

# The Place of the Marginalized: Witchers and Dwelling in *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt*

**Daniele Monaco**

Università degli studi di Perugia  
C.da Pantano, 6. Loreto Aprutino (PE) 65014, Italy  
[daniele.monaco@dottorandi.unipg.it](mailto:daniele.monaco@dottorandi.unipg.it)

## EXTENDED ABSTRACT

The engagement with gameworlds has increasingly been recognized as a profound existential experience (Gualeni and Vella 2020), offering players not only new avenues for self-representation but also complex relationships with the spaces they inhabit. Rather than functioning as neutral containers, gameworlds articulate modes of being, belonging, and exclusion that shape how players dwell within them. Scholars have shown how digital environments enable negotiations of identity, agency, and emplacement that challenge traditional conceptions of space and self (Aarseth and Günzel 2019). Building on this discourse, this paper applies a phenomenological framework of dwelling to *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* (CD Projekt Red 2015), examining how the figure of the witcher mediates the relationship between dwellers and place. I argue that the gameworld configures a mode of minority dwelling that cannot be reduced to representational politics or empathy-driven design but instead emerges from the ontological and socio-political structure of place itself.

Methodologically, this paper adopts a phenomenological analysis of gameworld structures, combining close reading of spatial design, narrative framing, and ludic affordances with a place-based hermeneutics informed by Casey, Heidegger, and Vella. This approach foregrounds how meaning emerges through the player's embodied engagement with the world rather than through representational content alone. Crucially, it enables an examination of how the witchers' condition is produced through the world's spatial, mechanical, and institutional configurations. By analyzing how Geralt's dwelling is shaped by geography, mechanics, and socio-political logics, the paper identifies the specific structures through which the gameworld positions witchers as minorities. In doing so, it shows how virtual places disclose existential conditions—precarity, liminality, conditional belonging—that exceed narrative intention and reveal minority dwelling as a mode of being-in-the-world

To conceptualize place as existential actor I draw on Edward Casey's notion that place is not a passive backdrop but an existential entity emerging through interaction (Casey 2009). Place is produced through lived experience, memory, and embodied presence, resonating with Heidegger's understanding of dwelling as the situated,

Proceedings of DiGRA 2026

© 2026 Authors & Digital Games Research Association DiGRA. Personal and educational classroom use of this paper is allowed, commercial use requires specific permission from the author.

world-constituting mode of human being (Heidegger 1993). Following Norberg-Schulz (1980), I employ the concept of *genius loci* to explain how geography, aesthetics, morals, history, institutions, and ways of dwelling converge to form the identity of a location. This framework allows virtual places to be analysed not as designed backdrops but as existential actors that shape and are shaped by the dweller.

This approach aligns with Vella's account of gameworlds as places of ludic dwelling, where the player's positionality emerges through the interplay of mechanics, narrative, and spatial configuration (Vella 2019). In *The Witcher 3*, Geralt's positionality as a witcher—neither fully inside nor outside the social order—structures the player's experience of place. The gameworld is not merely geographical but socio-political, shaped by histories, traditions, and power dynamics. Drawing on Agamben's notion of the "state of exception" (Agamben 2008), witchers occupy a liminal position: essential yet excluded, functional yet distrusted. This tension is central to the emergence of Geralt as part of a "minority".

Defining minority in this context requires shifting from representational to ontological and relational categories. A minority is not a group marked by fixed traits but a mode of being characterized by structural vulnerability, liminality, and misalignment with dominant forms of dwelling. This departs from approaches such as Nakamura's analyses of digital racialization (Nakamura 2008), Ruberg's work on queer play (Ruberg 2019), and the discourse on empathy games, all of which foreground representation, affect, or identification. My approach instead examines how the gameworld itself produces minority dwelling as an existential condition.

The contribution of this work lies in articulating minority dwelling as a conceptual tool for understanding how gameworlds produce modes of being that are structurally precarious, relationally unstable, and ontologically situated at the margins. This framework expands discussions of identity and representation by shifting attention from who is represented to how worlds configure positionality. It also offers a way to analyse liminal or ruined places—such as Kaer Morhen—not as narrative symbols but as existential structures that shape the player's mode of being-in-the-world.

Majkowski's reading of *The Witcher 3* as oscillating between epistemic disobedience and imperial nostalgia (Majkowski 2018) further clarifies this point. As he shows, Geralt's position is never fixed: the game alternately frames him as an outcast, a colonial agent, and a heroic protagonist, depending on context. This instability reveals that the witchers' marginality is not simply a narrative motif, but a structural condition embedded in the cultural politics of the gameworld. It is on this basis that witchers can be conceptualized as a minority—not in demographic terms, but through their shifting, precarious mode of dwelling within a world that both needs and excludes them.

This condition is embodied by the witchers and materialized in Kaer Morhen, their ancestral stronghold. Kaer Morhen is a place in ruins, a site of memory and loss, whose identity reflects the liminal status of its dwellers. It is simultaneously a home and a reminder of exclusion, a refuge and a monument to decline. Through Geralt, the

player participates in this mode of dwelling (Vella 2015), encountering the world from the margins rather than from a heroic center.

Beyond its narrative and aesthetic dimensions, *The Witcher 3* also provides concrete ludic situations through which minority dwelling becomes experientially accessible. Encounters such as Geralt's negotiations with village leaders, his interactions with non-human communities, or his confrontations with institutions that instrumentalize yet marginalize him reveal how the gameworld structures his positionality through mechanics of debt, obligation, and conditional hospitality. This dynamic becomes even more pronounced in *Blood and Wine*, where Geralt is granted ownership of *Corvo Bianco*. The possibility of acquiring and renovating a house introduces a counterpoint to his usual precarious emplacement: for the first time, the gameworld offers him a stable locus of belonging. Yet this stability is contingent, dependent on the exceptional hospitality of Toussaint rather than on any structural shift in how the world receives witchers. *Corvo Bianco* thus functions as a temporary suspension of minority dwelling, revealing what settled dwelling might look like while underscoring why it remains unattainable elsewhere.

Ultimately, *The Witcher 3* demonstrates how gameworlds interrogate dwelling, belonging, and identity within socio-political contexts (Soja 2010). By situating players within a world marked by exclusion and ambivalence, the game foregrounds the existential dimensions of place. I argue that the witchers' function as a minority lies not in their narrative role but in their mode of being-in-the-world, showing how virtual places can articulate forms of dwelling that resonate with real-world experiences of marginality.

## Keywords

Virtual dwelling, genius loci, marginalised identity, liminal space, identity and belonging

## REFERENCES

- Aarseth, Espen J., and Stephan Günzel, eds. 2019. *Ludotopia: Spaces, Places and Territories in Computer Games*. Media Studies, volume 63. Transcript Verlag.
- Agamben, Giorgio. 2008. *State of Exception*. Nachdr. Translated by Kevin Attel. University of Chicago Press.
- Casey, Edward S. 2009. *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World*. 2nd ed. Studies in Continental Thought. Indiana university press.
- CD Projekt Red. 2015. *The Witcher 3. Wild Hunt*. V. PC. Complete Edition. The Witcher. CD Projekt, released.
- Gualeni, Stefano, and Daniel Vella. 2020. *Virtual Existentialism: Meaning and Subjectivity in Virtual Worlds*. Palgrave Pivot. Palgrave Macmillan.

- Heidegger, Martin. 1993. *Basic Writings: From Being and Time (1927) to The Task of Thinking (1964)*. Rev. and Expanded ed. Edited by David Farrell Krell. HarperSanFrancisco.
- Majkowski, Tomasz Z. 2018. 'Geralt of Poland: The Witcher 3 Between Epistemic Disobedience and Imperial Nostalgia'. *Open Library of Humanities* 4 (1): 6. <https://doi.org/10.16995/olh.216>.
- Nakamura, Lisa. 2008. *Digitizing Race: Visual Cultures of the Internet*. Electronic Mediations 23. University of Minnesota Press.
- Norberg-Schulz, Christian. 1980. *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*. Rizzoli.
- Ruberg, Bo. 2019. *Video Games Have Always Been Queer*. Postmillennial Pop. New York University Press.
- Soja, Edward W. 2010. 'The City and Spatial Justice'. In *Justice et injustices spatiales*, edited by Bernard Bret, Philippe Gervais-Lambony, Claire Hancock, and Frédéric Landy. Presses universitaires de Paris Nanterre. <https://doi.org/10.4000/books.pupo.415>.
- Vella, Daniel. 2015. 'The Ludic Subject and the Ludic Self: Analyzing the 'I-in-the-Gameworld''. ITU Copenhagen.
- Vella, Daniel. 2019. 'There's No Place Like Home: Dwelling and Being at Home in Digital Games'. In *Ludotopia: Spaces, Places and Territories in Computer Games*, edited by Espen Aarseth and Stephan Günzel.