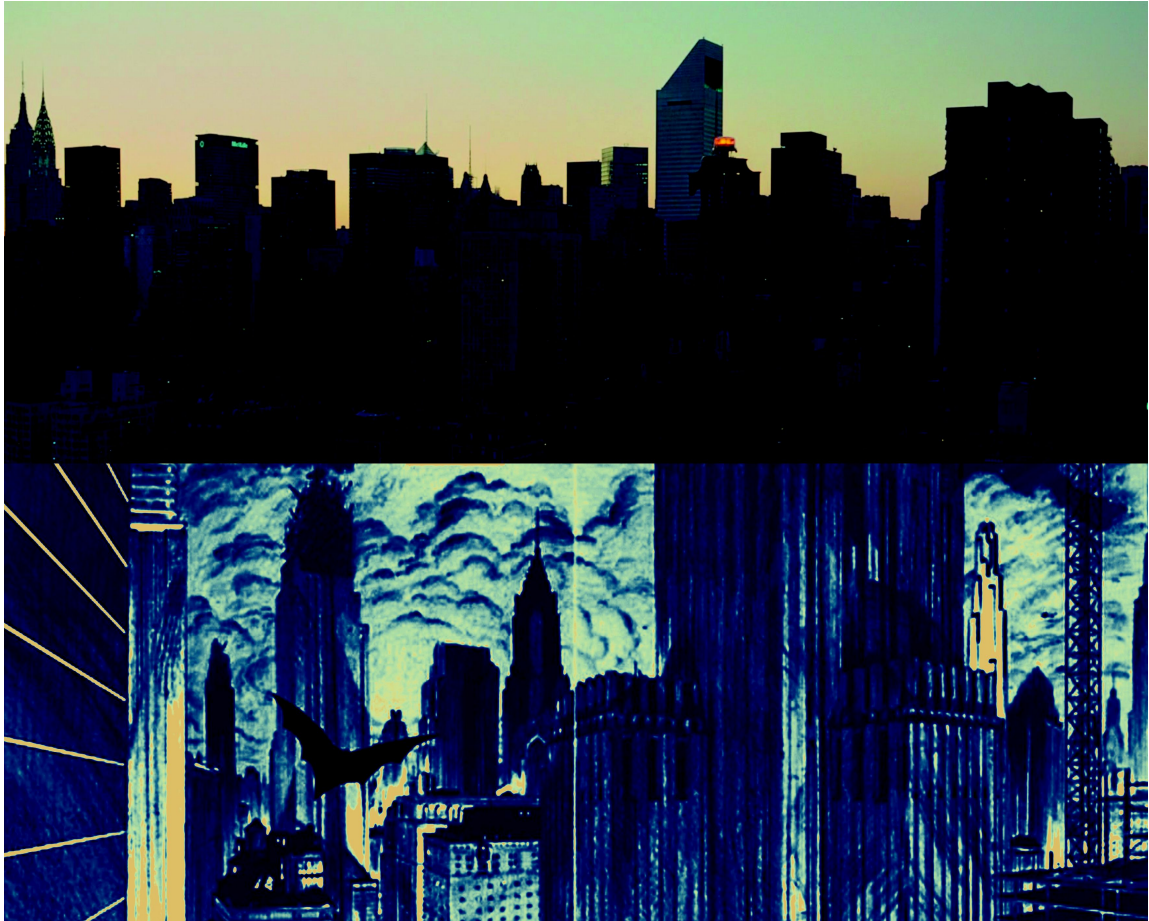


The Dark Knight Trilogy: Visions/Versions of Space in Gotham City



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Abstract

This project examines the representation of space in Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight Trilogy*. Batman has appeared in comic-books for more than 75 years. It is one of the most famous superheroes, and one that has a defined identity. The heroes and villains involved in the many Batman storylines are interesting, but the setting of his adventures, Gotham City, has a personality and a history of its own. Gotham is a setting which is sometimes almost turned into a character itself. Although portrayed very differently by countless authors, the city has a certain set of characteristics. These characteristics depend on its relationship to Batman and to the kind of story told. Movie adaptations of the character gave a fantastic tone to the stories. However, Christopher Nolan's version of Batman, *The Dark Knight Trilogy*, was groundbreaking in terms of its realistic setting. Gotham was more anonymous than before, a common city. This project examines the representation of space in Nolan's vision, centering on the analysis of the city of Gotham. For this purpose, the city as a character on its own will be analyzed, taking into account diverse theories on space and place. These will serve to examine the way the characters relate to Gotham City, and to the individual defined spaces presented in the films. Each one of the films represents a different side of Gotham, although all three of them share a common realistic setting. This text examines each one of the three films separately, ending with the general analysis of space and Gotham City in the trilogy itself. In sum, this project will aim at relating the representation of space in these movies to concrete existing cities, and stating the differences between this version of Gotham to other visions of this city.

Keywords: Batman, cinema, Nolan, space, city, Gotham

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1 Introduction

Batman is one of the most famous superheroes of all times. The character has a long history as part of the comic-book world. In more than 75 years of history, Batman has had very different interpretations and versions. Each one of the creators has given a new vision of the heroes and villains of the universe. However, the most important element of the Batman mythos is its fictional setting, Gotham City. This city has had almost as many different versions as the character itself. Its most important factor is the relationship it has to Batman: as it is a crime-ridden city, it needs a protector. Fantastic and defined elements have also been translated to films and TV series, among other things. However, the biggest on-screen Batman adaptation yet is Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight Trilogy*, a series that gave a very different feeling to the Batman universe. This project centers on the representation of space in this series of films, focusing on the city of Gotham. For this purpose, several theories on space, place and cities will be examined. Supporting the analysis on theories by authors such as John Agnew, Saskia Sassen or Yi-Fu Tuan, the examination will tackle each one of the three films separately. Although they do hinge around the same idea, the three movies show a different side of Gotham City. *Batman Begins* focuses on individual spaces that shape the characters' relationship, whereas *The Dark Knight* focuses on the general understanding of the city, and its common environment. *The Dark Knight Rises* develops on this last installment, showing a new look of the city. Finally, the representation of space in all three films will be examined and analyzed. The final purpose of this project is to analyze the representation of the city of Gotham in Nolan's trilogy and to compare it to real-life spaces and cities. Also, the description of previous works around Batman and Gotham will be analyzed, as this version of the city is a very different look to the famous superhero. Thus, making this series of films relevant to the history of the Batman mythos, as well as serving as a mirror to existing and changing concerns to real life cities and events.

2 Who is Batman? The Caped Crusader's Hometown, Gotham City, and their History

Batman, which has appeared in comics, films, video games and other forms of media, came to be in 1939. It was created by Bob Kane and Bill Finger. The character is part of the DC Universe, a fictional universe in which superheroes are a common thing. As with all the characters created for DC Comics, the publisher is the owner of the

character, although the creators are acknowledged every time the character appears. This kind of ownership is still very common in the creation of mainstream superhero characters. Artists and writers are paid a fixed amount of money depending on the volume of readership they have, they do not hold ownership of the characters. Because of this, most creators tend to finish their time on a character early. This makes the stories varied, since many of the creators have very different understandings of a certain character. Batman has benefited from this constant change of perspectives, as the character is probably one of the most reimagined ones in American media. This project will focus mostly in the cinematic aspect of the character, delving into the world of comic-books as an attempt to connect different visions of Batman and the history of the character.

2.1 Batman: The Birth of Gotham's Protector

Bruce Wayne is the person behind the mask, the inheritor of the Wayne family fortune. His parents, Thomas and Martha Wayne, are murdered by an unimportant criminal in one of the dangerous alleys of Gotham. From then on, Bruce Wayne swears he will become someone with the power to “fix” the city. He trains while he is abroad, turning himself into a fighter and becoming a good detective. When coming back, finding the city worse than ever, he begins working as Batman, Gotham’s own superhero. There have been many changes in the continuity of the character, and since each creator gives a different perspective it is hard to give a single idea of what the character is. Still, there are a set of characteristics that most Batman stories share.

Batman's brain is his most important weapon, and therefore, the comics usually have a different tone than most superhero stories. They tend to be detective stories, in which Batman uses gadgets and contacts to solve a crime. The crime-ridden Gotham gives a noir sensibility to the stories, as the character does share the motifs seen in those stories.

Throughout its history, there are many side characters in the stories. His butler Alfred takes the role of father figure in most versions of the character, also helping as an advisor from the Batcave, Batman's famous hideout. Detective James Gordon gives Batman a connection with the police. In the huge roster of villains, there are such characters as the famous Joker, the Penguin or the Riddler. These villains are usually associated with psychopathic tendencies and they tend to have unresolved psychological

trauma, making them a perfect mirror for Batman. Although these are the most important aspects, there are many elements to the comic stories, making them hard to follow. And since Batman stories have also been adapted in many other forms of media, they have influenced each other constantly.

In this DC Comics universe, the fictional Gotham City plays a huge role in mapping the characterization of Batman. One can not be understood without the other. Gotham has also undergone many changes in the history of the publishing company. The city has an unbreakable connection to Bruce Wayne.

2.2 Gotham: An Imagined City

Gotham City is part of the Batman character and of DC Comics for almost as long as the character itself, since 1940. It has a very defined characteristic: in Gotham there is always crime. Batman and Gotham always coexist, the existence of one implies the other. As with Batman, it has been reimagined countless times in different kinds of media, but it is identified with the darkest side of the city it was based on, New York. It is not by chance that at the beginning New York was the setting for Batman. Being located in the superhero universe of DC Comics, it has always been a unique setting and has changed from creator to creator. The metropolis has been rebuilt in the minds of countless readers, each version being a different view of the city at its place and time. From the 1940's until the 1960's there was not a big definition of what Gotham was, or what it had to be. It seemed that comic books or the famous 1960's Adam West Batman TV show did not care about the setting of its stories, the images of Gotham were not defined. However, beginning in the 1970's and specially in the 80's, these images started to change, and the city started to forge its new identity. These new visions of the city were created with the idea of a darker city, a nightmarish place. With the reimagining of a darker Batman by artist Dennis O'Neil and artist Neal Adams there came a darker Gotham. And a Gotham with a bigger and clearer identity. With the famous Adam's cover in *Batman* Vol.1 #251. (Figure 1)



Figure 1. Famous cover evoking the change from the campy TV Show to a darker tone.

Art by Neal Adams. *Batman Vol. 1 #251* (September, 1973)

This new trend was specially prominent with the arrival of comic books *Year One* and *The Dark Knight Returns* written by Frank Miller. These works would serve as a base for the understanding of Batman for the next decades, a tortured soul, and its city, a place in agony. After the campiness of the 1960's TV Show, there was a new rise of Batman in the media outside comics. These more mature stories gave rise to a seriousness of the adaptation. In the 1989 film *Batman* by Tim Burton, the despair of crime is fully realized as an almost unnatural enemy. The success of the film made this idea of an out of reality Gotham the one that would serve as basis for the 1992-1995 animated TV Show *Batman: The Animated Series*. Art Decó, similar to the architecture present in the 1927 Fritz Lang film *Metropolis*, would serve as an inspiration for the architecture of a city that worked with shadows, giving it a feel of impending doom (Figure 2).



Figure 2. General image of Gotham. Clear influence of Art Decó. *Batman: The Animated Series* (1992-1995)

This vision would become the most notable one in imagining the character's hometown both in films and comics. Different versions of this fantastic Gotham are seen in the three Batman films that were made in the 90's: *Batman Returns* (1992), *Batman Forever* (1995) and *Batman & Robin* (1997). The late two films in the series went back to a campy style, and were not well received. However, comics kept the idea of a darker Gotham, although at first there were no plans to get the dark Batman back in cinema. That changed in 2005 with the success of *Batman Begins*, the first film of what would later be called *The Dark Knight Trilogy*. The more realistic tone of the trilogy has also been kept in many modern comic-book Batman stories, although their bigger impact is in the more nuanced treatment of the city, as in the celebrated storyline “The Court of Owls” (2011-2012). In this storyline, the secrets of the city and the hidden architecture of the buildings are very important, something many Batman stories have analyzed. The TV Series *Gotham* (2014-) which depicts the origins of Batman, shows a very anachronic Gotham, a mashup of existing American cities and of different times. *Batman V Superman* (2016) is the latest cinematic Batman installment and it shows Gotham as a twin city to Metropolis, Superman's home. Metropolis has sometimes been described as the bright side of New York, opposing Gotham. This time, Batman shares the screen for the first time with Superman and Wonder Woman, the other two big superheroes in DC Comics. In this film, the city is not as developed as in other movies concerning Batman, as it is not a big thematic element for the story. Every decade, the city has had a tonal change. The different artistic trends in the world of comics and film have had an influence in the city. By having been experienced by so many authors and creative minds over such a long time, it has changed greatly from time to time. It unveils an understanding of a city, a city that exist because Batman exists, and viceversa. There is no way of understanding one without the other.

2.3 Gotham and Batman: A Symbiotic/Parasitic Relationship

Artists and writers give a very different interpretation of how Batman and the city are related, even if they are created in the same period and circumstances. This is better exemplified in the recent Batman storylines “Gothtopia” and *Batman Eternal*. Mainstream American comic-books tend to have a series of issues involving the same story, and these two tackle a similar situation in different ways, showing two different sides of the city and its superhero.

In “Gothtopia” the reality of Gotham has changed greatly, Batman is made to believe his crusade is over and Gotham has become the safest city in the United States. When discovering that he has been manipulated, he unveils a conspiracy to keep him from doing his work and begins his crusade again. In the story, there is a need of a chaotic Gotham for Batman to exist, and for Bruce Wayne to have a real purpose. Their relationship is almost parasitic. On the other hand, *Batman Eternal* shows a defeated Batman after a long battle against an unnamed foe. He has lost almost everything and feels helpless. In the end of the story, all of his allies help him stop the real culprit after Batman is almost defeated. He ends up defeating his enemy with the help of his allies. In this story, the city is part of Batman, showing that there is a need for Gotham to have Batman. He is a symbol for everyone, something that the films in *The Dark Knight Trilogy* agree with. These stories don't show a different Gotham in terms of aesthetics, but they do differentiate from the way the relationship of Batman and his city are. These different versions of Gotham never interfere, they coexist in how the city is understood. As it is mapped by the minds of the creators, by the people who interact in their stories and ultimately by the people who enjoy them.

2.4 Two Noteworthy Gothams: *Year One* and *Batman*

The 1980's were of huge importance for comic books, especially for American mainstream companies. The arrival of British artists to the landscape gave rise to interesting new concepts, which subverted the popular trends at the time. Stories became more adult and they would compete with big literary works. *Watchmen*, the graphic novel by English writer Alan Moore, changed the media forever. At this time is when the most important iterations of Batman appeared. The decade in which they were written saw rise to many more mature superhero based comic books. When comics earned respect, film adaptations of the character's earned more respect, such as Tim Burton's *Batman*. As a matter of fact, it is considered to be groundbreaking in terms of its cinematography and how it tackled superheroes seriously. Two of the most famous and influential adaptations of Batman are the 1986 graphic novel *Batman: Year One* by writer Frank Miller and artist David Mazzucchelli, and the aforementioned film *Batman*. As with most Batman stories, Gotham City is the setting in both these stories, but the overall importance of the city's architecture, mood and its inhabitants play a bigger role than in most stories about the Dark Knight. From this decade onward,

Batman stories saw Gotham being turned into a more important character.

Batman: Year One tells the beginnings of Batman. Writer Frank Miller and artist David Mazzucchelli created a Gotham which would be repeated many more times, including similarities with the films by Christopher Nolan. The city in *Year One* is experienced through the eyes of two characters, Gotham native Bruce Wayne and James Gordon, who is assigned to the Gotham City Police Department. The story hinges round these two characters, and their perspectives are very different. James Gordon is an outsider, and experiences first-hand the brutality in Gotham, whereas native Bruce Wayne sees it from his upper-clas upbringing, but he wishes to see more of the “real” Gotham. The understanding of Gotham could not be more different in these two characters. Even tough their background and experiences are completely different, both change Gotham for what they believe to be the best. The ties to modern New York are clear in the comic. The art of the book mirrors the look of a dirty American 1980's metropolis. *The Dark Knight Trilogy* takes a lot from its dirty streets and realistic city. (Figure 3)



Figure 3. Inside page on the common look of Gotham City. *Batman: Year One*. (1986)

To the contrary, the film *Batman* by Tim Burton shows many more fantastic elements. “As Burton described to Anton Furst, Gotham City should look like “hell burst through the pavement and grew.” (Murphy) The Joker, the main antagonist in the film, is also one of the common criminals in Gotham and the murderer of the Waynes. There seems to be a clear link between the metropolis and its corrupt inhabitants. The Joker, the villain of the story, is a common thug. He appears as a product of the environment, an environment without hope. Director Tim Burton intended the city to act as a mirror for a crime-ridden New York City. But not an existing one, a city which

never improved. The reality and anonymity of the space are not present in this imagining of Batman's hometown. This way, Gotham does not seem as terrifying as in *Batman Begins*, for example. At least in a more real sense, in a more personal sense. (Figure 4)



Figure 4. The nightmarish look of Gotham is evident in this general shot. *Batman* (1989)

As shown above, there are many ways to interpret a city with such a long history as this, as fictional as it might be. But there has not been a vision which has sparked so much commentary as Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight Trilogy*. There needs to be a framework to understand the complexities of the city in that film trilogy.

3 Understanding Space and Place

Even though they look alike, the terms space and place need clarification to be understood, as their meanings have changed, and keep changing, through time. Simply put by Yi-Fu Tuan in *Space and Place: A Humanistic Perspective*, space is a more abstract idea without any real connections to human beings, without a social value. Spaces are thought in terms of human relationships. Place, however, is a more concrete word, it is unique, and it “incarnates the experiences and aspirations of a people.” Space is not understood without time. Spatial relationships do not happen somewhere that is not understood relationally through time, whereas places are thought to have fixed characteristics to people. As Tuan writes “We get to know the world through the possibilities and limitations of our senses”, as how we understand space shifts from person to person, or from one community to the other. When an agreement is made the concept of place appears. Place can be understood as a “piece of space” that has meaning. “Place can be as small as the corner of a room or large as the earth itself”, (Yi-Fu Tuan 419-420) and places imply the emotional association of the people that interact with them. The concept of space deals more with time, whereas the concept of place

usually deals with the physical and social understanding of that space.

This distinction can be a very confusing one, as new ideas emerge concerning these concepts, especially with the rise of modern communication technologies. What can be understood as a place could no longer share the same ideas as it did in the past. Nowadays, place is usually associated with a past world and space with the world of the present and the future (Agnew 7). As Agnew continues, the sense of placeness has been lost to a bigger sense of samelessness. The landscape of everyday life has changed greatly, making the classic understanding of place old-fashioned, turning places with identity into commonplace spaces. These spaces, such as malls or airports, give a sense of loss of identity to more defined spaces. Feelings of community, which are usually equated to traditional definitions of place, have lost their significance. Place has a set of understandings, for which the use of space or location is needed. In a sense of belonging is when the term place takes its real meaning. But this idea of place as an entity in itself, isolated from the world, does not take into account the globalized world we live in. Places have not disappeared, but the way it is thought about them has changed. They are not isolated entities, but entities that are “best thought of relationally” (Agnew 24). Ultimately, places work better as means to develop what we understand as spatial relationships, settings from which the world is constructed. Therefore, for the purpose of this text, the term space will be used to understand the different relationships of the creators and the characters. These spatial relationships shape the character's ideological and physical features. They do not only provide a context for these relationships, but the city itself changes. Whereas the use of place will mostly be limited to the mention of Gotham as a vehicle for these spatial relationships. Gotham City has a huge fictional history, a history in which the understanding of cities has changed.

3.1 The Global City

A global city, a term coined by Saskia Sassen in 1991, is considered to be an important link to the global economic system. These places are financial centres, created by the importance given to the economic power of a city. Every one of these cities creates new spaces and movements to earn that place in the globalized capitalist system. Sassen, in her 2005 essay “The Global City: Introducing a Concept,” qualifies that early notion of a global city and expands on a more current idea. She argues that these networks are not as mobile as they look, since they are embedded in place. These places

usually are global cities that share an architecture and a socio-economic environment. In such places, transnational economic networks come into place. These transnational company networks create the new environment in these cities, meaning that big businesses hold control of the economic and social structures of cities. These networks are not composed of interconnected agents, but they “assume concrete, localized forms” (Sassen 14). These central cities have turned themselves into the centre of inequality in the world, becoming “a strategic terrain for a whole series of conflicts and contradictions” (Sassen 13). Since they completely change the features of the cities, conquering the dominant cultural and economic power. A feature of these places is that they tend to be “denationalized”, turning into cities that do not concern themselves with a sense of belonging, but are created and maintained by the flow of the capital. They unify these cities into belonging to a certain place. It could be argued that the agents of that change have gained these spaces over the nations in which they physically belong. If these spaces are created by economic power, this brings out an interesting question of the feeling of belonging to a place.

Doreen Massey develops on this idea by stating that globalization does not necessarily destroy the uniqueness of a place (Massey 5). She argues that the dominant force is still in the hands of the agents of change (Massey 3). Although, following that description, if place is understood as a space with a history of relationships behind them, then the global city is not only created by the people in charge, but by the people who create any kind of relationships. Later, the connection between these ideas of globality concerning Gotham city will be examined. Specially since there are modern imaginings of the city that follow a very clear path to understand this spatial relationships.

3.2 Space in Film

Cinema is a great cultural form to examine spatiality and the city, as it is a spatial media. The placement of cameras, the use of different shots or even the colour can give very different interpretations to a concrete space. As Mark Shiel states in “Cinema and the City in History and Theory,” cinema is better understood in terms of space, “*space in films* – the space of the shot; the space of the narrative setting; the geographical relationship of various settings in sequence in a film; the mapping of a lived environment on film; and *films in space*,” which is the organization of the industry itself (Shiel 5). Even though this text concerns itself with a variety of real life cities and

places, the tools used for the analysis of space in cinema can be comparable to those used in a fictional city. As the point of view of the different agents involved in creating the film (directors, writers, actors, producers and so on) shape how the spectator sees the film. This encloses the experience in a certain way, but in the case of Gotham it helps experience the city distinctly. The use of certain real-life spaces instead of others, or the use of some shots instead of others notoriously changes the feeling of involvement with a place. Taking into account the urban nature of the spaces presented in *The Dark Knight Trilogy* the examination of certain places is necessary. Settings, shots and the dark look of the scenes give a certain feeling to Batman's city. The following section will examine the nature of space in Gotham City, taking into account different features of space in cinema.

4 *The Dark Knight Trilogy*

The Dark Knight Trilogy (2005-2012) is the biggest and most successful adaptation of Batman yet put in cinema. The series of films are directed by Christopher Nolan, a British director who became well-known with the 1998 low-budget noir film *Following*. The success of the movie gave Nolan the chance to direct the film *Memento*, in the year 2000. It became a hit, it was one of the most celebrated movies of the decade. He directed the star-filled *Insomnia* in 2002. He began the trilogy in 2005, with *Batman Begins*, and continued it with *The Dark Knight* (2008) and *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012). Nolan directed two films in between those: *The Prestige* (2006) and *Inception* (2010) which were a huge success. In 2014 he directed the sci-fi film *Interstellar*. His biggest influences come from authors such as Stanley Kubrick, Alfred Hitchcock or Akira Kurosawa. Along with Quentin Tarantino or Paul Thomas Anderson, he is one of the few film directors that only shoots using film, not digital cameras. As he believes it represents the perfect standard for filmmaking, believing he has a duty to preserve a classic understanding of filmmaking. The success of the *The Dark Knight Trilogy* gave rise to the current era of more interesting superhero films.

Nolan, being a Batman fan, wanted to direct a more “realistic” and modern movie on The Dark Knight. For that he wanted to delve into the psychology of the character, and used it to reflect on post-9/11 American society. It was a very different retelling of Batman in the movies, in both terms of cinematography and thematic elements. The screenplay and the story of the three films were written by Nolan himself,

his brother Jonathan Nolan and David S. Goyer. All three films in the trilogy depict the evolution of Bruce Wayne from his origins to his last years as Batman. They have very defined thematic elements, and each film depicts different characteristics of the city they are set in.

4.1 The Story of *The Dark Knight Trilogy*

Batman Begins tells the modern origin story of Bruce Wayne and his Batman alter ego. The movie is the first ever to fully depict the origins of Batman on film. Christian Bale plays Bruce Wayne, a billionaire worried about the condition of his city. After his parents were murdered he becomes obsessed with fixing Gotham, as he believes himself guilty for their death. He feels powerless to stop the crime in Gotham City that led to their death and decides to leave to learn a set of skills. Skills that could make him fight crime, after an unfortunate event with the reality of the crime in his hometown. He trains with Ra's al Gul (Liam Neeson), a man in charge of a clan of secret warriors named the League of Shadows, who work in secret with the purpose of freeing mankind from evil doers. Bruce, who disagrees with his view, escapes and returns to Gotham. He reunites with his childhood friend Rachel (Kate Holmes), with whom he has a tough relationship. With the help of his butler and guardian, Alfred (Michael Caine), he becomes the Batman, and begins his crusade to get rid of crime in the city. Batman is constantly at odds with the police, and he only trusts Detective James Gordon (Gary Oldman), who helped him as a child after his parents were murdered. A conspiracy is unveiled that would destroy Gotham, in which the doctor Jonathan Crane (Cillian Murphy) and Ra's al Gul are involved. Crane is a psychiatrist with psychopathic tendencies himself. He takes advantage of the justice system to bring criminals to his Arkham Asylum, a place reminiscent not only in name to HP Lovecraft's horror stories, and perform experiments on them. It is the filmic counterpart of the comic-book villain Scarecrow, who uses fear toxins to control his victims. Batman stops the villains from trying to poison the city's water supply and a new character is teased, a killer that leaves joker cards in crime scenes.

The Dark Knight begins were the last film ended, with the appearance of the Joker (Heath Ledger). Batman's influence is obvious in Gotham: there are Batman impersonators in the city, the criminals are scared and the police have started relying on him. The mob has started to worry about Batman's increasing authority in the city, as the

war between criminals and the law is starting to escalate. The appearance of The Joker signifies this. At first allying with the mob, he begins a rampage across the city and Batman needs to unite with District Attorney Harvey Dent (Aaron Eckhart) and Detective James Gordon in order to stop him. Harvey Dent seems to be what Gotham needs in order to fix its crime, as it can act as a symbol in a way Batman can not. In the film, as in the comics, The Joker acts as a counterpart to Batman and begins playing mindgames with him, wanting to turn all of Gotham against themselves. Joker manages to murder Bruce's friend Rachel, this time played by Carey Mulligan, and scar Harvey Dent emotionally and physically. Half his body gets burned, and this duality becomes also psychological, in a version of Mr. Hyde. Dent begins a rampage just like Joker's and ends up confronting Gordon and Batman. The conflict ends with the death of Harvey Dent and the apparent defeat of The Joker. In the end, Batman takes the blame, and the fact that Harvey Dent went insane is hidden to the public, in order to save Gotham.

In *The Dark Knight Rises* eight years have passed since the ending of the previous film, and Batman has retired because of the events of *The Dark Knight*. "The Dent Act" gives power to the police to eradicate organized crime, as it denied mobsters the possibility of parole, among other consequences that are never fully explained. The false image of Harvey Dent as a savior was used to maintain this law. The burglar Selina Kyle (Anne Hathaway) steals a very precious item from Bruce Wayne's manor. This makes Bruce Wayne return to public life again. In the meantime a villain named Bane (Tom Hardy) lurks beneath Gotham, in the sewers of the city. Bane is supposedly a member of The League of Shadows, the organization that Bruce's teacher Ra's Al Ghul led. Miranda Tate (Marion Cotillard), a board member of Wayne enterprises, starts helping Wayne with his new public life and they begin a romantic relationship. John Blake (Joseph Gordon-Levitt), a young police officer who admires Bruce Wayne, finds out Batman's secret identity and convinces him to start his work as Batman again. Bane ruins the Wayne fortune, by purchasing fraudulent stock shares in Bruce Wayne's name. Batman confronts Bane, and his years of confinement make him weak against Bane. Bruce ends up in a prison from which he needs to escape in order to stop Bane. The villain destroys every bridge in Gotham and threatens to explode a bomb that would destroy the entire city if an outsider would enter it. The criminals are freed from prison and they

start a revolution. Batman secretly comes back to the city, and stops Bane. He then discovers that Miranda Tate is Ra's Al Guls daughter, who was working along Bane. Batman supposedly sacrifices himself by detonating the bomb far away from Gotham. The viewer is made aware later that he did not in fact die, Bruce Wayne has only hidden. The trilogy ends with the people of Gotham in charge of their own city, and a new protector, John Blake, rising.

4.2 *Batman Begins: Extralegal Space*

In order to examine the representation of space and place in *Batman Begins* with clarity, the description of events will center in places and describing their change chronologically. The movie does a good job in introducing the spaces of the city that will appear in the trilogy. The film opens with the fall of a young Bruce Wayne to what will later become Batman's hideout, the Batcave. After being attacked by bats, he starts fearing them. This will later become the reason for his transformation into Batman. coming back after being trained, he conquers the Batcave. He wins over his own fears, by surrounding himself by a swarm of bats (Figure 5). His hideout serves as a means of survival for him. What he has experienced in the cave gives way to the creation of his alter ego. And by constructing around it he creates a very different sense of that place. This change is exemplified in how confused the camerawork is in his first experience in the cave, and how confident he appears in the later shots. The use of confused close-ups opposed to the long shot later in the film gives a very different feeling of the environment.



Figure 5. Bruce Wayne accepting his fears. *Batman Begins* (2005)

Wayne Manor, his family's house, is very far away from the reality of Gotham. It is a conflicting space when compared to the rest of the city, making even characters doubt if it belongs to Gotham. It is worth noting that the manor does not belong in the United

States, but is a 19th Century English house. At the beginning, the general shots of the outside of the house give a feeling of peace and security, never feeling threatening. This contrast between Gotham and the manor is evident in the film, as very few people actually visit the house. Although it is in the city limits, and is part of Gotham, its location in the films is never stated. It stands as a signifier of the power of the Wayne family in the city, and as a symbol of their legacy. Bruce believes that “it is a mausoleum”, and his “will would be to put it down brick by brick”. It stays as an untouchable space for him, and does not spend any time in his family's home. He does not appreciate Alfred's attempts to make him feel at home in the old building. After all, he does not want to destroy the memories of his parents. Later, when Ra's Al Ghul destroys the manor, Wayne regrets not having appreciated it more. Referencing an earlier quote said by Bruce's Father, Alfred replies: “Why do we fall? So that we can learn to pick ourselves up.” This makes him realize the heritage of his family. He accepts the blame, but rebuilds the house “brick by brick” in the end, finding his own way of connecting to his deceased family. The comparison between the grandiose shot of the house at the beginning of the film and the tiny ruins left in the end signify the loss of a tradition. (Figure 6) By rebuilding the manor he claims it back for himself, and he honors a legacy. It speaks to the importance of a space that has been given meaning by the inhabitants and the people that interact with it. The process heals the trauma of the death of his parents, ending a cycle for the character. Although a hopeful closure for the character, this implies the continuation of an older rule. Perpetuating ideas that may not have a place in the current environment.



Figure 6. Shots comparing the two states of Wayne's Manor. *Batman Begins*. (2005)

These two places connect with two very different sides of the character. Considering that Batman takes the most part of Bruce's life, he spends more time in the hideout. Not wanting to connect with his family turns into time spent in his alter ego's home, where bats hide. That part of his personality consumes him, the dark corners of the cave make him forget the Wayne's legacy. Each one of these places clashes with one another, making an interesting dichotomy between the reality of Gotham and how Batman/Bruce Wayne experiences it.

The monorail is also an important part of spatial experience for the inhabitants of Gotham, and it reveals much of its importance for the city. The Waynes built the railway in order to, as Thomas Wayne says, “unite the city, and in the center Wayne Enterprises”. The building connects the different trains into a central point. It is a public transportation system created by the Wayne family in order to ensure a connection between the people of Gotham. Wayne Enterprises at the centre of the frame is meaningful to how much power the bussiness holds over its inhabitants, it literally controls the movements of the people. (Figure 7) Making the involvement of the business in the city central to the experience of mobility to the inhabitants of Gotham.



Figure 7. Wayne Manor at the center of Gotham. *Batman Begins* (2005)

Wayne Enterprises appears as the most important agent of change in the city. Although it is never clearly stated what their bussiness is. It appears as if the company holds all the economy and well-being of the city. In a similar way to that of a global city. These defined spaces do give a different feeling to *Batman Begins* than the rest of the films, which focus more in the general feeling of space and the interaction between

Gotham and its people. Still, this film gives a very defined look on what Gotham is like.

But the central theme of the film, besides fear, is justice and criminality. There has been an economic depression in Gotham, and many of its inhabitants have turned to crime. According to most of the characters, the blame lies in the hands of the criminals who have taken advantage of the situation in the city. Alfred helps his protégé with his crusade, but he can not help but worry if he is helping anyone. There needs to be a change in the system for real change to happen. Is the change happening where it should? This is a question that gets answered little by little as the trilogy goes on.

The appearance of Batman creates a new space in the law system that has been in place in Gotham for so long, a new extralegal space. He uses violent methods, which lie outside what police can do. The rules are changing, and Batman is making them. Gordon is reluctant to work with Batman as agreeing with him would imply that the city as a system does not work. However, the need to use this new legal space in the city is changing the landscape of the conflict itself. And this is ultimately demonstrated by the ending of the film, in which the menace of the Joker appears. The escalation of violence has give way to a bigger threat.

4.3 Duality in Space: *The Dark Knight*

Individual spaces in this installment of the trilogy are not as relevant as in the previous film, since this is the less distinct Gotham. Whereas *Batman Begins* gave importance to the spaces and places mostly taken from the comics, this film tries to impact on the city as a whole. While the house is rebuilt, Wayne Manor has been substituted by an anonymous loft (Figure 8). The cold shot of the loft and its views give loneliness to the frame, one of the chairs is empty, signifying the loneliness of the character. Spatial position is very revealing in this shot, as Bruce Wayne watches the city in his loneliness.



Figure 8. Bruce Wayne's attic. *The Dark Knight* (2008)

The lack of security of the system is a central point in the film. In *The Dark Knight* the landscape of criminality has changed in Gotham, Batman's influence is clear. In this environment, the police rely on Batman for help, and criminals are scared to act. The new District Attorney Harvey Dent, Batman and Gordon share information to extradite a Chinese accountant from his country, even if it is illegal. Batman travels to Hong Kong to retrieve him. The establishing shot describing the city does not apply much identity to Hong Kong. (Figure 10) Bruce Wayne can travel there because of his power as a businessman, the implications of a private person extraditing a rightful citizen are terrifying. Later, when Batman looms over Hong Kong, there is not much difference from his actions in Gotham. There is no difference between one city and the other. This lack of cohesion supports the idea of samelessness of global cities. Being both big centers of business there is not much difference between one and the other if the law is not involved.



Figure 10. Hong Kong, not too different from Gotham. *The Dark Knight* (2008)

The film starts with the Joker breaking into a bank used by the mob. The bank's employee that is shot by the Joker compares him to the ruling criminals, stating that they at least hold a code of honor, something the Joker supposedly lacks. This film gives a very different feel to Gotham, with the involvement of the villain. This character presents a clear counterpart to everything Batman stands for. The Joker defies the logic of the criminal mind. As Alfred says, remembering a similar situation: "Because some men aren't looking for anything logical, like money. (...) Some men just want to watch the world burn". He freely behaves in the criminal world, the same way Batman behaves freely on the side of the law. Even how the characters move is different, with

Batman's furious strenght, and the Joker's chaotic fragility. He seems to have a huge variety of resources, the same way Batman does. The Joker appears to be interested solely in the creation of chaos. However, the villain's plan is to unmask Batman, and therefore unmask the hipocrisy of the city. As he explains to a scarred Harvey Dent:

You know what I've noticed? Nobody panics when things go "according to plan." (...) But when I say that one little old mayor will die, well then everyone loses their minds! Introduce a little anarchy. Upset the established order, and everything becomes chaos. I'm an agent of chaos. Oh, and you know the thing about chaos? It's fair!

In the end, The Joker appears to win, as the safety of the city has been compromised by the several attacks he commits in the city. Parallels to modern terrorism are not hard to find, the involvement of the law and the use of torture and other methods lead to this. When Batman has a bigger autonomy, which is given by the law, a criminal appears. The city has been taken from the powerful, and the only thing that can bring the city back to its previous state is a lie told by Gordon himself. Who puts Batman as a criminal, he is easier to blame because of his unlawful methods. *The Dark Knight* plays on this fear of terrorism, but on a terrorism that has no one but ourselves to blame. The system has created The Joker, he will destroy the system. As James Charles Mak suggests in "In Search for an Urban Dystopia - Gotham City": "*The Dark Knight* not only suggests the possibility lying in the shadows, it introduces the idea that these two sides - the shine and the shadows - coexist as a doubling." Duality is a central film of the film, and lie at its core in understanding the sides Gotham has. As the spaces in this movie are less defined, and the relationship of the character gets a bigger importance, the focus is on the feeling of the characters and the people involved. This is specially true in the final scene, where prisoners and inhabitants are in two separate boats with the power to kill each other (Figure 11).

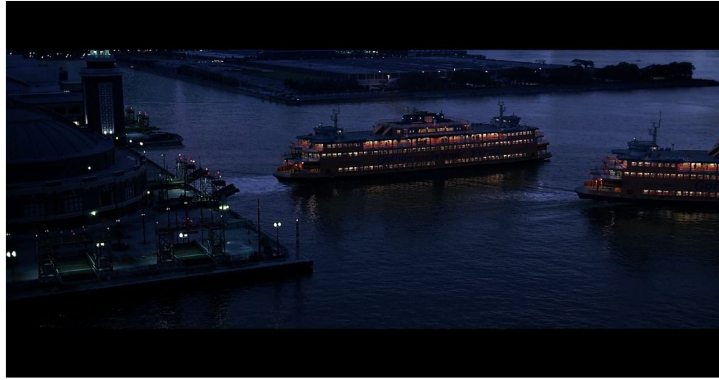


Figure 11. Boats sailing from Gotham. *The Dark Knight*. (2008)

Interestingly, “the good people of Gotham” are on one boat, and “the common criminals” are in another. As if the whole city of Gotham could be divided into this duality, into evil and good people. It is not easy to understand what the real effects of Batman's actions are, that duality is also unto himself. He represents justice, but does not behave inside of the law. He is a product of his environment, is he also part of the problem?

What prevails in the end is the uncomfortable sense that the system is fragile. Anonymity has led to a way of identifying with Gotham for the spectator: “Gotham City itself is an avatar, not only of the dreams of its fictional architects, but of our collective urban paranoia.” (Stamp 1) This rings even truer in this film.

4.4 Isolation and Revolution in Gotham City: *The Dark Knight Rises*

The Dark Knight Rises is the most representative of the central point of Gotham in the trilogy, of its inner workings and its central elements. However, this is by far the most different film in terms of location to the first two. Whereas the first two film's establishing shots were mostly filmed in Chicago and do appear alike, the last installment of the trilogy was filmed in New York and Pittsburgh. Presumably, there needed to be a city that was in an island, as it was a central element to the plot. But this makes the idea of a shifting city even clearer. It is not only anonymous but it can even change, making the identification easier. Although it may appear that this sets the spectator off, it actually supports the idea of Gotham as a nameless city, with its everchanging landscape.

Gotham is isolated by Bane from the outside world. This is the first there is a mention of a higher order in charge of Gotham. The government of the United States does not appear in the first or second movies, since Gotham is always left isolated from

the outside. The “fantastic action of comic books within a fictionalized city” is a device that makes “little sense of the outside world.” (Cogle 3) Bane breaks the bridges that are the passageway from Gotham, leaving the city to decide on its own. (Figure 12) When the physical connection between Gotham and the outside world is broken, there is an attempt to connect both.



Figure 12. Bane blows up the bridges of Gotham, separating the city from the world.

The Dark Knight Rises (2012)

After the events of the *The Dark Knight*, the Dent Act has been approved, which has made it easier for the police to stop the criminals of Gotham. However, the general public believes Dent to be a hero, and not a murderer. This raises many questions when the lie is revealed by Bane, which drives the city into mayhem. Political questions are raised by Bane himself, as he wants to give “Gotham back to its people”. As some critics have pointed out (Žižek 4), Occupy Wall Street is an inspiration for how Bane takes over the established order. The events of the OWS movement were recent when this film came out, and it stated a clear disbelief in the system. Revolution is the reason why Bane does what it does, or sho it would seem at first. The ending of the film reveals Ra's Al Ghul's daughter to be the mastermind, making Bane's justification invalid. Following the parallels between OWS and the villain, it makes the reasoning behind a certain kind of political movement devoid of purpose. But the film also states that the actions concerning the Dent Act are not solid. There are no rights or wrongs in this idea. Policeman John Blake calls Gordon out on this, as he disapproves of this idea, stating: “Your hands look pretty filthy to me, commissioner.” He is a common inhabitant of Gotham, unaware of the real workings of the city. Blake is ultimately left to take care of

the role of Batman, a symbol of the true masters of Gotham, its people.

4.5 Gotham in *The Dark Knight Trilogy*: A Real City

Gotham in *The Dark Knight Trilogy* has the general feeling of a common metropolis. It serves as a mirror for the modern metropolis. Its spatial construction draws heavily from the modern idea of the city. It serves as a common place, a nameless place. The uniqueness of the setting, which earlier film adaptations of the character had, is gone in favour of a more “realistic” space. Actions are confined to a central point in the city. In the case of these three films, the sameness to other cities that the movies evoke are not just coincidence, as they have been filmed in a variety of locations and have used very different features from many cities all around the world. When using establishing shots that do not focus in certain places, the identification of the city is harder, making it nameless. Every time an establishing shot appears in the screen it is not hard to see why Gotham City is anonymous, every shot in every movie appears to be the same, no new buildings or places are discovered or presented. (Figure 13) Most of the establishing camerawork does not lend itself to nuance. However, the standard shots are very well thought, giving a fictional city a reality which is terrifying.



Figure 13. Establishing shots of the three movies. They do not change from one another much, depicting the same general city. *The Dark Knight Trilogy* (2005-2012)

Even though they do look alike, each of the three films show a different side of

Gotham. The first film describes more individual spaces than the second film does, in which these spaces are left off by a more anonymous setting. They were both shot in Chicago, and they look similar, but the second tackles more the familiarity of the city. The third more clearly resembles Manhattan, the long shot of the bridges blowing up shows the geography of this different city. In this last case there is not much though given to new vies of the city, but it wraps up the ideas concerning its inner workings and biggest conflicts. The use of realistic locations, but everchanging ones, gives the viewer the idea of a place that could exist anywhere. Skyscrapers make for an anonymous place, they belong to any setting. Since the city does not have a real spatial location in the fictional world, anonimity is even more obvious. A global setting has turned into local in the mind of the viewer: the sense of being at home in a non-existent place. Because Gotham, being a global city, makes the viewer forget about the country they are in. A global city in which everything is justified by itself. Gotham mostly exists in itself and has or receives very little consequence from the outside world.

Normality is what is scary and efective in Nolan's Batman: “The shift from the dark and brooding Gotham to the banal city has disconcerted the classical good and evil binary” (Mak 6). The impact of the movies' environment is key to understand the underlying claims on the possession of a city, between bad and good people. The ending of the trilogy signifies the end of this binary idea that has been questioned for the whole series. Gotham is not destroyed in the ending, and the inhabitants are ultimately the ones in charge of their destiny. In this last scene, the people of Gotham are left to decide on what will be of them. Even if the status quo of the city wanted to impose a certain idea of living in the city, it is in the end proven to be a temporary solution. As George Ballas states in “The Power of Knightmares”: “In the end, it’s always the ordinary people who suffer the consequences. Everything built on lies collapses with the return of the truth”. This becomes true in the ending of the trilogy: where buildings and lies fall, giving a new beginning to a familiar and real city.

5 Conclusion

This text has examined the representation of space in Gotham City, the setting to Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight Trilogy*. This adaptation of Batman shows a very different feeling of space than most versions of the superhero, leaving behind the most fantastic elements and sticking to a realistic setting. Being aware of Batman's gigantic

history is key to comprehend why this film series' city is so relevant in the countless iterations of the character and his stories. Briefly stating the spatial significance of Gotham as a city and its different mirrors through time is essential to associate Nolan's Gotham to different versions of the setting. Gotham City serves as an imitation of modern cities and the times align perfectly with the film's elements. From the general spatial look of the setting, to the treatment of themes, there is a mirror to current global cities. Individual spaces, which are mostly brought from comics, are also interesting to analyze, although bigger questions arise in that sense. Although these films lead themselves to a big discussion concerning Gotham, this project has underlined the most relevant features on Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight Trilogy*: the relevance of these versions of Gotham City and their clear reflection on the concerns of the time are pertinent in this version of the city and its protector.

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