Bioshock and the Uncanny: The City of Rapture as Haunted House
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The video game Bioshock (2007) takes place in the city of Rapture, an underwater metropolis housing the greatest scientists and artists of their time in a sanctuary free from the constraints of traditional city and political life. Rapture is built to be a utopia, boasting the great achievements of modernity in its museums, libraries, theatre, laboratories, hospital, and the spoils of genetic research in food and plant life. Yet when the player arrives in Rapture it is an urban ruin, a world that embodies the failings of the Randian Objectivist philosophy upon which it is based. The ruined environment of Bioshock is an unheimlich (uncanny) space, which enables it to function as both a compelling and unsettling sf world and a metatextual comment on the game world itself. Rapture draws awareness towards the relationship of the game player to the game world through its use of the uncanny, questioning the affordances of this space and the role of the player in choosing their actions. (‘Affordances’ here refer to the abilities afforded to the player of video games in exploring and interacting with the game world.) Matthew Beaumont writes that the effect of the uncanny in sf can be to disrupt preconceptions, proposing that ‘the estrangement effect […] can be especially unsettling if it suggests more than simply that the apparently solid culture and institutions characteristic of capitalist society will be different at some scarcely conceivable time in the future, but also insinuates that, incipiently at least, they are already different’ (Beaumont 2006: 230; emphasis in original). Rapture presents just this form of uncanny sf world - in its architectural and aesthetic forms, its utilization of the figures of the ‘Little Sisters’, and its self-reflective choices regarding the player-character of Jack, it brings into question the stability of the game world itself. In its uncanny elements, Rapture operates as an unheimliches or haunted house, and by extension refers outwardly to the nature of the game world as a haunted space.

Anthony Vidler writes of how the uncanny has ‘found its metaphorical home in architecture: first in the house, haunted or not, that pretends to afford the utmost security while opening itself to the secret intrusion of terror, and then in the city, where what was once walled and intimate […] has been rendered strange by the spatial incursions of modernity’ (Vidler 1992: 11). The ‘labyrinthine spaces of the modern city’, he writes, ‘have been construed as the sources of modern anxiety, from revolution and epidemic to phobia and alienation’ (Vidler 1992: ix). These are ideas highly
appropriate to the city of Rapture in *Bioshock*, a place designed to be both sanctuary and city. The utopian ideal city is in a process of ruination, its genetically altered inhabitants having revolted against the power structures that once governed the city. Abuse of and dependency on the substance ADAM, a material that induces genetic mutation and gives its users unusual powers, has caused a citywide breakdown, and the citizens are left haunting the hallways and rooms of Rapture and enacting violence on each other and on the player-character Jack. Where once the city aspired towards the enlightenment in its elevation of the sciences, industry, and art, the environments that the player traverses are cloaked in darkness, and several of the encounters that make up the narrative of *Bioshock* involve the entering of ‘dark spaces’: shadowy locations that inspire fear and paranoia, such as a hospital that has become a morgue, luxury apartments inhabited by corpses, a farmer’s market made hostile to human life by a frenzied apiary, and a theatre used as a torture chamber. Vidler explains that the philosophy of the enlightenment had a literal consequence in architectural forms: the ‘conventional wisdom of modern urbanism’ is to ‘flood dark space with light’ in the form of transparent space, which, ‘it was thought, would eradicate the domain of myth, suspicion, tyranny, and above all the irrational’ (Vidler 1992: 168). As shown by Bruno Latour’s *Paris: Ville invisible* (2004), the establishing of a city of light naturally involves the suppression of dark places, but these dark places will eventually return. Rapture’s utopian idealism attempts to suppress realms of darkness and uncertainty by creating modern spaces of enlightenment, but what is suppressed is destined to resurface. As genetic mutations and civil unrest invade these spaces Rapture falls back into the violence that these dark spaces contain, both literally in the shadowed hallways of Rapture and figuratively in terms of the body in the form of the epidemic.

Rapture is a city born of man’s hubristic attempt to create light where once there was darkness, as neon signs, building illumination, and searchlights are introduced to the eternal night of the ocean depths. The exterior landscape of Rapture, viewed from the bathysphere on the player’s initial descent and from the glass walkways between buildings, is emblematic of the ‘architecture of the night’ introduced by Raymond Hood and illustrated in a book of the same name edited by Dietrich Neumann (Neumann 2002). ‘Architecture of the night’ describes the attention placed on the visual appearance of the city at night, as the new ‘building material’ of electric light expanded considerations of urban design from the 1920s onwards. Illuminating a building from below inverted a building’s daytime appearance, meaning that architectural structures needed to be designed with a nocturnal double in mind. In its incorporation of the contemporary aesthetic models of film and theatre lighting and its utilization of modern
electrical technology, this could have become a fully-fledged art-form of the future. The full potential was never fully realized, however, and as the utopian future visions of architecture of the night came up against the real-world limitations of costs and energy shortages, that aspect of architectural design is now less commonly explored.

Rapture presents a vision of night architecture from its heyday. The cityscape exhibits a rich architectural panorama: ambitious art deco skyscrapers adorned with coloured lights and illuminated advertisements for high fashion, stage shows, and casinos are visible through the murky water, and its avenues are traversed by schools of fish and whales in place of motor vehicles and streetcars. Mary Woods describes how the presentation of a nocturnal urban aesthetic was developed in the early twentieth century in the photography of Alfred Stieglitz, with what she terms ‘skyscraper noir’. Where others avoided the ‘halation of street lamps, light streaks shimmering on wet pavement, and extreme contrasts of lights and darks’, Stieglitz embraced these qualities of night photography, layering nocturnal urban scenes to create cubist collages in which buildings are ‘reduced to ghostly, skeletal frames’ (Woods 2002: 71–2). Stieglitz generally avoided the inclusion of art deco buildings in his photographs, however, viewing them as vulgar icons of popular culture, until Georgia O’Keeffe made a series of night paintings of New York in the 1920s. Utilizing the same abstractions of form and contrasts of light and dark, O’Keeffe incorporated art deco precisely because of its contemporaneity and relevance to the modern urban milieu. Works such as American Radiator – Night (1927) present a combination of Stieglitz’s skyscraper noir aesthetic, of abstract forms and conflicting, unsteady tones, along with the modern art deco subject bathed in the light of the architecture of the night. The external appearance of Rapture could be pulled from these works, composed as it is entirely of the illumination of art deco forms in the otherwise dark environment of the deep ocean. As much as Rapture shows a romantic and grandiose modernity in its architecture, it also appears, in accordance with the work of Stieglitz and O’Keeffe, as a melancholy, haunted environment, which revels in the ‘self-destructive beauty of the megalopolis’ (Woods 2002: 75). The use of art deco and night-time architecture brings to mind the darkened, neon-lit streets of film noir. The equation between the American city and the criminal underworld of film noir is made explicit by the use of private investigator Booker Dewitt as the lead character of Bioshock Infinite (2013). Rapture is quite literally an underworld, well below all other cities on earth; this also foregrounds the corruption of the utopian ideal embarked upon by Ryan Industries, and the violence and depravity found in the hallowed halls and community buildings of the city. As the city returns to darkness, the player is confronted with flickering lights, sparks from neon signs, and
toppled lamps casting long shadows, and is forced to enter these spaces of increased uncertainty, instability, and danger. Moreover, Bioshock is unusual among games of the ‘first-person shooter’ genre in that it does not equip the player with a flashlight, thereby retaining control of the scene lighting and shepherding the player towards dark spaces when desired by the story. As Elisabeth Bronfen writes, the darkness of night can create a powerful uncanny effect: ‘As our sight diminishes, other senses – notably our faculties of hearing and of the imagination – come to be increased’, and this results in ‘disorientation, which can be either fascinating or threatening’, and a world which ‘is harder to characterize; it shifts between the familiar and the unfamiliar’ (Bronfen 2008: 51). The dark spaces into which the player is forced in Bioshock conjure such anxiety, as one is made to feel unsure if one is hunting or being hunted by the deadly enemies of the game, the uncannily inhuman Splicers. For Sigmund Freud, fear of losing one’s sight is a preoccupation of works evoking the uncanny, though what re-emerges from the unconscious into the light can be equally as unsettling (Freud 2003:136–40). The world of Rapture, characterized by dark spaces which prohibit players’ cognizance of their surroundings, and light spaces which force horrific imagery into view, is a prime environment for increased paranoia and ghoulish fears.

Space thus operates as threat in the game, reflecting a violence inherent in all architectural spaces, but especially in the modern metropolis. The construction of architectural forms is a process laced with violence: structures are charged with dormant cruelty and they will ultimately meet with a violent end. Lewis Mumford writes that all living, built environments will end in the ‘Necropolis’, ‘a common graveyard of dust and bones’ and ‘fire scorched ruins’ (Mumford 1961: 53). More recently, Terry Smith has discussed how the built environment bears the violence of its inception in the form of inevitable ruin: ‘from at least some of its beginnings, and certainly throughout its unfolding, architecture has had various degrees of violence built, as it were, into it. All building does violence to natural order and offers to its human occupants the bargain that they surrender to its constraints on them in exchange for its protection of them’ (Smith 2006: 6). In other words, he writes, the “modern” has [...] become historical’ (Smith 2006: 8). The need to constantly resist the inevitability of violent ruination is an anxiety that plagues cities, and one that finds brutal expression in Bioshock.

This historicizing of the modern is additionally enhanced by the antiquated aesthetic that Bioshock presents. Jack reaches Rapture in 1960, but the city was built in the 1950s and its aesthetic draws heavily on the 1940s, 1930s, and even 1920s. In depicting the decaying city of Rapture, as Grant Tavinor writes, ‘decaying art deco facades, faded Hollywood socialites, and echoes of Hearst, Hughes, and Citizen Kane, are combined
with period music and philosophical and literary references to produce a coherent artistic statement’ (Tavinor 2009: 92). More specifically, though, the aesthetic of *Bioshock* is an example of retrofuturism, particularly the optimistic speculation of the Atomic Age and the Space Age. Referencing Disney’s Tomorrowland, Scott Bukatman describes retrofuturism as comfortably quaint visions of tomorrow, styled in the manner of *The Jetsons* and Googie architecture, revived from the past in order to be ‘simultaneously mocked and desired’ (Bukatman 1991: 59). The past visions of the future are expressive of innocence and a potential paradise lost, in a present in which the progress promised in post-war years gave way to ‘the dataist era’ and disembodying cyber-spaces which ‘exist independently of direct human experience or control’ (Bukatman 1991: 60–1). Sharon Sharp supports this idea, writing that ‘retrofuturism functions as comfort for assuaging the technological anxieties of the present’ (Sharp 2011: 26). *Bioshock* invites readings of an innocence lost in the pursuit of technological progress, not least in the naming of the tools of genetic mutation ADAM, EVE, and the Gatherer’s Garden.¹ The strong retro-futurist aesthetic can also be seen in the jolly cartoons that accompany the acquisition of new ‘plasmids’ (powers resulting from genetic mutation), as the player-character develops. Although the videos clearly state that the primary purpose of most plasmids is to inflict physical harm on Splicers, the tone of the videos is reminiscent of a 1950s public service announcement, with cartoon drawings, a sprightly and carefree voiceover tone, and the optimistic catchphrase, ‘Evolve Today!’ As such it seems to present a kind of innocence and naïveté with regards to the consequences of the genetic mutation it represents.

The architectural style of the city, too, can be described as retrofuturist. The floodlit architecture of the night, as Neumann writes, bears a clear link with futuristic urban scenes such as those created by Hugh Ferriss. A draftsman and architectural visionary, Ferriss, and particularly his collection entitled ‘Metropolis of Tomorrow’, greatly influenced architectural rendering in the 1920s and 1930s in connecting ‘nocturnal illumination’ and ‘glimpses of the architectural future’ (Neumann 2002: 61). In recreating the illuminated art deco facades of 1920s and 1930s America, Rapture evokes a time when these architectural designs were expressive of modernity at its peak, and the optimism of the future that was to come. Gary K. Wolfe writes of a tendency in sf to mourn such past visions of future metropolises, and how this often manifests in fantasies of destruction: the failure of ‘innocent urban extrapolations […] might well be indicted, given the realities of urban life we have come to face since those predictions were first made. […] The innocent visions of the past have become the traps of the present’ (Wolfe 1979: 86–7). The failure to realize utopia means that the city becomes a barrier ‘that must be broken, [and] a past that must be transcended’ (Wolfe
This is much the case in *Bioshock* as Rapture’s grand design, symbolized in retro-futurist architecture, results in a dystopian city that must of necessity be demolished.

Just as the visual aesthetic indicates antiquation, so too does the musical score that accompanies the game. The game’s soundtrack includes several tracks emblematic of 1930s and 1940s America, including songs by Cole Porter, the Ink Spots, and the Andrews Sisters. William Gibbons details the choice of music in *Bioshock*, focusing in particular on Bobby Darin’s ‘Beyond the Sea’ (performed by Stéphane Grappelli and Django Reinhardt), the song that greets the player on their initial descent into Rapture: ‘The lyrics, assuming the player knows them, reinforce the idea of travel to a better place; a life filled with love and happiness awaits the narrator “somewhere beyond the sea”. This optimism, however, soon reveals itself to be painfully ironic, as the utopian promises made by the song have long since dissipated’ (Gibbons 2011). As Jack and the player literally and figuratively submerge themselves into the game world of Rapture, this optimistic aesthetic becomes an ironic statement. *Bioshock* is filled with such early-twentieth-century-style texts, used in a way that establishes their ironic distance from the reality of Rapture. The effect of such stylistic choices as the plasmid videos, the architectural design, and the soundtrack is an aesthetic of innocence and optimism jarring against the death and destruction that now characterizes Rapture. The contrast vividly shows how the utopian dream became a dystopian nightmare, but in so doing it also comments outside of the text on the Randian philosophy that informs Rapture, and, in using a mid-twentieth-century aesthetic, on the American Dream and innocence of a post-war, and particularly suburbanized, America. They are reminders of a familiar world to the player in their recreation of the popular conception of 1950s America, which may be, as Fredric Jameson points out, a conception rooted more in that decade’s popular culture than in its reality (Jameson 1991: 281). In inverting this image, however, it becomes uncanny, and mid-century American life becomes a realm of nightmares. Freud writes of the uncanny as ‘that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar’ (Freud 2003: 124), and the subversion of this aesthetic becomes all the more horrifying in its being for the player a familiar past.

The game’s use of retrofuturism seems to invite similar questions, however, about the experience of playing *Bioshock* itself. With the city situated in an outdated aesthetic, both for the player and in its own diegesis with the incorporation of already aging architectural paradigms, Rapture generates a mood of obsolescence. The scenery is even replete with outdated media forms such as gramophones and film reels, and broken technology including many television screens bearing the words ‘Please Stand By’,
which call attention to the functionality of the game world itself. Just as we have seen these architectural and media forms become antiquated in the real world, so too have we seen and will we continue to see the technology that developed and houses the game *Bioshock* become outdated, with the Xbox 360 replaced with the Xbox One, the PlayStation 3 with the PlayStation 4, and with personal computers in a constant state of forward development. It is likely that as this technological progress continues, *Bioshock* will come to be viewed as possessing graphics and gameplay affordances as primitive in the way we now view games such as *Pong* (1972) as being primitive. As such, Rapture’s retro-futurist aesthetic can be seen as symptomatic of the technological anxiety expressed by Bukatman and Sharp.

*Rapture* also depicts the collision of different timeframes through its use of ghostly apparitions. As Freud writes, this is a common trope of the uncanny: ‘in some modern languages the German phrase *ein unheimliches Haus* [“an uncanny house”] can be rendered only by the periphrasis “a haunted house”’ (Freud 2003: 148; brackets in original). Nicholas Royle’s *The Uncanny* foregrounds haunting and the ghostly as vital components of the uncanny, being as it is “indissociably bound up with a sense of repetition or “coming back” - the return of the repressed, the constant or eternal recurrence of the same thing, a compulsion to repeat’ (Royle 2003: 2). One form this takes in *Bioshock* is past iterations of Rapture repeatedly encroaching on the ‘reality’ of Rapture as it appears to the player-character. As the player reaches certain rooms in the city, a fuzzy, static-like image showing traumatic past events is temporarily superimposed over the present. The use of static in the re-emergence of these repressed memories evokes old or broken television sets, further reinforcing the thematic of technological obsolescence. In an audio recording that the player can discover in the level of Arcadia, the character McDonough provides some explanation for the ghostly apparitions: ‘Ryan tells me it’s a side effect of this plasmid business. One poor sod’s memories getting passed onto another through genetic sampling. Leaks. Lunatics. Rebellion. And now bleeding ghosts. Ain’t life in Rapture grand?’ These segments resemble the repressed memories Freud describes: ‘the term “uncanny” (*unheimlich*) applies to everything that was intended to remain secret, hidden away, and has come into the open’ (Freud 2003: 132). This uncovering of a traumatic past not only manifests in this form of dream-like flashbacks, but also comments on the process of uncovering the historical narrative of Rapture: as Jack uncovers recordings and other media that reveal this history, so the player is given a window into the memories of the physical space of the city.

The figures of the ‘Little Sisters’, little girls genetically altered to collect genetic material, also evoke this realm of spirits and the dead, in their harvesting of ADAM from deceased citizens they describe as ‘angels’. As
Jack has his first exposure to genetic mutation, he falls unconscious, and wakes temporarily to see a Little Sister and her guardian, the Big Daddy, standing over him: ‘Look, Mr. Bubbles’, she says, ‘it’s an angel! I can see light coming from his belly. Wait a minute, he’s still breathing. It’s all right; I know he’ll be an angel soon’. The mental programming of the Little Sisters was instituted by the character Yi Suchong, as revealed in a recording, ‘Little Sisters and Corpses’, that did not make it into the final version of *Bioshock*, but that can be found online on the *Bioshock Wiki*: ‘Little Ones are repulsed by the look and smell of corpses. Must find a way to make gathering task more... attractive, maybe if we program them to see bodies as something more appealing: kitty cats, chocolate bars, some other stupid thing these children enjoy’. Seeing corpses as angels is just one part of the idealized double of the ruined Rapture that the Little Sisters experience. As is implied throughout *Bioshock*, and shown explicitly in *Bioshock 2* (2010), they see an idealized world in place of the ruined, dystopian city that the player sees, with rose petals instead of blood, flowers in place of rubble, and the violent Splicers replaced with elegant, amicable citizens.

One of the central choices in the game is whether to ‘rescue’ or ‘harvest’ the Little Sisters, respectively freeing them from their macabre task for a small share of ADAM, or killing them in exchange for a larger share. This choice would seem to be a moral one, were it not for the Little Sisters’ uncanniness. Though they appear to be young girls, they are in fact mutated beings with glowing yellow eyes. Even their protector seems confused over their humanity, as revealed in a recording also found in the Farmer’s Market: ‘I find being around them very uncomfortable. Even with those things [sea slugs containing ADAM] implanted in their bellies, they are still children. They play, and sing. Sometimes they look at me, and they don’t stop. Sometimes they smile’.² Their uncanny appearance intensifies the moral quandary of whether to harvest or rescue them. As Ernst Jentsch notes in his study of the uncanny, ‘Horror is a thrill that with care and specialist knowledge can be used well to increase emotional effects in general [...] In storytelling, one of the most reliable artistic devices for producing uncanny effects easily is to leave the reader in uncertainty as to whether he has a human person or rather an automaton before him in the case of a particular character’ (Jentsch 2008: 224). Of course, the Little Sisters should not really embody a moral dilemma for the player, as they are merely elements of a video game, and not real girls. However, as Tavinor and Gibbons separately report, this moral dilemma does exist for players. They embody, therefore, an unnerving ‘double’ of little girls, both in the sense that, as mutated monsters, they are an ‘other’ of girls within the game, while outside of the game, they are not girls at all, but computer generated images and sounds.

Further, the Little Sisters embody an extension of the ruined built
environment, as Evan Watts writes: ‘The Little Sisters themselves are in a way another manifestation of ruin, having had their innocence and very humanity stripped from them. They serve as reminders of a culture that was, and as the most striking visual embodiment of that culture’s downfall’ (Watts 2011: 255). What is interesting, however, is that if the player chooses to ‘rescue’ the Little Sisters they can ultimately be saved, as one of the three alternate endings shows. As such they constitute the hope of Rapture in their innocence. This is a trend that Smith notices in many representations of the dystopian city of sf:

Usually, an alien force threatens the city, above all by bringing out something other in the character of the city itself that seems ready to conspire with, or accede to, the external force. The city is saved, usually, by a person or an event that embodies its innocence. This is, in turn, a personification of the presumption that the city’s destruction is imaginable only as an aberration. (Smith 2006: 129)

The ‘aberration’ that plagues the city of Rapture, the epidemic of genetic mutation, may be effectively defeated by the innocence of these Little Sisters, as it eventually is in the killing of the villain Frank Fontaine. This final battle between Jack and Fontaine is won only in conjunction with the Little Sisters, who set upon Fontaine with their needles, and then offer Jack the key to the city. If the player has chosen to save all of the Little Sisters, the ending shows them being liberated from Rapture to a life of normality. If the player chose to harvest any of them, the ending depicts the brutality of Jack extending beyond Rapture, as the Splicers reach the surface of the ocean and take over a nuclear submarine. The innocence of the Little Sisters must, therefore, be protected in order to quarantine the infectious aberration that has overtaken Rapture.

The player-character Jack likewise serves to subvert the familiar. As in many RPGs, the player learns about the setting at the same apparent pace as the character, being gradually immersed in both the narrative and in the skills needed to interact with the game environment. As we discover later, however, the character of Jack is also a monster, a character genetically developed by Andrew Ryan who then undergoes further genetic transformation in his use of ADAM. The player-character, therefore, further embodies Jentsch’s uncanny uncertainty of characters as human or automaton, and, like the Little Sisters, signals in a broader sense the problem of Jack not really being human at all, but an inhuman puppet operated by the human player, according to the restraints of the game world. As well, Jack comes to represent an extension of the uncanny physical space of Rapture. Though he operates in the game as the player’s avatar, he is a troublingly unruly being who steals autonomy away from the player at certain points in
the game, such as when he encounters and kills Ryan. The character, though the manifestation or double of the player in the game world, has been altered by the same processes of genetic mutation that plague the Splicers, Little Sisters, and Big Daddies. This troubles the supposed divide between the player-character and the enemies we are encouraged to kill; ultimately, the motives of Jack and the Splicers are the same – to hunt Little Sisters for ADAM – and the limited affordance of the question of whether to harvest or rescue provides only an illusion of moral autonomy.

Each of these uncanny qualities – the use of dark space, the dormant violence of built space, the aesthetic of antiquation, and uncanny player- and non-player-characters – make Bioshock a highly metafictional work, inviting readings that go beyond the content of the game to critique the game world itself, and the media devices on which it is developed and presented. The game world is haunted by its future obsolescence, just as is the modern city: with games commonly becoming serials spanning multiple titles – Bioshock resulted in the games Bioshock 2 and its multiplayer game Fall of Rapture (both 2010), and the game Bioshock Infinite (2013) with its downloadable content Lost At Sea Episode 1 (also 2013) and Episode 2 (2014) – which see migration to more technologically advanced consoles or computers and feature significant steps-up in graphics and other technical areas, games always face being supplanted and disfavoured as time goes on. David Chandler writes that the anxiety over the future obsolescence of technology manifests in frequent utilization of the aesthetics of ruin:

As videogame technology evolves, the gulf that separates generations of gaming machines widens, and, though players will undoubtedly hold onto a few titles, the demands of new software and hardware will ultimately colour the way we remember these older games. Games are obsessed with ruins because they are products of a technology always trying to delay its inevitable crawl toward obsolescence. (Chandler 2014)

The city is a place of modern anxiety in Bioshock; housing revolution, epidemic, alienation, and fear. Within the hallways and rooms of Rapture, mutated citizens and ghosts haunt the player-character, as dark space invades the theoretically enlightened realms of modernity and progress that the utopia was meant to elevate. Within this space, media technology is shown to be obsolete and decaying, and innocent little girls and even the player’s own character appear as monstrous as the enemy Splicers. Overall, the game presents an uncanny double of the modern, enlightened city, as well as a metacommentary on the inevitable obsolescence and ruin of the very devices on which it was created and is played. The game world is cognitively and uncannily estranged from our own world, as well as from itself. Because of the limitations inherent and evident in its construction,
Rapture is haunted not only by the events of its past and the creatures of its present, but also by the inevitability of its future.

Endnotes

1 Whereas ADAM is the raw form of stem cells used to induce genetic mutation, EVE is a modified version of ADAM powering these genetic mutations. The Gatherer’s Garden is where players manage which of their genetic mutations are active at any given time. There are several other points of comparison made in Bioshock between the world of Rapture and the story of the Garden of Eden, including the garden of Arcadia, which the player visits, and the Garden of New Eden seen in Bioshock Infinite.

2 Several of the characters of Bioshock comment on the discomforting and alienating appearance of the Little Sisters. Atlas, for instance, feels the need to assure the player that harvesting these creatures is not an immoral act: ‘You think that’s a child down there? Don’t be fooled. She’s a Little Sister now. Somebody went and turned a sweet baby girl into a monster. Whatever you thought about right and wrong on the surface, well, that don’t count for much down in Rapture’. The architect of Rapture, Andrew Ryan, is deeply unnerved by their uncanny appearance and their status as monsters, as shown in a recording that can be found in the Farmer’s Market level: ‘The children with their very long needles, their tuneless songs, their ghastly errands. Their ghoulish, Frankenstein fathers. […] These children are an abomination’.

Works Cited


