/mgb85y/fair-use-vs-algorithms-what-the-dancing-baby-did-to-copyright](https://motherboard.vice.com/en_us/article/mgb85y/fair-use-vs-algorithms-what-the-dancing-baby-did-to-copyright).

- Johnson, Derek. "A History of Transmedia Entertainment." *Spreadable Media*. Accessed June 27, 2018. <http://spreadablemedia.org/essays/johnson/#.WzPhhNhKgWp>.
- . "Chicks with Bricks: Building Creativity Across Industrial Design Cultures and Gendered Construction Play." In *LEGO Studies: Examining the Building Blocks of a Transmedial Phenomenon*, edited by Mark J. P. Wolf, 81–104. New York: Routledge, 2014.
- . *Media Franchising: Creative License and Collaboration in the Culture Industries*. New York: New York University Press, 2013.
- Johnson, Rian. *Star Wars: The Last Jedi*. DVD. San Francisco, CA: Lucasfilm Ltd., 2017.
- Jong, Carolyn, Rob Gallagher, and Kalervo A. Sinervo. "Who Wrote the Elder Scrolls? Modders, Developers, and the Mythology of Bethesda Softworks." *Loading...* 10, no. 16 (2017). <http://journals.sfu.ca/loading/index.php/loading/article/view/169>.
- Jonge, Mathijs de. *Horizon Zero Dawn*. Playstation 4. Amsterdam: Guerrilla Games, 2017.
- "Justice League (2017) - Filming & Production." *IMDB*. Accessed July 3, 2018. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0974015/locations>.
- Juul, Jesper. "A Certain Level of Abstraction." In *Situated Play: DiGRA 2007 Conference Proceedings*, edited by Akira Baba, 510–15. Tokyo: DiGRA Japan, 2007. <http://www.jesperjuul.net/text/acertainlevel/>.
- Karger, Dave. "Batman & Robin disappointment." *Entertainment Weekly*, July 11, 1997. Accessed June 27, 2018. <http://ew.com/article/1997/07/11/batman-robin-disappointment/>.
- Karlin, Susan. "Who Really Created Batman? A DC Comics Historian Weighs In On The Controversy." *Fast Company*, July 21, 2014. Accessed June 27, 2018. <https://www.fastcompany.com/3033002/who-really-created-batman-a-dc-comics-historian-weighs-in>.
- Keizer, Kees, Siegwart Lindenberg, and Linda Steg. "The Spreading of Disorder." *Science* 322, no. 5908 (December 12, 2008): 1681–85. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1161405>.
- Kidd, Chip, and Dave Taylor. *Batman: Death by Design*. New York: DC Comics, 2012.
- Kilkenny, Katie. "Gotham Is Gorgeous." *The Atlantic*, September 29, 2014. Accessed July 3, 2018. <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2014/09/the-obscenely-opulent-grit-of-gotham/380714/>.
- Kinder, Marsha. *Playing with Power in Movies, Television, and Video Games: From Muppet Babies to Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991.
- Kittler, Friedrich, and Matthew Griffin. "The City Is a Medium." *New Literary History* 27, no. 4 (1996): 717–29.
- Kolozova, Katerina. *Cut of the Real: Subjectivity in Poststructuralist Philosophy*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2014.
- Konzack, Lars. "The Cultural History of Lego." In *LEGO Studies: Examining the Building Blocks of a Transmedial Phenomenon*, edited by Mark J. P. Wolf, 1–14. New York: Routledge, 2014.
- Krishna, Rachel. "There's An Online Harassment Campaign Underway Against People Advocating For Diversity In Comics Called #Comicsgate." *BuzzFeed News*, March 22, 2018. Accessed September 24, 2018. <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/krishrach/comicsgate>.
- Kristeva, Julia. *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*. Translated by Thomas Gora and Alice Jardine. New York: Columbia University Press, 1980.
- Kücklich, Julian. "Precarious Playbour: Modders and the Digital Games Industry." *The Fibreculture Journal*, no. 5 (2005). [five.fibreculturejournal.org/fcj-025-precariou-playbour-modders-and-the-digital-games-industry/print/](http://five.fibreculturejournal.org/fcj-025-precariou-playbour-modders-and-the-digital-games-industry/print/).

- Kukkonen, Karin. "Navigating Infinite Earths: Readers, Mental Models, and the Multiverse of Superhero Comics." *StoryWorlds: A Journal of Narrative Studies* 2, no. 1 (2010): 39–58. <https://doi.org/10.1353/stw.0.0009>.
- Lamarre, Thomas. *The Anime Machine: A Media Theory of Animation*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009.
- Landay, Lori. "Myth Blocks: How Lego Transmedia Configures and Remixes Mythic Structures in the Ninjago and Chima Themes." In *LEGO Studies: Examining the Building Blocks of a Transmedial Phenomenon*, edited by Mark J. P. Wolf, 55–80. New York: Routledge, 2014.
- Lang, Fritz. *Metropolis*. DVD. New York: Kino International, 1927.
- Langley, Travis. *Batman and Psychology: A Dark and Stormy Knight*. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2012.
- Latour, Bruno. *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Lauwaert, Maaïke. *The Place of Play: Toys and Digital Culture*. Amsterdam, NL: Amsterdam University Press, 2009.
- Lavolette, Chris. "Montréal Into Gotham: Photographic Evidence of WB Games Montréal Using Real-Life Local Graffiti Tags in the Backgrounds of Batman: Arkham Origins." *Noproblo*. Accessed June 27, 2018. <http://noproblo.dayjo.org/ArkhamOriginsGraff/>.
- Law, John. "Notes on the Theory of the Actor-Network: Ordering, Strategy, and Heterogeneity." *Systems Practice* 5, no. 4 (1992): 397–393. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01059830>.
- Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 1992.
- . *The Urban Revolution*. Edited by Robert Bononno. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003.
- Lego. "Loss of DKK 1.4bn in the LEGO Company in 2003," January 8, 2004. <https://www.lego.com/en-gb/aboutus/news-room/2004/january/loss-of-dkk-1-4bn-in-the-lego-company-in-2003>.
- . "MINDSTORMS and Harry Potter Will Continue." *Lego.com*, January 14, 2004. Accessed June 25, 2018. <https://www.lego.com/en-gb/aboutus/news-room/2004/january/mindstorms-and-harry-potter-will-continue>.
- "LEGO Batman 2: DC Super Heroes for PC Reviews." *Metacritic*. Accessed June 25, 2018. <http://www.metacritic.com/game/pc/lego-batman-2-dc-super-heroes>.
- "LEGO Batman 3: Beyond Gotham for Xbox One Reviews." *Metacritic*. Accessed June 25, 2018. <http://www.metacritic.com/game/xbox-one/lego-batman-3-beyond-gotham>.
- "LEGO Batman: The Videogame for PC Reviews." *Metacritic*. Accessed June 25, 2018. <http://www.metacritic.com/game/pc/lego-batman-the-videogame>.
- "Lego Tumbles as Toy Sales Slump." *BBC*. January 8, 2004. Accessed June 25, 2018. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/3380197.stm>.
- Lee, Stan, and Jack Kirby. *Fantastic Four Annual #3*. New York: Marvel Comics, 1965.
- Lessig, Lawrence. *The Future of Ideas: The Fate of the Commons in a Connected World*. New York: Random House, 2001.
- "List of Batman Comics." *Wikipedia*. Accessed December 30, 2017. [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=List\\_of\\_Batman\\_comics&oldid=847804013](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=List_of_Batman_comics&oldid=847804013).
- Lord, Phil, and Christopher Miller. *The Lego Movie*. DVD. Burbank: Warner Brothers, 2014.
- MacDonald, Heidi. "The Not-so-Secret History of Marvel's Seven Relaunches in Five Years." *The Beat*, February 20, 2018. Accessed August 7, 2018. <http://www.comicsbeat.com/the-not-so-secret-history-of-marvels-seven-relaunches-in-five-years/>.

- Maguire, Jennifer Smith, and Julian Matthews. "Are We All Cultural Intermediaries Now? An Introduction to Cultural Intermediaries in Context." *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 15, no. 5 (October 2012): 551–62. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549412445762>.
- Malmont, Paul. *The Vertigo Lounge Podcast*. Podcast. Burbank: DC Entertainment, 2016. <https://www.vertigocomics.com/blog/2016/01/25/enter-the-vertigo-lounge>.
- Manguel, Alberto, and Gianni Guadalupi. *The Dictionary of Imaginary Places – Expanded Edition*. Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys Ltd., 1987.
- Manovich, Lev. *The Language of New Media*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2002.
- Marks, Laura U. *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002.
- Marnell, Blair. "Batman Co-Creator Bill Finger Finally Gets Credit on *Gotham* and *Batman v Superman*." *Nerdist*, September 18, 2015. Accessed June 27, 2018. <https://nerdist.com/batman-co-creator-bill-finger-dc-comics-credit-gotham-batman-v-superman-dawn-of-justice/>.
- Martin, George R. R. *A Game of Thrones: Book One of a Song of Ice and Fire*. London: Harper Voyager, 1996.
- Martinson, Leslie H. *Batman: The Movie*. Los Angeles: 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, 1966.
- "Marvel's *The Avengers* (2012)." *Box Office Mojo*. Accessed June 28, 2018. <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=avengers11.htm>.
- Marz, Ron, Peter David, and Dan Jurgens. *DC versus Marvel Comics*. New York: DC Comics/Marvel Comics, 1996.
- Matheny, Bill, and Christopher Jones. *The Batman Strikes!: In the Clutches of the Penguin*. North Mankato: Capstone Stone Arch Books, 2014.
- Maypole, Melissa. "Minecraft Explained From a Mom Who Gets It (Finally!)." *Qustodio*, September 25, 2014. Accessed June 25, 2018. <https://www.qustodio.com/en/blog/2014/09/minecraft-explained-from-a-mom-who-gets-it-finally/>.
- McArthur, Colin. "Chinese Boxes and Russian Dolls." In *The Cinematic City*, edited by David B. Clarke. London: Routledge, 1997.
- McKay, Chris. *The Lego Batman Movie*. DVD. Burbank: Warner Brothers, 2017.
- McLuhan, Marshall. *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man*. New York: Signet, 1969.
- . *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. New York: Routledge Classics, 2001.
- McQuillan, James. *Destiny*. Playstation 4. Bellevue: Bungie, Inc., 2014.
- Medley, Addyson. "5 Complaints About The Star Wars Prequels That Should Retire." *Dorkly*, April 7, 2017. Accessed August 3, 2018. <http://www.dorkly.com/post/82966/5-complaints-about-the-star-wars-prequels-that-should-retire>.
- Meehan, Eileen. "'Holy Commodity Fetish, Batman!': The Political Economy of a Commercial Intertext." In *The Many Lives of the Batman: Critical Approaches to a Superhero and His Media*, edited by Roberta Pearson and William Uricchio, 47–67. New York: Routledge, 1991.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Phenomenology of Perception*. Translated by Donald A. Landes. New York: Routledge, 2012.
- "Middle-Earth & Hobbit Tours & Activities." *newzealand.com*. Accessed July 11, 2018. <https://www.newzealand.com/ca/feature/middle-earth-activities-and-tours/>.
- Miège, Bernard. *Les Industries du Contenu Face à L'Ordre Informationnel*. Grenoble: Presses Universitaires de Grenoble, 2000.
- Miller, Frank, and David Mazzucchelli. *Batman: Year One*. New York: DC Comics, 1987.

- Miller, Toby. "Gaming for Beginners." *Games & Culture* 1, no. 1 (2006): 5-12.
- Mills, Katie. *The Road Story and the Rebel: Moving Through Film, Fiction, and Television*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2006.
- Molinaro, John. "Who owns Captain America? Contested authorship, work-for-hire, and termination of rights under the copyright act of 1976." *Georgia State Law Review* 21, no. 2 (2004): 565-592.
- Monolith Productions. *Gotham City Impostors*. PC. Kirkland: Monolith Productions, 2012.
- Montgomery, Martin, Kent Mudle, Graham Ross, and Jason Latino. *Game of Thrones*. Playstation 4. San Rafael: Telltale Games, 2014.
- Moore, Alan, and Dave Gibbons. *Watchmen*. New York: DC Comics, 1986.
- Moore, Alan, and Kevin O'Neill. *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen Volume 1*. La Jolla: America's Best Comics, 2002.
- More, Thomas. *Utopia* (1516). Dover Thrift Editions. Mineola: Dover Publications, 1997.
- Morimoto, Kōji, Shinichiro Watanabe, Mahiro Maeda, Peter Chung, Andy Jones, Yoshiaki Kawajiri, and Takeshi Koike. *The Animatrix*. DVD. Burbank: Warner Brothers, 2003.
- Morrison, Grant, and Dave McKean. *Arkham Asylum: A Serious House on Serious Earth*. New York: DC Comics, 1989.
- Motter, Dean, Paul Rivoche, Klaus Schönefeld, Seth, Ty Templeton, Bob Eggleton, Neil Gaiman, Dave McKean, and Bill Sienkiewicz. *Mister X: The Archives*. Milwaukee: Dark Horse Books, 2017.
- Mudle, Kent, Jonathan Stauder, Jason Pyke, and Mark Droste. *Batman: The Telltale Series*. Playstation 4. San Rafael: Telltale Games, 2016.
- Murray, Laura J., S. Tina Piper, and Kirsty Robertson. *Putting Intellectual Property in Its Place: Rights Discourses, Creative Labor, and the Everyday*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.
- Narcisse, Evan. "Batman: Arkham Origins: The Kotaku Review." *Kotaku*, October 25, 2013. Accessed June 27, 2018. <https://kotaku.com/batman-arkham-origins-the-kotaku-review-1451970358>.
- Nelson, Elissa. "Windows Into the Digital World: Distributor Strategies and Consumer Choice in an Era of Connected Viewing." In *Connected Viewing: Selling, Streaming, & Sharing Media in the Digital Age*, edited by Jennifer Holt and Kevin Sanson, 62-78. New York: Routledge, 2013.
- Nevins, Francis M. Jr. "Copyright + Character = Catastrophe." *Journal of the Copyright Society of the U.S.A.* 39, no. 4 (Summer 1992): 303-344.
- Nieborg, David, and Thomas Poell. "The Platformization of Cultural Production: Theorizing the Contingent Cultural Commodity." *New Media & Society* 00, no. 0 (April 2018): 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444818769694>.
- Nitsche, Michael. *Video Game Spaces: Image, Play, and Structure in 3D Game Worlds*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2008.
- Nolan, Christopher. *Batman Begins*. DVD. Burbank: Warner Brothers, 2005.
- . *The Dark Knight*. DVD. Burbank: Warner Brothers, 2008.
- . *The Dark Knight Rises*. DVD. Burbank: Warner Brothers, 2012.
- Nova, Nicolas, and Laurent Bolli. *Joypads!: The Design of Game Controllers*. San Bernardino: CreateSpace, 2013.
- O'Donnell, Casey. *Developer's Dilemma: The Secret World of Videogame Creators*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2014.

- O'Meara, Radha, and Alex Bevan. "Transmedia Theory's Author Discourse and Its Limitations." *M/C Journal - A Journal of Media and Culture* 21, no. 1 (2018). <http://journal.media-culture.org.au/index.php/mcjournal/article/view/1366>.
- O'Neil, Dennis. *Knightfall: A Novel*. New York: Bantam Books, 1994.
- O'Neil, Dennis, and Chris Sprouse. *Batman: Legends of the Dark Knight #27*. New York: DC Comics, February 1992.
- O'Sullivan, Vic. "Manhattan Unmasked." *The Sunday Times*, July 17, 2006.
- Osawa, Toru, Yoichi Yamada, Eiji Aonuma, Yoshiaki Koizumi, and Toshio Iwawaki. *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*. Nintendo 64. Kyoto: Nintendo EAD, 1998.
- Pardo, Rob, Jeff Kaplan, and Tom Chilton. *World of Warcraft*. PC. Irvine: Blizzard Entertainment, Inc., 2004.
- Park, Robert E., Ernest Burgess, and R. D. McKenzie. *The City: Suggestions for Investigations of Human Behavior in the Urban Environment*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1925.
- Parker, Jeff, Richard Case, and Mike Allred. *Batman '66 Volume 1*. New York: DC Comics, 2014.
- Parsons, Arthur. *Lego Batman 3: Beyond Gotham*. Xbox One. Knutsford: Traveller's Tales, 2014.
- . *Lego Marvel Super Heroes*. Playstation 4. Knutsford: Traveller's Tales, 2013.
- Pearson, Roberta, and William Uricchio, eds. *The Many Lives of the Batman: Critical Approaches to a Superhero and His Media*. New York: Routledge, 1991.
- Pearson, Roberta, William Uricchio, and Will Brooker, eds. *Many More Lives of the Batman*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.
- Perren, Alisa. "Researching the Media Industries: The Case of the American Comic Book Industry." Workshop presented at the Society for Cinema and Media Studies 2017 Conference, Chicago, March 26, 2017.
- . "The Trick of the Trades: Media Industry Studies and the American Comic Book Industry." In *Production Studies, the Sequel! Cultural Studies of Global Media Industries*, edited by Miranda Banks, Bridget Conor, and Vicki Mayer, 227–37. New York: Routledge, 2016.
- Perren, Alisa, and Laura E. Felschow. "The Bigger Picture: Drawing Intersections between Comics, Fan, and Industry Studies." In *The Routledge Companion to Media Fandom*, edited by Melissa A. Click and Suzanne Scott, 309–18. New York: Routledge, 2018.
- Persson, Markus, and Jens Bergensten. *Minecraft*. PC. Stockholm: Mojang, 2011.
- Petit, Carolyn. "Batman: Arkham Origins Review." *GameSpot*, October 25, 2013. Accessed June 27, 2018. <https://www.gamespot.com/reviews/batman-arkham-origins-review/1900-6415506/>.
- Popper, Ben. "Why Parents Are Raising Their Kids on Minecraft." *The Verge*, September 15, 2014. Accessed June 25, 2018. <https://www.theverge.com/2014/9/15/6152085/why-parents-love-minecraft>.
- Reiner, Andrew. "Batman: Arkham Asylum: The Best Batman Game Ever Made." *Game Informer*, September 27, 2009. Accessed June 25, 2018. [https://www.gameinformer.com/games/batman\\_arkham\\_asylum/b/xbox360/archive/2009/09/27/review.aspx](https://www.gameinformer.com/games/batman_arkham_asylum/b/xbox360/archive/2009/09/27/review.aspx).
- Ritman, John. *Batman*. PC. Manchester: Ocean Software, 1986.
- Roberston, David C., and Bill Breen. *Brick by Brick: How Lego Rewrote the Rules of Innovation and Conquered the Global Toy Industry*. New York: Penguin Random House, 2013.

- Roddy, Kate Ellen. "Masochist or Machiavel? Reading Harley Quinn in Canon and Fanon." *Transformative Works and Cultures* 8 (October 4, 2010). <https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2011.0259>.
- Ross, Alex, and Paul Dini. *Batman: War On Crime*. New York: DC Comics, 1999.
- Ross, Andrew. *No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1989.
- Rossellini, Roberto. *Rome, Open City*. DVD. Rome, Italy: Minerva Film SPA, 1945.
- Rubin, Rebecca. "'Black Panther' Surpasses 'The Avengers' as Highest-Grossing Superhero Movie of All Time in U.S." *Variety*, March 25, 2018. Accessed July 16, 2018. <https://variety.com/2018/film/box-office/black-panther-surpasses-avengers-highest-grossing-superhero-movie-1202735863/>.
- Ruttmann, Walter. *Berlin: Symphony of a Metropolis*. DVD. Los Angeles: 20th Century Fox, 1927.
- Sage. "Retro Radio Memories #77 - The Batman Mystery Club." *The Retroist* (blog), September 18, 2016. Accessed June 27, 2018. <https://www.retroist.com/2016/09/18/rrm-ep-77-the-batman-mystery-club/>.
- Salen, Katie, and Eric Zimmerman. *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2004.
- Salkowitz, Rob. "Batman's Co-Creator Bill Finger Finally Receives Recognition." *Forbes*, September 19, 2015. Accessed June 27, 2018. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/robsalkowitz/2015/09/19/batmans-co-creator-bill-finger-finally-receives-recognition/#2d48733c287e>.
- Scharr, Jill. "NYCC: 'Batman: Arkham Origins' - Mobile Version Announced." *Tom's Guide*, October 14, 2013. Accessed August 3, 2018. <https://www.tomsguide.com/us/nycc-batman-arkham-origins-reveals,news-17705.html>.
- Schubert, Heather. "It's Elementary: Why We Need a New Copyright Standard, with Statutory Guidance, for Characters in a Series." *Rutgers Journal of Law & Public Policy* 12, no. 2 (Spring 2015): 216-251.
- Schumacher, Joel. *Batman & Robin*. DVD. Burbank: Warner Brothers, 1997.
- . *Batman Forever*. DVD. Burbank: Warner Brothers, 1995.
- Schumpeter, Joseph A. "The Process of Creative Destruction." In *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*. London: Routledge, 2003.
- Schut, Kevin. "The Virtualization of Lego." In *LEGO Studies: Examining the Building Blocks of a Transmedial Phenomenon*, edited by Mark J. P. Wolf, 227–40. New York: Routledge, 2014.
- Schweizer, Bobby. "Videogame Cities in Motion." Dissertation, Georgia Institute of Technology, 2014.
- Scott, Allen John, and Edward W. Soja, eds. *The City: Los Angeles and Urban Theory at the End of the Twentieth Century*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.
- Scott, Suzanne. "Dawn of the Undead Author: Fanboy Auteursism and Zack Snyder's 'Vision.'" In *A Companion to Media Authorship*, edited by Jonathan Gray and Derek Johnson, 440-462. New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013.
- . "The Trouble with Transmediation: Fandom's Negotiation of Transmedia Storytelling Systems." *Spectator* 30, no. 1 (2010): 30–34.
- Shakespeare, William. *The Tempest* (1611). Mineola: Dover Publications, 1999.
- Shaw, Adrienne. "What Is Video Game Culture? Cultural Studies and Game Studies." *Games & Culture* 5, no. 4 (October 2010): 403–24. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412009360414>.
- Shooter, Jim, Mike Zeck, and Bob Layton. *Secret Wars*. New York: Marvel Comics, 1985.



- Shprintz, Janet. "Judge Dismisses Case of 'Batman' Sculptures." *Variety*, June 4, 1998. <https://variety.com/1998/biz/news/judge-dismisses-case-of-batman-sculptures-1117471543/>.
- Simon, David. *The Wire*. Los Angeles: HBO, 2002.
- Smith, Kevin, Ralph Garman, and Ty Templeton. *Batman '66 Meets the Green Hornet*. New York: DC Comics, 2015.
- Snyder, Scott, and Greg Capullo. *Batman* vol. 2 #8. New York: DC Comics, 2012.
- . *Batman* vol. 2 #8. New York: DC Comics, 2014.
- Snyder, Zack. *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice*. DVD. Burbank: Warner Brothers, 2016.
- Snyder, Zack, and Joss Whedon. *Justice League*. DVD. Burbank: Warner Brothers, 2017.
- Soja, Edward W. *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*. London: Verso, 1989.
- . *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*. Cambridge: Blackwell Publishing, 1996.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Chicago: University Illinois Press, 1988.
- Stallabrass, Julian. *Gargantua: Manufactured Mass Culture*. London: Verso, 1996.
- Stamp, Jimmy. "The Cartographer Who Mapped Out Gotham City." *Smithsonian*, May 29, 2014. Accessed June 27, 2018. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/cartographer-gotham-city-180951594/>.
- Stapleton, Dan. "Batman: Arkham Origins Review." *IGN*, October 25, 2013. <http://www.ign.com/articles/2013/10/25/batman-arkham-origins-review>.
- Starlin, Jim, William Wray, Bernie Wrightson, and John Costanza. *Batman: The Cult*. New York: DC Comics, 1988.
- Starr, Jason. *Gotham: Dawn of Darkness*. London: Titan Books, 2017.
- "State of WB Games Montreal Studio?" *ResetEra*. Accessed July 11, 2018. <https://www.resetera.com/threads/state-of-wb-games-montreal-studio.36583/>.
- Stein, Daniel. "Spoofin' Spidey—Rebooting the Bat: Immersive Story Worlds and the Narrative Complexities of Video Spoofs in the Era of the Superhero Blockbuster." In *Film Remakes, Adaptations and Fan Productions*, edited by Constantine Verevis and Kathleen Loock, 231-247. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.
- . "Superhero Comics and the Authorizing Functions of the Comic Book Paratext." In *From Comic Strips to Graphic Novels: Contributions to the Theory and History of Graphic Narrative*, edited by Daniel Stein and Jan-Nöel Thon, 155-190. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013.
- Steinberg, Marc. *Anime's Media Mix: Franchising Toys and Characters in Japan*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012.
- . "Condensing the Media Mix: Multiple Possible Worlds in The Tatami Galaxy." *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* 21, no. 2 (2012): 71-92.
- Sterne, Jonathan. "Rearranging the Files: On Interpretation in Media History." *Communication Review* 13, no. 1 (2010): 75-87.
- Stewart, Susan. "Ceci Tuera Cela: Graffiti as Crime and Art." In *Life after Postmodernism*, edited by John Fekete, 161-80. London: Macmillan Education UK, 1988. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-19097-3\\_7](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-19097-3_7).
- Sticky Studios. *The Fire Rises*. Browser. Utrecht: Warner Brothers, 2012.
- Straley, Bruce, and Neil Druckmann. *The Last of Us*. Playstation 3. Santa Monica: Naughty Dog, LLC, 2013.

- Straw, Will. "The Circulatory Turn." In *The Wireless Spectrum: The Politics, Practices, and Poetics of Mobile Media*, edited by Barbara Crow, Michael Longford, and Kim Sawchuck. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010.
- Stuart, Keith. "Best Selling Games of 2011: Modern Warfare 3 Outguns the Opposition." *The Guardian*, January 11, 2012. Accessed June 27, 2018. <http://www.theguardian.com/technology/gamesblog/2012/jan/11/best-selling-games-of-2011>.
- Suits, Bernard. *The Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978.
- Taylor, T. L. *Raising the Stakes: E-Sports and the Professionalization of Computer Gaming*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2012.
- "The 6 Companies That Own (Almost) All Media [Infographic]." *WebpageFX*, July 9, 2015. Accessed June 25, 2018. <https://www.webpagefx.com/data/the-6-companies-that-own-almost-all-media/>.
- "The Dark Knight Rises (2012)." *Box Office Mojo*. Accessed June 28, 2018. <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=batman3.htm>.
- "The Lego Batman Movie (2017)." *Rotten Tomatoes*. Accessed June 25, 2018. [https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/the\\_lego\\_batman\\_movie/](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/the_lego_batman_movie/).
- The Toys That Made Us*. "He-Man." Directed by Tom Stern. Written by Benjamin J. Frost. Netflix, December 22, 2017.
- Tolkien, J. R. R. *The Fellowship of the Ring: Being the First Part of The Lord of the Rings*. The Lord of the Rings. Boston: Mariner Books/Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012.
- . *The Hobbit, or, There and Back Again*. 75th ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1936.
- Turkle, Sherry. "Cyberspace and Identity." *Contemporary Sociology* 28, no. 6 (1999): 643–48. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2655534>.
- Uricchio, William. "The Batman's Gotham City™: Story, Ideology, Performance." In *Comics and the City: Urban Space in Print, Picture, and Sequence*, edited by Jörn Ahrens and Arno Meteling, 119-32. New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Ltd., 2010.
- Vanaman, Sean, Jake Rodkin, Dennis Lenart, Eric Parsons, Nick Herman, and Sean Ainsworth. *The Walking Dead*. Playstation 3. San Rafael: Telltale Games, 2012.
- Vore, Bryan. "Rocksteady Studios Comments On Batman: Arkham Origins." *Game Informer*, March 26, 2014. Accessed June 27, 2018. <https://www.gameinformer.com/b/features/archive/2014/03/26/rocksteady-studios-comments-on-batman-arkham-origins.aspx>.
- Wachowski, Lana, and Lilly Wachowski. *Enter the Matrix*. Playstation 2. Laguna Beach: Shiny Entertainment, 2003.
- . *The Matrix*. DVD. Burbank: Warner Brothers, 1999.
- Waid, Mark, and Alex Ross. *Kingdom Come*. New York: DC Comics, 1996.
- Wallace, Aurora. "When the Set Becomes Permanent: The Spatial Reconfiguration of Hollywood North." In *Taking Place: Location and the Moving Image*, edited by John David Rhodes and Elena Gorfinkel. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011.
- Walton, Steve. "Assassin's Creed Origins: How Heavy Is It on Your CPU?" *TechSpot*, November 15, 2017. September 22, 2018. <https://www.techspot.com/article/1525-assassins-creed-origins-cpu-test/>.
- Warner Bros. Pictures. "The LEGO Batman Movie - Wayne Manor Teaser Trailer [HD]." YouTube Video, 2:01. March 28, 2016. <https://youtu.be/LHgQSwgKygk>.

- Wein, Len, Ben Blacker, Heath Corson, and Adam Beechen. "Nerdist Comics Panel #71: Year in Review." Podcast. *Nerdist Comics Panel*, 2014. <https://nerdist.com/nerdist-comics-panel-71-year-in-review/>.
- "What Continuity Error within the Saga Bothers You the Most? • r/StarWars." *reddit*. Accessed August 3, 2018. [https://www.reddit.com/r/StarWars/comments/4j97si/what\\_continuity\\_error\\_within\\_the\\_saga\\_bothers\\_you/](https://www.reddit.com/r/StarWars/comments/4j97si/what_continuity_error_within_the_saga_bothers_you/).
- Whistance-Smith, Greg. "Selective Spatiality: The Affordances of Architectural Drawing Types in Two-Dimension Videogames." Conference presentation presented at the Canadian Game Studies Association 2017 Annual Conference, Toronto, May 31, 2017.
- Whitbrook, James. "Proof That the Creators of Batman: The Animated Series Knew What They Were Doing From the Start." *io9*. January 13, 2017. Accessed June 27, 2018. <https://io9.gizmodo.com/proof-that-the-creators-of-batman-the-animated-series-1791176296>.
- White, Mark D., and Robert Arp, eds. *Batman and Philosophy: The Dark Knight of the Soul*. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2008.
- Wienberg, Christian. "Why Lego Is Snapping Off 1,400 Jobs." *Bloomberg.Com*, September 5, 2017. Accessed June 25, 2018. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-09-05/lego-cuts-1-400-jobs-on-weak-sales-of-batman-toys>.
- Williams, Raymond. *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1977.
- Wolf, Dick. *Law & Order*. New York: NBCUniversal Television Distribution, 1990.
- Wolf, Mark J. P. "Adapting the Death Star into Lego: The Case of Lego Set #10188." In *LEGO Studies: Examining the Building Blocks of a Transmedial Phenomenon*, edited by Mark J. P. Wolf. New York: Routledge, 2014.
- Wolfman, Marv, George Pérez, Dick Giordano, Mike De Carlo, and Jerry Ordway. *Crisis on Infinite Earths*. New York: DC Comics, 1986.
- Wollen, Peter. "Delirious Projections." *Sight and Sound* 2, no. 4 (1992): 24-27.
- Wood, Molly. "Lego, You Are Dead to Me." *CNET*, July 31, 2013. Accessed June 25, 2018. <https://www.cnet.com/news/lego-you-are-dead-to-me/>.
- Yin-Poole, Wesley. "Lionhead: The inside Story." *Euro Gamer*, December 5, 2016. Accessed June 27, 2018. <https://www.eurogamer.net/articles/2016-05-12-lionhead-the-inside-story>.
- Yockey, Matt. *Batman*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2013.
- Zackariasson, Peter, and Timothy L. Wilson, eds. *The Video Game Industry: Formation, Present State, and Future*. New York: Routledge, 2012.
- Zeiser, Anne. *Transmedia Marketing: From Film and TV to Games and Digital Media*. New York: Focal Press, 2015.
- Zemeckis, Robert. *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* DVD. Burbank: Touchstone Pictures, 1988.
- Žižek, Slavoj. *Absolute Recoil: Towards a New Foundation of Dialectical Materialism*. London: Verso, 2014.
- . *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism*. New York: Verso, 2012.
- . *Organs Without Bodies: On Deleuze and Consequences*. New York: Routledge, 2004.
- . *The Parallax View*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2006.
- . *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. Phronesis. London: Verso, 1989.
- . "'The Thing That Thinks: The Kantian Background of the Noir Subject.'" In *Shades of Noir*, edited by Joan Copjec, 199–226. London: Verso, 1993.

## Appendix 1: 2017 Bat-family Comics

<i>All-Star Batman (9 Issues in 2017)</i>	
<b>Writers</b>	<b>Artists</b>
Rafael Albuquerque	Rafael Albuquerque
Rafael Scavone	Sebastian Fiumara
Scott Snyder	Jock
	Francesco Francavilla
	Giuseppe Camuncoli
	Tula Lotay

<i>Batgirl v5 (13 Issues in 2017)</i>	
<b>Writers</b>	<b>Artists</b>
Hope Larson	Sami Basri
	Chris Wildgoose
	Inaki Miranda
	Eleonora Carlini

<i>Batgirl and the Birds of Prey (12 Issues in 2017)</i>	
<b>Writers</b>	<b>Artists</b>
Julie Benson	Roge Antonio
Shawna Benson	Marcio Takara
	Claire Roe

<i>Batman v3 (25 Issues in 2017)</i>	
<b>Writers</b>	<b>Artists</b>
Tom King	Alvaro Martinez
Joshua Williamson	Clay Mann
	Joelle Jones
	Mikel Janin
	Davide Gianfelice
	David Finch
	Mitch Gerads
	Jason Fabok
	Stephanie Hans

<i>Batman Beyond (12 Issues in 2017)</i>	
<b>Writers</b>	<b>Artists</b>
Dan Jurgens	Bernard Chang
Bernard Chang	Phil Hester
Vita Ayala	Siya Oum
Steve Orlando	Pete Woods

<i>Batwoman v2 (11 Issues in 2017)</i>	
<b>Writers</b>	<b>Artists</b>
Marguerite Bennett	Fernando Blanco
James Tynion IV	Marc Laming
	Renato Arlem
	Eddy Barrows
	Stephanie Hans
	Steve Epting

<i>Detective Comics (24 Issues in 2017)</i>	
<b>Writers</b>	<b>Artists</b>
James Tynion IV	Miguel Mendonca
Christopher Sebela	Joe Bennett
Genevieve Valentine	Alvaro Martinez
Marguerite Bennett	Eddy Barrows
	Carmen Camero
	Marcio Takara
	Fernando Blanco
	Christian Duce
	Ben Oliver

<i>Gotham Academy – Second Semester (8 Issues in 2017)</i>	
<b>Writers</b>	<b>Artists</b>
Becky Cloonan	MSASSYK
Brendan Fletcher	Adam Archer
Karl Kerschl	Sandra Hope

<i>Harley Quinn v2 (25 Issues in 2017)</i>	
<b>Writers</b>	<b>Artists</b>
Jimmy Palmiotti	John Timms
Amanda Conner	Bret Blevins
Frank Tieri	Mike Andolfo
Paul Dini	Michael William Kaluta
	Tom Derenick
	Eleonora Carlini
	Chad Hardin
	Joseph Michael Linsner
	Khari Evans

<i>Nightwing v4 (24 Issues in 2017)</i>	
<b>Writers</b>	<b>Artists</b>
Sam Humphries	Bernard Chang
Time Seely	Javier Fernandez
Michael McMillian	Scot Eaton
	Miguel Mendonca
	Paul Pelletier
	Minkyu Jung
	Christian Duce
	Marcus To

<i>Red Hood and the Outlaws v2 (13 Issues in 2017)</i>	
<b>Writers</b>	<b>Artists</b>
Scott Lobdell	Dexter Soy
	Joe Bennett
	Tyler Kirkham
	Kenneth Rocafort
	Mirko Colak

<i>Trinity (13 Issues in 2017)</i>	
<b>Writers</b>	<b>Artists</b>
Francis Manapul	V. Kenneth Marion
Rob Williams	Francis Manapul
Cullen Bunn	Guillem March
Sholly Fisch	Emanuela Lupacchino
	Clay Mann
	Miguel Mendonca

## Appendix 2: Filming Locations

1943— <i>Batman</i> (Film Serial)— <a href="https://imdb.to/2zOTTrB">https://imdb.to/2zOTTrB</a>			
Location	Address	City	Served as
Iverson Ranch (LA)	Redmesa Rd	Chatsworth	Unnamed
Columbia studios and backlots	Unlisted	California	Gotham, various interior locations

1949— <i>Batman and Robin</i> (Film Serial)— <a href="https://imdb.to/2O34He9">https://imdb.to/2O34He9</a>			
Location	Address	City	Served as
Iverson Ranch (LA)	Redmesa Rd	Chatsworth	Unnamed
George Lewis Mansion	Benedict Canyon Dr, Bel Air	Los Angeles	Unnamed

1966— <i>Batman: The Movie</i> (Feature)— <a href="https://imdb.to/2IBj9Ex">https://imdb.to/2IBj9Ex</a>			
Location	Address	City	Served as
Stearn's Wharf	State St	Santa Barbara	Unnamed
Cliffs, Marineland of the Pacific	6610 Palos Verdes Dr S	Rancho Palos Verdes	Batboat pier
Kirkeby Center	10889 Wilshire Blvd, Westwood	Los Angeles	Bikini girls dancing on rooftop
Los Angeles Metropolitan Airport	16461 Sherman Wy	Van Nuys	Batbike, Batgocart, Batcopter scenes
Bronson Caves Griffith Park	4730 Crystal Springs Dr	Los Angeles	Batcave entrance
Century City	Century City	Los Angeles	Police officers looking at Batcopter
Desilu Studios	9336 W Washington Blvd	Culver City	Unnamed
20th Century Fox Studios	10201 Pico Blvd, Century City	Los Angeles	Unnamed
Avenue of the Stars	1800 Avenue of the Stars, Century City	Los Angeles	Building climb
San Rafael Avenue	380 S San Rafael Ave	Pasadena	Wayne Manor exteriors



<b>1966-1968—<i>Batman</i> (TV Series)—<a href="https://imdb.to/2OBZ1aA">https://imdb.to/2OBZ1aA</a></b>			
<b>Location</b>	<b>Address</b>	<b>City</b>	<b>Served as</b>
Bronson Caves Griffith Park	4730 Crystal Springs Dr	Los Angeles	Batcave entrance
San Rafael Avenue	380 S San Rafael Ave	Pasadena	Wayne Manor exteriors
Desilu Studios	9336 W Washington Blvd	Culver City	Unnamed
Backlot, Desilu Studios	9336 W Washington Blvd	Culver City	Unnamed
20th Century Fox Studios	10201 Pico Blvd, Century City	Los Angeles	Unnamed

<b>1967—<i>Batgirl</i> (TV Short)—<a href="https://imdb.to/2zPYnOB">https://imdb.to/2zPYnOB</a></b>			
<b>Location</b>	<b>Address</b>	<b>City</b>	<b>Served as</b>
20th Century Fox Studios	10201 Pico Blvd, Century City	Los Angeles	Unnamed

<b>1989—<i>Batman</i> (Feature)—<a href="https://imdb.to/2NiUeGx">https://imdb.to/2NiUeGx</a></b>			
<b>Location</b>	<b>Address</b>	<b>City</b>	<b>Served as</b>
Knebworth House	Knebworth SG1 2AX	Knebworth, Hertfordshire	Wayne Manor exteriors
Acton Lane Power Station	Acton Ln, Acton	London	Axis Chemical
Hatfield House	Hatfield Park	Hatfield, Hertfordshire	Wayne Manor interiors
Pinewood Studios	Pinewood Rd	Iver Heath, Buckinghamshire	Gotham City
Little Barford Power Station	Barford Rd	Little Barford, Bedfordshire	Axis Chemical
Unnamed	Unlisted	St Neots, Bedfordshire	Axis Chemical

<b>1992—<i>Batman Returns</i> (Feature)—<a href="https://imdb.to/2xWu2wf">https://imdb.to/2xWu2wf</a></b>			
<b>Location</b>	<b>Address</b>	<b>City</b>	<b>Served as</b>
Warner Bros. Burbank Studios	4000 Warner Blvd	Burbank	Unnamed
Universal Studios	100 Universal City Plaza	Universal City	Penguin's lair

1995— <i>Batman Forever</i> (Feature)— <a href="https://imdb.to/2IzjxTP">https://imdb.to/2IzjxTP</a>			
Location	Address	City	Served as
Unnamed	Corbett Hill Circle	Portland	Unnamed
Unnamed	Figueroa St	Los Angeles	Pan-Asia town
RMS Queen Mary	1126 Queens Hwy	Long Beach	Unnamed
Webb Institute of Naval Architecture	298 Crescent Beach Rd	Glen Cove, Long Island	Wayne Manor
Unnamed	Unlisted	Tel Aviv	Unnamed
Former Los Angeles Fire Station 6	534 E Edgeware Rd	Los Angeles	Wayne Manor garage interiors
ARCO Refinery	Unlisted	Carson	Claw Island, Riddler lair exteriors
Alcatraz Island	Unlisted	San Francisco	Claw Island, Riddler lair exteriors
Warner Bros. Burbank Studios	4000 Warner Blvd	Burbank	Unnamed
Los Angeles Theatre	615 S Broadway	Los Angeles	Gotham City Excelsior Grand Casino interiors
Pantages Theatre	6233 Hollywood Blvd	Los Angeles	Ritz Gotham Hotel interiors
Queen Mary Dome	1126 Queens Highway	Long Beach	Bat Cave, Wayne Manor, Two Face lair
Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian	Unlisted	Manhattan	Ritz Gotham Hotel exteriors
US Customs House	Unlisted	New York	Riddler party exterior
Crescent Beach	Unlisted	Glen Cove, Long Island	Unnamed
Bowling Green	Unlisted	Manhattan	Unnamed
Exchange Place	Unlisted	Manhattan	Gotham City exteriors
Surrogate's Court Lobby	31 Chambers St	Manhattan	Dr. Chase Meridian office interiors
Manhattan Bridge	Unlisted	Manhattan	Two Face lair exteriors

1997— <i>Batman &amp; Robin</i> (Feature)— <a href="https://imdb.to/2PcIJ5j">https://imdb.to/2PcIJ5j</a>			
Location	Address	City	Served as
Unnamed	Unlisted	Vienna, Austria	Unnamed
Unnamed	Unlisted	Montreal	Unnamed
Unnamed	Unlisted	Ottawa	Unnamed
Queen Mary Dome	1126 Queens Hwy	Long Beach	Unnamed
Universal Studios	100 Universal City Plaza	Universal City	Unnamed
Unnamed	Unlisted	Dallas	Unnamed
Unnamed	Unlisted	Fort Worth	Unnamed
Greystone Park & Mansion	905 Loma Vista Dr	Beverly Hills	Unnamed
Unnamed	Unlisted	Long Beach	Unnamed
Unnamed	Unlisted	San Pedro	Unnamed
Unnamed	Unlisted	Vermont	Unnamed
Warner Bros. Burbank Studios	4000 Warner Blvd	Burbank	Unnamed

2002-2003— <i>Birds of Prey</i> (TV Series)— <a href="https://imdb.to/2Rm8Qbb">https://imdb.to/2Rm8Qbb</a>			
Location	Address	City	Served as
Warner Bros. Burbank Studios	4000 Warner Blvd	Burbank	Unnamed
Columbia/Warner Bros. Ranch	411 N Hollywood Way	Burbank	Unnamed

2005— <i>Batman Begins</i> (Feature)— <a href="https://imdb.to/2RnOH12">https://imdb.to/2RnOH12</a>			
Location	Address	City	Served as
Mentmore Towers	Unlisted	Mentmore, Buckinghamshire	Wayne Manor
Cardington Airship Hangars	Unlisted	Bedfordshire	Unnamed
Unnamed	LaSalle St	Chicago	Monorail
Hatfield House	Hatfield Park	Hatfield, Hertfordshire	Unnamed
Unnamed	Lower Wacker Dr	Chicago	Batmobile chase
Shepperton Studios	Studios Rd	Shepperton, Surrey	Unnamed
Knebworth House	Knebworth SG1 2AX, UK	Stevenage, Hertfordshire	Unnamed
Canary Wharf	Isle of Dogs	London	Unnamed
Chicago Board of Trade	141 W Jackson Blvd	Chicago	Wayne Corp. building
Franklin-Oceans St Bridge	Unlisted	Chicago	The Narrows Bridge
George Farmiloe Building	28-36 St John St, Clerkenwell	London	GCPD HQ
St Pancras Chambers	St Pancras Station, St Pancras	London	Arkham Asylum Stairwell
Unnamed	Unlisted	Waukegan	Unnamed
Senate House, University College London	Malet St, Bloomsbury	London	Gotham City Courthouse exterior
Unnamed	Unlisted	Tilbury, Essex	Unnamed
Unnamed	Unlisted	New York	Unnamed
National Institute for Medical Research	Mill Hill	London	Arkham Asylum
Abbey Mills Pumping Station	Unlisted	London	Arkham Asylum

2008— <i>The Dark Knight (Feature)</i> — <a href="https://imdb.to/2zPYwS9">https://imdb.to/2zPYwS9</a>			
Location	Address	City	Served as
Battersea Power Station	Unlisted	London	Unnamed
Brach's Candy Factory	401 N Cicero St	Chicago	Gotham Hospital exteriors
Millennium Station	Unlisted	Chicago	Unnamed
Unnamed	Unlisted	Los Angeles	Unnamed
Twin Anchors Restaurant and Tavern	1655 N Sedgewick St	Chicago	Unnamed
Old Post Office	Unlisted	Chicago	Unnamed
Piccadilly Circus	Unlisted	London	Unnamed
Senate House, University College London	Malet St, Bloomsbury	London	Unnamed
Unnamed	Unlisted	Bedfordshire	Unnamed
Unnamed	South LaSalle St	Chicago	Joker semi-truck is flipped
University of Westminster	Unlisted	London	Unnamed
Atwood Cafe	1 W Washington St	Chicago	Unnamed
Unnamed	Lower Wacker Dr	Chicago	Unnamed
Trump International Hotel and Tower	401 N Wabash Ave	Chicago	Skyscraper under construction in climax
Hotel 71	71 E Wacker Dr	Chicago	Unnamed
IBM Building	330 N Wabash	Chicago	Unnamed
McCormick Place	2301 S Lake Shore Dr	Chicago	Unnamed
Pinewood Studios	Pinewood Rd	Iver Heath, Buckinghamshire	Unnamed
Richard J Daley Center	55 W Randolph St	Chicago	Unnamed
Unnamed	Unlisted	Twickenham, Middlesex	Unnamed
Unnamed	N Franklin St	Chicago	Unnamed
George Farmiloe Building	28-36 St John St, Clerkenwell	London	GCPD HQ
Cardington Airship Hangars	Unlisted	Bedfordshire	Unnamed
Navy Pier	600 E Grand Ave	Chicago	Unnamed
Old Town	Unlisted	Chicago	Unnamed
Criterion Theatre	Jermyn St, St. James	London	Unnamed
Leavesden Studios	Unlisted	Leavesden, Hertfordshire	Unnamed

2012— <i>The Dark Knight Rises</i> (Feature)— <a href="https://imdb.to/2xYk8KF">https://imdb.to/2xYk8KF</a>			
Location	Address	City	Served as
Wollaton Hall	Unlisted	Nottingham, Nottinghamshire	Wayne Manor
Heinz Field	100 Art Rooney Ave	Pittsburgh	Football game
NYSE	Wall St	Manhattan	Gotham Stock Exchange
Osterley Park House	Unlisted	Isleworth, Middlesex	Unnamed
Delta Point	Croydon	London	Gotham Hospital
Carnegie Mellon University	5000 Forbes Ave	Pittsburgh	Blackgate
Unnamed	Unlisted	Los Angeles	Unnamed
Queensboro Bridge	Unlisted	Manhattan	Bridge showdown?
El Camino College	Unlisted	El Camino Village	Bike chase and reactor
Stansted Airport	Unlisted	Essex	Gotham City Airport
Unnamed	Unlisted	Newark	Unnamed
George Farmiloe Building	28-36 St John St, Clerkenwell	London	GCPD HQ, dive bar, Selina's apartment
Cardington Airship Hangars	Unlisted	Bedfordshire	Unnamed
One Liberty Plaza	165 Broadway	New York	Wayne Enterprises exterior - long shots
Carnegie Mellon Institute	Fifth Ave	Manhattan	GCPD vs mob fight scene
Warner Brothers Burbank Studios	4000 Warner Blvd	Burbank	Unnamed
Unnamed	550 Hope St	Los Angeles	Boardroom
Trump Tower	725 Fifth Ave	Manhattan	Wayne Enterprises main entrance and lobby that Bruce Wayne is ejected from
Senate House, University College London	Malet St, Bloomsbury	London	Costume ball
Unnamed	Unlisted	Greenwood Lake	Unnamed
Sony Pictures Studios	10202 W Washington Blvd	Culver City	Unnamed
Union Station	800 N Alameda St	Los Angeles	Kangaroo court
Third St Tunnel	Unlisted	Los Angeles	Catwoman blasts obstruction

2014-2018— <i>Gotham</i> (TV Series)— <a href="https://imdb.to/2Qt462q">https://imdb.to/2Qt462q</a>			
Location	Address	City	Served as
Steiner Studios	15 Washington Ave, Brooklyn Navy Yard	Brooklyn	Unnamed
Unnamed	Unlisted	Staten Island	Unnamed
Old Town Bar	45 E 18th St	Manhattan	Harvey's bar
Brooklyn Army Terminal	58th St	Brooklyn	Gordon follows Fish
Masonic Grand Lodge	23rd St	Manhattan	Bruce is kidnapped by the Court
Bronx County Courthouse	513 E 161st St	Bronx	Penguin's speech, Galavan announces campaign
Riverside Church	490 Riverside Dr	New York	Unnamed
125th Street Viaduct	125th St	New York	Mario falls, sex slave club
Roosevelt Island Steam Plant	Unlisted	New York	Unnamed
Grand Central Terminal	E 41st St	New York	Bruce stops Alfred from leaving town
The Campbell Apartment Bar	15 Vanderbilt Ave	New York	Alfred buys Lucius a drink
NYC Municipal Archives Building	31 Chambers St	New York	Loeb steps down
Bowery Saving Bank/Capitale	Chinatown	New York	Children's Hospital benefit exterior
Guastavino's	Under Queensboro Bridge	New York	Bruce has lunch with Galavan
Sands Point Preserve and Mansion	127 Middle Neck Rd	Sands Point	Galavan victory party
St Ann & Holy Trinity Church	157 Montague St	Brooklyn	Unnamed
Cortlandt Alley	23 Cortlandt Ave, Chinatown	New York	Crime Alley
Unnamed	72 Pearl St	New York	Ivy's home
Calvary Cemetery	Unlisted	Queens	Wayne funeral
New York County Supreme Court	60 Centre St	New York	Bruce confronts Montoya and Crispin
Abandoned Red Hook Grain Terminal	Unlisted	Red Hook	Gordon doesn't kill Penguin
Webb Institute of Naval Architecture	298 Crescent Beach Rd	Glen Cove, Long Island	Wayne Manor
Ansonia Club	Unlisted	New York	Balloonman strikes
Unnamed	22nd Ave	Long Island City	Balloonman lair, Gotham juvenile detention centre
5 Pointz	Unlisted	Long Island City	Murder scene
Abandoned Bayley Seton Hospital	Unlisted	Staten Island	Arkham Asylum
Bamonte's Restaurant	32 Withers St	Brooklyn	Maroni's hangout

<b>2014-2018—<i>Gotham</i> (TV Series)—Continued</b>			
<b>Location</b>	<b>Address</b>	<b>City</b>	<b>Served as</b>
Prison Ship Martyrs Monument	Fort Greene	Brooklyn	Falcone meets Liza
Moynihan Station	360 W 33rd St	New York	GCPD parking lot
Brooklyn Navy Yard Dry Dock	Unlisted	Brooklyn	Murder scene
New York Botanical Garden	2900 Southern Blvd	Bronx	Bruce's prep school
Abandoned Fort Totten	Unlisted	New York	Gotham City Armory
Manhattan Bridge	Unlisted	New York	GCPD HQ exterior
Staple St Skybridge	Unlisted	New York	Gordon and Alfred go looking for Selina
Alexander Hamilton Customs House	Unlisted	New York	Gordon press conference



## Appendix 3: Games

YEAR	TITLE	PLATFORM	GENRE	DEVELOPER	PUBLISHER
1986	Batman	Amstrad, ZX Spectrum, MSX(?)	Isometric action-adventure	Jon Ritman	Ocean Software
1988	Batman: The Caped Crusader	Amiga, Commodore 64, Amstrad, Atari ST, Apple II, MS-DOS, ZX Spectrum	Action-adventure; play takes place within comics panels	Special FX Software Ltd	Ocean Software
1989	Batman: The Movie	Amiga, Amstrad, Atari ST, Commodore 64, ZX Spectrum, MS-DOS	Platform	Ocean Software	Ocean Software
1990	Batman: The Video Game	NES, Gameboy	Platform	Sunsoft	Sunsoft
1990	Batman	Sega Genesis	Run and gun	Sunsoft—Yoshihata Kawabe	Sunsoft, Sega
1990	Batman	TurboGrafx 16	Overhead mazes		
1990	Batman	Arcade	Beat 'em up, driving and flying sections	Data East	Atari
1991	Batman: Return of the Joker	NES, Gameboy, Sega Genesis	Action	Sunsoft—Yoshiaki Iwata, Tadashi Kojima	Sunsoft
1992	Batman Returns	Game Gear, Sega Master System	2D platformer, branched levels with swinging	Aspect Co, Ltd.	Sega of America
1992	Batman Returns	Amiga	2D sidescroller	Denton Designs	Gametek
1992	Batman Returns	DOS	Adventure	Spirit of Discovery	Konami
1992	Batman Returns	Atari Lynx	2D sidescroller	Atari	Atari
1992	Batman Returns	Sega CD	2D platformer, some 3D racing levels	Acme Interactive/Malibu Interactive	Sega of America
1992	Batman Returns	Sega Genesis	2D platformer	Acme Interactive/Malibu Interactive	Sega of America
1992	Batman Returns	NES	Scroller, beat 'em up, driving	Konami	Konami

YEAR	TITLE	PLATFORM	GENRE	DEVELOPER	PUBLISHER
1992	Batman Returns	SNES	Beat 'em up, driving Batmobile and Batskiboat	Konami	Konami
1993	Batman: The Animated Series	Game Boy	Action	Konami	Konami
1994	The Adventures of Batman & Robin	SNES	Action-adventure platformer	Konami	Konami
1994	The Adventures of Batman & Robin	Sega Genesis	Run and gun	Clockwork Tortoise	Sega
1994	The Adventures of Batman & Robin	Sega CD	Chase Screens, Batmobile and Batplane	Clockwork Tortoise	Sega
1995	The Adventures of Batman & Robin	Game Gear	Action platformer	Novotrade	Sega
1995	Batman Forever	SNES	Puzzle, Beat 'em up	Probe Entertainment	Acclaim Entertainment
1995	Batman Forever	Game Boy	Beat 'em up	Probe Entertainment	Acclaim Entertainment
1995	Batman Forever	Sega Genesis	Puzzle, Beat 'em up	Probe Entertainment	Acclaim Entertainment
1995	Batman Forever	Game Gear	Beat 'em up	Probe Entertainment	Acclaim Entertainment
1995	Batman Forever	PC	Puzzle, Beat 'em up	Probe Entertainment	Acclaim Entertainment
1996	The Adventures of Batman and Robin Activity Center	PC	Puzzle	Gryphon Software Corp.	
1996	Batman Forever: The Arcade Game	Arcade	Beat 'em up	Iguana Entertainment	Acclaim Entertainment
1996	Batman Forever: The Arcade Game	Sega Saturn	Beat 'em up	Iguana Entertainment	Acclaim Entertainment
1996	Batman Forever: The Arcade Game	Playstation	Beat 'em up	Iguana Entertainment	Acclaim Entertainment
1996	Batman Forever: The Arcade Game	Windows	Beat 'em up	Iguana Entertainment	Acclaim Entertainment
1997	Batman & Robin	game.com	Action	Tiger Electronics	Tiger Electronics

YEAR	TITLE	PLATFORM	GENRE	DEVELOPER	PUBLISHER
1998	Batman & Robin	Playstation	Action-adventure	Probe Entertainment— Matt Nagy	Acclaim Entertainment
2000	Batman Beyond: Return of the Joker	Playstation	Side-scroller, beat 'em up	Kemco	Ubisoft
2000	Batman Beyond: Return of the Joker	Game Boy Color	Side-scroller, beat 'em up	Kemco	Ubisoft
2000	Batman Beyond: Return of the Joker	Nintendo 64	Side-scroller, beat 'em up	Kemco	Ubisoft
2001	Batman: Chaos in Gotham	Game Boy Color	Action	Digital Eclipse Software	Ubisoft
2001	Batman: Gotham City Racer	Playstation	Racing	Sinister Games	Ubisoft
2001	Batman: Vengeance	Playstation 2	Action	Ubisoft Montreal	Ubisoft
2003	Batman: Dark Tomorrow	Xbox, Gamecube	Action-adventure	HotGen	Kemco, WB Interactive, DC
2003	Batman: Justice Unbalanced	OS X, Windows	Puzzle	The Learning Company	The Learning Company
2003	Batman: The Rise of Sin Tzu	Xbox, Playstation 2, Game Boy Advance, Gamecube	Action, Beat 'em up	Ubisoft Montreal	Ubisoft
2005	Batman Begins	Xbox, Playstation 2, Gamecube	Stealth, Action adventure	Eurocom	EA
2005	Batman Begins	Game Boy Advance	2D sidescroller, stealth, action-adventure	Vicarious Visions	EA
2008	Lego Batman: The Videogame	Windows, Playstation 2, Playstation 3, Wii, Xbox 360	Action-adventure, puzzle	Traveller's Tales	WB Interactive
2008	Lego Batman: The Videogame	OS X	Action-adventure, puzzle	Traveller's Tales	Feral Interactive
2008	Lego Batman: The Videogame	Nintendo DS	Action-adventure, puzzle	TT Fusion	WB Interactive
2008	Lego Batman: The Videogame	PSP	Action-adventure, puzzle	TT Fusion	WB Interactive

YEAR	TITLE	PLATFORM	GENRE	DEVELOPER	PUBLISHER
2008	Lego Batman: The Videogame	Mobile	Action-adventure, puzzle	Gameloft	Gameloft
2009	Batman: Arkham Asylum	Playstation 3, Playstation 4, Xbox 360, Xbox One, OS X, Windows	Action-adventure	Rocksteady Studios—Sefton Hill?	Eidos Interactive, WB Interactive
2010	Batman: The Brave and the Bold — The Videogame	Wii, Nintendo DS	Platformer, Beat 'em up	WayForward Technologies	WB Interactive
2011	Batman: Arkham City	Playstation 3, Playstation 4, Xbox 360, Xbox One, Windows, OS X	Action-adventure	Rocksteady Studios—Sefton Hill?	WB Interactive
2011	Batman: Arkham City Lockdown	Mobile	Fighting	NetherRealm Studios	WB Interactive
2012	Batman: Arkham City	Wii U	Action-adventure	Rocksteady Studios—Sefton Hill? Article for <i>Origins</i> suggests that WB Montreal worked on this version too	WB Interactive
2012	Lego Batman 2: DC Superheroes	Windows, OS X, Playstation 3, Xbox 360, Wii	Open-world action-adventure, puzzle	Traveller's Tales	WB Interactive (Feral Interactive for OS X)
2012	Lego Batman 2: DC Superheroes	Nintendo 3DS, Nintendo DS, PS Vita, Mobile	Action-adventure, puzzle	TT Fusion	WB Interactive
2013	Lego Batman 2: DC Superheroes	Wii U	Open-world action-adventure, puzzle	Traveller's Tales	WB Interactive
2013	Batman: Arkham Origins	Playstation 3, Xbox 360, Wii U, Windows	Open-world action-adventure, fps	WB Montreal—Eric Holmes creative director? Splash Damage (multiplayer)—Alastair Cornish creative director?	WB Interactive
2013	Batman: Arkham Origins Blackgate	Nintendo 3DS, PS Vita, Playstation 3, Wii U, Windows, Xbox 360	Action-adventure, beat 'em up, stealth	Armature Studio—Mark Pacini director	WB Interactive
2013	Batman: Arkham Origins	Mobile	Fighting	NetherRealm Studios	WB Interactive

YEAR	TITLE	PLATFORM	GENRE	DEVELOPER	PUBLISHER
2013	Batman	Arcade	Racing	Specular Interactive	Raw Thrills
2014	Lego Batman 3: Beyond Gotham	Windows, OS X, Playstation 3, Playstation 4, Wii U, Xbox 360, Xbox One	Action-adventure, puzzle, hub-world system	Traveller's Tales—Arthur Parsons director	WB Interactive (Feral Interactive for OS X)
2015	Lego Batman 3: Beyond Gotham	Mobile	Action-adventure, puzzle, hub-world system	TT Fusion	WB Interactive
2014	Lego Batman 3: Beyond Gotham	Nintendo 3DS, PS Vita	Action-adventure, puzzle, hub-world system	TT Fusion	WB Interactive
2015	Batman: Arkham Knight	Windows, Playstation 4, Xbox One	Open-world action-adventure	Rocksteady Studios—Sefton Hill?	WB Interactive
2016	Batman: The Telltale series	Mobile, Windows, Playstation 3, Playstation 4, OS X, Xbox 360, Xbox One	Episodic point-and-click graphic adventure	Telltale Games	Telltale Games
2016	Batman v Superman: Who Will Win	Mobile	Endless runner	Can't find developer listed	WB International Enterprises
2016	Batman: Arkham Underworld	Mobile	Strategy	Turbine Inc	WB Interactive
2015	Doodle Jump DC Super Heroes	Mobile	Platform	Lima Sky	WB Interactive
2015	Dark Night — Batman Version	Mobile	Tapper	Edgars Vecozolins	Edgars Vecozolins