gamevironments

Novigrad in the evening sun. *The Witcher 3: The Wild Hunt* (CD Project Red 2015)

Special Issue

Gamevironments of the Past.

by

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Issue 05 (2016)

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The Architecture of *Bioshock* as Metaphor for Ayn Rand's

Objectivism

Brittany Kuhn

Abstract

Video games, as a visual medium, have been steadily advancing in their depictions of cityscapes and architecture. Post-apocalyptic games are most notable for their realistic depictions of these spaces, but Irrational Games' (now 2K Boston) 2007 release *Bioshock* takes dystopian architecture in games to a whole new level. Set up as an antithesis to Ayn Rand's theory of objectivism (as presented in her 1957 novel *Atlas Shrugged* and her 1943 novel *The Fountainhead*), *Bioshock* calls into question the existence of free will and honesty of a free market. And Rapture, as the setting upon which the game is set, echoes those sentiments completely. Littered with accoutrement of 1950s nostalgia, Rapture is the quintessential underwater, secluded utopia Rand envisioned at the time; however, where readers do not see Rand's utopia in action, Rapture, as a well-designed game environment, shows how such a place, meant to represent freedom and paradise, crumbles at the hands of its own inhabitants. As the game progresses and the narrative becomes increasingly savage and dystopian, so, too, does Rapture. It is both parallel and prison to the player, and only through overcoming these dangers will the player ever return to life on the surface.

The Architecture of *Bioshock* as a Metaphor for Objectivism

As a highly visual medium, video games rely on world building to aid in creating an immersive environment in which a player can experience the story. One game which has been heralded as utilizing this space effectively, through architectural design, is the original *Bioshock*, released in 2007 by 2K Boston and designed by Ken Levine and

his team at Irrational Games. As a 3D, first person action-adventure game, *Bioshock* has been acclaimed for breaking from the stereotypical war-game shooter genre through its critique of Ayn Rand's philosophy of Objectivism. Much has been written in regards to how the game's narrative and, to some degree, the gameplay makes this connection, while the visuals of the game get attention mostly for being so well executed, so crisp and emotive, something akin more, in 2007 at least, to *art* than *computer game*. In this paper, though, I'd like to focus on how the architecture itself does its part to critique Ayn Rand's philosophy; very little attention has been given to how the space is literally constructed to evoke the basic tenants of objectivism and its failures. It is the city itself which must be traversed, conquered, and defeated, not just the various enemies, and only when the player has done so is he released back to the surface and the world of the living.

Architecture, as used in this article, derives from Henry Jenkins' theory of narrative architecture, where the game's story should be created from the player's experiences in the environment more so than the actions of the characters and the events in which they participate (Jenkins 2004, 122). According to Jenkins, game designers can use the environment to create narratives in at least one of four ways: "[they] can evoke pre-existing narrative associations; they can provide a staging ground where narrative events are enacted; they may embed narrative information within their mise-en-scene; or they provide resources for emergent narratives" (Jenkins 2004, 123). By analyzing how the narrative architecture of *Bioshock* utilizes the first three of these elements to evoke Rand's novels, this article seeks to support Harrison Cox's (2011) argument: that video games can tell a highly complex, literary narrative not only through dynamic storytelling and gameplay but through world building and architecture, as well.

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What is Objectivism?

Ayn Rand, as a refugee to the US from the rising USSR, wrote and developed her philosophy in the 1940s and 1950s to encourage people to "pursue their own happiness" (Cox 2011) as a way of motivating a truly free market society. Objectivism was not selfishness, as such, but more a sense of self-preservation; Rand felt that contemporary philosophies such as socialism unfairly allowed for the more opportunistic and idle members of society to benefit from the hard work of those more able. One's labors should benefit one's self first and society second, not the other way around. In particular, Rand challenged four ideals she found lacking in a socialist/altruistic society and which she felt was necessary to a society's success, what the Ayn Rand Institute (ARI, 2016) has summarized as reality over religion, self-interest over the common good, capitalism over socialism, and reason over emotion.

More specifically, Rand's philosophy can be summed up in one phrase: "embrace reason as an absolute" (ARI 2016). All other viewpoints and challenges of Objectivism stem from this one statement in that to think logically, rationally, reasonably will undoubtedly lead to the understanding and acceptance of Rand's other arguments: of course there is no God since reality is what we experience, not what 'could be'; of course self-interest is more productive than altruism since one can only change one's own immediate circumstances, not those of the rest of the world's; of course capitalism is the most progressive and effective government since only through motivation to better one's own position in life will lead to bettering the whole. Reason, according to Rand and Objectivism, is the only method by which society can ever progress beyond its primal, immoral roots (ARI 2016).

Although Rand expounded on her philosophy in various nonfiction texts, she began to develop Objectivism through her later three novels: *Anthem* (1938, revised 1946), *The Fountainhead*, and *Atlas Shrugged*. Though they never specify whether they are

meant to be set in her present or the future, her books focus on the giants of industry of the early 20th century—steel constructors, railroad managers, architects— and the ways in which government, religion, and a welfare society hold them back and break them. Although *Bioshock* pulls from all three texts in terms of theme, subtext, and design, the world of *Atlas Shrugged*, what many consider Rand's magnum opus, could be considered the main source of inspiration for the architecture and environmental elements included within.

Rand wrote *Atlas Shrugged* during the 1950s at the height of the McCarthy Red Scare, the Cold War, and a resurgence of American Fundamentalism. As a refuge of the newly established U.S.S.R., Rand worried that the increases in taxation and removal of personal rights the American government were enacting in the name of safety and country were dangerously similar to what happened in her home country and feared a socialist uprising was soon to overtake America, too (Cox 2011). *Atlas Shrugged* depicts what such a Western world, where heavy taxation and regulation limit what good truly innovative creations could do for the country through an attempt to level the playing field designed mostly to benefit the lazy and ineffectual, would look like: essentially crushed by and dissolving under the weight of its own altruism. Mysteriously, the great thinkers in *Atlas Shrugged* begin disappearing and the protagonists, railroad heiress Dagny Taggart and steel manufacturer Hank Rearden, must work even harder to keep the country afloat amidst the subjugation. Through investigations of their own, Dagny and Hank discover that the great thinkers have not disappeared but have willingly abandoned society to create their own Objectivist utopia, a place referred to in the novel as Galt's Gulch (Packer 212).

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Why Critique Objectivism?

The reader never actually gets an explanation for how or why Galt's Gulch succeeds; they're just meant to accept that it does. And although such acceptance is an oft-used narrative trope (i. e. suspension of disbelief), promoting such an idyllic view of such a contentious philosophy could be dangerous in a realistic setting. In an interview available as an extra feature after completing *Bioshock* on the hardest difficulty, Ken Levine explains how the game developed from this basic concern over Rand's philosophy:

> "The reason I made *Bioshock* was so I could find out what happens when real people practice Objectivism...the team had to do a fair bit of research, and the more we did the more we started forming ideas for characters and settings which we could use in the game...the challenge was to criticize Objectivism without condemning it, to be fair but not cruel in a sense." (Levine 2007, as quoted in Cox 2011)

According to Levine, the characters, setting, and entire societal structure present in *Atlas Shrugged* are too unrealistic, too one-dimensional to be as successful as Rand makes out in her book. Nobody can be entirely selfish or parasitically altruistic, nor would so many creative and intelligent people be able to live in one area without conflict or subjugation of their own.

Harrison Cox delves into exactly how the game's narrative, enemies, and mechanics explore and promote that criticism. Based on his research, there are three specific areas in which Objectivism would fail: (a) the very selfishness Rand says will bring prosperity to a society would combine with humanity's inherent fallibility in order to prevent a successful Objectivist utopia; (b) Isolationism such as seen in Galt's Gulch in the mountains or Rapture underwater, only breeds fear and control; (c) this 'free will' Rand argues is the only real driving force behind humanity's existence is actually second to one's current circumstances. No matter how hard someone tries, being able to rise above one's station into a more successful one is an exception, not the

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rule. To that end, *Bioshock* was designed to stand as the perfect simulation of what objectivism would look like in a more realistic world, where people are opportunistic, greedy, envious, and scared. (Cox 2011). When viewing Cox's research through the lens of Jenkins' methods of narrative architecture—evoking narrative, staging the mise-en-scene, embedding the narrative—the despairing fate of Rapture, and Objectivism, seems sealed.

Evoking Objectivism: The First View of Rapture

> "Who can forget their first view of the city? Amazing what a man can create once he gets government and God off his back." (*Bioshock* 2007)

First impressions are extremely important. If, as Jesse Schell puts it, "the primary purpose of architecture is to control a person's experience" (2015, 368), then the first view of the game world would be considered even more important because it defines the atmosphere for the game and "helps give structure and meaning to the [player's] experience" (Jenkins 2004, 123). The first view of Rapture delivers on both these levels, drawing connections to Rand's philosophy and novels through the use of 1950s and objectivist landmarks.

Unlike *Atlas Shrugged*, *Bioshock* specifies its time period from the very beginning (May 1960), and the player enters Rapture after a plane crash has left him stranded in the middle of the ocean. As one of the few restricted-movement scenes in the game, this first view of the city is meant to evoke the utopian vision of objectivism Rand gives it in her novels, particularly that of Galt's Gulch. As the player descends into Rapture via the submersible bathysphere, a 50s style video overwhelms the screen and the voice of Rapture's founding father, Andrew Ryan, plays:

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"I am Andrew Ryan, and I am here to ask you a question. Is a man not entitled to the sweat of his brow? 'No,' says the man in Washington, 'it belongs to the poor.' 'No,' says the man in the Vatican, 'it belongs to God.' 'No,' says the man in Moscow, 'it belongs to everyone.' I rejected those answers. Instead, I chose something different. I chose the impossible. I chose…Rapture." (*Bioshock* 2007).
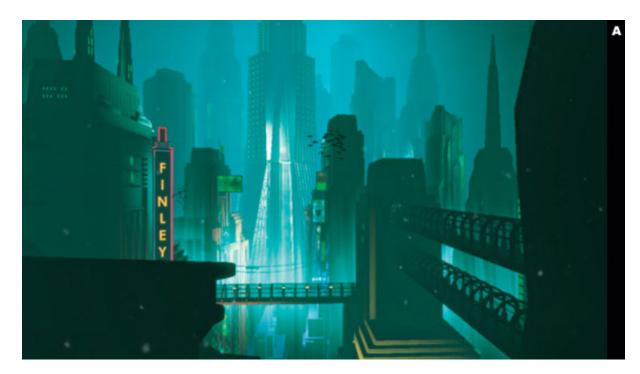

Figure 1. Screenshot from the first view of Rapture, *Bioshock*, 2K Games, 2007

At the moment Ryan says the city's name, the video screen drops, and the player finally gets that grandiose 'first view.' Skyscrapers (ironically labelled in this context) rise from the ocean floor as various fish and large whales swim around the various tunnels connecting them to one another. A Big Daddy, one of the more difficult enemies of the game, is seen repairing glass panels in a main tunnel, foreshadowing the destructive and dystopian elements the player is soon to discover. But for this moment, the image is serene, perfect, welcoming even.

Yet, this serenity does not last for long as Andrew Ryan continues to speak, reminding the player of the game's connections to Objectivism in his explanation of Rapture's

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ideological beginnings. As he states, Rapture was designed to be:

> "[...] a city where the artist would not fear the censor. Where the scientist would not be bound by petty morality. Where the great would not be constrained by the small. And with the sweat of your brow, Rapture can become your city as well." (*Bioshock* 2007).

Almost an exact replica of Galt's explanation for establishing his Galt's Gulch; Andrew Ryan sought to create a paradise for the hard-working and creative types who felt held back or pushed down by the various social constructs top-side. Only through self-interest and self-motivation will anybody succeed in Rapture, a concept Ayn Rand and Andrew Ryan are both proud to promote.

Even without Ryan's blatantly objectivist speech, Rand and the 1950s in which she lived and wrote are echoed visually as the bathysphere winds its way through the city skyline toward the first docking station. It is discovered later that Rapture was created after World War II, during what many would consider the Golden Age of United States industry. Rapture's use of steam, steel, and electricity evoke the three industries Rand used in her two latter and most objectivist novels. Almost every element within this first view of the city captures this time period: the opening plasmid advertisement resembles vintage 50s cigarette ads, the sprawling and grandiose cityscape of skyscrapers could be an underwater 1950s New York City, neon signs and all. It is a thriving metropolis, at the pulse of progress, right down to the final propaganda slogan seen as the bathysphere finally sets up to dock: "All Good Things of the Earth Flow Into the City."

Levine and his team also went so far as to visually represent the very covers of those two objectivist fictions: on the more well-known cover for *The Fountainhead*, a one-dimensional image of a man with chiselled physique and metallic sheen holds a ball of fire in his hand, aiming it at a tall building with the intent to destroy it; one can

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only image this cover is meant to represent Howard Roark himself destroying one of his creations (the act which leads to him attending the very trial by which he defends himself and objectivism). While on the cover of *Atlas Shrugged*, Atlas stands in the classic pose but has unburdened himself of the planet, choosing to hold his head in his hands instead; he, too, is one-dimensional and flat yet with a metallic and chiselled physique, and like the ball of fire on the cover of *The Fountainhead,* the sun shines from the horizon and another building stands looming in the distance.
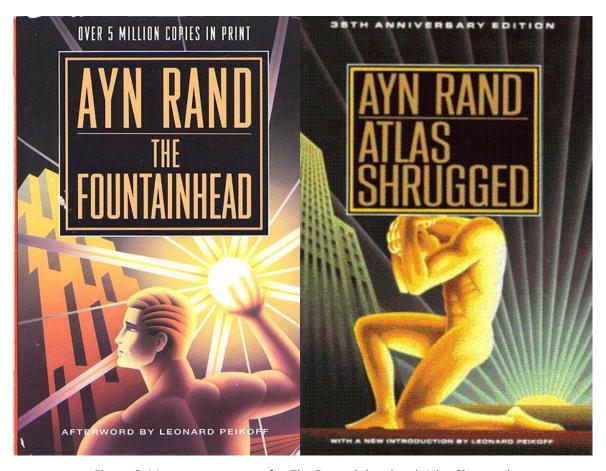

Figure 2. Most current covers for *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged.*

Landmarks have always been important to game design; because players tend to navigate the game space a bit easier, they tend to enjoy the game better, as well. Elements which are used repeatedly are even more relevant in terms of narrative architecture as players are subconsciously encouraged to draw meaning from those landmarks (Schell 2015, 371). Even without the skyscrapers in the background, the

statues of Rapture are almost perfect replicas of the covers to Rand's novels. The men stand proudly with their metallic, two-dimensional look and chiselled physiques. They, like Howard Roark, raise their arms to the sky while the rays of the sun shine from behind. They are silver and grey rather than the gold of the Rand covers, but their tall, straight stances present a more positive image than Roark or Atlas do, implying that this is Rand's ideas done right.

Figure 3. Screenshot from the first view of Rapture, *Bioshock*, 2007

The statues are then utilized as landmarks throughout the city, flanking or being flanked by other images which serve as constant reminders of the influence Rand's novels had on Levine's development and thematic arc for this dystopian society. The first instance is at the entrance to the city, paired with another propagandist, objectivist motto: 'Opportunity Awaits.' It is a latter appearance, though, where the statue is the focal point of a series of banners depicting the guiding principles of the city, that more deliberately connects Rapture's founding principles to Rand's.
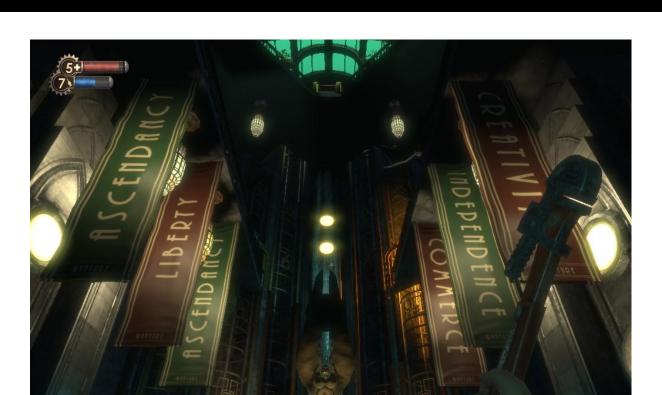
Figure 4: Screenshot from *Bioshock*, 2007.

The Ayn Rand Institute (2016) simplifies Rand's theories on objectivism into five

statements:

- Follow reason, not whims or faith.
- Work hard to achieve a life of purpose and productiveness.
- Earn genuine self-esteem.
- Pursue your own happiness as your highest moral aim.
- Prosper by treating others as individuals, trading value for value

The banners hanging in the hall directly relate to each of these five statements: where

Rand argues for reason instead of faith, Rapture promotes *Ascendancy* from

constricting governments and ideals; where Rand argues for hard-work and self-

motivation, Rapture promotes *Creativity*; where Rand argues that man should seek

only to build his own self-esteem, Rapture promotes such self-serving as *Independence*; where Rand argues that the pursuit of one's own happiness should trump all else, Rapture refers to it as *Liberty*; and where Rand states that all business should be done respectfully and with individuals providing items or services of equal value, Rapture simply calls this *Commerce*.

Other instances of the statue appear throughout the game but not nearly with the overtly objectivist overtones as in these three beginning scenes. By evoking an image so intrinsically connected to *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*, Levine and his team subtly remind the player throughout that this is Rand's world gone wrong, regardless of how it looks or sounds on paper. Yet, the statues are only the beginning in Levine's visual and environmental critique of Rand's philosophy; even placing the city underwater (possibly the only place such a society would ever be allowed to work) provides a catalyst for this objectivist utopia's inevitable downfall.

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Embedding the Narrative: Isolationism under the Sea

> "It was not impossible to build Rapture at the bottom of the sea. It was impossible to build it anywhere else." (*Bioshock* 2007).

In *Atlas Shrugged*, the objectivist hero John Galt convinces the world's greatest minds to go on strike and join him in creating an objectivist utopian community deep within the mountains. All we are told is that there are no laws or formal government, that everybody works together through mutual benefit but without a sense of obligation; ideas such as borrowing, lending, or giving are prohibited because it requires one to provide for another (Packer 2010, 213). We, as readers, are told that such a society works. But we never see how this community operates. *Bioshock* is that society put to the test.

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Like John Galt, Andrew Ryan creates his own objectivist society underwater because he feels that the planet has been over-run by parasitic theocracies, democracies, and autocracies. But creating a 'free' society underwater is not without its irony. Isolation is important to developing a utopian society because any speck of the previous world and its ideals would dampen this society's chances of success (Cox 2011). The embedded narrative connection of Rapture to Galt's Gulch is important because, in order to understand the critique, the game is implying, the player is meant to pull from it the story so-far. Players do not arrive at the start of a world (unless the narrative purpose of that world is for the player to create it from scratch); game spaces then must be designed with pasts, histories, and reasons for their existences (Jenkins 2004, 126). Rapture's origins and downfall are specifically designed to provide a view of the objectivist utopia as a shaky, fuzzy image at best.

An objectivist society can only work when every citizen has willingly given up and forgotten that any prior religious, political, or social system has ever existed. Unfortunately, such complete isolation can never exist because people bring with them all the knowledge and wilfulness of the human race in general. In times of strife or stress, people turn to those sentimental and often wistful memories of when times were good. Objectivism can only work when people believe in it so whole-heartedly that they forget all else, forget even their own self-interests (ironically) in order to keep the system working smoothly (Cox 2011). Not unlike that of a cult, actually, but to an even more extreme measure in that Rapture's citizens are being asked to forget even what the sun looks like or the wind feels like, an act alone which would breed fear and claustrophobia.

The only way to overcome this fear would be to tap into humanity's need to communicate. If allowed to run freely, like Rand originally envisions, the ability to

communicate with one another would in and of itself be enough to bring down the system. All it would take is one person unhappy with the status quo to vent their thoughts to enough other people or even just one right person to agree with them and a small coup would take place. Propaganda, then, was a necessary element in controlling the lower, less creative citizens of Rapture to believe that the interests of the city were the interests of the person and vice versa (Cox 2011).

This, too, echoes not only the philosophy being critiqued, but the time period, as well. Besides being visually similar to advertisements seen in magazines and on television in the 1950s, Rapture pumps out public service announcements over the loud speakers throughout the city, with a similar timber and tone of radio PSAs common in America during that time. Whereas radio advertisement in the US were aimed more at encouraging people to buy more Tide detergent or take the kids to the amusement park, Rapture's PSAs encouraged objectivism via collectivism, inadvertently encouraging an opposite social theory that subjugated the lower classes (i.e. Russian-style socialism) while promoting the one which benefited those in power (in this case, objectivism) (Cox 2011). And just like similar social structures of the like in our real history, Rapture imploded from the repression and unfair treatment of the working classes.

As discovered through various audio logs discovered throughout the game, the citizens of Rapture were originally on board with being isolated from the rest of the world; the idea of creating a new society from scratch was too exciting and adventurous to resist. But a social and literal claustrophobia soon set in, particularly as the architecture of the city itself reminded them at every turn just how isolated they were, not just from the world above but from each other, too. Not only were the citizens separated via glass panels and tunnels from the real world outside the city but iron doors with large cumbersome cranks create a literal in-between space which

required concerted effort to overcome. As most of these iron doors choose to shut off the lower classes from the upper, they also physically represent the struggle and helplessness those working classes felt in attempting to rise above their current stations, a frustration which came to a boiling point on New Year's Eve 1959, six months prior to the protagonist's arrival.
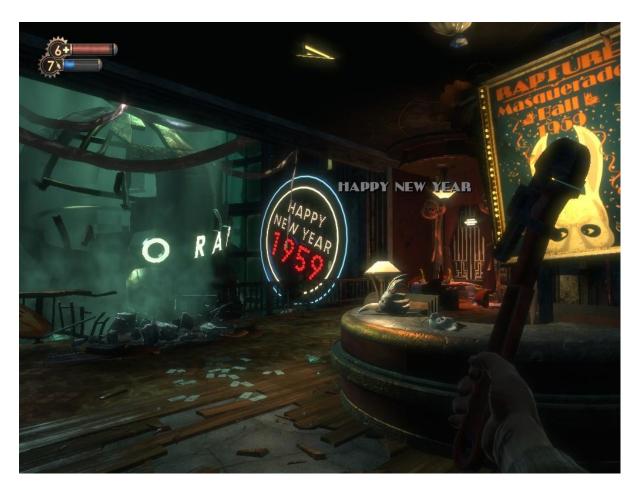

Figure 5. Screenshot from *Bioshock*, 2007.

For much of the game, the protagonist is led to believe that the citizens revolted out of some drug-induced haze brought on by the genetic-mutation-turned-recreational-drug called Adam. However, as further discovered audio files illuminate, this was no ordinary riot; this was a class war between the creative 'great thinkers' and the working lower class. What Rapture shows is what Rand avoided in her description of Galt's Gulch: laissez-faire capitalism does not create equality. As Frank

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Fontaine, Rapture's resident con man, acknowledges in an audio diary found by the protagonist: "These sad saps. They come to Rapture thinking they're going to be captains of industry. But they all forget somebody's gotta scrub the toilets" (*Bioshock* 2007).

And although the player discovers that Fontaine has been behind the entire lower class uprising in order to obtain control of Rapture from Ryan, such a divide between classes is not without its truths. It can be seen in the very land structures of the city: when the protagonist goes to Olympus Heights, the upscale entertainment epicentre for the rich and creative types, the music is lighter, the lights are brighter, and the area is much more 'Times Square' with its high-rise buildings, gentlemen's clubs, and fancy shops; whereas, when entering Neptune's Bounty, where the docks are located, the music slows down, the lights are dimmer, and the buildings are more derelict, with abandoned and rusted machinery sitting out where anybody can see it (Cox 2011).

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All Frank Fontaine does, and all any person would do if this were a real objectivist society, was capitalize on the unhappiness, fear, and boredom the working class were already feeling toward the upper. By re-introducing those old ideals from the surface (religion, charity, government) to the lower classes, Fontaine gives the people something (rebellion and equality) and someone (Atlas, Rapture's shadow-like altruistic character, a not-so-subtle antithesis to Rand's John Galt) to believe in. They gain the strength to overcome those physical barriers and take Rapture by force; the coup successful as a coup as everybody ends up destroying each other. The remnants are the enemies the protagonist meets and must overcome as he traverses the city throughout the game (Cox 2011).

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Figure 6. Screenshot from *Bioshock*, 2007.

Figure 7. Screenshots from *Bioshock*, 2007.

Being underwater also brings in the element of nature. A more romantic critique
against objectivism in this game is in the way nature itself seems to want to reclaim
Rapture's architecture from its creators. As the player enters the city, he is warned
about Rapture's slow dissolution: "Sounds like another tunnel collapse. Welcome to
Rapture, the world's fastest growing pile of junk" (*Bioshock* 2007). Water, unlike steel

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and people, cannot be contained, and the protagonist is often thwarted from progressing in a particular direction purely due to burst pipes or busted windows. In some areas the temperature has taken hold of the path, or in the case of Andrew Ryan's office, volcanic fire seeks to overwhelm the player. From even just this purely romantic point of view, nature's encroachment upon Rapture's space represents the unnaturalness of objectivism's main tenants and the confirmation that even nature will not allow it to succeed.

Enacting the Story: The Map *as* Objectivism

> "This city is not built with concrete and steel…it is built with ideas."
> (*Bioshock* 2007)

As a simulation of the utopian objectivist society, Rapture is meant to run like a well-oiled machine, with each individual performing his or her own part; however, as seen through the destruction by its inhabitants, the city lacks collectivism (Cox 2011). This is particularly relevant when discussing another symbolic landmark of the game: The Great Chain.

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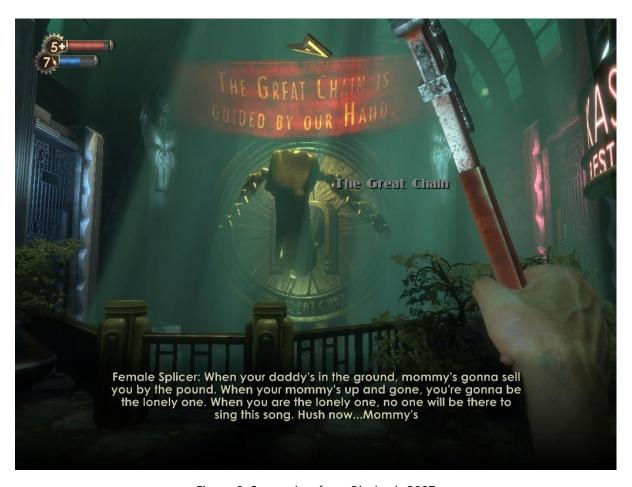ati et 3Q x80

Figure 8. Screenshot from *Bioshock*, 2007

As the banner above it details, the individual contributes to the success of the utopia, in some form or fashion. So important is this image that it shows up in various places for the protagonist to see as the game progresses: on pedestals, on walls, and even on the protagonist's wrists, signifying that he, too, is crucial to the city's survival. Or, possibly, just another pawn...

What's remarkable about The Great Chain, though, is that it seems out of place in an individualist society and more reminiscent of propaganda from the USSR; an idea not too far-flung considering Ayn Rand's origins. One would think that Rapture simply co-opted the image to show how objectivism subverts ideas of national welfare and socialism, and that might possibly have been true if not for its importance to the structure of the city itself.

Game spaces are not designed for realism. As Henry Jenkins argues, "narrative enters games on two levels—in terms of broadly defined goals or conflicts and on the level of localized incidents" (2004, 124). Even more importantly, both of these levels are defined by the player's location in the game; regardless of the type of video game being played (MMORPG, Sports, Platform Side-Scroller, etc.), events take place when a player has reached a certain point and 'activated' the event. Other factors, such as accessing pre-requisite areas or events, contribute to how the event will play out, but game designers create the game space in such a way as to highlight these events in relation to others (Jenkins 2004, 124-125).

In *Bioshock*, each of the big objectivist "thinkers" of Rapture represent those big industries of the American 1950s that Rand supported in her novels: scientists, artists, philosophers, and industrialists. To that end, their placements in the physical world of Rapture could also be viewed as literal links attached to a central metro line. This was not done by accident; in an interview about the game's connection to objectivism, Levine, said that he did this on purpose to show how mankind's opportunistic nature often undermines our ability to remain impartial and fair:

> "Every gamer gets excited before a boss battle…the purpose of using the members of Rapture's best and brightest is so the player literally kills off each individual aspect of Objectivism…whether it's the glorification of the arts in Sander Cohen or the shallowness of beauty in Steinman, each encounter is the player putting another bolt in the coffin of Rand's philosophy." (Levine 2007 as quoted in Cox 2011)

If one were to add to this map the order in which the player eliminates each enemy, the player's path looks like he's breaking a chain: beginning with Dr. Steinman, the surgeon who goes beyond science in his attempt to find beauty; to Peach Wilkins, the industrialist who eventually betrays Rapture to Frank Fontaine; followed by Sandy Cohen, the artist who seeks to create a photographic work of art displaying the

deaths of his enemies; then Dr. Langford, the botanist who wishes to play God; to
Rapture's living God, Ryan himself; and finally to the real power behind the city, the
Mafioso and opportunist Frank Fontaine.

Figure 9. Screenshot from *Bioshock*, 2007, with added elements by the author.

Rand argues, both in *Atlas Shrugged* and in her nonfiction philosophical texts, that
those in power should be in power for only two reasons: to steadily improve the
conditions of themselves and those around them and to be "impersonal robot" (Cox
2011) simply providing the basic function of regulating commerce and trade.
Bioshock, however, shows that government can never be as impersonal and detached
as Rand suggests because it is comprised of people, who are themselves weak in
terms of their own opportunistic and selfish desires. No other character represents
this corruption of self-interest than Dr. Steinman (Cox 2011).

Through found audio diaries and wall-scribblings, the protagonist discovers that,
before Rapture, Dr. Steinman was considered one of the foremost surgeons of his
time. However, rather than work towards creating more life-saving surgeries or a cure

for cancer, Steinman used his position as a founding member of Rapture to work towards creating beauty. He deliberately butchers citizens who come to him for simple rhinoplasties or liposuctions, instead forcing multiple entire facial and body reconstruction surgeries to the point where he claims they are doomed for failure and either abandons them to live with their hideousness or murders them on the surgery table himself (Cox 2011).

The other 'great thinkers' are just as selfish and misguided as Dr. Steinman; he just represents how such trust and faith in the fallible reasoning of a human being can lead to a government working not for the people, but for themselves. That the city's creator, Andrew Ryan, is not the final enemy to be pacified is representative of another critique of objectivism: the great thinkers will never have control over their own creations because the selfish, opportunistic, and greedy, personified by the mafia con man Fontaine, will find a way to subvert them. Or, more specifically, he didn't need to find a way, he just needed to make the citizens aware of their own unhappiness and use it to his advantage. It is this subversion which leads to Rapture's downfall, objectivism's death in its truest form, and it is the subversion which must be overcome by the player in order to escape. By having the protagonist eliminate each of these great thinkers, themselves part and parcel of both the government and the management of the city itself, *Bioshock* asks the player to consider whether such laissez-faire capitalism and unregulated freedom is really as good for society as Rand and her followers believe.

The player answers such a controversial question through how they play game: as an objectivist or altruist throughout the game. Follow Fontaine's example and sacrifice innocent children for one's own progress (the objectivist approach) and the player only brings Rapture's downfall to the surface. Ignore objectivism by protecting and helping the children (which diminishes the player's personal rewards in the game)

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and he completely escapes, finding the family and community he never had. What both of these endings prove is that it is the city of Rapture as the objectivist ideal which must be defeated, not just Andrew Ryan or Frank Fontaine, and only through eschewing those ideals can he be allowed to leave, and to live.

We all, to some degree, can feel trapped by our surroundings. Maybe we feel let down by our government. Or disappointed by our society. Or ignored by religion. Maybe we feel like just another link in an inevitable chain. The narrative architecture and world building of *Bioshock* makes that confinement literal through establishing Rapture as an underwater 1950s utopia. The neon lights and New York city-style skyscrapers wavering in the flowing water provides just enough of a cognitive dissonance to make the player feel uneasy about entering this world, a feeling which only increases the moment they step out of the bathysphere for the first time. Every new step brings the player closer to the point of this objectivist simulation: Rand's philosophy might be attractive in her novels, but like any misunderstood theories, it can become dangerous in the right conditions. If we aren't careful, we could one day be Rapture, too.

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