

“Spatial Rape”: Interleaving *House of Leaves* with *MyHouse.pk3*

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Abstract

On March 3rd, 2023, a forum user by the nickname of Veddge posted a custom-made map of *Doom II: Hell on Earth* (id Software/Nighttime Studios [1994] 2024) in a DoomWorld thread named “*MyHouse.wad*” (Veddge 2023). In it, “Steve Nelson” tells the tragic story of “Thomas,” his friend, who has taken his own life, and how he has found an old floppy-disk containing a recreation of his friends’ parents’ house in Doom. After porting the .wad file to GZDoom, it has been released to the wider community as *myhouse.pk3*. Deceptively advertised as “1 map: Not much of a challenge and roughly 10 minutes of play time,” it is in fact a deviously extensive, intricately modelled map designed to play tricks on the senses, utilising many UDMF features to hide the operations of the map and thereby disorient the player. The documentation of the creative process in the map’s Google Drive folder (veddge1987), including its typographical choices, as well as an in-game labyrinth, an endless staircase and a reference to “Navidson Realty” all serve to brand *MyHouse* as an homage to Mark Z. Danielewski’s *House of Leaves* (Zampanò 2000). This paper takes this intertextual reference as its departure point and asserts that Veddge has not simply been inspired by the novel, but that the entirety of the map’s presentation and its spatial poetics are fundamentally homologous to that of book.

I therefore propose to read *MyHouse* through a comparative media analytical perspective, identifying the techniques of “spatial rape” (Navidson quoted in Zampanò 2000, 55) the map uses to systematically confound players and exercise its machinic agency over them. Taking Henry Jenkins’ claim that game design can be read as narrative architecture (2004) to its logical conclusion, I argue that the spatial configuration of *MyHouse* is segmented strategically to recreate the experience of narrative space as reported within the novel. Although the edifice that was the basis of the map exists in real life, the adaptation of it into *Doom II* is “a reductive operation leading to a representation of space that is not in itself spatial, but symbolic and rule-based,” and as such, a “figurative [comment] on the ultimate impossibility of representing real space” (Aarseth 2007, 45-47) – let alone fictional space. Likewise, in the novel, “it is suggested that the space in the *house* always alters itself according to

the psychological state of the character who occupies it" (Farmasi 2023, 115), which points towards an implied cybernetic feedback loop within the text.

Both the novel and the map "challenge traditional concepts of mazes by creating liminal spaces that seem to reproduce physical spaces but in fact incorporate ever-changing, unmappable features" (Fernández-Vara 2007, 75). Due to the presence of Greek mythology, particularly the labyrinth and the **Minotaur** in the original text, "a parallel is drawn between the [textual] monster and the narrative space of the novel" (Farmasi 2023, 113). The rearranging of the spaces of the **house** allows for a cybertextual reading that was sensitively performed by several scholars (Hayles 2002; Kuhn 2018, 179-227; Rubenfire 2020; Wolf 2002), with many leaning on Aarseth's concept of ergodic literature (1997) to make sense of the interpretative efforts required for felicitous readings of the text. Most importantly, I would like to draw attention to Caracciolo's exhortation to read *House of Leaves* through the lens of video games: "the horror of endless corridors experienced by the protagonist also evokes the distinctive aesthetics of first-person shooters [like] Doom. The maze-like hallways are perhaps the most memorable location of close-quarters combat in Doom" (2023, 676). How fitting that the literary should emerge anew in its ludic reincarnation!

In my intermedial analysis (Fuchs and Thoss, eds. 2019, Neitzel 2015, Thon 2016), I focus on how **myhouse.pk3** behaves in the precise manner outlined in Zampanò's description of the Navidson home movie. The reader takes on a more configurative role compared to the implied reader of traditional realist fiction, since "readers are expected not only to imagine but to enact Johnny's experience. Moreover, readers are also expected to creatively participate" (Farmasi 2023, 115) for cognitively mapping scenes. Fortunately, the behind-the-scenes workings of the map are well-documented (Power Pak 2023). The map itself plays with a.) differing interior/exterior representations of space, b.) disorientation through the abstraction of navigational landmarks, c.) and the "devious and dialectical" "spatial discontinuities" of postmodern space, wherein "urban alienation is directly proportional to the mental unmapability" of cognitively represented space (Jameson 1990, 353).

By breaking down how these techniques are applied to both text and game map, I also attempt to answer "the unanswered question of what is so unfathomable and so insurmountable in reality that it can only be represented as a fiction" (Bailes 2019, 25). I locate this in the interpersonal trauma of failing human relationships in the paratextual stories (Veddege's separation from his wife, the death of "Thomas Allord"), losses that are sublated in the making of **myhouse.pk3**. In particular, I indicate two instances of the irruption of the Real into the game's space. First, the QR code engraved on the tombstone that takes the player to an obituary of "Steve Nelson," the supposed creator of the map, which, if true, would imply a rather on-the-nose invocation of the death of the author as a trope. But a second, more succinct encapsulation of the unfathomableness of the Real is present in the endless spiral staircase, where falling into the void is tantamount to eternal suicide. Ultimately, these two figures of "death" are the cornerstones of the motivation behind the artistic achievement of **myhouse.pk3**. Interleaving the novel with the game therefore illuminates the latter's attempts to spatialise and render imaginable the irrepresentability of loss and lack.

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