

NOT OF WOMAN BORN: MONSTROUS INTERFACES AND MONSTROSITY IN
VIDEO GAMES

By

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To Pete.

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Abstract of Dissertation Presented to the Graduate School
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Not of Woman Born combines an examination of the structure and genre of horror within video games to analyze how horror video games operate and the significance of those workings to video games and digital media, horror across media types, Gothic literature, and gender.

The majority of texts on games—like Espen Aarseth’s *Cybertext* and Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman’s *Rules of Play*—have focused on founding the overall methods by which games operate, either in terms of other media forms or solely within games and new media. *Not of Woman Born* focuses on the particularities of horror games to illustrate commonalities in video games, and to illustrate how certain conventions fail or can be subverted in order to produce particular effects. Running through the chapters is an awareness of games and their current placement as mass-conglomerated media, even as games repeatedly diverge into alternative projects like independent and political games and movements like the Serious Games Initiative and the Games for Health projects. *Not*

of Woman Born configures game and new media studies in such a way that gender studies and studies of Gothic literature expose the function of horror in/by video games, the relationship of gaming norms to that function, and the significance of horror games to typical and atypical video game playing and production—from the typical technological improvements leading to improved graphical realism to the atypical and more complex connection among technology, design, and production. Essentially, *Not of Woman Born* serves as a foil to the structuralist studies by studying abnormal play and design, including the relevance of atypical design and play to innovative design for positive or more equivocal gender representations and for larger possibilities in game design. The Gothic functions as a series of monstrous becomings, and it is within these becomings that this study operates—monstrosities made in the interface, the visual representations, the narratives, and in the technologies of horror games.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

“Who are the girls who fight without weapons around their lord? The dark ones always protect him, and the fair ones seek to destroy him.” *A game of chess*.

Mark Bryant, *Dictionary of Riddles*.

Introduction

Given the recent books on video games, in addition to the online journal *Game Studies* and the printed *Games and Culture* journal, video games are beginning to be recognized as electronic, artistic, and literary forms. *Not of Woman Born* studies video games as an amalgamation of their electronic and literary aspects by studying horror and the Gothic in games. In particular, *Not of Woman Born* studies the Gothic and horror as they transfer into gaming, within games that contain elements of the Gothic and horror in a form I refer to as the ludic Gothic. The Gothic and horror genres, as they operate in other media and as they transform into the ludic Gothic for gaming, follow exacting formulas of production and, in doing so, also manage to disrupt the formulaic nature of much of game design. Ludic Gothic games thus allow for both innovation in game design and for alternate representations of norms, values, and concepts.

Ludic Gothic games draw on conventions of the Gothic for their imagery and their narratives, as well as to subvert typical game narrative conventions, typical game controls, and the history of gaming development. This subversion is also an act of transgression. “The usual subject of Gothic fiction can be described as the transgression of the paternal metaphor;” Fred Botting argues, “Transgression, however, is not simply a

celebratory breaking of laws and taboos considered unjust or repressive, nor is it a straightforward libration from rules and conventions binding individuals within strict frameworks of duty or normative identity” (282). Botting continues to explain transgression in line with Foucault's concept of “play,” whereby transgression relies on the prior limit and then the limit subsequently relies on the possibility of a real transgression. Ludic Gothic games similarly utilize the limits already present in gaming and in the overall trajectory of game design and development to subvert those limits in order to present new possibilities, and new implications, for game design and development. This dissertation studies ludic Gothic games to show how they operate in terms of gaming and to show their significance.

Instead of approaching games from a meta-level that seeks to analyze the entire medium, this book studies the extremely popular genre of horror games to analyze how the games reaffirm certain values while subverting others to thus become ludic Gothic. Horror games rely heavily on gaming and narrative conventions—conventions which are established through genre divisions as well as player expectations and are formed through player experience with other media and other mediated experiences—to either use or refute those conventions. Because horror is one of the most popular gaming genres and because it is one of the least studied by academia, horror has the potential to disrupt both player and academic expectations in ways that are significant to game studies and to larger cultural conceptions.

Game studies, new media studies, and gender studies, like earlier studies of Gothic literature, all study the relationship of the structure of an individual work to the work itself and to larger issues of the media form or genre. Gender studies most often

emphasizes the presentation of the structure of the self, the other, and the system of selves and others as it relates to gender. Gothic literature studies more often addresses the highly conventional nature of individual texts in relation to the manner in which those texts present typical social and narrative structures while simultaneously disrupting those structures. *Not of Woman Born: Monstrous Interfaces and Monstrosity in Video Games* combines an examination of the structure and genre of horror video games to analyze how they operate with a study of the significance of those operations to video games and new media, horror across media types, Gothic literature, and gender.

The majority of critical studies of games have focused on founding the overall methods by which games operate, either in terms of other media forms or solely within games and new media. This study, by contrast, focuses on the particularities of horror games to illustrate commonalities in video games, and to illustrate how certain conventions fail or can be subverted for particular effects. Running through these chapters is an awareness of games and their current placement as mass-conglomerated media, even as games repeatedly diverge into alternative projects like independent and political games through organizations like the Learning and Serious Games Initiatives and Games for Health. This book configures game and new media studies, gender studies, and studies of Gothic literature in order to examine the function of horror in video games, the relationship of gaming norms to that function, and the significance of horror games to typical and atypical video game playing and production. Essentially, *Not of Woman Born* serves as a foil to studies of typical play and design by studying the abnormal play and design of horror games, including its relevance to innovative design for positive or more equivocal gender representations as well as for larger possibilities in

game design. For games, structure may refer to the immediately visible structures that the player is presented with, like the visual representations, spatial representations, the interface controls, and the game narrative. Gaming structures also include the programmatic code through which the game operates and paratextual elements like gaming communities and game booklets that often accompany or complement the games. The diversity of structures and structural elements in any given game—and their relationship to game genres, gaming as a medium, and the gaming industry—demand complex systems of analysis.

As game studies emerges as a new field, it requires both the analysis of its works and an analysis of the relationship of those works to existing fields of inquiry. While many scholars have examined the typical structuring of video games, such structures are often inverted or subverted in horror games. By examining the manner in which normative game-play structures and game-play itself is altered in horror games, this study shows how atypical structures and play both reaffirm certain video game norms and repudiate others. By analyzing horror games, which are more often found on console systems (as opposed to computers), this study addresses a doubly neglected area in game studies. Game studies most often addresses either adventure or more serious games than horror games, and game studies most often addresses games found on computers instead of consoles despite the greater popularity and use of console games. By addressing these doubly neglected games, this study also addresses the function of horror games and games in general as popular texts in the same vein as Jane Tompkins' study of sensational fiction, which showed that sensational fiction had been dismissed because of its popularity and its appearance of simplicity. Inverting that, Tompkins studied

sensational fiction for the manners in which it did and did not conform to seemingly simple formulas and the effect of conformance and nonconformance. Likewise, this study specifically aligns the hyper-structuralization of horror video games to the popular texts of Gothic literature—both of which often present seemingly normative narrative, character, and world structures in order to subvert elements within those structures and the structures themselves.

Horror games repeatedly subvert typical narrative and game-play structures, including altering the manner in which game space is presented and the way that the game interface is constructed and operates. By differing from the more typical game-play interface models, studies of horror games present a significant alternative to many studies of new media design and architecture. Further, horror games specifically counter the typical position of women in games by allowing for a greater percentage of women player-characters, non-player-characters, heroes, and monsters. Non-horror games allow for significantly fewer women and they only allow for significantly less powerful women. My study integrates these threads—video games, new media interface design, Gothic literature, and gender—to study game creation, presentation, and representation.

The Gothic

Any discussion of genre works risks formalizing and limiting it, instead of simply creating a loose definition for use in analysis. As Lawrence Alloway contends, "One of the dangers of genre theory is that the categories may be taken rigidly. When that happens they lose their descriptive usefulness and assume a normative function" (53). Genre divisions and their descriptive usefulness also pertain to games as a medium. Marie-Laure Ryan notes that Wittgenstein's arguments from *Philosophical Investigations* can be used to show that games as a medium have a complicated network of similarities

and details, which sometimes overlap and sometimes do not. From Ryan's perspective, Wittgenstein argues that particular forms are best characterized by "family resemblance" because they overlap and criss-cross without forming an exact structure (177).

Consequently, video game genres, like larger media structures, are constituted by systems of family resemblances that are cannot be strictly delimited. Ryan further states, "What constitutes a family, however, is not resemblance but kinship relations. The set of games may be fuzzy, which means that there is no set of necessary and sufficient conditions for an activity to be covered by the word game" (177). While Ryan is addressing how to classify games as a general category, the same 'kinship relations' apply to game genres. The individual games may or may not share specific resemblances with each other, but they will share kinship relations in terms of their formal and functional elements. As genres, the Gothic and horror genres share many family traits as they exist in other media, and it is with those traits that many horror games operate. However, while the Gothic has often been described as changing from text to text and from one media form to another, the Gothic is often more strictly defined than can be most productive for game studies.¹ Given the stricter definition, I use the term ludic Gothic to refer to games that may be generically classes as horror or Gothic, but which specifically thwart gaming conventions in significant manners.

Gothic literature has long been connected to periods of change, both technological and social. In its early form, Gothic literature relied on hyper-structuralization in order to

¹ For more on the conventions of the Gothic, see Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions* (New York: Methuen, 1980); David Punter and Glennis Byron, *The Gothic* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004); David Punter, *Gothic Pathologies: the Text, the Body and the Law* (New York: St. Martin's, 1998); Glennis Byron and David Punter, eds., *Spectral Readings: Towards a Gothic Geography* (New York: St. Martin's, 1999); and E.J. Clery and Robert Miles, eds., *Gothic Documents: A Sourcebook, 1700-1820* (New York: St. Martin's, 2000).

then subvert or question those structures. In doing so, it became, as Mark Edmundson notes, “the literature of revolution” (*Nightmare on Main Street* 17), which nevertheless is also often extremely popular. This popularity has often been used as a reason to dismiss the Gothic for, as Jane Tompkins notes of the closely related form of sensational fiction, “The popularity of novels by women has been held against them almost as much as their preoccupation with ‘trivial’ feminine concerns” (xiv). Just as the popularity of sensational fiction has often been held against it, it has also been held against the Gothic. In being dismissed by virtue of their popularity, both the Gothic and sensational fiction are often refused critical acknowledgement. “The problem with the notion that a classic work transcends the limitations of its age,” Tompkins remarks, “and appeals to critics and readers across the centuries is that one discovers, upon investigation, that the grounds of critical approval are always shifting” (35). Video games that incorporate Gothic themes are often dismissed in the same manner as Gothic and sensational fiction. Games like *Resident Evil*, *Fatal Frame*, and, to a less extent, *Silent Hill*, are often critically lauded as games while simultaneously being dismissed as ridiculous horror games unworthy of narrative analysis because of their formulaic design and story structures. Tompkins again proves useful as she states:

In arguing for the positive value of stereotyped characters and sensational, formulaic plots, I have self-consciously reversed the negative judgments that critics have passed on these features of popular fiction by re-describing them from the perspective of an altered conception of what literature is. (xvii)

Similarly, I address ludic Gothic and horror games as significant in part because of their stereotypical design and visual representations and formulaic plots. The formulaic nature of ludic Gothic and horror games must be defined not as a rigid limiting dimension, but as a flexible yet fundamental factor in their full analysis. As game studies continues to

grow as a medium, analyses of formulaic game designs and plots are pivotal in illustrating both game formulas and structures but also in illustrating how typical structures and designs can be and are subverted for alternate effects and uses. By virtue of their extreme popularity, ludic Gothic and horror games are simultaneously influential for video game development, and vulnerable to dismissal by academic criticism.

The Gothic presents formulas that are not only structurally and narratively based, but also related to social, political, and technological change. As the literature of revolution, the Gothic acts as a subversive genre not just for classic literature, but also for later literary forms and other media forms that rely on the conventions of the Gothic. For instance, Allan Lloyd Smith notes that the Gothic excelled during industrialization by acting concurrently with social and political change. He argues that as such, the Gothic relies on a shift between technology and production, which links traditional Gothic works to cyberpunk (15). The Gothic thus relies on social, political, and technological structures and their interrelations. From those structures, the Gothic builds a subversive stance which remains intrinsically related to the structures it subverts. Similarly, Christoph Grunenberg states, “The ubiquity of the cultural phenomenon of the Gothic continues in the newest media: the computer games *Myst* or *Obsidian* explore the romantic and industrial Gothic respectively in animated, comic-style versions of fairy-tales” (208). While Grunenberg focuses more heavily on the artistic representation of the Gothic in video games, games are hybrid forms that blend visual representation, narrative, and interface designs into interactive texts.

Because games rely on these components, the Gothic often acts as an element of visual representation in games, the narrative, and the interface. Gaming interfaces are

often presented as mere extensions of the gamer, to be learned and acclimated. However many games, particularly horror games, use the interface as part of the overall gaming experience. For example, many action games have sequences where the game controllers are set to “rumble” or vibrate to complement gaming activity. Unlike those complementary sequences, horror games often use the interface to contradict normal play. For instance, the *Resident Evil* series regularly uses the rumble functions on the game controllers to thump on alternating sides with alternating intensities in order to mimic a human heartbeat. This thumping is done to increase tension during game-play, but it has no corollary to onscreen shown activity. Similarly, *Eternal Darkness* uses an insanity factor when the player encounters too many enemies. The insanity factor causes the internal game representations to blur and slide and allow enemies that are not actually there to be displayed. Such insanity factors even affect the interface itself. These include messages stating that the game controller was unplugged, that all of the saved game information was being erased, and so forth. These uses of the gaming interface question the relationship of the gamer to the game, and of the gaming interface as a mediator in that relationship. The majority of games use the interface as a functional means of allowing for game play to occur. In contrast, ludic Gothic games often use the interface to subvert typical play and to challenge conceptions of game interface design and game design.

In addition to the Gothic subversion of typical interface design and visual representation, the Gothic strongly shapes gaming narratives. The traits of the Gothic, as Anne Williams illustrates, include abduction, blood, caves, dreams, earthquakes, feeble-mindedness, gaming, harems, maskings, portraits, lost reputations, suicides, twins,

mad scientists, and demonic children (17). The majority of these features are present in any horror video game, as is the Gothic use of the family as history, which is portrayed in Gothic literature through the use of the family as a basic structure in both the narrative and the spatial design. In Gothic literature, this is often accomplished through the castle or haunted house in which the narrative takes place, with frequent remarks on the past inhabitants through decorations, paintings, and other elements. In ludic Gothic video games—which are most often set in haunted houses, castles, or science-fiction or cyberpunk Gothic settings like space ships and island-based laboratories—the same elements remain. The frequent use of books, paintings, pictures, vases, sculptures, and other elements populate the game world to show that it is already inhabited by the past, and the specifically past as a patriarchal structure. In doing so, ludic Gothic video games both present the family and undermine it. Anne Williams cites the same behavior in Gothic fiction:

The first of these has to do with Mark Turner's analysis of “family” as a privileged or “basic conceptual metaphor.” [. . .] Elsewhere Lakoff and Turner (and others) emphasize that metaphors are not verbal ornaments (mere “flowers of fancy”) but patterns fundamental to thought.[. . .] Turner demonstrates that “family” is a source domain both basic to cognition and particularly privileged in Western culture. To think about any subject, we are likely to use metaphors of kinship, so that our thinking about the subject is inevitably shaped by what we assume is and should be. (87-8)

In relating the Gothic to typical conceptions of family, the Gothic story unsettles typical narratives and has the ability to disrupt notions held in conjunction with the story—like the male dominance in video game narratives disrupted to open a space for equal female characters. The disruption of patriarchal systems in Gothic narratives in the past has served to create, as Williams explains the female Gothic plot. Williams contends that these plots are constructive and empowering for female readers because they value

female thought-processes, “not only affirm the possibilities of ‘feminine’ strength; they also sketch in the outlines of a female self that is more than the ‘other’ as purely archetypal or stereotypical” (138). The Female Gothic Plot carries through diverse media forms including film and video games with a significantly higher proportion of women primary characters in horror video games than in non-horror games. For film, the Gothic as a subversive genre relating to women can perhaps best be seen with the *Alien* films.

Horror Films

Since the 1970s, horror films have largely transitioned from their portrayal of single-minded violence towards women to valorizing women with what Carol Clover has termed the final girl: “The image of the distressed female most likely to linger in memory is the image of the one who did not die: the survivor, or Final Girl” (35). Clover’s study reveals that, from 1974 on, the survivor figure in horror films has been female. While Clover’s entire book examines the complexity of gender and horror films, horror video games confirm the trend in horror films of empowering female characters. Horror video games are not yet completely aligned with film, as to have a Final Girl in horror, but horror games do present significantly more female characters than any other gaming genre with the exception of “pink games” or games targeted only at female players. By allowing for a higher percentage of female player-characters, horror games subvert typical game narratives and gaming conventions in line with the Gothic.

Horror films, like horror in other media, function through the crossing of borders. While horror films operate by presenting the narrative transgression and reaffirmation of borders, they often present only the transgression or dissolution of borders. Horror works also often present the transgression of borders in ways that transgress social norms. The *Alien* films in particular critique capitalism and patriarchy within a gothic-science-fiction

setting. Even in more typical horror films, horror defines borders so that the borders can be crossed and then possibly reinforced. “Horror defines and redefines,” Gregory Waller argues and, in doing so, it “clarifies and obscures the relationship between the human and the monstrous, the normal and the aberrant, the sane and the mad, the natural and the supernatural, the conscious and unconscious, the daydream and the nightmare” (12). In exploring these borders and in constantly defining and redefining them, horror can be both remarkably formulaic and traditional and also remarkably subversive in its redefinition of borders and in its border crossing. Similarly, Tony Williams notes that the family is often a locus of horror as it is in Gothic works, “Major works of family horror explore the social contradictions of dysfunctional families forced into rigid patterns by the dominant ideology producing victims and victimizers. Family horror films sometimes implicitly protest against this system” (*Hearths* 270). Because the family often stands as a microcosm of society, with social hierarchies and economic functions replicated within the family unit, questioning the family structure has repercussions for all other social systems. In this regard, Williams also catalogues the importance of horror films to larger social critiques, especially in relation to their marginalized position as horror works. In particular, Williams studies the relationship of George Romero’s films to social critique and to social critiques from horror comics.

EC Comics began as Educational Comics and quickly shifted to Entertaining Comics, which focused on horror and crime. In doing so, EC Comics gathered readers and media attention, eventually leading to the government’s intervention in the US and the Comics Code Authority regulations which sought to remove both the explicit gore as well as much of EC Comics social commentary. Like Romero’s horror films, Williams

shows that EC Comics' marginalized placement from their horror status allowed them to present broad social critiques, which continue to influence other horror media. Williams refers to this as the "gross out" factor:

These culturally marginalised productions also contained important allegorical messages within their versions of "gross-out." Both EC comics and Stephen King's writing put their respective audiences in touch with the "nightmare anxieties" of youth, which are often socially based. The youthful readers of EC comics certainly noticed the differences between perception of real-life injustices and the hysterical activities of the adult world. (*Cinema of George A. Romero* 115)

While American horror comics, particularly comics during the early age of the comics code, have been largely lost to the mainstream American public, their impact still reverberates through other media, particularly horror films and video games. The EC comics tradition is directly pertinent to horror games because the comics often embedded their social messages, often anti-discrimination and often pro-female empowerment, within graphic decapitations, zombies, and witches. In doing so, EC comics were able to pass as mainstream fodder while also presenting strong messages. Horror video games, like sensational and Gothic fiction, act in the same manner, making the connections among Gothic fiction, horror films, horror comics, and horror video games quite strong. Additionally, many horror games have been inspired by Romero's film-making, as well as the Giallo Films or Italian Horror Films from the 1970s, horror comics as in the EC comics tradition, as well as horror manga. The films and comics have frequently used narrative conventions from Gothic and other horror fiction. In turn, horror games have relied on the narrative traditions from Gothic fiction as well as horror films and comics. In addition, horror games have drawn on horror films and comics for visual representation styles, as well as relying on sound conventions from film.

Ludic Gothic and Horror Games

Ludic Gothic and horror games operate within both a rich tradition of horror media and the technical limitations of computer gaming. While those limitations have relaxed with increases in technology, the majority of ludic Gothic games still bear a trace of those limitations. For instance, the first *Silent Hill* used fog to limit the visual scope of the game world so that the first PlayStation could run the game. The fog allowed the game to run without having to process all of the surrounding graphics, which would have otherwise exceeded the PlayStation's processing abilities. Similarly, the *Resident Evil* series have relied on closely confined spaces to limit the visual scope and the number of items user's avatars can carry. Later ludic Gothic games have followed these horror gaming conventions even when these conventions are no longer necessary from a technological standpoint given the increases in processing power. Many of these conventions alter typical game-play and gaming conventions for significant effects. In addition, ludic Gothic games rely on traditional stylistic horror visual elements, including dark landscapes, confined spaces which are then further confined through the use of specific camera angles, dark castles and Gothic mansions, and—as in all Gothic works—elaborate indications of the past of the place with photographs, paintings, old furniture, books, journals, videos, and, eventually, corpses and ghosts. The heavily historicized and personalized worlds in horror games also lend themselves to a fuller presentation of monsters or enemies, which Chapter 2 addresses in detail. Speaking to the designation of horror, Vivian Sobchack notes, “In the SF [science fiction] film, the Creature is less personalized, has less of an interior presence than does the Monster in the horror film” (32). Sobchack goes on to explain that the viewer's sympathy is never elicited by the SF creature because it always remains a thing, while the monster becomes personalized and

humanized in some ways. The difference between SF and horror monsters is thus not the setting, but the presentation, as with SF films that have personalized monsters like the *Alien* films, with its final film focusing on the child of Ripley and the Alien Queen. Similarly, games like *System Shock 2* are set in SF worlds, but their monsters are intensively described and humanized, making the game exist within the borders of SF, action, and horror genres. The function and presentation of the Monster in horror games are thus defining attributes of horror games, as well as helping to define the manner in which games present and use enemies for particular—and often socially significant—effects. Like the monster, visual conventions of horror also include an emphasis on doubles and doubling, as explored in Chapter 3. In video games, horror games in particular firmly embrace the convention of doubles and doubling for characters, spaces, replay, and for game serialization.

Many ludic Gothic and horror games also utilize static points of view through fixed and primarily high and closely confined camera angles. These angles present the player as trapped within the screen and prevent the player from being able to view all aspects within even the plane the player is in, increasing the horror effects and making the games more difficult. In addition to their origins in horror and thriller cinema, these camera angles originated in technological limitations, as do many of the innovations in horror games and in gaming in general. In this case, because of the level of control required to maintain the appearance of three dimensions, horror games relied on highly controlled cameras and highly divided spaces to make two-dimensional game spaces appear and act as though they were three dimensional spaces. The separate game space units were then sutured together through doors, black fades, or other cinematic techniques. These were

used in conjunction with cinematic sound techniques—including drawing on horror films for atypical sound use such as the use of ambient sound from the game environment instead of an over-arching soundtrack as is used in most games. Chapter 5 studies the use of sound and visual representation in the game space and in game design in general.

Ludic Gothic games are also heavily defined by their relationship to the gaming interface. While this concern runs throughout the chapters, Chapter 7 in particular covers the significance of gaming platforms—in addition to gaming interfaces—to horror games. In addition to their internal platforms and interfaces, horror games are especially significant for their use of media within the games. Ludic Gothic games often inherently exhibit media awareness through their incorporation of specific media forms to conjure historical times and the telepresent nature of media. For instance, *Resident Evil* orients game-play through a save and escape model which relies on a typewriter for saving; *Fatal Frame* relies on a camera for capturing spirits and saving game play; *Silent Hill* uses a radio whose growing static indicates the approach of monsters; and *Obscure* uses compact discs for saving game progress. Additionally, the games all include media sources that add to game-play by presenting riddles or the information needed to solve riddles. The fragments of language as they are embedded in particular media and as they relate to solving the mysteries of game-play also connect ludic Gothic games to their antecedents in Gothic fiction. As Anne Williams mentions, “In Gothic, fragments of language often serve ambiguously to further the plot—in letters (lost, stolen, buried); in mysterious warnings, prophecies, oaths, and curses; in lost wills and lost marriage lines” (67). The emphasis on language is often found in the game-play riddles, which typify the extreme codification and the subversive potential in horror games for, as Ruth E. Burke

argues, “In order to break the spell [. . .] the reader has to know the secret language of the adepts and be initiated into the society of those who understand the significance and the interpretation of the symbols” (15). In this way, language in ludic Gothic games as embedded in particular media serves as both a means for game-play and a metadiscourse on that play.

In ludic Gothic games, the actual media within the games provide both a metaphor for game-play and a path through game-play’s telepresent attributes. The emphasis on media forms for narrative and game-play also lends itself to a documentary stylization, as it does in science-fiction films. Sobchack remarks on this tendency: “The usual mode of ritual dialogue is, however, the television newscast and montage[. . .] In general, the newscast is used as an economical way of compressing information or expressing emotion” (191-2). While the use of television and newspapers for truncated communication appears in many film genres and video games, ludic Gothic video games rely on these for background information as well as for pivotal game-play information in a manner that informs other usages. Many real world based video games, particularly military simulation and combat games and political games, rely on documentary techniques. Far fewer other-world settings games use documentary techniques to even limited extents. However, horror games, with their often very other-worldly settings, do. The method of documentary stylization, from game-play segments to paratextual documentaries that are included with the games like the prison-setting documentary in *The Suffering* and the supplemental disc with *Wesker’s Report* for *Resident Evil* are analyzed in relation to the creation of reality and to documentaries in general in Chapter 6. The documentary stylization is especially pertinent because it highlights the manner in

which horror games, while they often operate in fantastic and other-worldly settings, still utilize and negotiate real world social and political issues. Gender and female empowerment are the most prominently addressed concerns of all of the social issues most frequently covered by ludic Gothic games.

Gender and Textuality

As is perhaps already apparent, horror presents many subversive possibilities that directly relate to gender. While horror films were once focused primarily on the domination of women, now women have come to dominate horror and ludic Gothic games. Similarly, Gothic fiction was once neglected because of its seemingly trivial concerns. Now, however, scholars like Jane Tompkins and Nina Auerbach have reclaimed Gothic fiction, replete with its subversive and empowering abilities. Digital texts have also been lauded as potentially empowering for their non-linear and non-patriarchal methods of data organization and access, a sort of digital *l'écriture féminine*.

On radical methods of writing, Ellen G. Friedman and Miriam Fuchs argue:

Although the woman in the text may be the particular woman writer, in the case of twentieth-century women experimental writers, the woman in the text is also an effect of the textual practice of breaking patriarchal fictional forms; the radical forms—nonlinear, nonhierarchical, and decentering—are, in themselves, a way of writing the feminine. (3-4)

While artists like Mary Flanagan and Shelley Jackson have explored these possibilities in educational gaming like the Josie True project and hypertext like *Patchwork Girl*, the possibility that mainstream video games may present the same empowering potential has been less studied. Chapter 4 addresses the radical positioning of women in horror games because, as Anne Williams argues, “the madwoman in the attic has awakened readers to possible affinities between women writers and a literature that specializes in fear and in monstrous domestic secrets” (10). The madwoman in the attic, a long-standing

convention of the Gothic, both reaffirms the position of the woman as connected to the house and home while showing the insanity and horror of that connection. Ludic Gothic video games, as they are often set in haunted houses or dwellings and with their high frequency of female characters, foreground the same questions of womanhood, domestic life, and monstrosity.

While many ludic Gothic games and horror films begin with women characters, this has not always been and may not always be the case. Just as the revisions and sequels often also alter the narratives and characterization in the earlier games, so they alter the overall framework in which the characters and the games themselves operate. Following these issues, Chapter 8 addresses sequels and the function of seriality and sequence in video games. In doing so, it studies revisionist techniques in gaming, often techniques where women characters are added. The complex framework within which video game sequels exist—where characters change in appearance, sound, background, actions, abilities, and contexts—is perhaps most akin to Donald Ault’s articulation of aspectual interconnection in which details localized to particular characters in William Blake’s texts may negotiate through the text into the text itself. Thus alternate versions of the text are useful in noting the structural complexity and fluidity of the characters and texts (*Narrative Unbound*). Aspectual interconnection aids in bringing seemingly disparate and disconnected elements from the games as they are sequenced, into relation. The serial nature of games (with remakes, patches, mods, and sequels), game interfaces, visual representation, narrative, and the relationship of games to other media and to social issues are all significant to game studies as a growing field.

Game Studies

Many of the current arguments on video games try to situate games within a larger metastructure of narrative, game (Aarseth's *Cybertext*; Wolf's *The Medium of the Video Game*), or visual representation. While these approaches can be useful for creating a vocabulary to discuss video games, these approaches often fail to move beyond the particulars of video games into those moments of complexity that open up discussion of the relationship of the player, the game space, and the game narrative. Taxonomizing and classifying moves were necessary at the infancy of game studies as a field. However, game studies is now slightly older and, because the computer presents extremely plastic and malleable forms, operating as a work environment for virtual word processing, as a portal to the web, as a means to experience virtual spaces, and more, such primitive taxonomization proves rather limiting. Like film studies in the 1960s, game studies has not yet found a place for itself, so games are currently being studied from various fields and with various methods and technical vocabularies.

Following, and often included with, previous arguments over game genre and terminology are arguments over the limits of game studies. While games have only relatively recently been studied from the perspectives of media, communications, English, film, sociology, history, computer science, and other disciplines, game studies, in many senses, is not a new field because sociologists like Johan Huizinga and Roger Callois have studied games and play, as have game historians like David Parlett. But the emphasis on games in their computerized and visual format as their own field is rather recent. Many current debates in game studies concern whether game studies (or games studies) should exist as its own specific field or whether it can exist in established disciplines without being overly subordinated. While these are important debates, game

studies is best served by interdisciplinary approaches that include studies of gaming histories. Resources for this sort of work include studies of board and card games like David Parlett's *The Oxford History of Board Games* and *The Oxford Guide to Card Games*; studies of play like Johan Huizinga's *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*; and existing media studies theories. In game studies, as with other fields, theories should be used as analytical tools. Further, game studies must learn from the fan communities as comics studies have been informed through fan communities. Because games are a massively popular form and because games are expensive commercial entities that have not yet being largely archived and documented except through fan communities, those fan communities can act both as a valuable resource for scholars studying games and as a means for scholars to discuss their work with larger audiences.

Game studies has many hurdles to overcome, including the traditional desires for texts to be closed and archivable, which are significant problems alone. Following those, game studies, like comics studies, is on the forefront of image usage and citation in academic studies and publishing. Game studies and comic studies both more frequently require significant image use for arguments than many other fields. While online journals have eased these concerns, the typical academic publishing systems that weighs paper-based publications more favorably presents a serious impediment to game studies. Gothic and horror games are an important genre for game studies because they simultaneously present and subvert typical game-play and typical game construction, as well as typical means of analysis. As Kelly Hurley suggests: "Gothic in particular has been theorized as an instrumental genre, reemerging cyclically, at periods of cultural stress, to negotiate the anxieties that accompany social and epistemological transformations and crises" (5). The

Gothic as part of popular ludic Gothic games, especially with their emphasis on embedded media, questions the relationship of the games to the technology, and subsequently of the players to the technology. In this movement, ludic Gothic games are also significant for the manner in which they present and theorize anxieties about technology and other social issues. The culture industry is most often studied for its destructive capacities because it, as Adorno notes, combines old and new and high and low art. In doing so, it creates “products which are tailored for consumption by masses, and which to a great extent determine the nature of that consumption, are manufactured more or less according to plan” (55). The Gothic and horror follow the exacting formulas of the culture industry and, in doing so, serve to disrupt the formulaic nature of much of game design. This allows for both innovation in game design and for the representation of alternate social values, concepts, and ideals. The Gothic, as Kelly Hurley notes, “In its obsession with abominations, the Gothic may be said to manifest a certain gleefulness at the prospect of a world in which no fixity remains, only an endless series of monstrous becomings” (28). It is within these becomings that this study operates—monstrosities made in the interface, in the visual representations, in the narratives, and in the technologies of horror games.

CHAPTER 2 ENEMIES, MONSTERS, AND THE OTHER IN VIDEO GAMES

Video games have been extensively studied for the player's relationship to the player-character and the function and structure of the player-character within the game by critics including Espen Aarseth's *Cybertext*; Lev Manovich's *The Language of New Media*; Andrew Rollings and Dave Morris' *Game Architecture and Design*; Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman's *Rules of Play*; Bob Rehak's "Playing at Being." These and other works address the overall structure of game-play or the place of the player-character or avatar in depth. But, by necessity of their wide-scope approach, they spend less time on the figure generally classed as enemy or opponent. In regard to enemy figures, Salen and Zimmerman note that conflict is an intrinsic part of narratively based games, but given their abstracted approach, they do not address the nature of conflict nor the fact that many video games show the conflict through battles with individual enemies (79). Similarly, Mark J.P. Wolf and Bernard Perron attempt to define video games without enemies, instead stating that video games are made of the fundamental elements, "an algorithm, player activity, interface, and graphics" ("Introduction" 14). Like these studies, the majority of scholarship on video games has focused on establishing a wider image or core theory for game studies. In order to do so, these theories must be abstracted and cannot include monsters or the Other because many games, like the quintessential examples of *Pong* and *Tetris*, do not have enemies or monsters.

While definitions that include conflict and player activity are necessary for game studies and abstracted analysis, heavily narrativized games like *Deus Ex* (2000), *Tenchu*:

Stealth Assassins (1998), the games in the *Final Fantasy*, *Resident Evil*, and *Fatal Frame* series, and many others require a nuanced approach to conflict because they function—for both game play and game narrative—through a fundamental relationship between the player-character and the enemy-monster-other figures. Because relatively little work has been done on the function and place of the opponent figures, it is beyond the scope of this article to present a comprehensive study. However, the function of the opponent—as opponent, enemy, monster, or another form of Other—relates specifically to the game play type, the game world type, and the game narrative, so these figures need to be addressed within the specifics of their game world, game narrative, and game play. For this, I focus specifically on monsters and the Other as enemies in horror games to illustrate the function, use, and significance of these figures as narrativized symbols of conflict that also affect game play.

In this chapter, I use the examples of the zombies in *Resident Evil* and the ghosts in *Fatal Frame* to show that enemies, monsters, and the Other are not synonymous with abstracted concepts of conflict or opponent. While video games are capable of presenting varied forms of opponents and enemies, in presenting monsters and monstrous Others, games must rely on the structure of monsters and the Other instead of relying on stereotypical game design. This is because, while stereotypical game design schemas operate effectively for enemies, they lack the ability to present and accommodate monsters and the Other because these fall outside of the simple role of enemy or opponent.

Conflict, Opponents, Enemies, and Monsters

While many video game enemies can easily be covered under Salen and Zimmerman's rubric of conflict—for instance, the game space itself as conflict and the

enemies as threats to controlling territory in games like *Civilization* and *Warcraft*—games that are heavily narratively driven more often have enemies that are characters and that cannot be covered under conflict alone. Even non-horrific games like those in *The Legend of Zelda*, *Metroid*, and *Sonic the Hedgehog* series use ‘dark’ enemies to further define their player-characters through the relationship of the player-characters to their enemies. As will be discussed in **Chapter 3**, these dark enemies are visually and characteristically mirrored or inverted versions of the primary characters—just as the duplication of siblings occurs in games—as with Shadow Sonic. In this way, many video game characters are defined as much by what or whom they fight as they are internally defined. The definitional aspect of the enemies as opponents serves to lay the framework for the game world as well as for much of the functioning for game play.

Video games design and play schemas often create monsters that are simply non-descript evil enemies, which exist as tropes for the Other and as tropes for conflict. Horror games like *System Shock 2* (1998), *Resident Evil* (1996, 1997, 1999, 2000, 2002), *Fatal Frame* (2002, 2003), and *Silent Hill* (2000) change these schemas by creating enemies that are actual characters, though they often are flawed or mutated characters. Horror games explore enemy character schemas more fully than many video games because horror games rely on the personalization and humanization of the enemy characters to make the game spaces more horrific. Because of this, the game narrative—through its depiction of enemies and monsters—directly relates to game play and the gaming experience. While some degree of additional time on the enemy characters is expected with horror games, many horror games like *Resident Evil* explore their monster-enemies as fully as they do their player-characters, which is odd even given the larger

enemy-development schemas for horror video games. *Resident Evil's* extended exploration of the enemies aids in making the enemies more than tropes for conflict or troped opponents.

Many video games present monsters as both the monster-as-Other and as actual monstrous beasts. Monsters in video games serve to both structure and disrupt the game structure through their abnormal workings. As Jeffrey Jerome Cohen notes, “a monster signifies something other than itself; it is always a displacement, always inhabits the gap between the time of upheaval that created it and the moment into which it is received, to be born again” (“Monster Culture” 4). Cohen continues on to argue that monsters are an attempt at embodying Otherness or the uncanny, “The monster is difference made flesh, come to dwell among us” (7). Similarly, Kathy Nuzum remarks, “any individual or group that can be marginalized or viewed as standing outside the norm may be monstrosized” (“The Monster’s Sacrifice” 208). As such, monsters cannot accurately be subsumed into larger classifications of conflict or opponent because they serve to disrupt the very classification systems that would seek to normalize them by placing them within those systems.

Because the vast majority of video games present enemies as simplistic beings to be fought against, horror games like *Resident Evil's* personification and exploration of enemy characters represents new avenues in game design, which changes the schemas for the enemies, for the structure of game play, and for the structure of the game world. *Resident Evil's* use of monsters is similar to the monsters in other horror games like *Fatal Frame*, and the daughter-as-monster in the first *Silent Hill*. In each of these games, monstrosity itself narratively and structurally embodies the fragmentation and dissolution

of boundaries between human and non-human, between good and evil, and between men and women. For instance, in *Resident Evil*, the enemies are depicted as monsters in the present time of the game. However, the game also represents the past when the monsters were human. In doing so, the lines between monster and human are blurred. The dissolution of boundaries through the player-character and enemy relationship also often parallels the changing game spaces which, in horror games, often evolve over time to be more horrific and more monstrous. By undermining boundaries, the monster serves to create its own space in which traditional cultural rules, and traditional rules of game play and game design, also change.

The Player-Character and Her Opponent(s)

Narratively based video games super-construct the self-other relationship.¹ In narrativized video games, the player is often constrained to using or manipulating only the player-character, and often the player can obtain only limited information on other characters aside from their appearances. With this, the player relationships are player-characters, non-player-characters (NPCs) who are helpful or sympathetic to the player-character, and enemies. In order to define the player and player-character relationship, video games attempt to clearly construct systems that predetermine who the player is and is not within the game. This is often done through the game visual representation during game play as well as through game book paratexts that describe the player-character, non-player-characters, and enemies. While these attempts to fix the relationship between

¹ By narratively based video games, I mean video games with intrinsic stories like *Resident Evil*; games like *Civilization* could also arguably qualify, but Tetris does not because it does not have an intrinsic story, just an intrinsic game. Narrative and non-narrative games are one of the larger discussions in game studies, and this chapter is by no means an attempt to separate games into narrative and non-narrative. Rather, this simply argues that many games have enemies, opponents, and monsters that cannot be sufficiently described under the rubric of 'conflict' or 'algorithm,' which are two of the terms chosen because they operate with equal validity for games and can avoid the problems of narrative or non-narrative games.

the player and player-character remain problematic,² they still lay the foundation for the abstracted tripartite game design and game play structure that includes player-character, non-player-character, and opponent. While useful, the level of abstraction required for this structure of characters (or potential characters) in games fails to allow for the complexity of opponents as enemies, monsters, and as Others.

Within the abstracted structure, players may play as more than one player-character, as with party system games like those in the *Final Fantasy* series where the player controls a group of characters, but the basic structure remains. Enemies may come in more than one form, but essentially, the player only experiences her own positionality in the world, which is that of the player-character. All of this structuring often leads to a fundamental collapse of the Other, the enemy, and the monster into one position within the game structure as the opponent. In these cases, the enemies and monsters are all non-descript others to the self-as-player-character. While this simplification can be useful for game play design—David Kusher notes the *Doom* (1993) designers chose to remove narrative elements and to make the enemies more generalized for faster paced game play (*Masters of Doom*)—this simplification also removes many possibilities in game narratives and game design.

Horror games, because of their need for monsters to define the horrific nature of the game space and game narrative, have more fully explored the possibilities offered with using fully developed enemies. This is because, in order to make the system more horrific, horror games undermine the fundamental structure in most video games—that of player-character, NPC, opponent—by making the monsters not clearly the opponents,

² For more on the tenuous relationship between the player and the player-character, see Bob Rehak's "Playing at Being" and Laurie N. Taylor's "When Seams Fall Apart," as well as the wealth of research on Lara Croft and her relationship to the player.

which leads to changes in game play. For instance, horror games often require players to flee from fights instead of constantly engaging in battle as in most games. The game play becomes not just that of opposition or conflict, but of conflict avoidance.

Other non-horror games—notably including the *Metroid* series with the player-character Samus Aran being defined largely by her relationship with the monsters called Metroids instead of by the game narrative—have explored enemies and monsters as more than simple opponent figures. Like the atypical *Metroid* games, horror games take advantage of this sort of atypical play by forcing the player-character into frequent and direct contact with the monsters. Subgenres of horror like survival horror games further complicate this by adding the ‘survival’ aspect, which forces the player through lack of ammunition to run frequently instead of fighting. In this process, survival horror games change the typical video game structure of ‘us against them’ to ‘us away from them.’ This makes the game space more horrific because the player is forced into proximity with the monsters, while having escape or avoidance as the primary goals. Additionally, video games also sometimes change the structure of PC, NPC, and opponent by portraying friendly or sympathetic characters as they become traitors and by showing the human side of some of the monsters. This process upsets the fundamental structure, allowing for further exploration of the structure itself and its functioning within the game narrative and game space. In doing so, it shows that changing the game play function of the opponent is inextricably linked to changing the narrative function of the monster, both of which change the overall structure of the game and the game play.

Monsters and Horror

In video games, as in film, the horror genre holds the monster as one of its most significant aspects, be it the monster proper or a monstrous Other. While comparisons of

genre—especially across media—are problematic, horror in all forms focuses on the monster. Horror video games, in turn, can utilize studies of horror in other forms while still noting differences as they occur in video games especially as those differences apply to the playable game space and game play itself. While the horror genre most often includes a monstrous Other, the monstrous Other need not actually be a monster in the typical werewolf, ghost, zombie sense, but can also be represented as an alien monster, monstrous humanity (often serial killers in 'realist' horror), as well as through the internal loss of control (as in *American McGee's Alice* where Alice fights herself). In “Reimagining the Gargoyle: Psychoanalytic Notes on *Alien*,” Greenberg discusses the anatomy of horror films and comments, “No matter how evocative the milieu, the monster film ultimately stands or falls on the believability of its inhuman protagonist” (89). Greenberg’s comment shows how monster films particularly, and horror films more generally, rely on the monstrous Other to form their settings and narratives.

Like horror films, horror video games also rely on the monster to construct game play, game space, and game narrative. Because video game conventions are so firmly defined through the player-character-against-opponent structure, video game player-characters and video game spaces are defined by their relation to the opponent. Horror games in particular rely on the opponent as monster to create the horrific game space. Many games are more 'classically' horror in that they are gothically stylized and focus on haunted houses, supernatural events, and fantastic settings that transgress one world and go into another dark world. *Eternal Darkness: Sanity's Requiem* (2002), *Fatal Frame* (2002), and *Silent Hill* all typify this sort of classic monster or monstrous world horror. However, the Gothic style is by no means inclusive of horror video games because games

like *System Shock 2* (1998) create horror in science fiction settings. *System Shock 2* is a particularly good example because nothing in it is supernatural. Instead, it offers science gone mad through the monster of the murderous artificially intelligent computer SHODAN. For the slippery divisions between horror and non-horror, Vivian Sobchack's remarks on the formulation of horror in relation to its monsters prove useful:

In the SF [science fiction] film, the Creature is less personalized, has less of an interior presence than does the Monster in the horror film... Our sympathy is never evoked by an SF Creature; it remains, always, a thing. Conversely, in the horror film there is always something sympathetic about the Monster, something which gives us - however briefly - a sense of seeing the world through his eyes, from his point of view. (32)

Sobchack's comments show that horror is not defined simply by the world theme; indeed, if it were, Lucas Arts humorous *Grim Fandango* (1998) could qualify as horror for its use of the dead and demons. Instead, horror is defined by the monsters that alter the structure of the world to make the world itself horrific. Other game genres similarly use the form of the monster to disrupt typical game design and game play.

Sobchack explains not only the manner in which horror is formed, but the significance of the monster in that formulation and the manners in which monsters are transgressive because they question the relationship of the human to the monster. For video games, personalized monsters pervade the entire game space because the games are played and structured with the player in direct opposition to the monster. As such, any discussion of the structure of the horror game must also include a discussion of the monster, a clause that either does not hold for other game genres, or does not hold in the same degree.

Because the monster and horror are intertwined, video games handle horror in similar ways to horror film in terms of setting and visual structure as scholars like Steven

Poole have argued (66-9). In "Hands-On Horror," Tanya Krzywinska remarks on this tendency and argues that horror video games present more intense horror experiences than horror film. She suggests that the video games create horror through a combination of cinematic effects and through the alteration between player control and loss of control (206-223). This loss of control stems both from the structure of the game and from the internal game elements. While Krzywinska's analysis operates specifically at the level of the horror genre and within the medium of video games, her notes on the visual display and its relation to game play for creating horrific effects are significant because they address both how video games draw upon cinema and how they remediate cinematic effects.

Because the horror genre is extremely structured in terms of narrative and opponent-enemy-monster formulation, it offers a base structure from which alteration and change in the individual game elements can emerge. Horror games, like horror films, fall into one of the most codified genres in their medium. Conventions of the video game horror genre often include constrained views; limited fighting ability, often through lack of weapons or an inability to fight back, as with the monsters in *Siren* (2004) that cannot be killed; horrific premises, that are often supernatural with ghosts, demons, and gates to hell; monsters or enemies that undermine the player-character's humanity as in *American McGee's Alice* (2000) in which Alice's fight for sanity and her killing the monsters is clearly her killing the unwell parts of herself; and altered realities, as with the two worlds of *Silent Hill*. Conventions of subgenres like survival horror genre are further constrained, and include limitations placed on game play to make the horror games more

horrific by making the games more difficult to play. However, one element that remains constant in horror and its subgenres is that of the enemy as monster.

Monstrous Focus in *Resident Evil* and *Fatal Frame*

The stark demarcations of elements within horror games allow for a clear analysis of the monster and how the monster operates in these games. In order to explain how horror games use and rely on monsters and monstrous Others for game play and game space creation, *Resident Evil's* use of zombies and *Fatal Frame's* use of ghosts and demons illustrate how the monstrous blurs distinctions and complicates game play and game readings. Zombies in video games often exist as simple examples of enemy-monsters, appearing in the *Castlevania* (action-adventure) games and the *House of the Dead* (arcade style) light gun shooter games. However, the *Resident Evil* games actually explore zombies as perversions of life and living. In order to produce zombies as fully defined creatures, rather than as generally horrific or monstrous creatures, the zombies are shown in direct contrast to their former living selves. The figure of the zombie is that of the dead returned, or the undead, and showing the undead without revealing their prior life negates the un-ness of the dead and makes them a fashion of monster instead of a specific monster type with the trappings of that particular figure. Many early horror-themed games, like *Castlevania* (1987) and *House of the Dead*, did not explore the figure of the zombie because they did not explore these creatures' existences prior to their zombie conversion, nor did they explore the human to zombie conversion that took place after the humans were infected.

On the other hand, the *Resident Evil* series, which falls within the subgenre of survival horror, aimed to create a horrific atmosphere and so showed the particularities of the zombie figure as a perversion of life in order to increase the horrific nature of game

experience. The exploration of the monster and the monstrous in the *Resident Evil* games directly serves game play and game design in the creation of a tense and horrific atmosphere. Other games do not rely on monsters for game play tension. For instance, horror and monsters are not explored in the *House of the Dead* games because they are light gun shooters and do not require narrative in the normal sense; likewise the exploration of monstrous characters outside of Dracula is not warranted within the *Castlevania* game series which combines role-playing and action adventure elements to focus on the story of Dracula and the Beaumont family that fights him.

The *Resident Evil* games begin by showing zombies as a tropological figure of the Other, the enemy, or the generalized monster. But as the internal game play of each *Resident Evil* game progresses and, as the series itself progressed, the games began to explore more fully the nature each zombie and of zombies in general. This progression includes having the main characters first fight seemingly non-humanized zombies in each game. But as each individual game progresses, the players read the notes and see the belongings of those who have since become zombies. Thus, the zombies in each game progresses from more generalized opponent figures to specific and often named persons who have become monsters. As the game series progresses, and the technology used in the games progresses with it, even more background is provided for the once-human monsters. The *Resident Evil* games even force the player-characters to kill their loved ones after they become zombies, or face dying. In doing so, the games create horrific game spaces by relying on the narrativized relationship and game play interaction between the player-character and the non-player-characters who become monsters.

In *Resident Evil - Code: Veronica-* (2000), the player occasionally plays through Steve Burnside, making him temporarily a player-character. At other times, he also exists as a non-player-character in the sense that he is not continuously playable and that his death does not constitute a losing, but a winning scenario at the game's end. While a playable character, Steve kills his father to protect Claire Redfield, one of the main player-characters. After befriending and trusting Steve, Claire is later forced to kill him after he becomes a zombie. The *Resident Evil* games present various situations like this, where player-characters or friendly non-player characters die or are treacherous and must be killed or fought. Perhaps the most significant examples of treachery are Albert Wesker, who betrays the main tactical team S.T.A.R.S. and directly causes almost all of the suffering and death in the games. To a much lesser degree, Barry Burton betrays Jill Valentine in the first *Resident Evil* order to protect his family from Albert Wesker. While these convolutions of friend and foe and the changing from human to zombie proliferate in the *Resident Evil* games, one example typifies the difference between *Resident Evil's* use of zombies and monsters and the other games' use of monsters. This example comes in the form of the child-woman named Lisa Trevor.

Lisa Trevor, who appears in *Resident Evil: 0* (2002), represents the most in-depth zombie created in any video game thus far. Lisa appears in the first *Resident Evil*. She is a child, whose father, George Trevor, inadvertently worked for Umbrella by acting as the architect for the Spenser Mansion. As a maniacal corporation, Umbrella management killed George and his wife. Lisa managed to escape immediate death, but was infected by the zombie-causing virus. Lisa grows into a zombie-creature with some memories. Before confronting Lisa, the player has a chance to read Lisa's journal, where Lisa writes

of missing her mother and being afraid. Slowly, Lisa's journal entries deteriorate in terms of grammar, punctuation, and spelling, until her last entry consists only of scratches on the page.

Resident Evil's use of journals to narrate the transition from human to zombie, with the gradual breakdown of language that occurs as the change progresses shows Lisa as both human and as a monster, along with the intermediate steps. When the player first meets Lisa, Lisa attacks and captures the player, saving the player to be eaten later. Most representations of zombies, including those in *Resident Evil* games, depict zombies as mindless, unthinking creatures. Lisa exhibits not only a past as a human, but a current ability to think that cannot rely only on past experience because an ordinary young girl would not know how to capture and constrain an adult. Later in the game, the player escapes Lisa by opening a coffin, and throwing it over a ledge, with the remains of Lisa's mother inside. Lisa jumps after her mother, yelling “mo..ther..” Lisa clearly has both memories and thought processes as a zombie, and she has the ability to care, as she does for her mother. While players could ignore the narrative elements that construct Lisa as a character, Lisa cannot be fought outright or physically. In order to defeat Lisa, players must read about her character to learn that Lisa would abandon food for her mother. The game narrative in this and many other instances is wedded to the game play—in this case, for defeating Lisa—and the game space, in this case for making the space more horrific based on the narrative.

By presenting Lisa first as a monster, and then as a monster with a past, Lisa is both associated with otherness from the start, while also moving towards humanness because of her past and because of her ability to remember and think, attributes that separate her

from other monsters. Lisa is always a monster in the exact present of the game, yet she also carries a trace of humanity with her. As such, Lisa is unlike monsters in most video games, and unlike those in a good deal of literature. As Ruth Waterhouse notes about female monsters:

Grendel's mother is a monster who, like Hyde, Frankenstein's wretch, and Dracula, kills, she differs strikingly from the women in the recent monster discourses because unlike Lucy, who in *Dracula* is drawn into Otherness only after her death, she is, together with Grendel, associated from the start with Otherness. (35)

Like Grendel's mother, Lisa is associated from the start with Otherness, but she is also associated with humanness from the start. Lisa is a monster who carries traces of human, thus narratively complicating any easy divisions or simplifications between human and monster. When Lisa follows her mother, the player is able to escape, but the player can never directly fight Lisa. To fight Lisa guarantees death because a single hit from Lisa kills and because Lisa is not even injured by the weapons available to the player. The player's inability to fight Lisa displaces the normal structure of monster/opponent equivalence because the opponent role in video games implies the ability to fight, at least at some point in the game. Because Lisa can never be fought, Lisa is also outside of the structure for normal opponents or conflict even though she can kill the player and thus end the game.

Lisa Trevor is certainly an extreme example, but she is an elaborated form of many of the zombies in *Resident Evil*, whose human pasts are shown in their photographs and journals. She is also an elaborated form of many of the creatures in horror games who cannot be fought, and so they cannot be easily classified as generic enemies. For the zombie-character backgrounds, *Resident Evil* even goes so far as to have the journals appear on the screen, while having the character who wrote them provide a voice-over

reading. This voice-over serves to bring the dead-as-alive back into the journal writing and to the moment in which the player reads the journal by making the writer's voice exist in the present. The combination of opponents that cannot be opponents because they cannot be fought and monsters that cannot be simply monsters because their humanness constantly re-intrudes upon the game leads to an overall breakdown of the clarity of game play. This breakdown leads the player to be aware of the need for running instead of fighting, for using items, or for fighting, instead of relying on the general schema to fight anything that can be fought, which would inevitably cause the player to lose many horror games.

In terms of game narrative, this also prevents the player from making any easy distinctions between friend and foe, because these change the game play. For instance, in *Resident Evil - Code: Veronica-*, the player as Claire Redfield must leave items for her brother Chris Redfield to use, or the game becomes incredibly difficult to play as Chris. The player cannot simply follow this logic and leave additional items for other characters, like Steve Burnside, because the player has to fight and kill Steve after he becomes a zombie. If the player had left items for Steve, the player would have inadvertently hindered her own game play in doing so. The lack of clear distinctions shows how horror games subvert norms to establish their own game play and genre through that subversion.

Like *Resident Evil's* penchant for zombies, the *Fatal Frame* games rely on ghostly monsters—most of whom appear to be ghosts and demons—to create horrific worlds. Unlike *Resident Evil*, where the zombies are generally non-descript people who may have been in service to the evil Umbrella corporation or who could have been innocent

bystanders, with the divisions coming through based on the journals and notes found, *Fatal Frame's* enemies are almost entirely evil in some way.

The *Fatal Frame* games are both set in small communities—the first, in a mansion home with the surrounding support systems buildings and the second, in a small village—whose residents have tried to sacrifice young women. In each of the games, the game narrative insinuates that the villagers are trapped in an undead state, not for the murder-sacrifices they committed, but for their failure in performing one of these ritualized murders. Given this premise, the townspeople are all portrayed as somewhat monstrous initially for their part in these rituals, but also as very human for being trapped in these cycles of death and fear. Because the townspeople did live in these places, the buildings, rooms, and gardens are filled with their journals, photographs, clothing, and day-to-day items like pots and pans. This abundance of material portrays the people, even with their horrendous acts, as humans and, even in their horrendous forms as ghosts, as extremely human. The game further confuses questions of good and evil and human and monstrous by making the sacrificed “innocents” also attack the player-characters. The game also muddles these distinctions by making the player-characters slowly become like the now-dead sacrificed women. This is evidenced Miku’s scars in the first *Fatal Frame* and by Mayo’s possession by the place and by one of the sacrificed in the second *Fatal Frame*.

By presenting *Fatal Frame's* mansion and townspeople not as normal video game non-player-characters—which is a norm that places them as either helpful or innocuous towards the player-characters—the townspeople populate a horrific place that has complicated moral determinants. The townspeople committed decidedly wrong acts by killing young girls; however, they were also forced to commit these acts by their

circumstances. This makes the townspeople's actions no less deplorable, but it does make the actors not overtly evil, where most video games have opponents that are evil actors and evil characters collapsed into one singular figure of the opponent for representational ease and clarity.

Similarly, the player-characters in each *Fatal Frame* game slowly become like the girls killed before them. Even as they do, the sacrificed girls continue to attack them. The “innocent” girls attacking the innocent player-characters and attempting to kill them blurs the lines between monster and human because the sacrificed girls are narratively the victims. The repetition of human characters who are not necessarily immoral and their immoral attacks on the player-character could indicate that they are just ghosts, and that as ghosts they act in evil ways, except for the fact that the second game has the ghost of a young boy who is good. By presenting him as a ghost from the same time and the same town, and yet allowing him to be good, the game erases the possibility for any clear moral divisions that could situate the ghosts as evil, thus allowing the townspeople to remain morally indeterminate as ghosts and humans. Instead, *Fatal Frame* works to blur the boundaries between good and evil, moral and immoral, and action and character. In doing so, a video game structure of player-character and opponent cannot sufficiently address the functioning of the characters in light of the game narratives.

Lisa, the less elaborate zombies in *Resident Evil*, and the monsters in *Fatal Frame* are not presented as simple enemy-monsters, but as complex creatures who have been formed through their human pasts and monstrous present. “Monsters are never created *ex nihilo*,” Cohen argues, but are instead created, “through a process of fragmentation and recombination in which elements are extracted ‘from various forms’ (including - indeed,

especially - marginalized social groups) and then assembled as the monster, ‘which can then claim an independent identity’” (“Monster Culture” 11). The majority of zombies in *Resident Evil* are either lower-level Umbrella employees or innocent bystanders. As such, they are most often portrayed as middle or working class people who have been trapped into their positions, and their eventual zombification, through their social standing. Like them, the ghosts in *Fatal Frame* are trapped in their towns and as ghosts because of the bizarre rituals required of them to keep the gates to Hell closed. Their humanness, including the social rules that bound and doomed them into their later monstrous forms, along with the monstrosity of the zombies and ghosts combine to create monsters that are more than the troped opponent or conflict schemas established in earlier games.

Monsters and the Other

In addition to the monster as a form of Other, some horror games clearly present creatures which are explicitly both monster and human, making them fundamentally Other and uncodifiable. With their full exploration of monsters as more than a simplistic form of opponents, the zombies in *Resident Evil* and the ghosts in *Fatal Frame* are unlike those in other video games. However, each of these enemies/monsters is still an alteration of the typical opponent structure. In addition to the opponent structure, are monstrous non-player-characters who cannot be fought, and are narratively constructed such that the player-character would not fight them. In this place, the narrative significance of the non-player-character still affects game play by creating a more horrific game space and more horrific game play that does not narratively end even with the winning of the game. An example of this comes from the player-character in *Silent Hill*, Harry, who is seeking his adopted daughter Cheryl who was lost in the town of Silent Hill after a car accident. Because the player-character goal for the game is a reunion with Cheryl, the game

requires that players follow narrative cues to learn more about Cheryl and more about her whereabouts.

In her discussion of survival horror structures, in “Play Dead: Genre and Affect in *Silent Hill* and *Planescape Torment*” Diane Carr notes that, “*Silent Hill*'s tight, maze structure fuels its ability to frighten its users” (para. 17). Carr continues on to note that *Silent Hill* uses monsters to change the town's structure from the safe regions of schools and hospitals to horrific spaces. In her notes, Carr does not definitively place the monsters as the flying and skittering non-human things or as Harry's daughter, but Harry's daughter could be the most monstrous of all.

As the game progresses, the player learns that Cheryl was not formally adopted, but found. Also as the game progresses, Harry learns that Cheryl was not born and is not a singular entity. Instead, Cheryl is one part of two children who form a demon, or the anti-Christ (the game is a bit unclear as to the exact name or place of the creature, but it is fairly clear that the creature is a demon who can end all existence). Harry's relationship begins with Harry as a father to Cheryl, which is certainly a self-other relationship in the psychoanalytic sense. Then Harry learns that Cheryl is a monster, making the relationship a self-other in the human-monstrous sense. Subsequently, Harry must deal with the fact that Cheryl is not even one monster, but part of one monster. She is thus not human and not monster; she is also his daughter and not his daughter. Cheryl is in some ways defined by what she is not, but by the end of the game, she cannot be defined by what she is. In this way, Cheryl becomes wholly Other because she cannot be included in any structure—she exists outside of all. As Cohen remarks, Cheryl and other monsters are disruptions because of their abnormal existences where they refuse “to participate in the

classificatory 'order of things'" and act as, "disturbing hybrids whose externally incoherent bodies resist attempts to include them in any systematic structuration. And so the monster is dangerous, a form suspended between forms that threatens to smash distinctions" ("Monster Culture" 6). Harry similarly occupies an odd place as player-character because of his relationship as father to Cheryl as monster.

With Harry's entire driving motivation in *Silent Hill* his desire to save his daughter, Harry's existence is bound to his relationship to Cheryl. Cheryl's otherness pushes the town of Silent Hill from a typical town to being a town that is sometimes earthly, and sometimes part of a demonic or hellish plane of existence. Neither of these spaces can accommodate Cheryl because she is neither monster nor human; she is part monster, but not even a full being. The physical changing game space of the town of Silent Hill is thus directly related to the game narrative and Cheryl. While Cheryl is a non-player-character, Lisa is a monster, and Steve is both a player-character and an opponent-monster, the narrativization of each of these characters as fully being Other characters affects the feel of the game space as well as the method of game play.

Conclusion

Video games may present enemies, monsters, and the Other who are more than just troped figures for conflict. In doing so, they allow for new directions in game design and game narrative because they include a figure that complicates traditional game design boundaries as well as traditional narrative boundaries. Additionally, the figure of the monster complicates the overall structure of the game by breaking and crossing existing boundaries that serve to create that structure. Cohen remarks on how monsters change structures noting, "The monster haunts; it does not simply bring past and present together, but destroys the boundary that demanded their twinned foreclosure" ("Preface"

ix-x). Cohen also remarks that, “Monstrosity challenges a coherent or totalizing concept of history” (“Preface” x). Cohen's remark on monsters and borders, and monsters and history directly relate to monsters in video games because monsters in video games serve to transgress and alter boundaries both for game narratives and for game design.

The history of the monstrous creatures before becoming monstrous also serves to present multiple narrative possibilities for the game space and for the game narrative, each of which tie to game design because of the influence of narrative on game play. As the monster disrupts the systems in which it exists, it also metaphorically points outside of itself. Basic opponents exist as tropes and generally do not have internal representation so they cannot act metaphorically in relation to something outside of themselves, but non-trope, or fully formed enemies and monsters can. This full formation of opponent-enemy-monster allows for the critique of consumerism in both Romero's *Dawn of the Dead* and the critique of humanity in *System Shock 2* and *Resident Evil*. As Constance Penley suggests about horror film:

George Romero's *Dawn of the Dead* is more than a kitsch ambience, it is a way of concretely demonstrating the zombification of consumer culture. By exposing every corner of the mall - stores, escalators, public walkways, basement, roof - the location becomes more saturated with meaning. (71)

Similarly, *Resident Evil* uses zombies to critique the general video game structures—video game structures that I have previously noted enforce capitalistic systems of points for kills and for exploration (“Working the System”). Instead, *Resident Evil* offers extras only for beating the game quickly, which necessitates running and not fighting and not exploring.

The zombies and ghosts in horror games critique video game structures that offer trope and unformed opponents who have no internal characteristics by offering

opponents whose humanity is imbued in the artifacts of their lives within the game space. Horror games also offer a critique to the types of game play that these general structures give rise to in relation to monsters and enemies because, while many games operate as 'hack and slash' or the ambivalent killing for progress, horror games often instead make players question every bullet or attack by restricting ammunition. The critiques are often presented in kitschy and overly contrived Gothic stylings—like Romero's *Dead* series and the 1970's Italian horror films, known as Giallo, from which the games draw stylistic and thematic elements. While the presentation of horror games often leads them to be dismissed as a result of poor game design or poor game narrative, horror games like *Resident Evil*, *Silent Hill*, and *Fatal Frame* present alternate options for game design by fully incorporating the monster into their game structures. In doing so, the overly contrived structures, game play, and themes serve to create boundaries that the monster blurs and dissolves.

CHAPTER 3
FRACTURED IDENTITIES: SIBLINGS AND DOPPELGANGERS IN VIDEO
GAMES

As a new media form, video games are inextricably bound by their technological limitations.¹ These include limitations in terms of processing power and in terms of code space on early cartridge and CD-based games. The limitations for game design have decreased dramatically as the processing power of the game stations and the run-of-the-mill personal computer have increased along with the data capacity for individual games. However, the prior limitations led to certain approaches to game construction that became tropes of game design that remain in use. Those former technologically based limitations that have become tropes often rely on the doubled use of code to mirror certain parts of the screen or parts of the game world, parts of the game narrative, and particular game characters or aspects of the characters. Using examples from several video games and particularly games from the *Resident Evil* and *Fatal Frame* series, this chapter demonstrates the manner in which character mirroring or doubling functions in games. In particular, I argue that the mirrored characters parallel the structure of folk and fairy tales in their subversive potential. By studying popular video games in connection with folk and fairy tales, this chapter illustrates the potential of popular, mainstream video games to present subversive and empowering narratives to their players.

¹ An earlier version of this chapter appears as "Fractured Identities: Siblings and Doubles in Video Games," in *Reconstruction: Studies in Contemporary Culture* 5.2 (Spring 2005).

In literature, the figure of the double takes many forms. As Albert Guerard notes, “The word *double* is embarrassingly vague, as used in literary criticism. It need not imply autoscopic hallucination or even close physical resemblance” (3). In video games, which are bound by technological limitations, the double emerges in a very distinct manner both within game-play and within gaming narratives. In a single-character and thus seemingly simpler example, many critics have attempted to frame *Tomb Raider*’s Lara Croft within Laura Mulvey’s theories of voyeurism in film. However, as Helen W. Kennedy rightly argues in “Lara Croft: Feminist Icon or Cyberbimbo?: On the Limits of Textual Analysis,” Lara Croft cannot be easily accommodated into the voyeuristic gaze because Lara is both the object of the gaze and the acting heroine within the game. Lara Croft manages to complicate any attempt to simplify her relationship to the player or the game because of the importance of game-play. While Lara Croft offers a comparatively simple example because she is one character, many video games double and multiply single characters into multiple player-character choices, and may then even double those player-characters into their own enemies.

Studies on doubling and identification in games have more often used psychoanalysis to focus on the doubling of the player in relation to the player-character. However, doubling and mirroring in video games also occurs at the level of game-play, with the player doubling the player-character, and within the game structure as the characters themselves are doubled and multiplied. The doubling and multiplication within the game structure is directly tied to the game’s technological requirements that demand the mirroring of code for conservation of space. For instance, the first *Metroid* presented mirrored game areas so that the game could appear more expansive while utilizing the

same code. However, because technological mirroring proves necessary, many games incorporate that mirroring into the game narratives to make the games' narratives operate within the structural confines of that mirroring. Thus, many games have structural and spatial, as well as narratively mirrored characters. Because of the partly technology-derived mirroring of narratives and characters, and their subsequent multiplication, video games often focus on sibling rather than romantic relationships.

The shift from romantic to sibling relationships not only changes the space in which the games are played, but also the overall movement and shape of the game narratives. In doing so, many video game stories present radical departures from traditional romantic storytelling conventions specifically because they adhere to game design conventions and constraints. While many games also follow more conventional romantic storylines, these are often portrayed in conjunction with sibling storylines. While psychologically-motivated romantic structures occur more frequently in game narratives, as video games develop and more mature-rated and adult-themed games are released, the sibling structures dominating earlier game narratives still remains in use in many current and upcoming games.

Because of their prevalent use of sibling structures, video games connect to a long tradition of fairy and folk tales. Further, folk and fairy tales highlight the subversive and radical possibilities in video games, whereby video games can subvert traditional narrative and typical game-play conventions.² Bruno Bettelheim notes in his study of

² Typical game-play conventions tend to focus on acquisition and progression while less typical games tend to focus on exploration and use. By focusing on acquisition and progression, many games emulate an exchange model where game-play is rewarded by virtual goods or spaces. For more on game-play dynamics and their relationship to an exchange model, see Laurie N. Taylor, "Working the System: Economic Models for Video Game Narrative and Play," *Works and Days* 2: 43-44 (2004): 143-153.

fairy tales *The Uses of Enchantment* that two siblings are often used in fairy tales, often as brother and sister, to represent two different types or different aspects of the same person. This structure has continued and evolved through comics, animation, and video games. One modern day example of this structure comes from Donald Duck's nephews, Huey, Dewey, and Louie who act as a unit in terms of actions and speech—they are parts of one person divided into three. In video games, this occurs frequently with one sibling representing greater skill in one area or more fully embodying a certain concept. For instance, one game player-character is stronger and another is faster, or, as a variation on the “Two Brothers” theme that Bettelheim studies, one character often embodies “the striving for independence and self-assertion, and the opposite tendency to remain safely home, tied to the parents (91). Bettelheim's remarks here are in reference to the entire frame of fairy tales, but they also apply to video games, as Janet Murray has noted in using Vladimir Propp's “Morphology of the Folk Tale” to study the story structure of video games (*Hamlet on the Holodeck*). While Propp can be apt and useful for many games, for others, Propp's analysis is overly simplistic and cannot account for the many variations. As a result Bettelheim's remarks on the movement and tension between siblings and on how those tensions often vary in accordance with the siblings' relationships opens the gap left in Propp's work and shows that video games, like fairy tales, need a more complex approach to even seemingly simple stories.

The sibling structure in video games often acts in the same subversive manner as the sibling structures in fairy tales. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari explain the significance of sibling relationships for social change in the context of schizoanalysis, which they consider to be an alternative to psychoanalysis in respecting the relationship

of siblings and equals instead of predicating all relationships on the dominant family structure with father and mother. “This combined formula, which has value only as an ensemble, is that of schizo-incest,” Deleuze and Guattari explain: “Psychoanalysis, because it understands nothing, has always confused two sorts of incest: the sister is presented as a substitute for the mother, the maid as a derivative of the mother, the whore as a reaction-formation” (*Kafka* 66). Psychoanalysis reaffirms that dominant structure by insisting on the power and presence, even in absence, of the ordering or power structure of the adult-parent formation. As Deleuze and Guattari note, psychoanalysis insists on the mother even when the mother is absent; when the mother is absent and the sister fills a pivotal role by becoming representative of the mother. Alternately, schizoanalysis argues that for some texts – while the parental-power formation remains present – the parental-power structure is not the pivotal relationship within that structure.

The structure of schizoanalysis is a structure of confusion and movement, of doubles and combinations. As such, it allows for changing and evolving structures that exist outside of the patriarchal power system. Folk tales that subvert social norms – like *Hansel and Gretel* as the tale of two children surviving parental abandonment and as a critique of the family structure that allowed for child abandonment – often use figures of children to question the existing power structure in part by reaffirming the fundamental nature of the sibling relationship. Similarly, many video games also reaffirm the sibling relationship, often to specifically argue against the power structures present in the game.

Because of their emphasis on game-play, video games rely heavily on the reader/player for interpretation and meaning, especially as that meaning may change based on different game-play strategies. The fluid nature of video game play allows

games to be analyzed using schizoanalysis and psychoanalysis with the majority of games displaying components of each, especially given the usefulness of psychoanalysis to articulate the relationship between the player and the player-character(s). The usefulness of psychoanalytic and non-psychoanalytic models is clear given the ubiquity of sibling relationships in video games. These siblings are often doubles in their places within the game narratives and in their visual representation and also afford a subversive vision akin to the sibling doubles from fairy tales, a vision that requires multiple lenses. The prevalent use of siblings and emphasis on sibling relationships in games points to narrativized struggles between traditional and non-traditional social models. As Paul Wells notes, the double is generally used as a metaphor for "struggles between law and order, the sacred and the profane, barbarism and civility, truth and lies" (8-9).

Siblings in Structure: Player-Characters and Enemies

Video game designers often use sibling relationships because—though changing rapidly with the popularity of teen and mature rated games—the majority of video games are still created and rated for all ages. Video games need stories that are accessible for all ages and that can be translated for cultural and linguistic changes. The need for translatability is foregrounded because video games are sold across the world, with most games developed in either Japan or the United States. The need for translation requires video games to use a simple schema for game-play, and one that backgrounds more adult-related issues like sexuality. While many video games do have romantic relationships and high levels of explicit sexuality, these present greater difficulty in translation because of the different cultural standards for beauty, romantic relationships, and gender-specific behavior. While having a female character fight to save her beloved may not easily translate across cultures because of the position of women in those

cultures, children's stories provide a schema in which male and female player-characters can play and fight with almost equal strength as siblings.

Using nearly-equivalent siblings also allows game designers to easily offer player character options that do not unfairly skew game-play. As Andrew Rollings and Dave Morris note in *Game Architecture and Design*, game balance includes matching the player's skill to the game-play, matching game-play elements with each other (for instance having equivalent weapons do equivalent damage), and matching the player option so that each player, or player-character, is afforded equal skills and abilities (73-4). Rollings and Morris go on to note that exact symmetry is the fairest solution, "but it's rarely the most interesting" (74). By striving for symmetry, video games follow other competitive sports and events like horse races and boxing in that video games try to equally weigh the players in order to create an even and competitive match. One common way to make games fair while also providing equivalent, but not symmetrical, characters is to make multiple player-characters that have higher abilities in certain areas. The characters are then balanced overall with each excelling in certain areas; the characters are siblings in structural usage because they are equivalent but not necessarily symmetrical.

One example of the relationship of sibling structures for character creation and development are the characters in *Tenchu: Stealth Assassins*. In *Tenchu*, the player can choose to play as the male character Rikimaru or the female character, Ayame, who is faster but less powerful than her male counterpart. This allows for slight player-character differences that relate to gender, but that more significantly relate to different options in game-play. Ayame allows for game-play that is based on quick movement and that

requires more hits for a kill, while Rikimaru allows for slower play based on slower, more powerful attacks with less movement and fewer hits required for a kill. The two characters are then synonymous with their game-play options and they parallel each other in terms of their ability to represent facets of game-play.

Following the need for ease of translation, game designers also need to be able to easily implement multiple possible player-characters, for play in multiplayer games, and in multiple-character single player games. Siblings and sibling structures—where the player-characters are equivalent in age, overall skills, and goals—allow for game designers to create multiple characters with few extra programming demands. Because video games are incredibly popular and game technology is rapidly evolving, game designers' and technological needs play a large role in the creation and evolution of game structures and narratives. As such, the sibling structures for game-play and game design operate on both the more simplistic level of player-character choice, as well as on the level of the underlying game meta-structures.

In terms of player-character choice, using siblings as the multiple player-character options allows the game narratives to be written once, and then the siblings can be easily substituted for each other during game-play without the need for multiple narrative structures or game-play options. This also allows game designers to add additional characters and character types and to add in unlockable³ or extra characters with relative ease. One simplified example of a video game that uses characters within a sibling structure, but not a sibling narrative is *Gauntlet*. *Gauntlet* provides an excellent example

³ In video games, items and characters are said to be unlockable if they are at first locked and inaccessible to the player and then, after the player completes a particular action or quest, the items become 'unlocked' and available.

of the sibling structure because the player plays as one of several player-characters which all begin with different levels of ability within the same skill sets. As the game progresses, all of the characters slowly grow more powerful in the same main categories of strength, speed, endurance, and magic. New characters with the same skill areas can be unlocked and all characters have the same maximum levels for each skill, allowing them to become equal in terms of their in-game attributes. While the characters differ only slightly, and their differences do not greatly affect game play, *Gauntlet* still offers the appearance of choice by using the sibling player-character structure with each character as an aspect of the other characters.

The sibling structure also allows game designers to easily add in additional characters for the appearance of additional game-play options and rewards. For instance, *Super Mario Brothers* uses the siblings Mario and Luigi as identical character options, except for their coloration, in the two-player game. While *Super Mario Brothers* is ‘a princess on a pedestal game,’ in which the player fights to save a trapped princess, it focuses first on the sibling relationship because both brothers are enlisted to save the princess. Mario and Luigi are identical in terms of abilities, age, and their appearance only varies in terms of the colors of their clothing; Mario wears red and brown and Luigi wears white and green.⁴

In *Super Mario Brothers*, the sibling relationship is also apparent in enemies like the Hammer Brothers, who are always in pairs and who fight by throwing hammers at the player-character. In later Mario games, the player can play as Mario, Luigi, Toad, or the Princess, all of whom have higher abilities in some areas, but have equal overall skills.

⁴ Mario and Luigi's appearances do change in later games, but at first they appear identical except for the colors of their outfits.

More recent games also feature the character Wario, a larger and more yellow version of Mario, as an enemy or a player-character, depending on the game. The multiple player-characters and monsters, even in the simple example of the *Super Mario Brothers*, connect to the overall evolution of monsters. As Judith Halberstam notes, "[t]he post-Frankenstein monster emerges at the turn of the century as a creature marked by an essential duality and a potential multiplicity" (53). Like other monsters, those presented by video games are multiple in each of their instances, and in the spectrum of their iterations within a single game. And while the monsters in *Super Mario Brothers* are not horrific monsters, the general structural and narrative multiplicity of enemies and monsters in video games allows for the creation of multiple monster types, including horrific monsters and doppelgängers.

Siblings in Narrative

Design requirements push game designers towards using sibling structures for player-characters. However, the scope in which many games use siblings not only for player-character choice, but for the game meta-narrative and game-play design shows that video games operate both within traditional romantic and familial structures, as well as within alternatives like sibling structures. For games using the sibling structures for game design, Deleuze and Guattari's schizoanalysis proves a useful approach. For instance, both of the early games *Super Mario Brothers* (1985) and *The Legend of Zelda* (1986) are technically 'princess on pedestal' stories, but to read these merely in a psychoanalytic manner misses the sibling relationships in each. In *The Legend of Zelda*, the main character, Link, and Zelda, the princess he must save, appear as brother and sister. In a later game in the series, *The Legend of Zelda: the Wind Waker* Link is, in fact, explicitly named as brother to Aryll, whom he must save.

In each of these games, the 'princess on a pedestal' story is also a narrative of a brother saving his sister. As such, the game narratives are more like modern renditions of radical folk tales that question the explicit power structure by presenting an alternate structure. The folk and fairy tale structures in these games further reinforces their subversive tendencies, as Jack Zipes notes: "No matter what has become of the fairy tale, its main impulse was at first revolutionary and progressive, not escapist, as has too often been suggested" (36). While folk and fairy tales can be subversive, Zipes also argues that their presentation often diminishes or negates their subversive potential. In particular, Zipes states that the mass production of fairy tales leads to, "a technologically produced universal voice and image which impose themselves on the imagination of passive audiences. The fragmented experiences of atomized and alienated people are ordered and harmonized by turning the electric magic switch" (17). Thus, the structure of folk and fairy tales alone does not necessarily allow for subversion. Rather, it is a combination of the stories themselves and the manner in those stories and their structures are presented that allow for the subversive potential. Because video games must offer options, or the appearance of options, and because they rely on game-play, they may escape the universalized voice. For instance, even in games like *Super Mario Brothers* in which the player is sent on a quest to save the princess, the game focuses first on the brotherly relationship between Mario and Luigi and then on their quest to save the princess. In moves similar to this, the Mario video games often posit the primary relationship to be that of siblings, with the Princess included as an equal as she is a player-character in several of the games.

Super Mario Brother's characters can be incorporated into a psychoanalytic structure that would reaffirm the dominant social-power structure of the family, but to remain only within this interpretative framework would neglect or obscure significant aspects of the game. Making this misstep, Mia Consalvo in "Hot Dates and Fairy-Tale Romances: Studying Sexuality in Videogames" psychoanalytically analyzes one of the games in the immensely popular *Final Fantasy* series for its characters' romances. However, Consalvo's analysis fails to take note that all of the characters in *Final Fantasy* are orphans in worlds torn by war, with absent parents, making the characters siblings through their loss. Her analysis also neglects that, while the games' ending and the jokes during the game suggest romance, the game is played in a traditional fairy tale form with the siblings fighting for survival. Consalvo bases her psychoanalytic reading of the *Final Fantasy* games only on the game dialogue. While dialogue is an important component for game analysis, game-play and structure point to another structural level that complicate readings of the game structure presented by the game dialogue.

The sibling structure employed in *Final Fantasy*, with its use of orphan-siblings as the player characters, also occurs in the *Final Fantasy* offshoot, *Kingdom Hearts*. *Kingdom Hearts* retains some of the *Final Fantasy* characters while also adding new ones. *Kingdom Hearts* also has the player-character Sora fight his own shadow. *Final Fantasy* and *Kingdom Hearts*' use of orphans to provide equivalent player characters influences the game narrative and connects to doubles. As Karl Miller notes, "[w]here the double is, the orphan is never far away" (39). For video games, orphans and doubles are connected by the game narratives that seek to provide equality, and must thus remove the more powerful 'parental' figures and make the characters equal by way of making them

orphans. Because of the need to balance player characters, video games use doubles for both characters and enemies. By making the players in *Final Fantasy* orphans, the players are equal in a manner that psychoanalysis, with its emphasis on sexual relationships and the priority of the parent, cannot grasp.

Furthermore, because the player-characters are all orphans and exhibit equivalent abilities, the player-characters act as doubles of each other with each one providing slight alterations, but acting in similar ways and remaining tied to the other characters within the narrative. Similar to *Final Fantasy*, the game *ICO* places the player as a young boy banished from his home village. In order to escape the prison the villagers confine him to, he must help another prisoner, a young girl named Yorda. Because of the girl's age and the game's storytelling style, *ICO* also shows a sibling relationship with the two children joined in their orphaned status, banishment, and loss. In *Gender Inclusive Game Design*, Sheri Graner Ray argues that in *ICO*, "the way in which the NPC [non-player character] is presented to the player encourages emotional involvement" (55).

This emotional involvement stems from the depiction of Yorda depicts as a sibling in need of help, and as a sibling in circumstances that place both the player-character and Yorda living by themselves in exile. The fairy tale structure in these games is not a reaffirmation of the dominant structure, but one more in line with the subversive nature of early fairy tales. This is not to say that video games were designed for their revolutionary potential, just as folk and fairy tales were not always created for revolutionary reasons. As Zipes contends, folk and fairy tales have been considered subversive, "as they have tended to project other and better worlds," and additionally they, "have provided the critical measure of how far we are from taking history into our

own hands and creating more just societies” (Zipes 3). The majority of video games are certainly not developed with revolution in mind, but the majority of video games do present the possibility of better worlds and a method for making those worlds, if only in terms of the fictional worlds they present.

Final Fantasy, *ICO*, *Super Mario Brothers*, and *The Legend of Zelda* are typical video games in their presentation of sibling relationships as the primary relationships, with parents and parental structures being notably absent. On its own, a psychoanalytic framework proves inadequate for video games like these, if one wants to address the manner in which relationships are constructed and explored, as they are often without parental or other hegemonic structures. Psychoanalytic theories would most likely respond to this that the parents may be removed, but that they still exist structurally. In these games, however, the parents and all parental structures have not only been removed, but the game worlds are also frequently in chaos. To argue that this chaos still implies a traditional psychoanalytic structure misapprehends these narratives and their development through game-play. As an alternative to a psychoanalytical frame for discussing these games, schizoanalysis helps to illustrate the manner in which games use sibling structures and the significance of the sibling structures in games.

In *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Deleuze and Guattari argue that psychoanalysis misunderstands the function of the family. In doing so, they argue that the entire field of the familial structure is misinterpreted in making the family the site where the entire social field is applied and performed:

The family becomes the subaggregate to which the whole of the social field is applied. Since each person has his own private father and mother, it is a distributive subaggregate that simulates for each person the collective whole of social persons and that closes off his domain and scrambles his images. Everything is reduced to

the father-mother-child triangle, which reverberates the answer 'daddy-mommy' every time it is stimulated by images of capital. (265)

Deleuze and Guattari here specifically relate schizoanalysis to the capitalistic system and to the overall social structure. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to explore the implications of sibling-structured video games for capitalist society, the alternative social structure presented in such games corresponds to the subversive potential of folk and fairy tales which question the dominant social order.

Sibling Worlds: Chaos of Changing Structures

Horror games like those in the *Fatal Frame* and *Resident Evil* series present examples of subversive texts that rely on the sibling structure in order to question the narrativized power structures in their game worlds and the function of player-characters and non-player-characters in those worlds. Unlike many sibling-based games that are designed for all player ages and designed with little of a recognizably real world included, survival horror games provide a critical perspective on sibling relationships because they are situated within more realistic worlds, both with older player-characters, and designed for older players. Furthermore the games also question all of the world structures they depict. Survival horror games are also easier to disentangle from their explicit narratives because the narratives are often Gothic. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick explains of Gothic conventions; “Surely no other modern literary form as influential as the Gothic novel has also been as pervasively conventional. Once you know that a novel is of Gothic kind [...] you can predict its contents with an unnerving certainty” (9). Gothic conventions may make for greater confusion in terms of the actual narrative and structure; yet, the codification of Gothic conventions serves to simplify the separation of the structures from the explicit narrative. Because Gothic narratives often appear as

psychologically motivated tales, their use in survival horror games also further helps to show the need for schizoanalysis given the failure of psychoanalysis to fully explain these games. Psychoanalysis postulates that the fundamental structure is that of the family—whether this structure is that of mother-father-child or of caregiver’s absence, the structure always refers to the initial values of the hierarchical family of parents and children. Deleuze and Guattari argue against this structure because it attributes all power to the parents and reifies the small nuclear group even as it applies to the larger social structures. The subversion of this is the schizoanalytic structure, which is one of change and evolution and which focuses on the relationship between equals – that of siblings or doubles.

Removal of the parents or governing power, which is typical of many childrens’ stories and video games, does not in itself change the narrative movement from psychoanalytic to schizoanalytic. The psychoanalytic structure must be fundamentally subverted or questioned for the schizoanalytic structure to take hold. This fundamental change is enacted throughout the *Resident Evil* and *Fatal Frame* games, in which the parental figures are removed, undermined, or corrupted. The removal of parental figures and structures leads to changes in the narrative structure and the game world presentation that make psychoanalytic treatments of these games inadequate. Deleuze and Guattari contend that:

The Oedipal incest occurs, or imagines that it occurs, or is interpreted as if it occurs, as an incest with the mother, who is a territoriality, a reterritorialization. Schizo-incest takes place with the sister, who is not a substitute for the mother, but who is on the other side of the class struggle, the side of maids and whores, the incest of deterritorialization [...] Schizo-incest, in contrast, is connected to sound, to the manner in which sound takes flight and in which memory-less blocks introduce themselves in full vitality into the present to activate it, to precipitate it, to multiply its connections. (*Kafka* 67)

In many video games, the sister or brother is just that – a sister or brother – and does not represent the mother or any sort of territorialized structure. In the survival horror games investigated here, all of the existing structures are eroded or destroyed; only the sibling relationships remain and these are relationships of tension and change.

Within the schizoanalytic structure, Deleuze and Guattari also note the importance of sound for schizo-incest's ability to take flight. Sound in the doubled and sibling worlds of survival horror video games provides the only reliable game system – vision cannot be trusted, and often cannot be used effectively at all because of the lack of light and heavy fog. Sound fills survival horror games to define the characters' relationship to the virtual space of the game world, the narrative, and each other. Survival horror games are nightworlds and operate, as Paul Coates suggests, as worlds "in which vision is abolished and a series of suggestive sounds come into their own" (123). Within these worlds, all structures are lost, save for sounds and siblings. The emphasis on sound complements the narrative removal of traditional hierarchies (with parents and the government) by removing the traditional focus of the game display by refocusing it on the auditory rather than the visual.

The *Resident Evil* games begin with capitalistic and militaristic structures gone haywire. The games' conflict begins with a corporation named Umbrella, which engineers biological weapons, creating one called the T-Virus (and mutations of this virus in subsequent games). This virus animates dead flesh so that dead creatures live on in an undead state and attack the living in the attempt to devour them. As the virus mutates and as Umbrella develops other virus strains, dead plants and animals also become extremely violent and aggressive. In the various game iterations, the virus gets released into a city

and several Umbrella training and development areas, which the player fights his or her way through in order to survive and to find friends and family. While the basic plot on the surface seems to be that of a low-budget horror film, the story that unfolds through game-play and the game characters indicates that this can hardly be the case. Through game paratexts and game-play, the player learns that some of the player-characters are members of S.T.A.R.S., a tactical unit that has been sent in to control the virus.

Player-characters include Claire Redfield, sister to Chris who is in the S.T.A.R.S. unit; Leon Kennedy, who was reporting to Raccoon City to be a police officer (but since the Police are destroyed, he is completely unconnected); Steve Burnside, son of two Umbrella operatives now dead; and Billy Coen, a fugitive naval officer who was framed, incarcerated, and has escaped from that incarceration. In the course of the game plot, the S.T.A.R.S. leader, Albert Wesker, betrays the group and attempts to kill them. In all of these cases, for S.T.A.R.S. members like Chris, Jill Valentine, Barry Burton, and Rebecca Chambers, and for the others like Claire, Leon, Steve, and Billy, the controlling social structure is absent. Only in Steve's case is this structure literally parental, but all of the characters previously existed within a psychoanalytic structure of family, career, and military forces, but which have been removed or proved corrupt.

Psychoanalysis could take this removal and aberration of the traditional structure as simply that, an aberration being used to generate horror in the games. However, the games refuse such a simple reading. The removal of the parental and patriarchal structures is shown in small paratextual notes and in short cinematic sequences sprinkled in with game-play so sparsely as to be insignificant compared to the sibling relationships. For instance, members of the S.T.A.R.S. team are all shocked when they learn of

Wesker's betrayal, but that shock in reaction to Wesker is much less than their reaction to the loss of any of their quasi-sibling team members. The overall game trajectory, including the overall movement of actual play, focuses on the characters operating as siblings in order to help each other, often in direct opposition to their other orders. The focus of the game is on saving the sibling characters, and those who act otherwise are shown to be destructive and evil.

Even the romantic relationships in *Resident Evil* are first and foremost sibling relationships—in structure or in actuality—and only after that are any of the relationships romantic for those that are not actual siblings. In *Resident Evil 0*, the S.T.A.R.S. medic Rebecca Chambers, and the fugitive Billy Coen have moments where they seem to be romantically interested in each other, but the game never makes this clear. They are both clearly linked as caring friends, as comrades fighting against the monsters around them. This cooperation questions the apparent order because Rebecca's military orders are to capture Billy and because, even though she was told that Billy is a criminal by her superiors, she still trusts him. Rebecca is still a teenager in the game and her placement as a child within a militaristic order structure casts her military superiors, like Albert Wesker, as parental figures. While this is true for all of the S.T.A.R.S. members, it is especially true for Rebecca because she does not appear to be in a strong position, in terms of age or physical ability, to resist the existing structure in any way. Her placement as medic, and thus less skilled with weaponry, further reinforces her subordinate position. However, she disobeys her orders and resists the dominant powers with little effort.

Like the seemingly romantic relationship between Rebecca and Billy, Jill Valentine and Chris Redfield (*Resident Evil*, *Resident Evil 2*) seem to be romantically interested in

each other. Like Chris, Jill is a member of the S.T.A.R.S. team and they both fight to help each other. Their relationship, other than their functional relationship as siblings in their military unit, is never made explicit. However, Chris searches for Jill in the same manner that he searches for his sister, Claire; and as Claire and Jill are furthermore similar in appearance, they both function and appear as Chris' sister. In addition to these oddly unromantic relationships, one must also consider Barry Burton and his family (*Resident Evil*). Barry obeys Wesker because Wesker threatens to kill Barry's wife and child. Barry acts as a traitor to his team for a period of time, but then risks his family in order to save his team members. In doing so, Barry both overthrows Wesker's control and reaffirms that the sibling relationship between S.T.A.R.S. members and other survivors comes before that of the traditional family structure. Following Barry, the traditional family is even shown to be a destructive force.

Destructive forces appear in all of the complete family units presented - even in those that are now incomplete, as with Steve Burnside's family (*Resident Evil - Code: Veronica -*) and Lisa's family (*Resident Evil*). Steve Burnside has to fight to survive after he and his parents are taken to an island and imprisoned by Umbrella. In one cut scene, Steve even kills his zombified father in order to protect Claire. While this could be read psychoanalytically with the teenage Steve destroying his father to emerge in full manhood, the scene, however is merely a cut-scene and the player has no control over this action. Steve does kill his father to save Claire, and Steve is clearly shown to be attracted to Claire; but his patricide is clearly shown as motivated by the desire to protect his equal and become part of the system in which she exists with her brother Chris, a system of siblings and of survival.

Sibling Worlds: Enemies and Monsters

While the sibling system presents a web of equal and equivalent characters, it also provides the basic structure that ties the characters to their enemies. The doubling of characters in video games applies to player-characters, non-player-characters, and enemies alike, as well as to the entire structure of game-play itself. In the words of Matt Bittanti, “[t]he avatar is a technologically charged *doppelgänger*” (248). This doubling of the player and the player-character is repeated throughout video games for both player-characters and their enemies. This multiplicity figures in the construction of the monster in both game narrative and structure because the monster also presents a portion of the subject. The monster, Judith Halberstam explains, is the subject’s double and, “represents not simply that which is the buried self, rather the monster is evidence of the production of multiformed egos. Indeed, it is only the evidence of one self buried in the other that marks the subject human” (71). In this way, the monsters within the sibling system also present the system itself either by verifying the sibling structure or by embodying the traditional structures and showing that these must be destroyed. While this replication of the system could serve to verify the hegemonic structures, in the case of survival horror video games, it serves to further undermine those structures.

A large factor in undermining the traditional family structure is Lisa, in the first *Resident Evil*, a monster. Like Steve, Lisa is a young girl whose parents worked for and were subsequently killed by Umbrella. Lisa's parents are already dead when the game narrative begins, but the player learns of Lisa’s parents through their journals, notes, and other remnants of their lives as humans. As noted in Chapter 2, the player also finds Lisa's journal which progresses from Lisa the small girl, through her infection by the virus where her written language deteriorates until she at last writes meaningless

scribbles. Lisa is one of the more difficult opponents to fight in terms of game-play because Lisa is strong and still has some level of intelligence. By reading Lisa's journals and other notes in the game, the player learns that Lisa wants to be whole again and so Lisa eats everything and everyone in order to have them as part of her. Lisa has been given a clear psychological motivation in this sense, because she desires to fill her emotional needs by quite literally devouring that which she needs, and her needs include human companionship. Specifically she wants to eat her mother, the one she misses most.

Lisa and, to a lesser extent Steve, can thus be read psychoanalytically, but to read them only psychoanalytically misses the complexity of both game narrative and game-play. Lisa and Steve represent traditional family structures, are both monsters, and are both killed in the end.⁵ The structure that is killed with them represents the attempt at a traditional family structure and unity. Steve tries to be a sibling to Claire, but he is inevitably unable to escape his family structure and has to kill himself in order to protect Claire from the monster he becomes. Like Steve, Lisa is trapped by her familial past and is killed.

By showing the family structure fetishized by psychoanalysis as a structure which kills, the *Resident Evil* games open the possibility for another reading; and, because of the emphasis on equal sibling relationships with the chaotic disruptions that this brings with it, a schizoanalytic reading. Because the games can be considered Gothic, the conventionality of the games in terms of structure and narrative sets the stage for explicit breakages within the hyper-structuralization of the Gothic genre. As Halberstam demonstrates, the Gothic, “tracks the transformation of struggles within the body politic

⁵ While they seem to die, the game leaves open whether or not Lisa survives.

to local struggles within individual bodies. The Gothic monster, moreover, as a creature of mixed blood, breaks down the very categories that constitute class, sexual, and racial difference” (78). Lisa, as a monster, acts to break down multiple categories through her growth from a child into an adult monster. As a monster of family, Lisa thus represents family even while disrupting the familial structures.

Characters

Far from being unusual examples, the *Resident Evil* games parallel the *Fatal Frame* series of games, which also present sibling relationships as the fundamental connection between player-characters. This connection is made and maintained even through multiple realms of existence. In *Fatal Frame*'s case these are a realistic realm and at least one spiritual realm. The first *Fatal Frame* follows a young girl named Miku as she searches for her brother Mafuyu in a haunted mansion. Because of her concern for him, Miku searches for her brother even when confronted with terrifying ghosts and the gates to hell. Not only are Miku and Mafuyu children of a dead mother and an absent father, they are also psychically linked, which is how Miku is able to track her brother. During game-play, the player as Miku will occasionally stumble onto a place her brother has been recently and the player, along with Miku, sees what happened to Mafuyu at that place.

Fatal Frame 2: Crimson Butterfly also follows two siblings. This time the siblings are twin girls, Mio and Mayu Amakura. The player plays primarily as Mio, but also plays as the sibling Mayu for short sequences. *Fatal Frame 2* begins with the two sisters walking in the woods. They stumble into a haunted village and, once inside, they cannot leave. Mayu seems possessed by the place and walks away, quickly lost in the space and time of the village. The village is frozen in time from nearly a century ago, when the

town was supposed to perform a bloody ritual involving the sacrifice of twin girls to appease spirits. The townspeople failed, and now the town is frozen in time and place, trapping and killing all those who enter. As Mayu drifts into the alternate realm in which the town exists, she also slowly merges with one of the twins who was to be sacrificed so many years ago, while Mio attempts to save them both. The *Fatal Frame* games differ from the *Resident Evil* games because the player only has one player-character choice in the *Fatal Frame* games. However, the sibling relationship in the *Fatal Frame* games is even more intense because the only relationships in the games are that of the two siblings, and those of the ghosts of the townspeople who performed human sacrifices.

In each of the games, the narrative focuses on human sacrifice—women in the first game and young girls in the second. A male town elder sacrifices the women in order to prevent a catastrophe from occurring. In each game, the other townspeople assist the male elder in the sacrifices. After the sacrifices fail, the townspeople in their ghostly forms attack the player-characters. In fact, the only helpful non-player-character in either of the games is a young boy in the second game. However, the townspeople-ghosts' cruelty towards the player-characters is understandable because the mansion and the town suffer not for performing these sacrifices, but for failing to do so. The sacrifices are presented as good acts, in the sense of preventing the doors to hell from opening, as well as evil for their cruelty. All of the townspeople's relationships are bound by death and, at best, ambiguous moral choices. In this way, the only relationship that does not involve death is that of the siblings, and the only path to freedom or even survival is through the siblings working together. The parents, town elders, and all those in power are absent or malevolent. The only survival or hope is through disrupting the systems that they have

put in place by reaffirming the sibling relationship. In both the *Resident Evil* and the *Fatal Frame* series, the characters, worlds, and game-play are thus defined by the sibling relationships. The sibling relationships, moreover, define the enemies and their places within these narratives.

Doubles, Shadows, and the Other

Like the doubling of player-characters, video games also present enemies as double or shadow characters because it allows the game designers to repeat code, making the games easier to program and design. These double or shadow characters can be found in all game types. Some of the games with explicit shadow characters include: *Super Mario Sunshine*, which presents a water-shadow Mario enemy; *The Legend of Zelda II*, which has a dark or shadow Link enemy; and *Sonic Adventure 2*, which has a Shadow Sonic enemy. The shadows in these and many other games are doubles and are concordantly presented and often also named "Shadow" or "Dark," but these doubles are not horrific as doubles and shadows often are. Instead, doubles and shadows are connected to technology for both literature and for video games. In *The Double and the Other: Identity as Ideology in Post-Romantic Fiction*, Paul Coates argues that the large-scale emergence of the double in literary works relates to the cheapening of mirrors and their increasing commonality in people's experiences, stating: "As the multiplication of reflecting surfaces, mirrors and plate glass in modern architecture increases the self-consciousness of society, the sight of one's own image ceases to be the harbinger of death" (35). To cope with the technological limitations, Nick Montfort explains, video game doubling

began with the early games, where half of the screen had to be mirrored to present a full screen.⁶

Following the extreme limitations of mirroring the game screen, other early games, like *The Legend of Zelda II*, doubled characters because it allowed the game designers to reuse code for both the fighting and movement styles as well as the character appearance. Even in the early *Resident Evil* games, the doubling of the player-character—choices with only minor changes to the game space and game-play for each character— allowed the game world to seem larger without requiring large amounts of additional code. While the repeated use of code led to many doubled characters, many of these were doubles in a non-horrific sense.

The double as a horrific structure further complicates and subverts traditional structures. Doubles exist within traditional structures, and they exist in manners that question the relationship of one of the doubles to the other. In video games, the doubling questions both the relationship of the doubles and the structures in which the doubles exist because video games that use sibling structures present horrific doubles that are fundamentally connected to each other and to the story. Because video games often use sibling relationships as primary, the threat of the other becomes not a threat of something unknown, but the threat of a perversion of the known. As such, video game enemies in sibling-based stories are more likely to be doppelgängers, shadows or doubles of the player-characters. While early shadow characters are simply that, video games quickly

⁶ See Nick Montfort's work on early text-based games and early video game consoles, like the Atari for more on code and screen mirroring. It is also interesting to note that mirror effects in games, where the characters could walk in front of a mirror or mirrored surface like water and see their reflection, is a rather recent effect in games, emerging around 2003. The underlying technical mirroring exists on the code and narrative levels, but the visual representation of that mirroring has only been technically possible in recent games. Montfort presented his work on this at Princeton's "Video Game, Form, Culture, and Criticism Conference," in March 2004.

developed non-symmetrical shadow characters in the double and doppelgänger figures of Mario's double in Wario, Luigi's double in Waluigi, Solid Snake's double in Liquid Snake, and Samus' Alien-Samus double in *Metroid Fusion*. *Resident Evil - Code: Veronica* also has the explicitly double characters of Chris and Claire Redfield as brother and sister and as the game's player-characters, and then their doubles in sister and brother Alexia and Alfred Ashford, the heads of the Umbrella corporation and the main enemies in this game. *Code: Veronica* also uses Alexia and Alfred as doppelgängers, having Alex dress in drag as Alexia after he has confined her to a zombie existence through a failed experiment. Alexia emerges to fight as a zombie-esque creature at the end of the game, making her a double or perversion of her human self. The reversal and mirroring of the brother-sister pair in *Resident Evil* concretizes the seemingly simple sibling relationships in video games, but also the twisted relationships of dual character games where the male and female characters are used as interchangeable counterparts for each other to add player-character choice without disrupting the game narrative.

Fatal Frame more explicitly doubles the player-characters in relation to the enemies than does the *Resident Evil* series, as the first *Fatal Frame* depicts the scars of the sacrificed women slowly appearing on Miku while she stays on the haunted estate. In *Fatal Frame 2*, the twin girls parallel the girls who were almost sacrificed so long ago. The twin girls become doubles of each other and of the pair of girls before them. In addition to the player-character doubles in the twin girls, the earlier twins themselves have doubles in their dolls. In the game's background story, one of the earlier twin girls to be sacrificed ran away, and her sister was terribly upset. To console her, the townspeople made a doll of her sister that slowly comes to life as the girl plays with, and

loves, the human-sized doll. The player-character has to fight both of these earlier twin girls and the doll, which also gets doubled into two dolls, at different points in the game. The use of dolls as doubles is a familiar trope, as Paul Coates discusses Henry James' non-horror *What Maisie Knew* and how the young girl, Maisie, used her dolls in such a way that they became her doubles (59). The dolls as doubles for video games is particularly odd because it inherently questions methods of game-play because the player is playing as one of the characters, making the character perform as a puppet or a doll for the player. This bizarre connection between the player and the player-character is further reinforced in games like *Resident Evil* where the controller can be set to use rumble-effects to thump and pulse like a human heartbeat. These odd connections serve to increase the doubling effect and to increase the horror of the game, all the while increasing the importance of the sibling relationship as the only means of escape.

Fatal Frame's game-play and fighting style further increase the doubling effects because its game-play is based on the characters fighting the ghosts by taking photographs of them that slowly diminish the ghosts' power and eventually destroy them. In discussing that the double most often appears at dusk, Coates argues that the double is like that of the photograph, stating that "[t]he Double in fin de siècle literature is thus the uncanny aspect of the photograph, which is similarly momentary and monochrome" (4). The ghosts in *Fatal Frame* can only be clearly seen through the camera lens, but using the camera lens makes moving the player-character more difficult and more awkward. When the player takes pictures of the ghosts, the ghosts are sometimes knocked backwards by the force of the shot, while at other times the ghost retreat slightly, and on occasion the ghosts charge forward, undaunted. The closer the range in which the

photographs are taken, the more damage to the ghosts, so the player must balance fear of the ghosts and the damage they do with the need to conserve film to survive subsequent encounters. Balancing these needs often means that, in terms of game-play, the player must wait until the ghosts fill the entire screen view, because the view is through the camera lens, and the ghosts are about to pounce upon the player before the player attacks. The need for close-up photographs and the camera-view construction forces the player into close proximity with the ghosts. Thus, the player is bound by a visual and proximate relationship with the ghosts while also forced to take multiple shots of a single ghost, memorializing these enemies in the game photographs, which the game allows the player to keep. The *Fatal Frame* and *Resident Evil* series, while extremely codified, also present ruptures using the sibling structures to double the human with human, the human with monster, to double the structures of narrative, and to double the structures of game design. Moreover, the actual game-play further enforces this ghostly doubling by repeatedly bringing the characters in contact with doubled spaces and doubled monsters.

Conclusion: Survival Horror and Family Border Crossings

The doubles in video games serve to undermine traditional family structures while also presenting game spaces filled by multiplicity, mirrors, and complications that intertwine game-play, narrative, and game design. Using the figure of the double, video games present subversive texts that parallel folk and fairy tales in their questioning of dominant structures, including their foregrounding of technological structures that require such doubling. Arguing for the neutral value of technology in the presentation of folk and fairy tales, Zipes states, “Technology itself is not an enemy of folk and fairy tales. On the contrary, it can actually help liberate and fulfill the imaginative projections of better worlds which are contained in fairy tales” (18). Zipes' statement indicates that video

games, like folk and fairy tales, can display both alternate world structures or the problems in current worlds. Video game doubles and sibling structures inherently question the reigning order and provide an alternate path, one for which folk and fairy tales point the way for both children's stories and adult fiction.

In *More Than a Game*, Barry Atkins suggests that *Tomb Raider* is very much like an epic folk tale because of its use of a princely narrative structure where the child of an aristocrat goes on heroic quests (42). Atkins' remarks on the folk tale are a minor note in terms of his overall argument; however, his remarks are telling in that so many games, even those with limited use of doubles, still connect to folk and fairy tales. Furthermore, video games' relationship to folk and fairy tales are far from simple. While *Tomb Raider* and many video games like the classic hero story-structured *The Legend of Zelda* can easily be read as duplicating a basic fairy tale structure, seeing only that structure without regard to its implications for subversion neglects other equally valid structures within the text. Video games, as a new and popular medium, are in danger of being inaccurately analyzed as simplistic stories in ways that neglect the interplay between game design, game-play, and narrative. Schizoanalysis is but one method for investigating video games in a manner that respects their formulation through game-play, game design, and narrative, because it retains the complex interrelations of power and social structures and sees them in relation to the subversive structures created by the game narrative and the actions of game play.

CHAPTER 4 GOTHIC SUBVERSIONS OF GENDER: WOMEN HEROES IN VIDEO GAMES

Video games most often feature male protagonists. When video games do feature female protagonists, the women are generally intended as—whether or not they prove to be—eye-candy for a male audience, like *Tomb Raider's* Lara Croft (first released by Eidos in 1996) and the girls of *Dead or Alive* (Cad Douglas et al. 6). However, other depictions of women and gender are explored in video games. Several ludic Gothic horror video games, because of their relation to the breakages and openings created by the Gothic, serve as settings for several of the most progressive female video game characters to date. These include the *Fatal Frame* games and *Resident Evil* games – complete with their dark towers and eerie courtyards – and *American McGee's Alice*, with its Gothic-punk Alice and Cheshire Cat. Women in *Fatal Frame*, *Resident Evil*, and *American McGee's Alice* disrupt the norms of video gaming because they present strong female protagonists who are defined by skill and wit, rather than by their feminine physiques or feminized personalities.¹ The women in these games are rounded characters – capable of fighting and thinking – because they were designed as full characters and must be played as such in order to succeed in the games. This chapter addresses the changing role of women as players and characters in video games, as this evolution occurs in several ludic Gothic video games with emphasis on the peculiar manner in

¹ In one of the more exaggerated examples of female characters being defined by their bodies, *Dead or Alive 2* was actually programmed to make the female fighter's breasts bounce at all times—even when the characters were not otherwise moving. The breasts bounce without any possible physical reason for doing so. For details on the programming involved, see Chris Baker's "Gettin' Jiggly wit It" in *Wired Magazine*, 10.11 (Nov. 2002): 5 pars. 1 Sept. 2005 <<http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/10.11/play.html?pg=2>>.

which this evolves in *American McGee's Alice* and in the *Fatal Frame* and *Resident Evil* series.

The Gothic setting allows for the disruption of norms and normality. In doing so, the female characters are not immediately identified as sexualized objects, but are instead identified as characters trying to survive. Within these games' Gothic settings, the characters' physical appearances do not factor into their abilities and actions, nor into the game narratives as they do for female characters in other games. By being made first into full characters, rather than caricatures of women, they exceed the stereotypical confines for women in games. The games themselves also require excessive repetition and replay, such that the method of play becomes nonstandard and non-stereotypical. By exceeding the predetermined limits imposed by normal gaming, ludic Gothic and horror games allow for women characters to be portrayed within the act of play as a sort of *l'écriture féminine* in much the same manner that theorists like Michelle Kendrick have argued hypertext could allow for a possible eruption of *l'écriture féminine* (3). For video games, *l'écriture féminine* relates to the context of the video game narratives and worlds, but primarily to the construction of play which relies on the process of a form of disruption as a form for play.

The women characters in *Fatal Frame*, *Resident Evil*, and *American McGee's Alice* are composed as whole characters formed through fragments. They rise to the level of full characters as heroes and monsters, roles that they have been barred from in other video games. They have been empowered to occupy these more complete roles by the changes in character and world design that Gothic allows, and through the Gothic method of play that subverts play standards that would otherwise codify these characters.

Gothic and Gender

The Gothic is particularly important to the evolution of women as characters in and players of video games because the Gothic allows for the fissures through which new representations and methods of play may erupt. Gothic elements create Gothic texts; however, a codified Gothic genre does not exist because the Gothic relates to a composition of fragments and themes instead of cohesive elements. As Misha Kavka argues “there is no established genre called Gothic cinema or Gothic film” (209). Kavka continues, the Gothic is not a unified form or class, but a collection of elements that together situate a particular work as Gothic: there are “Gothic images and Gothic plots and Gothic characters and even Gothic styles [. . .] but there is no delimited or demonstrable genre specific to film called the Gothic” (209). Because the Gothic is defined by these elements horror video games, like horror films, may have elements of the Gothic; therefore, they may also function as Gothic texts.

Within the fragmentary form of the Gothic, ludic Gothic video games present an opening for changing video game gender roles in terms of the visual and narrative representations as well as the game-play methods. While not all games have narratives—as with *Pong* and *Tetris*—and some games relate to their narratives in only marginal or tangential ways, ludic Gothic games heavily rely on the game narratives for continued game-play and for the construction of the game world. In this reliance on the game narrative, ludic Gothic games depict Gothic themes that subvert the often implicit and foundational patriarchal narratives found in other video games. As Anne Williams argues in *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic*, “‘The Gothic myth,’ the mythos or structure informing this Gothic category of ‘otherness,’ is the patriarchal family” (22). The Gothic as such serves to disrupt the norms of video games as a whole as with the presentation

and implementation of female figures. The history of Gothic narratives situates gothically-styled video games within a rich tradition of breakages—breakages specifically within patriarchal structures and concepts. These breakages allow for non-traditional video game gender roles, while also allowing for non-traditional video game structures.

The Gothic for video games is indicative of a blending and dissolution of boundaries. Because games often present truncated narratives and world views, games also often reduce difficult concepts to binary oppositions. However, the Gothic disrupts simple oppositions. As William Veeder suggests, the Gothic is not a set of simple oppositions, but the interplay between oppositions, a “praxis that involves - necessarily - the interplay of psychological and social forces” (20). Judith Butler similarly presents a view of the Gothic not as an overall category, but one that “is the breakdown of genre and the crisis occasioned by the inability to ‘tell,’ meaning both the inability to narrate and the inability to categorize” (*Skin Shows* 23). Ludic Gothic video games, like *Resident Evil* and *American McGee’s Alice*, embody the breakdown of oppositions and definitions through the movement between individual versus collective psychological and social forces in their game narratives, their representations of women, and their game-play.

Gender as Style

Because of the widespread, disproportionate number of male to female characters in other video games, many examinations of gender in video games have focused on how any female characters are used. Lara Croft has garnered the most attention because of her prominent role as the player-character in the *Tomb Raider* series and because of her prominent sexuality. While Lara certainly figures into any study of gender and gaming, I suggest here that the use of gendered characters, the stories in which they exist, and the

method of game-play must be seen as interacting together to portray gender in gaming. Consequently, the use of female characters alone is less significant than the manner in which the characters are presented in video games. Thus, while Lara Croft is “an avatar; she is not just viewed, she is played, occupied and propelled by an off-screen agent,” as Diane Carr notes (171), Lara is also structured first as a woman and as a woman to be looked upon. Carr continues, “When I play as Lara, I play in the company of her creators, and in the shadow of the desiring gaze that her breasts and short shorts were formed to address” (174). Similarly, Claudia Herbst remarks on Lara’s construction, “The image of Lara has been employed in the promotion of female empowerment. [. . .] Women are supposed to ignore that the image of Lara was created neither by them nor for them” (28). Helen W. Kennedy similarly argues that Lara Croft cannot be easily accommodated into the voyeuristic gaze because Lara is both the object of the gaze and the acting heroine within the game. Kennedy, Carr, and Herbst all note that Lara, while in many ways representative of female empowerment, remains a construction completely based on gender. Carr rightly concludes that Lara, despite her strength and agency, still “reaffirms more borders than she crosses” (178). Lara does so because, while disrupting some gender stereotypes, she simultaneously functions to encourage others.

Lara’s gendering remains problematic because, as Judith Butler has shown, gender is not a fixed category, but a “*corporeal style*, an ‘act’ [. . .] which is both intentional and performative, where ‘*performance*’ suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning” (*Gender Trouble* 130). As such, gender in video games can be examined in terms of that performance. Lara performs in empowered ways, disrupting gender norms; however, her appearance and even her very existence then recapitulate those norms. In

video games, gender acts as created performance to an additional degree because the player performs as the character, who is often preset to perform as a certain gender and according to certain gendered norms.

Eric Hayot and Edward Wesp, in their article “Style: Strategy and Mimesis in Ergodic Literature,” have analyzed the performance of social and cultural stereotypes. Hayot and Wesp frame the use of race in video games through Rey Chow's concept of ‘coercive mimeticism’ in which Chow argues that ethnic subjects are expected to both wear and perform the mark of their difference. Hayot and Wesp argue that this expected performance connects directly to video games in terms of the predetermined methods of play in colonial video games, like *Age of Empires*. While Hayot and Wesp relate Chow’s coercive mimeticism to representations of race in video games, the same coercive mimeticism also functions for representations of gender. Hayot and Wesp posit that the games they examined use race to mark the physical appearance of the ethnic groups, while also marking the game-play strategies as ethnic. Hayot and Wesp note, “The ethnic subjects of game-play in *Age of Kings* have no ‘choice’ but to enact at the levels of both ornament and ability the ethnic identity to which game designers have assigned them” (411). Hayot and Wesp further argue that the game’s logic teaches players to perform as the ethnic identity chosen – the Mongols are best played as horseback-riding archers, the Chinese begin with a larger population, more easily outnumbering enemies – and that this performance is encoded in a “genetic” game logic that situates race as a determined and determining factor of appearance and action.

In this same stylistic encoding, video games engender player-characters by making the female characters both appear and act as excessively feminine. In doing so, the games

coerce players into playing the game within the confines of the character's limits for the performance of gender. For instance, women characters in most video games both look and act within stereotypical gender bounds; women characters are much more likely to be skilled at running or healing than the male characters who are presumed to be more skilled at fighting. While Lara Croft breaks borders through her strength and her ability to fight, she nonetheless reaffirms borders through the way her female bodily characteristics are hyperbolically represented. Despite her reaffirmation of some borders, however, Lara still breaks from the traditional video game representation by not coercing the players to play "as a woman," which would generally mean to play as a healer or as a cooperative helper. Nevertheless, Lara still cannot completely break the barriers of her gender because of her placement within a highly defined gaming genre and game design. The same limits that bind Lara are often the result of game designers' needs for ease and clarity of game-play.

Using gender as style to create a coercive mimeticism is facilitated by game designers' needs to offer non-trivial game choices while also offering a balanced game-play system. Andrew Rollings and Dave Morris argue in *Game Architecture and Design* that, "player/player balance is the art of making the game fair so that each player gets no other special advantage but his skill. There can be luck in the game, but it must apply evenly to all players" (73). But Rollings and Morris also contend while that symmetry "may be the fairest solution [. . .] it's rarely the most interesting" (74). In order to provide interesting, yet equal, variations many games offer female characters as alternatives to male characters. The female characters appear not only as feminine in appearance, but also as women according to culturally sanctioned roles for women.

The gendered player-character roles can be seen easily in party system games, where a single player controls multiple characters, each with different skills. In party system games, the woman character is most often the healer, as is the case with White Mage in *Final Fantasy*. Similarly, the gendered roles are also apparent in single player games where the female player-character is an option with other male player-characters and, in most of these games, the woman character is better skilled at fleeing than at fighting. Examples of skilled escapist women include the Princess in *Super Mario Brothers 2*, who excels at jumping, making the difficult game jumps easier and allowing her to jump over enemies.

Other games present the “fleeing woman” less transparently and structure the woman character’s skills to be faster and more nimble, yet less powerful and less able to endure attacks from other characters. This format applies to for the woman ninja, Ayame, in *Tenchu: Stealth Assassins* and the many woman warrior-characters in *Dynasty Warriors 3*. In presenting women characters this way, video games use femininity as a stylistic choice, and one that encodes traditional gender norms of women as healers or caretakers, and as physically smaller and weaker. While these options for any single game are not inherently problematic, the lack of women characters combined with the limited presentation of female characters who most often exemplify femininity through their appearance and/or function becomes problematic for the overall video game medium.

Despite video game design, which attempts to normalize female characters as the sexualized sisters of their male counterparts, the very act of making them into women, and into sisters in particular, opens game design for more possibilities and ruptures. As

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari acknowledge in *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature*; “But women present an even more precise blend of things: they are part sister, part maid, part whore. They are anticonjugal and antifamilial” (64). By including women characters at all, video games open a space for change and for characters that are actually women, rather than the amalgamation of gendered attributes and performances. The changes also allow for atypical game design, as in the case of ludic Gothic games, which in turn allow for the further disruption of video game and gender borders.

Gender as Structure

Gothic structures in video games present breakages that allow for alternatives to the traditional stereotypical representations of women. While most female video game characters began as either versions of their male counterparts – as with Ms. Pac-Man in *Ms. Pac-Man*, the female frog in *Frogger*, and the Valkyrie in *Gauntlet* – or as damsels in distress, ludic Gothic games immediately allow for primary woman characters. The damsels needing rescue, from angry apes like King Kong in *Mario Brothers* and evil spiders in *Wizards and Warriors*, are generally the first women video game characters noted by game journalists and game studies critics. They also note that Lara Croft is the first major woman protagonist, although this is far from true. The history of women characters in video games, especially by virtue of its omissions, proves that women characters in video games need a rupture or breakage to overcome the design limitations already present. The history of video game women characters, designers, and players is particularly important because the meta-narrative tells of a masculine genre, with male characters and male players. Without reclaiming parts of this history, some of the more recent changes cannot be properly contextualized. Ludic Gothic games are particularly

important in this regard because they are ahistorical in terms of most video game development. They are ahistorical in that video games generally follow a trajectory of increasing technological ability that corresponds to improvements in computer graphics. Ludic Gothic and horror games; however, often rely on lower-quality images to obfuscate image and vision, disrupting technologically-based historical placement.

Before delving further into women in ludic Gothic games, it is necessary to mention their precursors in the history of women game characters. One of the first breakages allowing for women video game characters occurred in an action adventure game. This rupture came with Samus Aran, who starred in *Metroid* as the galaxy's best bounty hunter. Both Sheri Graner Ray and Marsha Kinder have noted the oddity of Samus Aran as such a powerful character in the early years of mainstream video gaming (*Gender Inclusive Game Design* and *Playing with Power*). *Metroid's* game book told players that Samus Aran's past was unknown, but that he was the last hope for the galaxy in the face of the alien Metroid threat. The game book referred to Samus as 'he,' but after winning, *Metroid's* final credits revealed Samus to be a woman by showing her with long hair and in a bikini. She became the first Nintendo female protagonist, when *Metroid* was released in 1985.

Most important, while Samus appears in the bikini at the end of *Metroid*, players see this ending only if they win by meeting several requirements. Moreover, Samus always appears first in her spacesuit, so her outfit is not sexualized. In addition to her initial outfit, Samus also does not appear as sexualized in any sort of graphical manner. Her image is extremely basic and the hair and bikini are used to show her as female - she does not have exaggerated breasts and she does not appear outside of her space suit in

more graphically advanced games that would be capable of showing her as sexualized. This explanation of Samus's outfit and appearance is necessary to show the important differences between Samus and Lara Croft. Both characters are highly skilled, but Lara is portrayed as a highly sexualized object while Samus is not. Samus came alive in a game that never mentioned her past and in which she never spoke. Samus's silence offers the counter-history of women in video games—that of a slow and steady growth of strength and power that is not immediately recognizable in mainstream histories of gender and video games. Samus, in herself, certainly does not represent a full history of gender in video games, but she does serve as a pivotal example of how the existing histories that focus on Lara Croft have missed not only a precursor, but another version of femininity which favors innate ability over a sexualized appearance.

As the first non-hypersexualized female video game protagonist, Samus Aran presents an opening in the history of gender in video games. Despite this initial opening, emphasis on male video game characters remains because of the types of stories that video games present and because of players' perceptions of those stories. Video game stories often draw on existing story frameworks, and many of those frameworks put men as the main characters with women as helpers, romantic interests, or side characters. This use of existing stories is evident in military scenario games; detective based stories like *Max Payne* and *Post Mortem*; anti-hero epics like *Soul Reaver* and *Grand Theft Auto 3*; action-adventure knight tales like *The Legend of Zelda*, *Prince of Persia*, and *Maximo*; and many others. These story types fit within basic culturally-held story schemas where the protagonist is generally a man, where women only save or help him in his quest. Video game story schemas are adapting these pre-existing schemas to include more

women characters; however, schema modification occurs slowly. In order for women characters to be present in video games in more active and empowered positions, the games themselves, as well as the stories the games are based on, must change.

The majority of video games that include female characters have amended the narratives in minor ways to allow for women to play a more prominent role. For instance, in cases like *Onimusha* the player performs as the woman character for only a few minutes during the entire game-play. In games that replace the male for a female protagonist, as with games like *Ms. Pac-Man* and *Bloodrayne*, a woman plays the anti-hero. In games that use gender as a stylistic choice, as with *Dynasty Warriors 3* and with the ruling figures in strategy games like *Civilization III*, a woman plays as a hero who is divorced from gender. These three uses of women in video games do show an overall arc of improvement in that women are being included in games more frequently, but none of these constitute a radical shift in the way gender is configured in games. Gender in video games, like other media, remains highly problematic.

For games to present gender in ways that do not fall under the current problems of gender as style or simple option of appearance, video games must use existing schemas that do not figure gender within the common cultural stereotypes of woman as weak, non-aggressive, victims, and men as strong, heroic, and aggressive. Gothic narratives present this opportunity because they are based in breaks from family rule, patriarchy, and conventional conceptions of gender. Gothic narratives thus present stories that can be used to portray gender roles that exist outside of stereotypical constructs. Further, because the Gothic is founded on disruptions of vision and space, game-play based on the Gothic similarly changes.

Ludic Gothic Video Games

As an amorphous and changing collection of elements, Gothic narratives are not easily situated in any particular time or place. Instead, Gothic narratives are most often defined by their setting (normally castles, mansions, or another form that invokes the structure and influence of the often familial past); involvement with tangled (and often incestuous) family and hegemonic structures; pre-occupation with the past (often resulting in hauntings); and an overall focus on disrupting the traditional family structure, through the broken home, broken family history, or broken social concepts that underlie these structures. In discussing the home as a family structure, Anne Williams argues that “A haunted castle, so crucial to early Gothic, connotes many inherited traditions, such as the structures of political power and families, which are not only inherited but potentially imprisoning: in short, the Gothic novel evokes the weight of the past” (“Edifying Narratives: The Gothic Novel, 1764-1997” 127). The focus on the past and the existing structures of power situates Gothic narratives as disruptions—Gothic texts overtly structure the past and the structure of power as it builds from past to present. This emphasis on the past and the structure allows Gothic narratives to disrupt convention.

The Gothic, because its existing structures and images have altered throughout its use, has traditionally relied on multiple, conflicting structures in order to present its counters to those structures and divisions. Kate Ferguson Ellis claims, of monasteries, prisons, and insane asylums: “In the Gothic novels of this period, these institutions are set up as foils to the domestic sphere” (45). Since Gothic narratives often construct two types of buildings that divide gender, with the home for women and those buildings outside the home for men, Ellis argues that, “The reconceptualization of womanhood that is being

argued out in the subtext if the Gothic novel engendered a parallel discourse about men” (151). Gothic narratives, by arguing against the traditional gender roles for men and women, present new ways of conceptualizing gender as a whole in terms of both gender roles and the spatial context in which those roles are enacted. Thus, Gothic narratives fuse with spatial construction to disrupt the general schemas for patriarchal story structures and world views.

Video games that use Gothic narratives then, are able to break not only with the commonly known and accepted stories for video games but also with the common tropes for game-play. Video games that use Gothic narratives present the openings and radical dimensions that are found in other Gothic texts. These Gothic elements are radical not only for the types of stories they allow, but for the types of play spaces they create. In “‘Complete Freedom of Movement’: Video Games as Gendered Play Spaces,” Henry Jenkins notes that action-oriented play spaces are gendered as male both in the physical and the virtual spaces of novels and video games. Unlike the stereotype of action-only video games, *American McGee's Alice* and the *Fatal Frame* and *Resident Evil* series all present action-oriented spaces that are couched within Gothic narratives, which create the narratives as spaces of action for both men and women.

Resident Evil, *Fatal Frame*, and *American McGee's Alice* are representative of ludic Gothic video games that present Gothic narratives and disruptions in the standard video game form. Each of these games presents women characters in atypical ways for video games. They do so by presenting women characters who are well-developed and defined by more than their appearance or their stylization as female. The Gothic settings

and stories of each of these games allow for the presentation and the playability of some of the most powerful female video game characters to date.

Additionally, the continuing *Resident Evil* and *Fatal Frame* series allow players to repeatedly play using the women characters, which allows for further character development. In a similar vein, Jeffrey A. Brown notes that television serials allow viewers to more easily “grasp the heroines as more than mere fetish objects for male viewers. They may be sex symbols, but they are sex symbols that we come to know over time as fully rounded characters” (71). While Brown is discussing female characters in television, the same transformational character development is afforded through the serialization of video games. Because they are serials, these video games also show that their representations of women in one game are not errors or experiments, but that the portrayal is part of a larger gaming structure, be that the narrative or the game world design. Combined with the disjointed structure of ludic Gothic games, the iterability and repetition of play—both within the play of a single game and through repeated serialized play—help to foster a type of atypical play, play that repeats and undoes itself as *l’écriture féminine*. As *l’écriture féminine*, this atypical play counters the typical methods of play while also subverting the entire structure through which play is codified.

Un-making Family and Social Structures

The *Resident Evil* games offer players the choice of playing as a male or a female character. The game-play develops differently for each character, based on the character’s background and the items to which each character has access. The game stories also vary slightly based on the character used. In most of the *Resident Evil* games, the player will control both sexes at some point in the game or both sexes will be reunited

in one or more cut-scenes. The family, military, and corporate structures presented in *Resident Evil* are all corrupt and broken – allowing for characters to prove themselves based on their actions rather than their placements within these structures. *Resident Evil* lacks a traditional patriarchal structure because all systems in the game lack dominant male figures. The two militaristic units, Umbrella and S.T.A.R.S.—the tactical team sent to kill the zombies and right Umbrella's wrongs—itsself both lack paternal figures. In addition to the absence of dominant males within these structures, the characters in *Resident Evil* lack actual fathers. *Resident Evil's* characters include a number of young adult player-characters including eighteen-year old Rebecca Chambers (*Resident Evil 0*), nineteen-year old Claire Redfield (*Code Veronica*), and seventeen-year old Steve Burnside (*Code Veronica*).

In *Code Veronica* Claire, who lacks professional training, has set out to find her brother, Chris (who is a member of the S.T.A.R.S. team), but their parents are not mentioned. Chris also fights to find Claire, but neither of them is shown as the better or stronger of the two. Instead, Chris and Claire both fight valiantly in a world overrun by zombies and confusion. Rebecca is the youngest member of the S.T.A.R.S. team and is a medic; thus she narratively falls into the traditional role afforded for women in video games, that of the healer. Yet, while Rebecca is listed as the S.T.A.R.S. medic, she does not actually function as the medic on the team because of the way that the game-play is constructed. Instead, she fights, heals, and rests as much and as often the other characters. While S.T.A.R.S. is led by the male commander Albert Wesker, he turns on everyone, including Umbrella, for which he initially betrayed the S.T.A.R.S. team. Thus, Rebecca lacks any resemblance of a patriarchal frame. No mention of Rebecca's family or parents

is made; instead, Rebecca is characterized only in relation to her status within the S.T.A.R.S. team, which is a team without male leadership, a team that can never return to any base because its base has been destroyed by Umbrella. Moreover, the team is constantly being separated into single units by the need to fight zombies.

Unlike Rebecca and Claire, Steve has no relation to the S.T.A.R.S. “family.” Steve's parents both work for Umbrella and they are both turned into zombies. Later in the game to protect himself and Claire, Steve has to kill his zombified father, who was imprisoned with his entire family for selling Umbrella's secrets. This killing is done in a cut-scene, so the player has no control over Steve's decision to kill his father instead of running. While Steve's killing of his father to protect Claire could be read as Steve's re-indoctrination into the patriarchal order to assume the place of the dominant male figure in the game world, this is far from the case. Steve is constantly shown to be young, naive, and annoying—as Claire characterizes many of Steve's actions. In addition to Steve's placement as less than a leader-figure, Steve literally becomes a monster at the end of the game and must kill himself to avoid killing Claire.

Older *Resident Evil* player-characters include Jill Valentine and Chris Redfield, both of whom are members of S.T.A.R.S. Jill and Rebecca are the only female members of the largely male S.T.A.R.S. team, but the game-play for male and female characters in the *Resident Evil* games is equal despite this disparity, because many of the other S.T.A.R.S. male team members are killed even before game-play begins. The lack of a family structure with dead family members and missing parents, along with the absence of father figures within the two primary structures, S.T.A.R.S. and Umbrella, shows that no patriarchal system exists in *Resident Evil*. Further, *Resident Evil* uses mansions and

underground catacombs as settings for the games. These settings present gothically stylized worlds that are corrupted and that serve as breaking points from normalcy.²

Resident Evil's playable, strong women characters function in much the same manner as do women in more recent horror films. Clover notes the importance of the survivor figure in horror, stating, "The image of the distressed female most likely to linger in memory is the image of the one who did not die: the survivor, or Final Girl." Clover goes on to examine the final girl, how she is injured, chased, and "abject terror personified." Further, Clover illustrates that from 1974 on, the survivor figure has been female (35). While Clover's entire book examines the complexity of gender and horror films, this complexity is greatly intensified in horror video games – in particular the *Resident Evil* series. Horror games, in turn, further complicate the relationship by offering two survivor figures with one of each gender. Paul Wells, in discussing Clover's concept of the Final Girl, suggests: "They [Final Girls] often distinguish themselves by not merely rejecting the established tenets of masculine behavior, but enhance their credentials as modern *post-feminist* women by moving beyond both the traditional/generic expectations of women, and feminist/psychoanalytic orientations" (19). Wells essentially argues that the Final Girl figure presents a break in the traditional portrayals of women as victims.

The Final Girls in video games certainly also present a point of rupture, and they are allowed to become the Final Girls through the opening created by ludic Gothic horror games. The differences in the final survivor figure from the traditional girl in horror films to the male-female pair in many horror games, shows the changes in figuring gender in

² See Chapter, "Enemies, Monsters, and the Other."

these games. One manner in which gender is reconfigured is through the traditionally feminized healer role, which becomes twisted in Gothic settings. This is because the healers must become fighters within the undead enemy structure which focuses more on healers-as-fighters than fighters-as-fighters. While this seems convoluted and confusing, a simple way to envision this is that the undead enemies make life or survival paramount. As such, healing becomes a greater force than fighting for oppositional power. In most horror games of this type, running and healing are done more often than fighting because of constraints in the game world.³

Similar to the *Resident Evil* games, the *Fatal Frame* series follows two characters within each of the first two game iterations. In the first two *Fatal Frame* games, two siblings are trapped within a horrific situation, and in each a sister saves her sibling. Both of the games remove parents and parental figures from the game narratives. Additionally, both games focus on the ability of a single female character to fight malevolent, powerful ghosts, demons, and the very gates of Hell to save her sibling.

The first *Fatal Frame* follows a young girl, Miku Hinasaki, as she searches for her brother, Mafuyu, who has gone missing in the haunted Himuro Mansion. Because of her concern for him, Miku searches for her brother even when confronted and forced to fight ghosts and demons. The first *Fatal Frame* opens with the player playing as the player-character's brother, Mafuyu. The female player-character, Miyu, comes in after the opening sequence and remains as the player-character for the rest of the game.

³ This inversion of fighting and healing can also be seen in more traditional games like *Final Fantasy*, where the female healer character can cast a healing spell on an undead creature to actually kill the creature. In these inverted situations and games, healing becomes a fighting force as the healer also becomes a fighter in games and in their filmic forms as with the nurse-fighter in the remake of *Dawn of the Dead* (2004) and the doctor-fighter in *Day of the Dead* (1985).

Fatal Frame 2 follows Mio Amakura as she tries to find her twin sister Mayu in a haunted village. Mayu is possessed, and so the majority of the game is played with Mio, but for short sequences, the player does control Mayu. In each of these games, one young woman fights to save her sibling. In doing so, she fights horrid ghosts, including enemies who are dead female shrine maidens. For each game, the narrative focuses on a small group of people who sacrifice women in order to keep the gates to Hell closed. In each, something has gone wrong with the sacrifice, and the gates to Hell have opened. The first game takes place within a mansion and the surrounding estate. The mansion and surrounding area were overtaken by ghosts and demons after the residents failed to sacrifice a woman by ripping her limb from limb. As a result, the woman who was not properly killed, and the women before her who were, become some of the primary enemies. The second game focuses on a small town that sacrifices one of two twins in order to keep demons out. The town became possessed after one twin ran away and the sacrifice could not be performed. In the second game, the player fights the ghosts of the killed and sacrifice-surviving twins as well as the townspeople who all participated in this ritual.

In both of the *Fatal Frame* games, the player-characters' parents go unmentioned (or mentioned only as dead and ghostly). Further, the town family structures are those that have been undone by their placement in controlling the gates of hell and by their placement as being destroyed by their failure in these rites. The first game focuses on the 'Shrine Maidens' who are drawn and quartered for the human sacrifice. The second game is more complex, with twin girls needed and their bodies and souls in jeopardy. Because

the sacrifices are all women in the first game and almost all women in the second, the attacking ghosts are the ghosts of those women and others from the time period.

The women are particularly horrible because, in addition to being malicious spirits, their bodies are also physically distorted and broken from the ceremonies. Their heads are twisted backwards and upside-down hanging from their bodies. Their contorted positions are more horrific in appearance than the human-like appearance of the male characters, but they are also more difficult to defeat because their broken bodies move abnormally, making their movements more difficult to track and predict. The twin girls in *Fatal Frame 2* are also more difficult than the other characters to fight because they are physically smaller and faster, and because they tend to attack as a pair. The Gothic narrative, combined with the more difficult game-play structure and the less predictable monsters build these Gothic texts into games that disrupt traditional gaming narratives, play styles, and typical gendering in games.

The use of female player-characters, combined with equal numbers of male and female monsters, makes the *Fatal Frame* series one of the more progressive presentations of women in video games because the female characters are empowered to fight as women who are defined by their personal strength and determination, even in the face of horrific enemies. Further, the absolute grotesqueness of the enemies who are female themselves shows representations of women who exceed traditional spectrums of attractiveness and unattractiveness to present women who are not defined by feminine appearance, actions, or a simple inverse of those. Instead, these characters and enemies are individually constructed through their own internal traits and through game-play—neither of which is dictated by gender. Further, the game-play style of both the *Resident*

Evil and *Fatal Frame* games is classed under the genre of “survival horror,” which means that game-play consists of running, trying to escape or evade, and fighting less often due to constraints on ammunition. The survival horror genre inverts gaming tropes for fighting. In doing so, it similarly presents a Gothic rupture in terms of game-play.

Like the Gothic worlds of *Resident Evil* and *Fatal Frame*, *American McGee's Alice*, depicts Alice’s journey back into Wonderland, which has become corrupt after the death of Alice's parents and her later attempted suicide. Eventually, Alice must fight the Queen, and then Alice must fight herself, to escape her corrupted mind and to restore order to the corrupted Wonderland. Because Alice fights for her sanity, she is one of the few video game women—like the women in *Fatal Frame* and *Resident Evil*—who is not defined by her appearance or her function as ‘simply’ a female. Alice also presents a significant break from traditional video game presentations of femininity and traditional video game presentations of the Alice character. In *American McGee's Alice*, Alice fighting herself is also her fighting the other depictions of herself in other Alice games, which have mainly been low-level children's games with Alice playing checkers, or her wandering through a forest.⁴

⁴ Interestingly, the death of Alice's parents and her attempted suicide are shown through cut-scenes and the initial game menu screens. Her mental escape as paralleling her fight for Wonderland is covered in the final closing cinematic sequence when she defeats the Queen and herself to walk free from Wonderland and the mental hospital she's been living in since her parent's death. While this presents a very interesting story for Freudian analysis into her developing sexuality, replete with huge vaginal monsters in the final levels, the analysis would be lacking because this sexual emergence is not present throughout game-play, only in the opening and closing scenes. However, the ice wand, which is the only weapon Alice uses that is not made specifically from a toy presents another possibility. The ice wand operates as both a familiar object from other video games and as a sexualized freezing object. In relation to the Gothic, Anne Williams cites Luce Irigaray's conception of ice as a figure for the repressed mother with water and the ocean as mother and ice as the mirror (*Art of Darkness* 200). Alice's ice wand is a conspicuous oddity in the game world because it is not representative of any toys or any real world weapons, which all of the other weapons are. The ice wand does draw on traditional video game weapon sets, but this is out of place within a game that does not draw on traditional video game depictions. While the ice wand function simply by freezing enemies and thus its function does not point to any greater structure of sexuality and reflection, its conspicuous placement within the game world does deserve further study.

The other Alice games were typical so-called “pink” games in that they did not require much skill, and were based on cuteness rather than well structured game-play. In this way, Alice's fighting represents both her fighting her way through Wonderland and her fighting the previous depictions of herself to emerge fully as a character with agency. *Alice* is perhaps the most blatant gender-questioning game because the character of Alice fights free from her childhood, shown to be in a fairly traditional early 1900's setting, to emerge as free, independent woman at the end of the game. In fighting, she saves Wonderland and herself and emerges as a character without family, but with a future that will be defined by her. Notably, the final battle features Alice fighting the Queen, who also has Alice's head, and who also has vaginal imagery surrounding her. The vaginal imagery, combined with Alice's suicide attempt and the early twentieth century placement shows Alice's battle to be a battle for autonomy and adulthood. This reframes the normal trajectory of women game characters because it shows Alice as neither a child nor an adult—as a character who is in between ages and worlds, who defines herself through the game.

The fighting style in *Alice*, however, only indirectly complements the strong Gothic narrative and imagery. *Alice*'s fighting style is typical of many other games because it relies on *Quake*'s system for game action. Despite the fact that the game-play itself is codified to a degree because of the game engine, the narrative and the placement of *Alice*—as a game using a first-person shooter game system to present a specific character study—is disruptive to the history of the gaming engine on which it relies. Thus, while the game-play system itself does not subvert or invert gaming styles in the same manner

as the *Resident Evil* and *Fatal Frame* games, it does offer a smaller point of rupture within the normally rather codified genre of first-person shooters (FPS).

Conclusion

Women video game characters are sometimes differentiated from typical gender norms, as with Lara Croft who is portrayed as unfeminine in her level of action, while being hyperbolically feminine in appearance. But even Lara does not represent simple answers. The women characters in horror video games are often represented as being forced into their situations. They are still feminine and not male-identified by having male interests, but that they are in a situation in which male interests and female interests are broken down into a question of survival instead of gender. Ludic Gothic games make this particularly clear with the sisters in *Fatal Frame* and *Resident Evil* because they all fight only to escape and save their siblings. They enact traditional feminine roles of supporting their families; but in the disruption of gender and social structures, fighting is incorporated into this family support and the patriarchal family structure is replaced with one in which sisters and brothers, as siblings, are primary.⁵ Changes like this show how ludic Gothic video games present a radical departure from traditional gaming gender roles that cannot easily then be reinserted into typical video game tropes.

The history of games beginning with Samus Aran's silence in *Metroid*—which opened a path for women characters that exist as more than the stylized forms of gender stereotypes and as more than a choice in appearance—pointed the way for other openings in video game gender portrayals. *American McGee's Alice* and the *Resident Evil* and *Fatal Frame* series have more recently explored other possibilities that fuse visual representation, game-play, and game narrative. The changes in gender configuration are

⁵ See Chapter 3, “Siblings and Döppelgangers.”

necessary to explore new and further possibilities for gender in games. These changes are also necessary to show how video games can use existing schemas from other media in combination with existing video game schemas to create new types of games and new types of game-play. In this, the Gothic narratives in *American McGee's Alice* and the *Resident Evil* and *Fatal Frame* series point to one particularly powerful method of doing so, a method that engages not only the characters and the narrative, but also the game-play and the game landscape.

In *Resident Evil*, *Fatal Frame*, and *Alice*, the Gothic narrative—in terms of setting, stylization, and the inversions of family structures—allows for a disruption of norms and normality. The changes in visual presentation and game-play combine with the Gothic narrative to create games that are disruptive on multiple levels. In doing so, each game creates characters who embody contradictory gender norms. By embodying difference and disruption, the characters refuse systemization and they refute the systemization found in games more generally. Because of their peculiar placement within the traditionally disruptive form of Gothic narrative, the characters emerge as existing outside simple video game conventions and stereotypes. Further, the Gothic within these games combines game narrative, game-play, and game visual representation in order to foster the changes in video game gender portrayals.

By disrupting traditional game representations and game-play, ludic Gothic games are able to change the apparatus by which video games are viewed and played. Of horror films Clover notes that the Final Girl, or the survivor in most recent horror films, is shown to be feminine, yet also unfeminine through “her exercise of the ‘active investigating gaze’ normally reserved for males and punished in females when they

assume it themselves” (48). Unlike the Final Girl in film, the Final Girl(s) in video games *must* assume the active investigating gaze, because the games demand it. The women characters in ludic Gothic games are not signaled as unfeminine in the games because they do not choose to look; instead, they are placed in worlds where looking equals living. By changing the system from which the look originates, the look, too, is changed into a visual and textual *l’écriture féminine*. Ludic Gothic games continue in their tendency to rupture and alter by presenting a space that almost seems to demand for feminist form and feminist content. “Cixous believes the poetic must underlie the political for a truly oppositional politics to be effective;” Kennedy explains and then argues that, “Hypertext may give us a space for a poetics of the and/and/and rather than the either/or: a place where our feminist content, arguments or musings, may coexist side by side with their contradictions” (par. 21). Gothic games also offer a space of connection and rupture—a space defined by contradictions and possibilities which in turn allow for a feminist way of gaming.

CHAPTER 5
REMNANTS, RUINS, AND RUPTURES: HORROR VIDEO GAMES' SUBVERSION
OF CAPITALISTIC CONCEPTIONS OF SPACE

Introduction

As a genre, the Gothic comes in many forms, including print novels, short stories, film, and video games. The Gothic moves easily from one media to another because it is a hybrid that alters slightly in each use and each media. As Kimberley Reynolds notes, the Gothic is

a hybrid genre, which masquerades under the label 'horror', but which in reality combines characteristics of what literary critics have traditionally termed the fantastic, the marvelous, the grotesque, the Gothic, the uncanny, literature of terror, and literature of the occult. (3-4)

In all of its many forms, it continues as a genre fixated on boundaries and divisions, including the use of space to depict horrific blurrings and transgressions. In its use and disruption of boundaries and divisions, many Gothic texts are highly spatial, in terms of both the narrative and visual depictions of space. Misha Kavka points out the Gothic draws much of its force on screen through the spatial visual representation, “When the conventional themes of the literary Gothic are cast on screen, their discomfiting representation inevitably draw its effect from the plasticity of *space*” (210).

While capitalist conceptions of space seek to present space as objective, quantifiable, and controlled, Gothic and Marxist interpretations of space inherently question and undermine the seemingly constant and quantifiable nature of space. Even within the virtual spaces presented in video games—which often exemplify typical

presentations of limited, controllable, and quantifiable space¹—ludic Gothic and horror games inherently question the typical video game spatial construction by presenting spaces that are larger than their Cartesian dimensions based on their phenomenological components. Essentially, ludic Gothic and horror games populate their spaces with the narrative significance of the spaces, remnants of the characters that have been in the spaces, and other remnants of the history and potential future of those spaces within the game and the game world. These elements, in turn, augment the programmatic dimensions of game spaces. In a subversion of typical video game structures that compress time and space to be equally representative of each other, ludic Gothic and horror video game worlds populate the game spaces to create thick, phenomenological or experiential spaces. In order to present thick spaces, these games rely on linear, claustrophobic spatial construction so that each space is limited not by the geometric dimensions, but by the historical, emotional, and lived depth of each area. In doing so, ludic Gothic and horror video games subvert the typical gaming spatial construction that reinforces capitalist conceptions of space, and capitalism itself.

As a mass-media form, the subversive potential and the popularity of ludic Gothic and horror games presents an important point of rupture that undermines other hegemonic portrayals and uses of capitalism in games. In this chapter, I demonstrate the function of space in several ludic Gothic horror games to show how space functions differently in them as compared to how space functions in typical video games. In doing so, I show how the Gothic setting allows for a conception and creation of space that deconstructs typical capitalistic notions of space as commodity. Furthermore, I argue that this

¹ For a longer discussion of the how both the video game industry and internal game design standards recapitulate capitalistic norms, see Laurie N. Taylor, "Working the System: Economic Models for Video Game Narrative and Play," *Works and Days*, 22:43-44 (2004), pp. 143-153.

deconstruction of capitalist conceptions of space continues through to a deconstruction of capitalistic notions of order and identity.

Video Game Spatiality

While video game spaces are virtual, represented spaces, they are also played through and experienced. As such, they occupy a precarious position because they blend idealized representations with representational, or lived, spaces. Edward W. Soja explains Henri Lefebvre's notions of space as interrelating, “in a dialectically linked triad: Spatial Practice (*espace perçu*, perceived space); Representations of Space (*espace conçu*, conceived space); Spaces of Representation (*espace vécu*, lived space)” (65). These divisions prove useful for video game studies because video games create spaces that blend these three forms. In doing so, video games present virtual spaces that may be taken as conceptually relevant to real spaces. In the same manner that Gaston Bachelard's argues of physical spaces, “Inhabited space transcends geometric space,” so do the experiential spaces of video games transcend their programmatic dimensions (47). Thus, video game spaces relate directly to spatial comprehension and have implications for the politics of space. As Soja states, spatialization involves not only spatial metaphors, but the contextualization of politics and concepts: “[S]patialization [...] is a vital discursive turn that both contextualizes the new cultural politics and facilitates its conceptual re-visioning around the empowerment of multiplicity, the construction of combinatorial rather than competitively fragmented and separated communities of resistance” (96). For some games, this turn serves to reinforce capitalistic norms; however, for others, the presentation of space allows for radical possibilities.

Because video games are played through, they are lived spaces. However, they are first representations of conceived spaces. As conceived spaces, they are constructed in

various ways using programmed visual, auditory, narrative, interface, and paratextual elements. The diversity of components allows for multiple types of conceived space to be creating in different games. Some games rely on what we might call thick and thin spaces, after Clifford Geertz's notion of thick and thin description in anthropology. Geertz classified thin description as the basic description pertaining to cultural spaces—who was married to whom, what food was eaten, general commerce information, and the like. He then defined thick description as the larger cultural and contextual information that included the social significance of that information. For instance, a mother yelling at her child would be included in thin description; thick description would also include why the mother yelled, what rule the child had broken, and the significance of the exchange. For digital media, Terry Harpold has applied “thick” to digital works to explain how digital spaces operate—sometimes thick for experiential richness, and sometimes “thinned” for user clarity. According to Harpold, some digital media, like interfaces and computer applications, purposely try to thin the virtual space in order to clarify options to the user and to make the user experience simpler. For instance, Harpold explains that the desktop metaphor thins the computer interface for the user to make the computer easier to use. Harpold defines thin space as, “a form of space that is very nearly emptied out beforehand, so that movements within it and mastery of the objects it contains are minimally challenging to users” (15). Other works, like video games, use thin spaces because they are simpler to create, even though thick spaces offer viable options for video game spatial representation.

The tendency in game design to use thin spaces relates directly to capitalism in that thin spaces are less costly from a design standpoint, take less mental energy for player's

to play within because the spaces are more defined, and thin spaces are more easily and completely codifiable such that each item has a direct use value. Thus, traditional game design focused more heavily on thin game spaces because thin game spaces are more easily defined, controlled, and conquered. Furthermore, in most video games the space itself becomes a codified object that is ‘won’ through game play that rewards successful play with additional space in which to play. In these games, the space itself becomes a troped object whose use value is that of a reward for successful play.

Thick game spaces like those found in ludic Gothic and horror games, on the other hand, present spaces that are not merely rewards for successful play, nor are they merely changing landscapes to be conquered. Instead, ludic Gothic and horror game spaces are constituted by their uncontrollability, inaccessibility, and their lack of a simple quantifiable measurement. Ludic Gothic horror games present thick, often subversive spaces as opposed to typical games and typical gaming conventions. This difference for ludic Gothic and horror games exists in part because of the manner in which games have traditionally been designed and in part because most video games follow capitalistic traditions in their conceptions and representations of space.

Typical Video Game Spatial Construction

Video games are constructed through a combination of the programmatic game space and the experience of the player working from within that space. In order to do so, video games rely on the creation of a consistent spatial presentation to sustain the gaming environment. In the creation of a persistent game space, Marie Laure Ryan's remarks, “A successful game is a *global design that warrants an active and pleasurable participation of the player in the game-world*” (181). While Ryan emphasizes the player’s active participation in the game world, different games construct game worlds differently. Some

game worlds require nothing more than a simple interface for a puzzle, others require full worlds populated by various characters. The politics of various games often comes across in the game spatial representation of conceived space and in the allowance or negation of lived space.

Many video games use space simply as a surface upon which the game takes place. In this sense, most video games use space as a board game uses the game board. The game boards in most video games and board games serve no purpose other than providing a playing field. These basic playing fields lack spatial depth because they exist only as surfaces on which the games are played. As both Espen Aarseth and Terry Harpold have separately noted, these playing fields, whether two or three-dimensional in presentation, lack the spatial sense or presence in actual, physical spaces (Aarseth “Allegories of Space” and Harpold “Thick and Thin”). Many of the video games that do attempt to create a sense of place and space fail because they construct the space as simply a geometrically contrived space of polygons instead of a space or place of encounter. The spaces are insufficiently imagined and populated and so they present the geometric form instead of an actualized space. This is in keeping with capitalistic notions of space, where the space can be objectively measured, contained, and controlled. Like capitalistic notions of space, these game spaces are only defined geometrically, their sense of place and space is then created by the elements—or effectively the property value—they contain.

While many games use the space as a simple board on which the game is played, as with *Civilization III*; others use the space as a simple trope for conflict or progress, as with platform games where the player fights to progress in the space. In platform games,

the space itself is often a greater conflict than that of fighting enemies. Other games use the game space as an exploratory space of play, as is often the case with children's games. Still other games use the space as a place of encounter for the game narrative. Horror and ludic Gothic games are uncommon in that they present game spaces as spaces of encounter, encounter with the space itself and the game narrative. While many video games use the game space as the setting for the game narrative and many games require the player to interact with the game space, other games do not force players to occupy the space in the same manner, nor do they instill such a great sense of place, space, and depth within the game space. Further, horror games create this depth and field of encounter not through improved programming and rich three-dimensional environments, but through claustrophobic cameras, breakages, remnants, and through a lack of visual acuity. The lack of visual acuity and accuracy in horror and ludic Gothic games presents game spaces that are not controllable or codifiable in the typical capitalistic conception of spatial accuracy and control. While capitalism generally seeks to place an absolute value on an object, and attempts to objectify space in order to do so, ludic Gothic and horror games resist the visual determinacy necessary for such a move.

Despite ludic Gothic and horror games' deviation from the video game paradigm of visual accuracy for control, most video game scholarship and journalism presumes that video game spaces are gauged primarily through their visual accuracy. Janet Murray and other critics go so far as to equate video games with virtual reality. While video games do present virtualized realities, ones that often parallel real world social problems, these are not the antiseptic promised worlds of virtual reality. Further, visual accuracy and rendering do not equate to the thickness and depth of the game space in terms of the

player's experience with the space. This is because the spatial depth relates to how the player experiences the space as space, instead of the space as only the visual field. Horror games are most quickly defined not by their visual clarity, but by their need for small inventories, locked areas, relative control schemes, and constrained views because they present three-dimensional spaces using only two-dimensional graphics. By often relying on outdated technical constraints, horror games function outside of the typical game design dependence on improved hardware and on the system of commodification that encourages further technology-related products and purchases.

Many games present purely geometric game spaces. These spaces range from those present in board games, where all information about the space is completely accessible by the player, to other simple, yet not so holistically represented games spaces, as present in games like *Civilization III*. In *Civilization III*, the space itself is multilayered, yet each layer is still discrete and quantifiable, especially in relation to its use-value in the game. The game presents the game world as a map, which players can view from the overall world level—showing oceans and general land masses as well as the cities and unexplored areas—or from the individual city levels—showing the basic elements of the city and allowing players to choose and alter certain aspects of the city. Thus, the map is the space, and each directly relate to their use-value in terms of building an empire within the game. The multiple levels of space can be seen in the larger view of the game world and in the closer view for particular elements. These levels are embedded within *Civilization III*'s two-dimensional visual spatial representation. This visual interface which is similar to a computer screen then offers multiple levels of two-dimensional spaces. In doing so, the game offers a complex interface with many levels of control;

however, *Civilization III* still in many ways epitomizes one version of a capitalist, transparent space. *Civilization III*, like the other *Civilization* games before it and like other territorial strategy games, is based on controlling the game space. The aim in *Civilization III* is to control the entire game space either through conquering the space literally or by controlling through cultural prominence or alliances. Regardless of the method of control, the space exists as a structure to be conquered and controlled. The game spatial layout is that of nearly perfect information. David Parlett in *The Oxford History of Board Games* explains that board games show the game layout and present all of the possible information for the players, as games like *Monopoly* and *Risk* do, such that the players are in question as to how they will play, but not as to how the game is structured (18-19). Perfect information in a game like *Monopoly* means that each player knows the amount of money that each item in the game is worth, each player starts with the same known amount of money, and that each player knows that the only randomness stems from the dice and the cards on the game board.

Perfect information thus means that each object is known and controlled by the rules of game play, and that any randomness is carefully controlled within those rules. Perfect information also bolsters capitalistic conceptions of space by conceiving of space that is objectifiable, as with the other game objects, and space that is completely controllable or comprehensible. Under Parlett's definition, *Civilization III* presents nearly perfect information that, when combined with the game spatial control goals, creates a game where space exists both as a playing board and as a measure of game success. The space thus becomes a trope for conflict or progress instead of existing as a full space of possibilities. Chess presents an ideal example of perfect information because chess

boards are all exactly defined, the rules are clearly laid out, the pieces all have exact movement allowances, and each player is aware of all of these settings and the rules. Perfect information thus relates to the manner in which the game is structured, but it does not necessarily relate to the manner in which the game is played. It is here that ludic Gothic and horror games excel in disrupting the typical manners of game design as well as the typical capitalistic conceptions and representations of game space.

Similarly, games like *Max Payne* present three-dimensional space, but the space is thinned by the fact that—despite the many doors, alleyways, newspapers, and posters throughout the game—the player can only interact with usable items. The space is thus reduced to a flow chart of the status of its parts instead of existing as a rich experiential space instead of being populated to give a sense of a larger world in which the game exists. Further thinning the space, *Max Payne* is set in a city, but the city itself could be any city or any industrial or suburban setting. Any narrative significance of the space is imposed from the cut scenes and the paratext, the space itself is irrelevant. By thinning the game space, *Max Payne* presents a simplified world view where all objects have direct values and where space and reality equate to the same geometric configuration. Unlike these narratively and experientially thinned spaces with their reinforcement of capitalism are the thick spaces regularly found in ludic Gothic and horror games.

Space in Ludic Gothic and horror games

Ludic Gothic and horror games can be defined antithetically to typical game design. While typical game design focuses on transparency and visual accuracy and acuity, ludic Gothic and horror games rely instead on the loss of visibility, the loss of spatial comprehension, and on thickened spaces that complicate any attempts at transparency. Because video games are primarily visual and spatial, horror games disrupt

both visual and spatial comprehension by preventing players from having lines of sight by which to perceive any holistic version of the game space. As Tanya Krzywinska contends on the differences between horror films and horror games, “In some respects the more open economics of looking in games unravels the predetermined, ideological systems codified in looking patterns in the horror film” (217). These open economics of looking, added to the inability for full sight in ludic Gothic and horror games allow for the representation of and play within space that places greater emphasis on spatial experience than the typical spatial commodification in other games.

The visual layout of any video game relates to its mental imageability, or the player’s ability to develop a mental image of the space. In *Image of the City*, Kevin Lynch studied urban design and navigation; however, because of the focus on space and movement, many of the same concepts apply to video game spaces. Developing a mental image allows players to codify the space as a map of the terrain for ease in game play. While imageability aids in game play, it also serves to make the space more of a mapped, geometric construction than a vivid, changing space of encounter. In discussing visual comprehension, Lynch argues that smog and haze hinder imageability and that visibility across a distance can help create persistent landmarks and reference points that orient the overall space (41, 54-55). Lynch's arguments directly relate to video games because the field of view - the rendering of objects in the distance such that those objects in the distance, like houses and castles, appear on the screen even when they are far away - is used to improve game visibility and navigation. In contrast to video games that use a large field of view to aid navigation, ludic Gothic and horror games frequently block visibility through extreme camera angles and spatial divisions. For instance, *Silent Hill*

separates spaces through a dense fog, because of which the player cannot see across a narrow road in the game. The use of fog obscures vision making the game space seem more limited and more difficult to explore. Further, the fog allows navigation to be influenced by sound with the game's radio signalling when enemies are near.

Compounding the navigation issues, horror games focus on movement through thick space, forcing players to navigate and encounter the purposely difficult spaces.

In addition to the obfuscation of visibility, ludic Gothic and horror games also regularly remake game spaces so that even if the spaces were imageable, the spatial image would be forced to change. To create the thick game spaces, horror games, ludic Gothic and horror game spaces constantly change and reconfigure in terms of the spaces they connect to by unlocking new areas and destroying previous areas with falling buildings or debris. In doing so, the space comes to be a place of encounter rather than just a board on which the game is played. This leads to the game space becoming more than the sum of its parts and exceeding the limits required of capitalistic gaming conventions. For instance, in *Resident Evil - Code: Veronica-*, one of the characters, Claire, must travel through the Umbrella training facility multiple times to solve puzzles and open new spaces for escape. As Claire solves puzzles, the spaces change with new areas opening and previous areas becoming blocked. After Claire escapes from this training facility, the game progresses and eventually the player plays as Claire's brother Chris. Chris must also fight through the initial training facility, which has again changed because of an explosion that Claire set during her escape. All of these are multiple iterations of the same spaces as those spaces change, and all within different contexts.²

The repetition of the game spaces allow the player to play in the game spaces not as places on a map to be traveled through and over, but instead as spaces within an overall space of change and difference. The repeated traversal of the same and of slightly changed spaces allows the player to occupy these spaces as parts of a changing and indeterminate whole. Through the limited and changing visual apparatus and spaces, ludic Gothic and horror games also undermine the use of game maps, a staple in the codification and commodification of game spaces in most games. Where most games equate the map itself to the spatial significance of the place, horror games imbue the space with significance and meaning that cannot be represented by a simple placement and spatial relation as displayed in a map. In lived spaces outside of video games as in video games, maps can serve to help orient an encounter with space or they can serve to codify and limit the spatial experience. As Lynch notes in *The Image of the City* the usefulness of any map is directly related to its connection to the space it represents, “You can provide the viewer with a symbolic diagram of how the world fits together: a map[...] As long as he can fit reality to the diagram, he has a clue to the relatedness of things” (11). Lynch's remarks show that maps must correspond to that which they represent in order to strengthen image development. Most video games use maps in this way - with an accurate method of connecting the maps to the actual spaces they depict. For instance: *Civilization III* presents a game world that is itself a map, whereas *Dynasty Warriors 3* has an in-game map that can be selected by pausing the game and a small map that can remain in the corner of the screen during game play to provide immediate correlation with the space. Because of the tightly constrained views used in horror games, maps in

² For more on the changing spaces in Ludic Gothic and horror games, see Laurie N. Taylor, “Compromised Divisions: Thresholds in Comic Books and Video Games,” *ImageText: Interdisciplinary Comics Studies*, 1.1 (2004), <<http://www.english.ufl.edu/imagetext/archives/volume1/issue1/taylor/>>.

horror games seem to have little or no relation to the spaces they represent because the view point shifts dramatically within each small modularized space, and the individual point of view units seem to have little or no connection to the overall game space. As such, the maps—which are so often used as direct correlates to the game spaces in other games—are shown, in horror games, to be overly reductive and flawed in their goal of presenting the game spaces as limited and quantifiable.

While a map in a game like *Resident Evil - Code: Veronica* - should assist the player in imaging the game space, it does not accomplish this because spaces in ludic Gothic horror games are framed within certain areas that the player can move through, then combined with permanently claustrophobic views. Moreover, each frame transition breaks the space again and requires a reorientation. Because of these constant breaks and reorientations, maps in these games prove fairly useless for actually providing direction and spatial clarity. Instead, the player must become familiar with the space through interaction in order to function and move within the space. Even when the maps do prove useful in orienting the player within the game space, as the maps in *Silent Hill* do, the maps still prove useless in indicating the significance of the space within the game.

Rather than maps and the typical emphasis on visibility and spatial control found in other video games, ludic Gothic and horror video games populate the space as a rich field of encounter and, to do so, they rely more heavily on sound than on visual imageability as found in maps. In *More Than a Game: The Computer Game as Fictional Form*, Barry Atkins suggests that sound influences the horror of a text through its lack of explanation and the sheer effect of the unknown (69). Sound in video games frequently comes in the form of a soundtrack that is divorced from gaming events or as soundtracks that differ

based on the area in order to delimit different spatial areas. In this way, it serves to mark off and codify certain spaces as when particular soundtracks play in certain game levels or areas.³

Unlike typical games use of sound to delimit certain areas, or even more complex sounds which are used to cue the player for events, the sounds in horror games are more often ambient sounds. Many segments in horror games are completely devoid of sound, while other areas have ambient sounds of bugs buzzing or monsters in the distance. Horror games also normally include the sound of footfalls when the player-characters walk. This aids in indicating hollow areas where secret passages may lie and in creating a greater sense of tension. Additionally, horror games normally include the sound of the character breathing, and the character tends to breathe more deeply after running. The sounds of the characters' footfalls and breathing on the quiet backdrop help to create a sense of a large, empty, lonely world. Sounds from the character and from within the space itself create a space that is alive and dynamic, which is unlike game soundtracks that force the space to conform to a predetermined sound-set that drowns out the possibility of other sounds, of echoes, and of silence. Ludic Gothic and horror games use sound to create game spaces that are lived spaces of encounter. The sounds echo, reverberate, and populate the often seemingly empty game spaces. In doing so, the games exceed their Cartesian dimensions to offer a sense of depth and spatiality that eschews codification and simplistic readings.

Horror games like those in the *Resident Evil*, *Silent Hill*, and *Fatal Frame* series also have moans, whispers, and laughter in the distance.⁴ Sometimes these noises indicate

³ For a longer discussion of the use of sound in games, see Zach Whalen, "Play Along - An Approach to Videogame Music," *Game Studies*, 4.1 (2004), <<http://www.gamestudies.org/0401/whalen/>>.

the presence of another character or monster. But, at other times, the sounds serve only to thicken the game space without clarifying from where or what they came. Because the sounds sometimes alert users that monsters are present but provide no indication of where the monsters are, the moans and shuffles increase player anxiety rather than actually providing information. The radio in *Silent Hill* proves the best example of the significance of sound in survival horror. The radio in *Silent Hill* plays only static and it functions as a warning device with the static growing louder when the main character is closer to monsters. The radio provides no indication of direction and the player can only tell the direction of the monster by running and seeing which direction quiets the radio. However, if multiple monsters are near, the radio's buzzing may grow louder in multiple directions, so the radio provides a sense of depth without giving any concrete information about the location of enemies. Because it is not directional and instead works on proximity, the radio gives the spatial field a depth completely separate from visual depth. Furthermore, in each instance the sounds in these horror games are not directly equivalent to in-game use values. Sometimes the sounds equate to warnings about passing enemies; sometimes the sounds indicate secret passages; and sometimes the sounds do not have any usable function in the games. The majority of video games treat sound in the same manner as the game space—as an object that is codified and can be used, thus having a use-value, in the game. Ludic Gothic and horror games complicate the use of sound as well as and in furtherance of their use of space.

⁴ The *Resident Evil* and *Fatal Frame* series each have multiple games with additional games in development. The ones specifically referenced for this article not already mentioned are: Capcom, *Resident Evil*, (Sunnyvale, CA: Capcom, 1996); Capcom, *Resident Evil 0*, (Sunnyvale, CA: Capcom, 2002); Capcom, *Resident Evil 2*, (Sunnyvale, CA: Capcom, 1997); Capcom, *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis*, (Sunnyvale, CA: Capcom, 1999); Tecmo, *Fatal Frame*, (Torrence, CA: Tecmo, 2002); and Tecmo, *Fatal Frame 2: Crimson Butterfly*, (Torrence, CA: Tecmo, 2003).

Gothic, Horror, and Spaces of Memory

Gothic and horror spatial visibility and the use of sound still remain directly connected to the physicality of the game space. Both aspects are certainly important to the creation of lived space in the games. However, ludic Gothic and horror games also thicken and complicate game spatial construction through the game narrative elements. These elements are perhaps the most radical aspects of the games in that they create a direct relationship between humanity and human suffering with the fullness of existence and its inability to be truncated without causing harm. They do so by narratively populating the broken game spaces with fragments and remnants of those who have occupied the space before. Horror largely defines game spaces by the people who have left the space.

Notes, pictures, books, equipment, and other belongings of the dead, act as remnants reminding the player that this space was once filled. These bits occasionally aid the player in solving game puzzles; however, far more often these remnants serve neither game play nor the overall game narrative. Instead, these remnants serve to show the incompleteness of the presented space and serve to remind the player of the voices of others that have occupied these spaces. Horror games then use these items in conjunction with their thick spatial presentations to point to a regular world, with space as a complicated field, filled with those who now haunt the game space: the zombies, ghosts, demons, or the past. With each of these objects, the use value is divorced from items themselves (pictures, journals, and so on). The only remaining function is the function of memory and its inability to completely represent the objects or the people who have encountered those objects.

Because the objects do not serve a distinct purpose, as they would in a more typical game, the objects serve to haunt the game space. In *Victorian Hauntings*, Julian Wolfreys provides an in-depth study of the field of memory in Gothic texts. Throughout the book, Wolfreys repeatedly argues that the effects of haunting cannot be systematized. In ways similar to Victorian literature, horror games found themselves in breakage, thus preventing systemization in order to present the landscape of memory. Most video games populate the game space with bits and pieces of equipment and then use these to provide in-game hints, to provide additional equipment, and as answers to puzzles or quests. Horror games use the extra items for these same reasons; however, they also provide these additional notes and pictures for no usability reasons at all. In the early horror games, the text-based notes and single images were used as a simple method to communicate greater narrative depth without stressing the physical game system processing power. In later games these notes were added to files, as though the players were collecting evidence against to solve these crimes and later prosecute them. Yet, some of the images and files have nothing to do with any game goals and serve only to further the game stories. Ryan notes that immersive techniques often rely on what, "Roland Barthes ascribes to *l'effet de réel* (the reality effect): the mention of concrete details whose sole purpose is to fix an atmosphere and to jog the reader's memory" (130). Horror games have taken the concrete details to extreme levels by putting thousands of notes, ribbons, videos, tape recordings, and more inside the games, most of which have nothing to do with winning the game. Many of the files do not even serve to further the main game narrative and instead further the overall game world to create a thick world space.

The sheer variety and quantity of extraneous elements prove the significance of the unusable items. Further, these items do not occupy inventory space, proving their unnecessary nature because all items in the majority of horror games that can be of use take up inventory space. These unusable items show the past of the place and slowly reveal the many stories within. The pictures, lab notes, diaries, letters, notices, posters, video tapes, old home movie clips, and others are all used to tell the story of the game. The player can certainly complete the game without using these items. Although these items often refer directly to the problems at hand in game play, many of these items are simply extras and serve only to show the story of what has happened prior to the player's arrival. But these stories are often illogical, sometimes contradictory, and always just fragments – especially the diaries and notes written during the process in which their writers become ghosts or zombies.

Ludic Gothic and horror games also have a tendency to populate the game space with architectural components from multiple periods. While Gothic novels often have aging castles and mansions, video games continue the process of including historical architectural artifacts to invoke the past and to complicate readings of the game space. Lynch demonstrates that space and historical time are related, with spatial construction giving a sense of time, and a sense of the past:

The contrast of old and new, the accumulated concentration of the most significant elements of the various periods gone by, even if they are only fragmentary reminders of them, will in time produce a landscape whose depth no period can equal. (57)

In the inclusion of small objects and in the inclusion of buildings and other architectural elements from the past, ludic Gothic and horror games invoke the past into the present of the game. In doing so, they create game spaces that are thickened spatially and

temporally. This creates spaces that elude simplistic readings or capitalistic control through the fixity of time or place.

Gothic's Discontents

Ludic Gothic horror games clearly present new possibilities in video game spatial construction, construction that deviates from the typical problems of capitalistic control. However, because of the popularity Gothic horror as a genre, other games have attempted to use elements of the genre, including *Clock Tower 3*. *Clock Tower 3* was designed to be a horror game; yet, it followed a more traditional gaming trajectory in its attempt at closure and transparency. The lack of spatial depth is functionally compounded by a removal of thickness in having space have a singular purpose in the game play sequence. The game then removes the additional notes, journals, and other internal elements that aid in thickening the game space. Given all of these removals, *Clock Tower 3's* placement in London for actual historical points (1942, 1963, 1982 and 2002) proves particularly problematic. *Clock Tower 3* removes the aspects of ludic Gothic and horror games that allow the games to create thick, lived spaces and, in doing so, shows that relying on tropes from the Gothic and horror, even as they have already been implemented in other games, does not guarantee an escape from codification and commodification.

Clock Tower 3 focuses on player-character Alyssa Hamilton, a young girl who must fight to escape her home and her evil Grandfather, who wants to kill her and who can travel through time. To survive, she must ease the suffering of the innocent dead in order to defeat the undead Entities, who are evil killers from different time periods. *Clock Tower 3* combines this premise with the realistic and specific place of modern day (2002)

London.⁵ This placement unravels as Alyssa is teleported to London during the German air raids of World War II. Here, in the first fifteen minutes of game play, Alyssa sees that to appease the suffering of the dead who have been killed by the bombing raids, all she must do is find one item and return it to its proper place. The first item Alyssa finds is a diamond engagement ring, and she must place it in the ring box to send the owner's ghost to rest in peace or the ghost remains tied to life and attacks Alyssa. The ring's owner - who never had closure or saw the ring's intended again - is completely satisfied by having the ring moved from the street to the ring box. Once the item is returned, the ghost dissolves into nothing. In this way, each object in *Clock Tower 3* has a direct use value, and, moreover, a direct use value that acts as a totalitarian representation of the historical past, of personal pasts, and of the people who have become ghosts.

Clock Tower 3's ghosts are wholly defined in terms of their relationship to particular objects. The ghosts can be completely removed from the game space by achieving a simple goal. In creating the ghosts in this manner, the ghosts equate to value of their most prized object; for different ghosts the objects are rings, teddy bears, watches, and the like. Other horror games like the *Fatal Frame*, *Silent Hill*, and *Resident Evil* series do not promise any sense of holism or salvation. Instead, they use fragments to present broken spaces that cannot be made whole. By presenting broken spaces without the possibility of closure or completion, horror games thicken the game space to show a space that is not completely comprehensible and controllable. In contrast, *Clock Tower 3* uses the visual display of horror games and combines it with the typical method of video

⁵ *Clock Tower 3*'s background is typical of many horror games, and similarly sounds somewhat ridiculous when being paraphrased. The difference in the creation of the game space from this game to other horror games stems not from the basic plot, but from the manner of execution in regard to the space.

game play, which is over-determined in relation to capitalism, control, and commodification.

In most horror games, the players can escape from the undead, or perhaps temporarily banish the undead, but the undead can never be completely removed from the game space. The undead haunt survival horror games and create a sense of space, both by their physical/corporeal presence and by the remnants they leave behind. *Clock Tower 3* allows Alyssa to fully banish the ghosts and to give them over to some absolute peace through the use of a single item. This attempt at holism is the false holism of capitalism where a person can be reduced to a commodity. This falseness is only amplified through placement within an actual historical situation.

Conclusion

While the Gothic provides video games with an avenue for disruption and change, use of the Gothic does not guarantee that the Gothic's subversive potential will be realized. As Maggie Kilgour contends of the Gothic in other media, "the gothic appears to be a transgressive rebellion against norms which yet ends up reinstating them, an eruption of unlicensed desire that is fully controlled by governing systems of limitation" (8). While the Gothic carries with it a tradition of rebellion and subversion, that tradition can also be subsumed into larger systems of limitation and codification, and this can occur with the Gothic in any media form including video games. Games both use the Gothic as a backdrop for typical play, as with *Clock Tower 3*, and games rely on the player's perception of the game. Essentially for video games, any space can be thin in terms of the player's interaction with the spatial dimension of the game. Thin game spaces, in their emphasis on ease, often over-emphasize the totalitarian nature of use and value, thus recapitulating capitalistic tropes for control. However, even the thick aspects

along with the potential political implications, can be ignored, based on the player's experience with the game space. Ryan describes the significance of the spatial experience: "The difference between 'being in space,' like things, and 'inhabiting' or 'haunting space,' like the embodied consciousness, is a matter of both mobility and virtuality" (71). Here Ryan shows that spatial usage can determine spatial form. While ludic Gothic video games often present thick spaces that question the normative functioning of other gaming spaces and of larger social issues, players may still play as though they are within a thin space, ignoring the greater implications of the game world and game narrative.

Despite the mainstream movement of games and players that participate in the further commodification of gaming in line with a traditional capitalist trajectory, the presence of ludic Gothic games allows for a breakage. That breakage in turn allows for games to present space, the passage of time, and the human presence within the virtual space of games. In doing so, some games exhibit spaces that participate in Lefebvre's triple consciousness. "A more specific historical geography," Soja argues, "of Lefebvre's triple consciousness of the complex linkages between space, time, and social being, or, as I suspect he would prefer them to be called, the production of space, making of history, and the composition of social relations or society" (7). Video games, and particularly ludic Gothic and horror games, through their use of thick space, emphasis on time, and through their narrative emphasis on characters and humanity, foreground the production of space during game play. Unlike the mainstream video game trajectory towards transparency and the erasure of borders and breakages, horror games present worlds that are fundamentally broken and inexact. In doing so, they provide an alternative

developmental line that allows for a dialectical questioning of value. Further, they also allow for digital development that veers away from antiseptic, capitalist presentations of space into presentations of space that embrace rupture, creating a subversive space. As video games can serve to reinforce or subvert the status quo, ludic Gothic and horror games provide an instrumental function in shaping spatial conceptions, along with other concepts that follow from them, including issues of order and identity. The space of the games themselves is an integral, required component for further studies of the presentation and creation of order and identity in video games.

CHAPTER 6
DOCUMENTING HORROR: VIDEO GAMES AS INTERACTIVE, AND UNREAL,
DOCUMENTARIES

“Documentary film practice is the site of contestation and change.” (Bill Nichols
Representing Reality 12)

Introduction

In earlier games and text-based interactive fiction, the individual works were often packaged with maps or other paratextual elements. As video games have moved to DVD and multiple CD formats, these paratextual elements have become embedded in the games themselves. While many games include internal information, like maps, notes on game-play, encyclopedias, photograph albums, and similar paratextual elements, horror games often include longer documentary segments. The documentary segments are often embedded within videos, journals, notes, and other records—such as the source of the monsters—that aid in unraveling the mystery that surrounds the particular horror. These segments logically follow the structure of the horror games themselves, with the embedded mysteries and their close affinity with adventure and mystery games which demand a great deal of item collection. However, many horror games also include larger documentaries that do not directly relate to game-play. For instance, the *Resident Evil* series has released *Wesker's Report*, a bonus CD of Albert Wesker's—one of the game's characters—reports about the events in the games. Similarly, *The Suffering* includes a short documentary film on the game disc about the prison on which the game's prison is modeled.

The documentary elements in video games follow two primary trajectories. One follows more traditional documentary film styles, as with games like *Titanic: Adventure out of Time* which features a fly-through of the ship that is so realistic that it has been used in museum exhibits on the Titanic. Games like these blur the boundaries between simulation and documentary, and between documentaries and game, acting in ways that Tracy Fullerton terms “docu-games.” Fullerton argues that game simulations—analogueous to courtroom computer simulations that are becoming more admissible as evidence—present a new method of documentary by which simulations represent the real or the possible. Another game documentary trajectory, and the one I explore in this chapter, is that of game mocku-mentaries, or mocku-games. These mocku-games function in ways similar to film mocku-mentaries, using the documentary form to document unreal happenings. However, game mocku-mentaries also use the documentary or docu-game style to create representations and experiences which cannot otherwise be represented. Whereas docu-games offer simulations of real events that could not otherwise be experienced, mocku-games offer simulations of unreal events or events that lack the traces of significant historical information by which to construct a simulation. For instance, the *Fatal Frame* games allow players to experience the social and cultural place of women in historical Japan, along with the experience of the supernatural. Because *Fatal Frame* is made in Japan and because Japanese culture is more accepting of the possibility of the supernatural, the representation of the supernatural is intended to present an undocumentable, nonfiction reality within a fiction. In games, the undocumentable, nonfiction reality presented within a fiction constitutes a mocku-game which importantly allows players to both see and experience the realities of the

undocumentable stories. As Hayden White argues in “Historiography and Historiophoty,” historiophoty—the representation of history through film and visual imagery—is often afforded a lesser degree of validity than historiography—the representation of history in writing. White argues that this division is overly simplistic, especially given the inherent problems with unitary verbal or visual histories, stating: “Too often, discussions of the irredeemably fictional nature of historical films fail to take account of the work of experimental or avant-garde filmmakers, for whom the analytic function of their discourse tends to predominate over the exigencies of ‘storytelling’” (1199). White also mentions that feminist filmmaking has questioned the “conventions of historical representation and analysis” because of the way these conventions continue to “effectively present a patriarchal version of history” (1199). Similarly, docu-games tend to present histories based on an abundance of historical documentation. Mocku-games often present histories based on less or unaccepted forms of documentation or a smaller amount of historical documentation; however, they continue in the experimental filmmaking tradition in order to make artifacts that present alternate and silenced histories.

Like the supernatural in *Fatal Frame* and the unknowable aspects of imprisonment in *The Suffering*, mocku-games take many forms. This chapter examines the emergence and function of these mocku-games in order to explicate the function of mocku-mentaries and documentaries in the formation of the game narrative and in the creation of a horrific game space. Specifically, this chapter focuses on mocku-games that present possible realities that are otherwise unrepresentable or unexperienceable as a new avenue in documentary and mockumentary production, one which presents fictional dimensions in

service of non-fictional realities using a playable or experiential form. I argue that the fictional dimensions can help correct nonfictional realities in terms of the representation and documentation of women and minorities, because traditional documentary practice and documentation itself often silences women and minority voices while simultaneously obscuring their images in games and in reality.

Documentary and Docu-games

Documentary, as a form, is tied to the film medium. In print, documentary styles connect to historical artifacts such as official histories, diaries, photographs, and the like. For webbed media, documentary styles link to websites that archive historical information ranging from official history sites like Visual History Foundations' "Survivors of the Shoah" project, to less official sites like Wikipedia, and even to personal websites that archive family histories and websites that act as diaries as with sites found on Livejournal.com. However, video games, as a new media form, have yet to delineate such a rich historical and documentary tradition. This is largely due to the fact that video games are interactive or participatory so the events in games can change.

Documentary and historical traditions are often rooted in the relationship of the represented object, specifically for documentary film, the relationship of the moving image to the real object. As Bill Nichols argues in *Introduction to Documentary*, "Because documentaries address *the* world in which we live rather than *a* world imagined by the filmmaker, they differ from the various genres of fiction (science fiction, horror, adventure, melodrama, and so on) in significant ways" (xi). Nichols continues on to explain that the differences, "guarantee no absolute separation between fiction and documentary" (xi); yet he also reaffirms the connection of documentary to the world stating, "But documentary is not a reproduction of reality, it is a *representation* of the

world we already occupy” (20). While the connection to the real world is required of documentary film practice, that world and the manner in which it is presented constantly change. As Nichols demonstrates in *Blurred Boundaries*, “Traditionally, the word *documentary* has suggested fullness and completion[...] More recently, though, documentary has come to suggest incompleteness and uncertainty, recollection and impression, images of personal worlds and their subjective construction” (1).

Documentary films have thus followed the trajectory of other historical documentation, at first seeking to prove a unitary sense of history and events and more recently seeking to show multiple viewpoints in the construction of events and history. In allowing for multiple viewpoints, documentaries have, in some ways, exceeded their cinematic form because film is inherently limited in the portrayal of particular senses and in the depiction of infinitely possible viewpoints and worlds. Video games, on the other hand, rely on simulations and can simulate factual histories or the possibilities of histories, whether or not those can be proven to exist.

Even as documentary film has changed to embrace multiple perspectives and worlds, theories about exactly what constitutes a documentary are, as John Corner notes, “quite few and most of them maintain a strong connection with specific practice, either by way of critique or recommendation” (9). Trinh T. Minh-ha goes so far as to claim, “There is no such thing as documentary—whether the term designates a category of material, a genre, an approach, or a set of techniques” (90). Minh-ha further argues that the definition of documentary needs to be in motion so that it does not become closed and unable to change. In its ability to present alternate histories and additional viewpoints, documentary as a form can be liberating and informative. However, Minh-ha’s concerns

that documentary film practice could also become standardized is a valid fear in light of the prevalence of documentary-styled programming. Video games offer new possibilities for documentary in the form of docu-games, as articulated by Fullerton, as well as in mocku-games.

While Minh-ha's worries address representation in documentaries, because of its format documentaries are constantly faced with change. These changes are often in context with technological developments because, as film technologies improve, documentaries are more able to capture and represent events on film. As Keith Beattie states, "Throughout its history, documentary representation has been linked to changing technologies, the invention of colour and sound film, portable cameras, 16 mm and 8 mm film stocks, video and the camcorder have all impacted variously on documentary representation." As video games present new technological possibilities, they also present new possibilities for documentary styles. Beattie rightly contends that digital media presents changes to the documentary format by reworking established forms which allow "viewers to arrange the order of material presented on screen in an interactive, non-linear process which enables a viewer to explore issues and perspectives at will, and hence to disrupt the unidirectional 'linear' rhetorical drive of established documentary forms" (213). Along with the changes in interaction come changes with representation, as with docu-game and mocku-games.

Minh-ha and Beattie both see the need for documentary to change and adapt, Beattie with a specific emphasis on technology and viewer/user exploration. In some ways the traditional form of documentary is repeatedly deconstructed and reconstructed for use in fiction film and television. Carl R. Plantiga cites Oliver Stone's *JFK* (1991) as

particularly interesting because it blends the Zapruder footage and staged footage within the film (23). The changes to documentary with digital, interactive texts point directly to Nichols' requirements for documentary: "Images and memories must be made to move, to take time, to trace a path from then to now, to reenter the historical narrative from which they have been excised. This proves only partially successful" (*Blurred Boundaries* 128). While the movement of images and memories in traditional documentary are only partially successful according to Nichols, the changes in documentary available in digital forms allow for different methods of creation, representation, access, and interaction. As such, the images and memories are able to move and change in manners not previously available.

Fullerton has rightly argued for the viability of games as documentaries or docu-games—as with *JFK: Reloaded*, *Medal of Honor*, and *911 Survivor*. According to Fullerton:

there remains the creative question of what we can learn from documentaries in which we participate, and how do these experiences add to our understanding of historical events and the issues surrounding them, rather than simply allowing us to be "in the moment." There may yet be an expressive mixing of the game and documentary forms that will someday carry a cultural value equal to that associated with film documentaries. (20-1)

While Fullerton is specifically discussing the possibilities for historical documentaries in games, games offer multiple trajectories based on documentary traditions. In addition to games that act as documentaries in the more traditional sense, game documentaries also act within the growing traditions of mock-documentaries akin to *The Blair Witch Project*.

J.P. Telotte notes that while *Blair Witch* is not a game, it shares many similarities with games because the website and the narrative it supports "draws to varying degrees on each of these [interactive and game play] 'pleasures,' which, it forecasts to those who

have grown up with the computer and the Internet, extend into the world of the film as well” (43). James Keller also argues for the significance of *Blair Witch* in that it complicates the original source material, “The comprehensiveness of *Curse of the Blair Witch* and the book *The Blair Witch Project: A Dossier* tends to prioritize them, rendering the cinematic release a merely supplementary text” (55). While *Blair Witch* is not a game, it does share many aspects with video games. Because documentaries, as Fullerton has shown, and mock-documentaries, such as *Blair Witch*, share many similarities with video games, the potential connections between mock-documentaries and video games create the possibility for games that function in a way more closely akin to mock-documentaries while also informing traditional documentary practice for representing viewpoints and worlds that cannot otherwise be represented because of cultural biases or technological limitations.

Mock-documentaries for the Voiceless and Invisible

In *Faking It: Mock-documentary and the Subversion of Factuality*, Jane Roscoe and Craig Hight argue that, “At the margins of documentary are also a growing body of *fictional* texts which, to varying degrees, represent a commentary on, or confusion or subversion of, factual discourse” (1). Roscoe and Hight define these as mock-documentaries which they define as “*fictional* texts; those which make a partial or concerted effort to appropriate documentary codes and conventions in order to represent a fictional subject” (2). Under this definition even the real world events and realistic representations in the games Fullerton examines could qualify as mock-documentaries. However, Roscoe and Hight continue to further codify mock-documentaries as, “fictional texts, but they position themselves quite differently in relation to the discourses of fact and fiction. In sharp contrast to drama-documentary, they tend to foreground their

fictionality” (46). This definition of mock-documentary limits the form to those texts that are in some way intentionally fictional, instead of the traditional documentary texts that include fictional elements in service of non-fictional representations. For instance, actual documentaries often include re-enactments to support or illustrate the non-fiction within the documentary. Some texts are created and received as nonfiction, only to be later reframed as fiction, as with the documentary witch pamphlets that Kirilka Stavreva investigates as docu-fiction (“Fighting Words”).

Mock-documentaries like *Curse of Blair Witch* examine the fiction in order to support that fiction, in this case to support *The Blair Witch Project*. For the *Resident Evil* video games, *Wesker’s Report* serves as a mocku-mentary that complements the fiction of the games. However, this leaves a gap between documentary—as those texts which aim for non-fictional representations—and mock-documentary—as those texts which aim to have a fiction dimension. This gap encompasses texts that are complete fictions, but that are in service of a non-fiction reality that cannot be otherwise represented. These texts include the *Fatal Frame* games, which are fictional and also depict the supposedly nonfiction of the supernatural, a nonfiction that cannot otherwise be represented or documented.

Mocku-games need to be recognized not only for their fictions, but also their nonfiction implications. Kathleen Brogran argues that ghost stories often use the supernatural in order to recover lost histories and that, “in the process of recovering history emphasizes the difficulty of gaining access to a lost or denied past, as well as the degree to which any such historical reconstruction is essentially an imaginative act” (6). As all historical texts and all documentaries exist within particular frames, none represent

absolute truth or nonfiction. With events that cannot be otherwise created—as in the case with supernatural experiences which many cultures validate—the simulation abilities of video games allows for a mocku-game style that relies on traditions of documentary and docu-games in order to present the realities of otherwise unrepresentable events. Texts of this sort are fewer in number than completely fictional mock-documentaries or the documentaries proper, with their nonfictional aspirations; however, these texts do exist. Further, the form of video games, which allows for the simulation and exploration of possible non-fiction events, realizes further depth to these real, yet unreal histories and events.

Roscoe and Hight indicate a possible path into these fictional texts that are in service of a non-fiction reality. Noting the constructedness of any documentary, they state that “new technologies allow the referent itself to be manipulated—in other words, the basic integrity of the camera as a *recording* instrument is fundamentally undermined” (39). Texts that focus on the reality of events that are impossible to prove operate in a parallel fashion by manipulating not the integrity of the recording instrument, but the integrity of the reality that can be recorded. For instance, Nichols argues, “In documentary, we remain attentive to the documentation of what comes before the camera. We uphold our belief in the authenticity of the historical world represented on screen” (*Introduction to Documentary* 36). Yet, the belief in the world before the camera allows viewers to forget those rendered without voices and rendered invisible which the camera either neglects or cannot capture. As Nichols also posits, “The most compelling critique of realism involves the subordinated position of women, not simply in terms of roles but also in terms of narrative structure” (*Representing Reality* 176). The lack of

representation of women in documentaries and histories is only one aspect at the tip of the iceberg, as it were, of the virtual erasure of representation for many groups. Yet the belief in the reality of the world before the camera facilitates the disappearance or erasure of what the camera neglects, overlooks, or cannot capture—rendering whole dimensions of cultural reality as silenced voices and invisible figures as if they are unreal or nonexistent. The mocku-mentary and mocku-game allows for the recovery of the vanished and suppressed gender, minority, and other truths.

Both mainstream popular cinema and documentaries have tended to under-represent women. Because of this pervasive subordinate of women, Janet Walker and Diane Waldman contend, “the most urgent project of feminist film work has always been twofold: a critique of the dominant cinema (defined as Hollywood fiction film) and support for the development of an alternative feminist cinema” (6). Like cinema, video games are a media form born into a patriarchal system and so they focus on male fantasies and male histories, as in the docu-games Fullerton discusses. Yet, video games are a new media form created with digital imaging and can also create representations for which no analog in the real world exists.

Dana Heller suggests that, in the process of creating realistic versions of events that have not been recorded, film developed strategies to mimic found footage, thereby creating a space where unrepresented even unrepresentable, yet real, histories, can now be used to support a history of feminism (93). Video games, through their creation of visual and auditory representations—often within narrative and social contexts—can readily create the same sort of “found” footage. Additionally, because video games are played through, they offer the ability for players to make choices and to play an active

role in those choices. To choose, for example, to follow paths of previously suppressed or unrepresentable realities. They also offer players, through replay, the ability to make multiple different choices, even choices that conflict.

Alexandra Juhasz comments on the urgency of this sort of interaction in feminist documentary, arguing, “Feminists have a need for the recent past—history—to be alive, instructive, interactive, so as to be able to perpetuate (the) *movement*” (95-6). Nichols similarly insists on the necessity for feminist positionalities within documentaries, “de Lauretis argues that the principal challenge for a feminist aesthetics is to construct a feminist viewer position or subjectivity regardless of the actual gender or subjectivity of the viewer” (*Blurred Boundaries* 97). Similarly, J. Yellowlees Douglas argues that video games especially need to offer more than just masculine genderings specifically because video games can allow for the simulation and experience of otherwise inaccessible views, like that of the opposite gender (“Virtual Intimacy and the Male Gaze Cubed”). Essentially, each of these theorists argues for the validity of feminist documentary given its ability to depict and realize feminist positions, whether or not those positions are available through actual archival materials or through created, yet appropriate documents. Video games offer the same possibilities, with the added advantage of placing the player in the role of the character, whether that character is a man or a woman. As with the case of gender, docu-games and mocku-games can both allow for simulated unrealities that act in service of realities. Docu-games act in service of realities that could otherwise potentially be depicted through traditional documentary form, and mocku-games may act in service of realities that could not otherwise be depicted nor elicited through traditional documentary form.

Docu-games for the Undocumentable

Studies of player positionality have focused largely on the relationship of player to the screen (Rehak) or the player and gender—especially in studies of Lara Croft (Carr “Playing with Lara;” Lancaster). While those are essential to the formation of game studies, here I am more interested in the formation of game documentaries, particularly in games that document events for which insufficient archival materials exist. This sort of fictional non-fiction is already in use in historical museums through what Stacy Flora Roth terms “ghost interpretation,” which is the process by which re-enactors take the role of a ghost from previous times to lead museum visitors through the past and through the ghost’s personal memories (17). In doing so, the ghosts can represent the past from subjectivities for which only limited documentation may be available. Further, the ghosts can comment on both the past as it was experienced and the past as seen through the present. Creations that seek to express events for which no record remains or ever existed follow Renov’s four fundamental tendencies of documentary: “1. to record, reveal or preserve; 2. to persuade or promote; 3. to analyze or interrogate; 4. to express” (“Toward a Poetics of Documentary” 21). These tendencies interconnect to form the basis for documentary texts as well as the basis for non-traditional documentary forms.

Fatal Frame presents one possibility in game design because the game focuses on the story of a young girl, Miku Hinasaki, and her journey into a haunted past of oppression while promising to be “based on a true story.” Makoto Shibata, the game’s director, based the game on his experiences with the supernatural and on the story of incidents that occurred in a small mountainous village in Japan (“Interview with the Team”) along with the stories surrounding locations in Tokyo (GameZone). Thus, the

game's specific goal is to create a representation whereby players can experience the supernatural, which by its definition is undocumentable by conventional means.

The supernatural experience as a game design goal seems at odds with Western standards for objectivity and documentary, yet it accomplishes several goals when read in context with Japanese culture and society. First, Japanese society does not restrict the validity of the paranormal in the same manner that the United States dismisses and often condemns belief in the paranormal. The cultural differences are highlighted when major corporations in Japan like Sony invest in paranormal research (Landers) and when tourism in Asia suffers after the 2005 Tsunami in part because people fear the ghosts of the dead (Cheng). Second, by bringing in the supernatural as a valid part of the game and by setting the game within real stories of Japan, *Fatal Frame* is marked as a specifically Japanese game and, further, as a game that represents a dimension of Japanese culture and society that cannot be represented by traditional documentary methods.¹ This particular aspect cannot be otherwise as accurately documented because it is predicated on an experience or belief in the paranormal. Thus, such things as documents of people discussing the paranormal do not constitute the intellectual issue at stake; the actual events that follow from the already accepted existence of the paranormal are.

Western logic for documentaries would suggest negating these issues, at least as other than novel or idiosyncratic cultural artifacts; however, the presence of women adds a dimension not so easily dismissed. *Fatal Frame* not only bases itself on Japanese belief in the spirit world, but also on the history of Japan and the un- or under-represented

¹ Even within the select few documentaries that would study Japanese society and women in Japan, the paranormal as viewed within Japanese society could not be as experientially addressed.

history of women and the oppression of women in Japan as these are tied to a history of belief in the supernatural.

Japan in *Fatal Frame* thus becomes an ethical space in the same way that Nichols argues regarding documentaries where, “Historical place becomes ethical space” (*Representing Reality* xv). In becoming an ethical space, the game aids in creating a history that both does and does not exist. After all, “What does it take for a historical event to gain entry into the circulatory system of prime time news, especially if there are no publicists to make a case for it?” (*Representing Reality* 11). As a game set in the historical and ethical space of Japanese history, *Fatal Frame* begins with Miku Hinasaki traveling to Himura Mansion to find her brother. Her brother, Mafuyu, is a journalist and has accompanied several other investigators to the mansion and its surrounding gardens and grounds to study the supernatural events that take place there. The game thus begins as a ghost story of sorts, but as Miku explores the mansion, she learns that the mansion was the site where women were ritually sacrificed for years. The women, called Shrine Maidens, were sacrificed in the mansion by being torn apart. Ropes were tied to their arms, legs, and necks; then, the women were literally pulled until their bodies broke. The ghost story quickly evolves into social and cultural commentary as Miku learns that the Shrine Maidens had to remain pure for their sacrifice to be accepted. In the fictional game narrative, the system of sacrifice is disrupted when Kirie, a specifically isolated young woman, looks upon a man and feels interest in him. According to the documents that Miku finds, this interest is enough to pollute Kirie’s mind and, because her sacrificers do not know of this pollution and continue with the sacrifice, the system goes awry with Kirie as the tainted sacrifice.

With this story, the game appears to be a tale of oppression and destructive gender roles. However, this simple reading is complicated by the fact that the sacrifices were necessary to keep the Hell Gate, which is underneath the mansion, closed. When the ritual failed, the mansion descended into a hellish dimension and all who were in the mansion and surrounding areas were killed. Hell here can be read metaphorically as the established social system, yet to do so neglects the obvious and literal emphasis on the supernatural. The game first acts as a documentary of the undocumented aspects of the supernatural, and then as a documentary on the role of women in Japanese society both in the past and in the present. Using the supernatural to conjoin past and present, the game expands to directly comment on women in traditional Japanese society. As Miku explores the mansion, she develops rope burns on her arms, legs, and neck. With these wounds, Miku is shown as being transported back into the past and into a world where women are oppressed and tortured. Miku also slowly collects items that speak of the suffering of the women in the mansion, and of women's suffering throughout Japanese history. Some of the women's suffering is told through their notes, diaries, hair clips, the lone window in their prison room through which they can barely see the outside world, and some are told through their broken, ghostly bodies. The game itself functions as a museum or a documentary in its collection of items, stories, and events. In particular, by focusing on the under-represented past of women in Japan, it provides a method of documenting what is unspoken, unknown, or otherwise inaccessible.

In addition to offering a critique of what can be and is represented in documentaries, *Fatal Frame* also offers meta-commentary on the technologies of representation. It offers this commentary through the camera used in the game, which is

specifically referred to as the camera obscura. Miku's family structure embeds issues of technology, documentation, and gender within one another because Miku fights the ghosts using the camera obscura that her mother gave her. Miku's mother, like Miku and Mafuyu, had a connection with the supernatural, so her camera connects Miku to technology, to her mother, and to the paranormal system that both she and her mother can access. By situating the camera as a connection between technology, spirituality, and history the camera binds these together in context with the history of women in Japan.

Fatal Frame also serves to document the changes of technology, which connect older Japanese traditions with more modern traditions. This game strategy again depicts the role of women and society in connection with technology and spirituality. Traditional documentary methods could provide general historical information, more recent personal accounts, and information gleaned from artifacts. However, traditional documentary practice could not put players in contact with the same depth of information and its valences. Through replay, characters gain insight into the multiple compossibilities of events and are allowed to experience the, often limited, choices that construct particular historical situations. Players playing through Miku's story also play in a manner akin to a documentary form of *l'écriture féminine* in that the players play as a woman, telling a woman's story, and telling the history of women, while simultaneously playing to create a path that frees the women trapped in this tale and this history. In representing an otherwise unrepresentable depth to a social situation, *Fatal Frame* acts as a fictional genre of documentary practice, or as a mocku-game.

By presenting Miku and the camera as embodiments of the connection and divide between old and new Japan, technology and the supernatural, and the opportunities for

women in both cases, Miku comes to represent a personal story that acts as a path into these issues. Miku's story as a personal account thus also embodies certain elements of documentary filmmaking for, as Nichols contends:

the attempt to give witness to personal, subjective experience rather than categorical knowledge coincides with an increased reliance on the techniques of fiction in documentary. The goal of this reliance is usually more to archive a sense of historically situated subjectivity than to transform the historical person into a narrative character or mythic persona. (“Getting to Know You...” 175)

In a similar move, *The Suffering* uses a single figure to present a documentary-styled critique of the penal system. *The Suffering* does this first by basing itself in the real historical place of Pennsylvania's Eastern State Penitentiary—in the game this is reconstructed fictitiously as Maryland's Abbott State Penitentiary—and then by adding ghosts and demons to create a method of game play where the prisoner can be either innocent or guilty of horrible crimes.

The Suffering thus both bases itself on a real world prison and makes this basis clear to players through the inclusion of a documentary film (in the traditional sense) on the game disc about the prison and about the making of the game. *The Suffering* focuses on a man named Torque, who has been sentenced to prison and to die for killing his ex-wife and children. The game then allows players to decide Torque's guilt or innocence through the method of game play. If the player performs cruelly as Torque (killing guards and not just demons), then Torque will eventually be shown to be a murderer. However, if the player performs morally, Torque will be eventually shown to be a man plagued by demons, but not a murderer.

Within the moral play options also comes a commentary on race in games. Torque's ex-wife and children are shown in a photograph with dark skin, as African-Americans. Torque himself defies racial categorization because his skin is essentially a

pale gray color.² However, he has been sentenced to death, a penalty more often imposed on African-American males than on Caucasian males. While Torque's race may appear as a minor variation in game design, it is worth noting that the vast majority of game characters across the board are Caucasian or Asian, and that very few are African-American unless their race is explicitly tied to the gaming narrative as either a representation of the real, or as a racist stereotype as with racing games that portray African-American street-smart racing criminals. As representations of the real, games like *Madden Football* depict real life African-American players realistically in the games, and *Def Jam: Fight for New York* accurately represents characters based on real people like Snoop Dog. Other games rarely incorporate African-American characters in the foreground.³ Because of the overall absence of African-American characters in video games, Torque as possibly an African-American male—with the meta-commentary on the prison system that accompanies this—shows his race to be relevant to the gaming narrative and the game's larger social implications.

The Suffering's game setting includes the prison, part of a World War II bunker that the prison was built next to, and the site of much earlier witch burnings. By embedding these locations within the game—and especially by contextualizing them with notes that decry all killings as murder—the entire penal, war, and social systems within which Torque exists are critiqued. Further, some of the supposedly good guards are also shown to be corrupt and some of the evil prisoners are shown to be overly punished. For

² *The Suffering's* game designers, in the making of the game video which is included on the game disc, state that they chose to make Torque's racial and ethnic appearance ambiguous.

³ For more on the problematic and often racist portrayal of characters in games see David Leonard, "Live in your world, play in ours': Race, video games, and consuming the Other," *Studies in Media & Information Literacy Education* 3(4): November 2003.

instance, Abbott's Commanding Officer Hargrave feels justified in torturing or even killing prisoners because he believes the prisoners deserve death. Similarly, Dr. Killjoy formerly tortured patients in the asylum on part of Carnate Island where Abbott State Penitentiary sits. The monsters that erupt from Abbott are also depicted as due to the suffering of the prisoners and due to the fact that prisoners were executed on the prison grounds.

The game—clearly a fictitious tale of demons and anger—still contextualizes itself within a real US prison, and within the US penal system, which it then critiques. By critiquing the death penalty, the prison system, asylums, the people in charge of such institutions, and even the determination of guilt for criminals, the game presents a factual argument that could not otherwise be sustained because of the lack of complete records on prison abuse, convictions of innocents, and the like. In this, *The Suffering* also serves to critique video game play which most often reaffirms the righteousness of social institutions and killing as a viable and morally acceptable method of control and social protection. It further examines the continued lack of racial diversity for characters in video games, and the lack of racial diversity in other media forms.

Documentary Traditions in Fictional Games

Fatal Frame and *The Suffering* parallel other video games in their creation of a documentary sense. Yet they go beyond most video games in both trying to represent a reality, and a reality for which documentation is lacking. Many games, like the ones Fullerton discusses, are based on real world events for which sufficient documentation exists. Other games use documentary styles in order to better create the fictional game world. Games of this sort include games which use grainy camera footage to create the illusion of technical and economic film restrictions in much the same way as Sarah L.

Higley and Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock have argued that the grainy camera footage and seeming technical limitations led viewers to believe that *The Blair Witch Project* was a real documentary (21). Games featuring documentary elements also include games that embed additional items within the games—as with the diaries, notes, letters, videos, and photographs in each of the *Resident Evil* games—as well as supplementary game materials not included in the games—as with *Wesker's Report*, which is a separate promotional disc for *Resident Evil* that details a report made by one of the game characters, Albert Wesker.

Similarly, Alternative Reality Games use supplemental materials, including supplemental websites and print media, to create the game world—essentially the entire game is constructed through paratextual elements that subsequently constitute the existence of a primary text. The documentary styles that do not aim to be actual documentaries also include paratextual elements like video game out-takes, bloopers, and other items that serve to create the video game world or its characters as real and the game as the fiction.

In larger circulation, many games use in-game news bulletins, fictional interviews, fictionalized records, and the like. Yet each of these retains the trace of a documentary style in that each of these—whether they are real or they imply the reality of the documents within the given scenario—could be used in a documentary setting. Vivian Sobchack comments on the use of similar documentary styles of news bulletins and interviews in science fiction film, stating, “In general, the newscast is used as an economical way of compressing information or expressing emotion, which, if stated by characters in an unframed situation, would sound talky or unnatural or funny” (191-2).

Video games similarly use these documentary elements to quickly convey information and to provide a sense of reality. Even the use of minor elements in games like notes and x-rays in video games also connect to the accepted history of documentaries as they are changing to include these elements as well as more officially constructed elements.

On the changing nature of documentaries and their inclusion of different artifacts, Renov notes, “Now we can see as never before that medical records, curriculum vitae, and performance art are autobiographical acts of a most profound sort and arguably more pertinent to our lived experience than their pedigreed literary cousins” (*The Subject of Documentary* xiii). The changes in documentary as a film form—from the creation of a more linear history to the expression of subjective viewpoints that create a multitude of voices and compossible histories—parallel the changes and opportunities that video games create for the documentary form. Video games allow for an evolution of the documentary form by allowing for additional representations, representational methods, and by allowing players to have experiences with those representations even when they are of undocumented voices and events.

Conclusion

The docu-games Fullerton explores utilize the perceived standard techniques of documentary film practice, while *Fatal Frame* and *The Suffering* rely more fully on mock-documentary practices. Further, each of these have implications for game documentaries and for documentary practice as a whole. “Historical representation, and collage, becomes a form of cartography quite distinct from its Cartesian predecessors,” Nichols has rightly argued, and, “the assumption of a fixed reference point or even the determination of a fixed location ‘on the map’ no longer has the commonsense cogency that was once taken for granted” (*Blurred Boundaries* 120). In viewing historical

representation as closer to a line of flight than to a fixed path, Nichols acknowledges the vicissitudes of the real and of the past. Similar to the changes in historical representations, in terms of tracing movements rather than attempting to trace an exact chain of events, documentaries have diversified from a singular narrative voice to that of many, and sometimes conflicting, voices. The changes in historical representation and documentary also impact how new media forms use conventions and standards from documentary film practice and from methods of historical representation.

Documentary is still seen as having a semi-fixed or fixed form. This fixed form persists despite the fact that Nichols contends, “Documentary as a concept or practice occupies no fixed territory. It mobilizes no finite inventory of techniques, addresses no set number of issues, and adopts no completely known taxonomy of forms, styles, or modes” (*Representing Reality* 12). While documentaries have explored many possible depictions and permutations, they are still most closely allied with representations of the real as it can be visually captured, an alliance troubled by digital representations.

As Nichols also posits, digital media changes the primacy of the visual such that, “fidelity lies in the mind of the beholder as much as it lies in the relationship between a camera and what comes before it” (*Introduction to Documentary* xii). Nichols adds that the presentation of the real is necessary to instill belief:

Fiction may be content to suspend *disbelief* (to accept its world as plausible), but non-fiction often wants to instill belief (to accept its world as actual). This is what aligns documentary with the rhetorical tradition, in which eloquence serves a social as well as aesthetic purpose. (*Introduction to Documentary* 2)

Renov similarly argues for the rhetorical nature, and subsequent fictiveness, of documentary, “all discursive forms—documentary included—are, if not fictional, at least *fictive*, this by virtue of their tropic character (their recourse to tropes or rhetorical

figures)” (“Introduction” 7). While both Nichols and Renov claim the importance of the fictive and rhetorical in documentaries, they also continually return to the presence of the real. For instance, Nichols cautions against the use of reenactments instead of archival footage because of reenactments lack a primary correlate to the real, “Reenactments risk implying greater truth-value for the *recreated* event than it deserves when it is merely an imitation or a copy of what has already happened once and for all” (“Getting to Know You...’: Knowledge, Power, and the Body” 176). Despite these arguments, the “real” that sometimes seems so precious to documentary film practice cannot be captured fully on camera, if at all.

Renov elucidates certain aspects of the real that cannot be captured, “Where Barthes confined his analysis to the photographic sign, I take heart in my extrapolation to film and video, for increasingly, the 'somewhere' from which the dead are both memorialized and annulled is in the moving image form” (*The Subject of Documentary* 122). As memorials to the dead, film, video, and now video games serve to document the undocumentable—to stand as a testament to that which they cannot represent. The undocumentable and unrepresentable are two aspects which are brought to the forefront with recent mock-documentary practices and with the emergence of similar practices in video games.

Mock-documentaries question and enlarge traditional documentary practices in several manners. First they reinforce the fact that, like historical representation, documentary practice traces a possible path instead of fixed, exact events. Second, they trouble the position and possibilities afforded by documentary film practice. As Roscoe and Hight argue, “Within this complexity of social-political and audio-visual contexts,

mock-documentary seems to be symptomatic of a subversion of the continued privileged status of documentary itself” (4). In vexing the position and possibilities for documentary film practice, mock-documentaries can also open histories that are neglected, closed, and lost. Further, they can introduce these lost histories into the mainstream so that other cultural forms can represent, or attempt to represent, these histories. By interjecting themselves into the mainstream, “The mock-documentary form has attracted a wide audience, outside of the academic and visually sophisticated elite which have been the main viewer's of the form's factual cousin, the reflexive documentary” (Roscoe and Hight 189). The wider audience of mock-documentaries in turn allows for documentary film practice to change, adapt, and further connect to mainstream audiences.

Mocku-games often use their connection to mainstream audiences to present arguments to which those audiences would not normally have access. In the US, as the majority of video game players remain white males (despite initiatives to change this), *The Suffering* and *Fatal Frame* present arguments engaging the national issues of race and imprisonment along with transnational questions on cultural beliefs and on the history of women’s rights. Thus, video games based on the unrepresentable aspects of the real offer a corrective to documentary film practice through their clearly unreal visual representations and through their interactive format which allows for the presentation of multiple viewpoints and chronologies. Video game interactivity allows for the shifting of viewpoints, the opening of new options, the playing of new segments, and for the changing and altering of events that occur. Play in video games is always fundamentally a reenactment, so the reenactment is not privileged. Instead, the fact that the real cannot

be known is privileged and, in this, the unrepresentable and the invisible can take a tangible form.

CHAPTER 7
PLATFORM DEPENDENT: CONSOLE AND COMPUTER CULTURES

Introduction

Ludic Gothic and horror games more often appear on consoles than on computers.¹ This difference could be a minor statistical anomaly; however, closer analysis shows that this stems from larger reasons underlying the difference between console and computer platforms. The differences between computer and console gaming alter game design, game genres, gaming audiences, and game studies. While the differences between consoles and computers are reducing as consoles grow more powerful, these differences impact games and game studies in such a manner and to such a degree that they need to be addressed.

As game studies emerges from new media as a new interdisciplinary field, it has focused on many new media related issues like interactivity and immersion. In order to do so, game studies often truncates games into one unified field, rather than examining them as the related, yet disparate fields of computer and console games. Computer and console games differ in use and in the cultures that they create because of their intrinsic differences in game-play, game usage, and game type. Academic study has traditionally focused on computer games because of their ease of access, with most academics having access to computers but not to consoles; their ease of use, due to easy cheating methods for computer games; and because of their generally older gaming cultures. Console

¹ A version of this chapter will appear as “Console Wars: Console and Computer Games,” in *Among Players: Digital Gaming and Social Life*, J. Patrick Williams and Jonas Heide Smith, eds., (Jefferson, NC: McFarland Press, Forthcoming 2006).

games, on the other hand, have been studied far less because they require additional materials, are more difficult to play and to cheat at playing, and because their gaming communities are generally younger. Further, most academic game studies have examined only the cultures present in multiplayer games, rather than including the large gaming communities that are formed around single-player games as these cultures begin and develop in online discussion, bulletin boards, forums, magazines, and other venues.

The differences between console and computer gaming communities are formed through the game interfaces, the spaces of game play, and through player perceptions that often mis-label consoles as children's games and computers as systems for girls or older players. These different gaming communities are then fostered through online and face-to-face discussion, magazines targeted at particular platform players, and through player perceptions on the types of games that belong on a certain platform. Academia has situated itself more closely with computer gaming communities despite the importance of console gaming communities for console game studies and for game studies as a whole.

As James Paul Gee rightly notes:

A good number of people play both platform games and computer games, of course. Nonetheless, somewhat different affinity groups, with different attitudes and values, have arisen around each domain, with lots of overlap in between. There are people who play in both domains but have strong opinions about what sorts of games are best played on platforms and what sorts are best played on computers.
(35)

This article traces the reasons for the divisions between console and computer gaming cultures so that the different cultures may be noted for historical accuracy, for studies of gaming cultures and of gaming genres as they relate to platform, and for future game studies, particularly mobile gaming studies. For game studies, the gaming platform relates directly to game play and to game genre because of the manner in which gaming

interfaces and gaming key configurations are used as tropes for particular game types and particular gaming cultures. These connections based on platform are necessary to note for the differences in game types, game narratives, and gaming cultures that emerge in relation to the platform.

Distinguishing between console and computer gaming cultures aids in differentiating studies of audience as many studies are divided by audience age, gender, skills, education, and so forth. Furthermore, gaming communities and cultures have been examined primarily for the manner in which they operate during multiplayer play. Gaming cultures also operate around and during single-player play as focused on video games as their objects of interest in much the same manner as other subcultures like Trekkers, *Xena* fan communities, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* communities operate. Because gaming cultures often divide themselves based not only on game titles or game narrative types (for instance, horror gaming fans), but also as based on the gaming platform, studies of gaming platforms aid in studies of overall gaming communities, particular gaming communities, and the creation of gaming communities.

Future approaches to game studies that account for platform differences will also be needed as the Xbox 360 and Nintendo Revolution are promising to act as virtual consoles, allowing for legal emulation, but emulation that alters the nostalgia that often fosters console gaming communities. Further, as consoles increasingly offer online gaming culture support, the differences between online gaming cultures and offline gaming cultures (through magazines, websites, and shared physical play spaces) will need to be nuanced in relation to the gaming platform. Studies that account for platform are also a needed caveat for game studies itself as many academics tend to focus on

computer games and their cultures with less attention to console games and the cultures they create.

Studies of gaming cultures also need to take into account the importance of platform as the portable gaming market expands. With the release of the Nintendo DS and Sony PSP, along with other portable gaming systems embedded in cell phones and PDAs, the portable gaming market is growing at a rapid pace. The portable gaming market directly relates to the gaming platform because the manner of game-play and the games themselves are tied to the platform, especially as game developers create games for this casual, quick play market. Notions of platform and its relationship to game studies aids in bridging portable game studies with studies of other portable devices like the wealth of scholarship on the Sony Walkman.

Game Culture Platform Dependence

While many gamers play on both consoles and PCs, many have a specific preference for one and that preference defines their relationship to their gaming community. These preferences for specific interfaces and platforms, and the cultures that they create, can be seen with the options for controller configurations provided by games as well as on popular clothing, like the shirt patterns from GameSkins.com which depict the button sequences for throwing fireballs or for multiple lives.

All video games can certainly be studied under one rubric, with interface and platform differentiations as subsidiary considerations for game studies in much the same vein as media differences like the differences between televised film, theater film, and DVDs operate in relation film and media studies. However, for game interfaces and platforms, game players often divide themselves into computer and console gamers (the rise of mobile gaming may soon lead to new categories like cell phone gamers and PDA

gamers)² with important differences for each. For clarity, the category computer games here refers specifically to games played on desktop computers like those running DOS, Windows, Linux, or a Macintosh Operating System and consoles refers specifically to dedicated (or nearly dedicated) game machines like the Game Boy, Playstation, Playstation2, Xbox, GameCube, Atari, and so on. Computer and console games differ in use and in the cultures that they create because of their intrinsic differences in game-play, game usage, and game type. Academia currently tends to neglect the differences between these gaming communities or the games themselves, but there are important distinctions that warrant examination for their influence on the gaming communities and the games.

Academics and Computer Vs. Console Games

Many of the academics first analyzing video games studied video games as a new media art form akin to film or hypertext. These scholars tended to focus on computer games, and on computer games as in relation to new media, as with Espen Aarseth's *Cybertext*, J. Yellowlees Douglas' *The End of Books or Books Without End?*, and Lev Manovich's *The Language of New Media*. They also tended to focus on computer games like *Myst* and *Riven* and did not include console games like those played on Nintendo and Atari systems. In fact, one of the few texts on console gaming is Marsha Kinder's *Playing with Power in Movies, Television, and Video Games From Muppet Babies to Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, which is actually focused on children's media and not on gaming. While the work by Douglas, Aarseth, and Manovich proves excellent and applicable to video games in general, the differences between console and computer games need to be noted because of their significance for gaming and for gaming cultures.

² The gaming industry already has a category for casual gamers, who are players that play shareware games and are primarily women.

Video games – while existing as one expansive heterogeneous field – contain critical differences that originate in the platform type and that are more pervasive and significant than simplified issues of interface that are found with all electronic media. Indeed, while other scholars have specifically studied gaming cultures, their studies generally focused on multiplayer computer gaming cultures, as with Sherry Turkle’s *Life on the Screen* and *The Second Self*, and Sue Morris’s “First-Person Shooters – A Game Apparatus.” Many scholars are now studying console video games, but academia on the whole neglects that there are significant differences in the apparatus, the culture, and the communities for console and computer games. Academic games studies is in its infancy as a field, but already many scholars argue that platform differences are minor, or they neglect these differences entirely.

Video game scholar Mark J. P. Wolf argues that computer games are a subset of video games, stating: “‘Computer games,’ then are most usefully seen as a subset of video games, due to the shared technologies such as the microprocessor and the cathode-ray tube. Furthermore, many games are now released across multiple platforms at once” (“The Video Game as a Medium” 17). All video games are played on computer systems; however, for video games – on computers or consoles – the distinction of platform is more significant than a generalized sense can encompass and these distinctions can only be reduced with caution. While classifying video games as one field with the platform as a subcategory simplifies game studies, it also obscures significant aspects of game-play, including particular games being released only on particular platforms and the cultures that accompany those platforms, effectively closing investigation of those relationships.

Further, classing computer games as a subset of video games effectively hides issues of platform, culture, and gaming interface.

The ever-advancing technology in console systems like the PS2 and Xbox with their hard drives and network adapters continues to blur the divisions between consoles and computers. The distinctions between console and computer games may soon be academic for some platforms; however, the gaming cultures that these differences have created will not automatically be negated. Despite this slow merging and blurring, games have traditionally been, and indeed still are, wedded to their platforms in manners that are significant enough to warrant recognition. In discussing the history of video games, Wolf also claims that the distinctions between console and computer games are insignificant and diminishing: “Although some people make a distinction between ‘video games’ and ‘computer games,’ games are often ‘ported’ (rewritten into different computer languages or systems) from one platform to another, broadening their markets and appearing in multiple modes of exhibition” (“The Video Game as a Medium” 27). Wolf rightly argues that the differences are rapidly shrinking for console and computer games; however, the significance of the platform for existing games and the fact that many games are still not ported and are only available for other systems through illegal emulation programs makes the study of current platforms necessary.

The argument that games are ported also neglects the fact that these ports are generally not as successful on the secondary systems, as Patrick Klepek states in *Computer Gaming World*: “After all, console publishers have traditionally limited their PC support to pushing out half-assed ports of console releases” (33). The extremely popular Resident Evil series highlights the lack of porting because one of the most

popular of the *Resident Evil* series, *Resident Evil – Code: Veronica* – (2000) has still not be ported as a computer game, despite winning game of the year from several gaming publications. Additionally, the games that have been transferred have received consistently lower ratings for their computer editions.³ The popularity and critical acclaim of the *Resident Evil* games, yet their failure to be completely transferred to computers shows that significant differences exist both for the gaming platform and for the gaming culture as it relates to that platform.

While many games are available on both computer and console systems, many more are not available through legal means and the method of play changes dramatically when shifted from console to computer or computer to console. With the latest generation of game systems, and in particular the Xbox, computer and console games are more often being simultaneously released. Despite the simultaneous and cross-over releases, which are still in limited degree, the method of game-play and the gaming cultures still vary greatly as divided by the gaming platform. Further, the rise of cell phones, PDAs, and multiple mobile gaming forms like the many versions of the Game Boy, and Sony's portable gaming system, the PSP, also require further studies into platform.

Gaming interfaces, as they relate to game platforms also require greater attention because of the ways in which gaming interfaces shape the gaming experience and cultures. In “As We Become Machines: Corporealized Pleasures in Video Games” discussing game interfaces and their relationship to embodiment, Martti Lahti argues that the new shock controllers aid in blurring the boundaries between user and interface,

³ See for instance Gamespot.com's overall rankings of the *Resident Evil* games. The first received an 8.2 for the Playstation release and a 7.2 for the computer release; the second received an 8.9 on the PlayStation and a 7.0 on the computer.

“They provide a tactile feedback from the computer to the body that literalizes the implied bodily sensations conveyed through visual and sonic effects used in earlier games” (162). Lahti also argues that games make players cyborgs through their relationship to the games and to the game interfaces: “Joysticks, game controllers, pedals, and various steering systems further foreground haptic interaction and simultaneously encapsulate players in a game world complete with bodily sensation” (169). Notably absent from this list of interfaces are keyboards and mice, despite the fact that most of Lahti's examples are computer games.

While computer games can use joysticks and controllers, *Wolfenstein 3D* (1992), *Unreal* (1998), *Half-Life* (1998), *Duke Nukem 3D* (1996), *Doom* (1993), and many of Lahti's other examples are more commonly played on computers by a user with a keyboard and mouse. Lahti's argument could rely on a wealth of research on computer users, but instead it seems to couch itself within a rhetoric of console controllers, or computer peripherals, which in turn limits the analysis because it fails to address the manner in which most of the games mentioned are played. Studies that address the differences between computer and console gaming cultures are additionally necessary because console gaming cultures are further into divided by the types of consoles.

Internal Divisions: Console Wars

In addition to the separate gaming cultures formed by the division of console and computer games, individual gaming systems like the Game Boy, GameCube, PlayStation, Xbox, and even iterations of a gaming system, like the Sony systems and the Nintendo systems serve to create their own miniature gaming cultures. This is due in part to the availability of a game on a particular system and to the fact that many gamers have access to only one or a few systems. The gaming cultures are influenced by the gamers' only

having access to that or those systems and games, which has spawned forums and magazines devoted to particular console systems like *Nintendo Power*, *Xbox Nation* and *PlayStation Monthly*. Gaming cultures are also supplemented by internet discussions and by production from the gaming culture itself. “Game players excited about specific games such as *The Legend of Zelda: Majora’s Mask*,” Mia Consalvo explains in her study of video game fans, “can jump on the internet, where they engage in chat, read newsgroups, hang out on Internet Relay Chat, and create and surf web sites devoted to their creators” (327). As Poole posits in *Trigger Happy* by the 1980s and 1990s, “Already by this stage a great number of teenagers were more interested in videogames than in pop music. And Nintendo and Sega inspired fanatical loyalty” (4). That loyalty served to harness many players and to keep them tied to a particular console type, or to consoles in general. In delimiting the different gaming cultures, many single games embody the divisions between the different player communities and cultures, and these divisions often cause controversies.

These controversies include the “console wars” in which the different console types struggle against each other to win portions of the console gaming communities with their specific games and interfaces (Sam Leitch). For instance, Nintendo’s GameCube won the right to exclusively release the latest *Resident Evil* games, *Resident Evil 0* (2002) and several remakes. Nintendo fought for the exclusive rights because the console gaming industry recognized that the *Resident Evil* series featured prominently in console gaming culture and so players would purchase the GameCube specifically to play these games. In doing so, Nintendo further instilled divisions of gaming cultures based on the gaming platform. Further as Max Lake notes, Nintendo recognized that exclusive rights to this

Mature-Rated series would make the GameCube appear as a more mature system so it could appeal to a larger gaming culture with older gamers (“*Resident Evil Series: GameCube Exclusive*”).

In addition to the internal console wars, these controversies also include arguments from players over where certain game titles or types 'belong', as with the arguments around the new *StarCraft* (1998) being released on consoles, instead of on a computer system. *StarCraft* began solely on computers as a real-time strategy game, generally a computer gaming genre. As commentator Malcivar remarks, players often argue that a particular game, like *StarCraft*, belongs on a computer or a console and that the game cannot operate properly on the other platform (“User Comments, Starcraft: Ghost Demo at E3”). While many of these arguments are popular bravado, they are voiced from a distinctive fan culture which has emerged because many games do remain wedded to a particular platform despite clear economic rewards for releasing on multiple systems.

The gaming culture divisions based on platform feed player arguments because games released on multiple platforms remain more common for games released either on multiple computer systems or on multiple console platforms—like different versions of Windows and Macintosh or different versions released on the Xbox and PlayStation 2—than games released on both console and computer systems together. While console systems often each have their own smaller gaming communities, the larger gaming cultures are more greatly connected to the difference between the console or computer system. The two cultures are formed in part by the technological differences in the game systems and can be differentiated by several factors that also relate to those technical differences like game-play conventions, the gaming interface, and game genres. Each of

these technical differences relates heavily to console or computer gaming and, thus, to their respective gaming cultures.

Gaming Interface

Despite the blurring of divisions by academia, the technical apparatus for console and computer play differs greatly and these differences are perhaps one of the most visible divisions between console and computer gaming cultures. Video games can now often be played on both consoles or computers because of emulation programs and multi-platform games. Furthermore, many console games can now be played through additional peripherals like keyboards and computer games can be played through additional peripherals like controller pads. However, the typical manner of play relates heavily to the typical interface for any given platform, be it computer or console. The typical console interface features a controller pad with several buttons and directional-sticks or pads for movement.

This typical configuration is present on the controllers that are included with the majority of console game systems including the Game Boy, Game Boy Advance, all of the Nintendo Home Systems, the two PlayStation Systems, the Sega Systems, the Xbox, and others. The typical computer interface consists of a keyboard and mouse. While the difference in keystrokes and button configurations may seem insignificant, Gillian Crampton Smith and Philip Tabor both contend in "The Role of the Artist-Designer" that interface design affect users: "There is a commonly held assumption that content is somehow separate from form[...] We think that this assumption is mistaken. Content cannot be perceived without form, and the form of a message affects the content" (43). Terry Winograd also argues for the importance of the interface to the actual work: "Design cannot neatly be divided into compartments for software and for devices. The

possibilities for software are both created and constrained by the physical interfaces” (xviii). As Winograd explains, software must be designed with a platform in mind. As such, the platform affects the manner of software design, which in turn affects the software user. Because of this, the interfaces for consoles and computers affect the games on each, and the types of games that are available on each. In doing so, they also affect both how the players play the games on each platform and whether the players play on multiple platforms and thus within both computer and console gaming cultures.

Human-Computer Interaction Scholar Donald Norman notes that for interface design, “In fact, controls with more than one function are indeed harder to remember and use” (*The Design of Everyday Things* 22). Computer game interfaces are generally more programmable than console interfaces both because computer games can assign a single function to a single keyboard “hot” key and because most computer games allow players to assign each skill to a key. Console games, on the other hand, generally allow between one and three preset button configurations. These configurations cannot be changed, so players must learn the configurations in order to play. However, for skilled console players, the preset configurations are normally related to the popular key sets for other console games. The reuse of similar configurations makes console games easier to play for those familiar with them, and makes them more difficult for those unfamiliar with consoles. The difficulty levels for console or computer gaming interfaces are exacerbated when moving between the two forms, which in turn reinforces the boundaries between console and computer gaming cultures.

Illustrating the importance of control configurations, is the *Resident Evil* game series’ implementation of extremely limited game controls. The *Resident Evil* games use

a character-relative control configuration, which simply means that pressing a direction on the directional pad will always make the character move in that direction. However, these games combine the character-relative controls within changing screens that are sharply divided into small segments such that pressing up over one screen can quickly result in the player moving in the opposite direction in a new screen because of the game design. Character-relative controls are often viewed to be controls for hardcore gamers and they are more popular for console gamers. Character-relative controls are most often found in console horror games, which shows the connection between control schemes and platform as well as control schemes and game genres.⁴

As Zovni mentions in the *Moby Games* review of *Silent Hill 2* (2001), a game that offers both camera and character-relative controls: “Thankfully, those of us with reflex-problems can now switch between camera-relative and character-relative controls that finally allow you to handle your character in a more natural way when placed under the game's kickass but often awkward camera positions” (para. 6). Character-relative controls are difficult for players who have not learned them, and they require a longer than average learning curve. However, *Resident Evil* was first released in 1996 on the PlayStation, with many subsequent games on various systems, and so many console players learned the controls, especially with console players as more familiar with the overall use of a controller. Computer players did see the release of *Resident Evil* a year later, as well as later releases of several other *Resident Evil* games; however, the gaming controls are still seen as too obtuse for many computer games.

⁴ See Tanya Krzywinska's “Hands-On Horror,” which studies horror games and the manner in which horror games allow for a greater loss of control due to game play and the game interface.

While the interfaces do differ from console to console system, the primary differences are between console and computer games. As Gee notes—referring to console games as platforms as they are generally referred to in gaming magazines; “Many platform-game players think keyboards are a bad way to play video games, while some computer-game players think they are a good way. In turn, these matters are connected to their identities as game players” (34). While the differences between console and computer interfaces can be mitigated through the use of peripherals console and computer gamers, and thus their gaming cultures, generally view the differences not simply as aspects of the interface, but as intrinsic to the game type and as extremely significant to game-play.

Consoles are for Kids

The interface differences are also the basis for gaming community biases. Console and computer gaming communities are further separated by the representation of one community within the other as less skilled, more childish, or in some way a weaker community. In particular, computer gaming communities often depict console gaming communities as being younger and less mature based on the types of games available on console systems, and this depiction continues in academic studies. Game designer Crawford divides milestone games into ‘videogames’ and ‘computer games,’ using the same child-console gaming bias stating that in their early development computer games and video games were easily separated: “videogames played on consoles didn't have much computer power and tended to appeal to younger kids, while computer games were played on more expensive personal computers and so tended to appeal to older boys” (20). The perception of consoles as children's systems and computers as gaming systems

for adults continues through both gaming cultures and through much of the older work on game studies.

In *The Design of Everyday Things*, Norman states that the Nintendo is “meant to be used by children” and even describes the system as “The Nintendo Children's Toy” (138-9). While the arguments over platforms and age appropriateness have evolved since that publication, Norman again argues in *Emotional Design* that consoles are for young people, specifically young males (43). Like Norman, Sheri Graner Ray confines her analysis of games based on age and gender in relation to platform. Because she studies young girl gamers, she bases her arguments on computer games (2-6). Both Norman and Graner Ray’s divisions of console and computer games are implicit in their arguments. In this, they define a gaming culture based on a particular platform; in this case, they define consoles as more for boys or dedicated gamers and computers as more available for girls, older players, or atypical players in general. While problematic, these divisions do carry some validity and do underlie some of the divisions in gaming cultures because young boys are more likely to have console systems available for them and atypical players, like girls and older players, are more likely to have access only to computers (Graner Ray 3-14). These divisions are also due in part to the fact that computer games require a higher initial cost for the computer. The perception of consoles as for children and computer gaming as for older players also relates directly to the spaces in which the games are played.

Places and Ways of Play: Living Rooms, Online Hints, and Game Play Conventions

In addition to the technical aspects of consoles and computers are the physical placement of the systems. Early gaming culture derived from arcade games where players could enter their initials for high scores. The physical format of arcade games led to

others watching while one player would play. This, combined with the social acknowledgement for high scores formed small communities based on location. These individual gaming cultures were united by the types of games they played, the places the games were played, and the manner of game-play. Like arcade games, computer and console gaming cultures were and are based largely on the spaces in which the games are played. The platform type relates to the space in which the games are played, which also directly relates to the gaming cultures, as Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin posit:

Arcade games, home video games, and desktop computer games each operate within their own social space[...] Home video games must be played where the television is located, which is often a large and public room. Although one or two people can actively participate, everyone who sits in or walks through the room shares the experience of the game[...] Desktop computer games, played where the computer is located in an office or perhaps a bedroom, are comparatively antisocial, for they are often designed for a single player. On the other hand, desktop games may use networking to expand their social space. (102)

The physical space of game-play leads to different gaming cultures because the television space required of console games places console games in a localized communal space. In this communal space, several people often participate in the playing of a single game.

Computer games, however, are often played in an office in a bedroom and require that the player be closer to the screen. The change in location and in physical set-up lead computer games to more often be played by a single player without others participating in the same physical location. However, computer games are more easily connected to networks for virtual community play. Because of the differences in play spaces, computer gaming cultures became more immediately tied to online culture, and console gaming cultures remained more concretely based in small groups of players and more reliant on magazines for larger gaming culture discussions. Now, the Xbox and PS2 allow for multiplayer online play, but this has only recently been the case.

Because of the more localized spaces of play for console games, and because those spaces most often reside in communal areas, console games have founded communities based around single-player games like the *Resident Evil* series, the many games in the Mario world (of which several can be played as multiplayer games), and games like *Devil May Cry* (2001). These communities, based around single-player games, either originate through the small, localized play groups that play and watch the games being played, or through external discussion of the games in magazines and forums. While many scholars have investigated the gaming communities present in online multiplayer games, much less attention has been paid to the gaming communities present with single-player games. These cultures are much more difficult to study because they exist asynchronously from game-play, yet they are significant because they affect the gaming culture as a whole.

Before the internet revolution with forums, bulletin boards, and chat sessions focusing on aspects of video game culture was *Nintendo Power*. *Nintendo Power* was first released in the spring of 1988 and featured high score lists, gaming contests, a letters to the editor section, a fan art section, and other areas that fostered the creation of a Nintendo gaming culture based on the primarily single-player games for the original Nintendo Entertainment System. As David Sheff contends, “*Nintendo Power* became the largest-circulation magazine for kids in America by the end of its first year” (179). Game journalism initially split between the console magazines like *Nintendo Power* and *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (EGM) and the magazines dedicated to computer games like *Computer Gaming World*. However, their split is being minimized as console and computer games continue to blur and as the magazines share articles and websites like

1UP.com, which supplements console magazines like *EGM* and *Xbox Nation* as well as computer magazines like *Computer Gaming World*.

Acknowledging the differences in computer gaming audiences and games, Klepek also claims that the differences are often invisible even within the industry, “Having found success on consoles, however, many publishers may be coming into the PC world without much of an idea of how the audiences and markets differ” (33). Magazines and their websites, as well as fan sites, offer walkthroughs, maps, and hint guides. While these exist as external texts to the games and game cultures, they still operate for the creation and continuance of gaming cultures, as Gee notes, “These texts are all integrated into the appreciative systems associated with the affinity groups connected to video games” (101). Because the game walkthroughs, maps, and tips all refer to specific games—even with ported games, these texts often differ based on the game system—these texts all serve to engender a gaming culture specifically tied to the game system. The hints and walkthroughs connect to the overall gaming culture, which is tied by issues of interface and gaming convention, and which then fosters the culture through the repeated use of those conventions, including cheating.

Gaming conventions differ for consoles and computer games, making game-play and game design for each format differ based on the gaming platform. Some of the more significant differences include saving and cheating. Computer games normally allow players to save at any point in game-play. Console games, on the other hand, often limit the number and frequency of game saves as determined by their limited game memory space for internal, incremental saves. Gee suggests that console gamers are more accustomed to extended replay, “Furthermore, in my experience, many platform users do

not see playing large parts of a game over and over again as repetition in the way in which I do” (34). This extended replay is necessary for console games because of the limited save allowances, but limited saves are often counted against computer games when games are reviewed.

One of the most extreme examples of limited saves can be found in the *Resident Evil* series. Reviewer Ron Dulin notes: “The method by which you save games will infuriate PC purists, as it is not only sporadic, but requires an item of which there are a limited number” (para. 7). Originally, the game saves were limited due to technological constraints for memory space. However, this became a game convention for the series and many players cannot win because the game severely limits ammunition and saves so that the player is easily killed and replay becomes more difficult. This forced replay and limited save system is part of the reason for the failure of *Resident Evil* on computer systems, because the conventions for computer games and the *Resident Evil* games are at odds.

Additionally, cheating is easier to perform on a computer system because cheat codes and 'hacks' are readily available through codes that grant infinite life, 'God Codes' and other basic codes entered into the game files. For console games, cheat codes can usually only be administered through additional peripheral materials that must be purchased and then configured. Because cheating was generally more difficult on consoles, easy cheating methods became part of the console gaming culture. One example of this is the *Metroid* (1985) “JUSTIN BAILEY” cheat code which gave the player almost all of the game powers, the *Contra* (1988) and *Life Force* (1987) code for additional lives, which was done using the controller keys “Up, Up, Down, Down, Left,

Right, Left, Right, Select, Start.” In fact, the popularity of these codes as part of the culture now feeds t-shirt sales with businesses like GameSkins.com selling shirts with these codes on them.⁵

Like cheating, modification of games proves simpler on computers because computer games are meant to be modifiable for corrections. Further, computer players are familiar and accustomed to being given incomplete games and downloading patches to correct their games. Because of the need for patches, computer players are also readily familiar with the need to alter their existing games, through both the game’s sponsored corrections and through player-made modifications or “mods.” These mods have even fostered mod communities where groups of players work together to create personalized mods of games, like specific-themed *Quake* (1996) mods and *Sims* (2001) character mods (Morris).

Console gamers, on the other hand, have not had the possibility for mods until recently. In prior and many of the contemporary gaming consoles, mods are not possible because the game materials must be contained on the game cartridge or disc. While the PlayStation2 and Xbox now have hard drives for their systems, enabling console players to use game or player created mods, game mods were almost entirely unavailable until now. In fact, the culture of console gamers has come to expect games to be fully developed. “PC gamers are often tech junkies. They like to fiddle with their boxes,” as Rider notes “Console gamers just don’t want to be that bothered with the technology – they don’t want to install patches, tweak settings, or work to play the game. Consoles are made to be powered up and played with little to no hassle” (para. 5-6). While computer

⁵ Even the gaming clothing divides computer and console gamers with the clothes on GameSkins.com most often depicting console gaming icons and the clothes on sites like ThinkGeek.com most often depicting geek culture with computer coding and computer gaming icons.

gamers often developed communities around game modifications and patches, because console players had to rely on the game cartridge or disc, their communities often developed because of the cultural commonalities in dealing with cartridge and disc errors. One of these commonalities is the method of cleaning dust from the original NES cartridges. Many players used cotton-tipped swabs with rubbing alcohol to clean the dust from the cartridges, despite the fact that Nintendo specifically advised against it. Other players developed special methods of blowing into the cartridges to clean out the dust. In addition to legal mods are the illicit mods and methods of copying games which have fostered subcultures for both computer and console gamers. Because computer games are available on full computers, the games are more easily copied even with copy protection.

Game Genres

Further reinforcing gaming cultures divided by gaming platform are the technical aspects of gaming genres. Given their consistent releases divided by console or computer, certain games, game series, and game genres are representative of their platform and its relationship to genre because the games remain, despite popularity or demand, on a single system for many iterations. For instance, massively-multiplayer games like *Everquest* (1999) and *City of Heroes* (2004) are more often found on computer systems, as are real-time strategy games like *WarCraft* (1994) and *StarCraft* (1998). Real-time strategy games are more often found on computers because they require multiple functions, and are more easily mapped to the multiple keys on a keyboard, and because they require higher processing power which is more readily available on computers. Conversely, multiplayer racing games like *Rush 2049* (2000) and *Mario Kart* (2003) are more often found on console systems because these games predicate on small groups of players playing collectively. Regarding the transfer of game genres to different platforms Klepek

states, “Many of these games are from genres (fighting, shooting) that typically don’t find success with PC audiences” (33). The fighting and shooting game genres are both situated with console systems and console gamers in large part because of the spaces in which the games are played because of the controller configuration for the games. While certain genres are tied to the platform interface, many genres also remain tied to their systems because of the gaming culture’s perception of that genre or game series. Because of the divided gaming cultures, genre differences, which may or may not be based within those separate gaming cultures, still serve to further differentiate those cultures.

Conclusion: Platforms for Academics

In some ways, the significance of platform type for consoles and computers is diminishing with technological improvements; however, the differences for portable gaming systems like cell phones and PDAs has barely begun. Aside from the mobile gaming platform differences, console and computer game interfaces still differ and their differences still factor largely for gaming culture in general, as well as for gaming genres and the act of game-play. Game studies needs to further recognize the impact of the platform and interface for purposes of historical accuracy and for the significance of platform given the changes in platforms with the Nintendo DS radicalizing the handheld market, and with the rise of other gaming platforms. The complex relationship of the gaming apparatus to gaming cultures shows that games cannot be studied without regard to their platform and to their gaming culture. Any attempt to do so would serve to further instantiate an academic gaming culture, one that has already begun in its preference for computer games with their cheat codes. The differences in gaming platform, as these differences inform all gaming aspects, must be noted and investigated.

The academic gaming culture is driven in part by the desire to have replicable gaming experiences through the multiple saves offered by computer games, and the desire to archive the games for later use. Console game emulators make older games available for play on computers; however the method of play is still drastically changed, often in fundamental ways that alter game-play and game reception. Once the differences between computer and console games are recognized, then the academic desire to protect data may come to include console games and pieces of console gaming culture through the archiving of console gaming systems instead of just their 'essence' through the archiving of emulators. Whether or not this archiving could be successful, the recognition of the differences between console and computer games would still serve to inform investigations of gaming systems, mobile gaming, and gaming cultures.

CHAPTER 8 SEQUELS, PREQUELS, AND SERIALITY IN VIDEO GAMES

Introduction

Globalization has brought an increase in mass media convergences, which have in turn led to the increased production of texts in multiple media forms and in multiple iterations. Scholars like Vera Dika have called this a “serial impulse” (205). While serialized and multiform texts have been a common practice, the degree and type of serialization has changed with globalization and the rise of digital media. Of these changes, Angela Ndalians argues that, “Expressing their seriality in alternate ways and through alternate forms of media, contemporary entertainments reveal a serial logic that has emerged from the contexts of globalization, postmodernism, and advances in new technology” (32-3). She contends that “One media form serially extends its own narrative spaces and spectacles and those of other media as well” (33). As one of the newest media forms to be serialized, video games operate within the complex movements of this serial impulse or serial logic.

Because of their mass-market status and because of their extremely high production costs, video games often beget sequels. While the sequels themselves are often first created due to market conditions, those same market conditions subsequently add security in terms of sales for the sequels especially in global markets. The extremely high production costs for any one particular game—in terms of conceptual art, game engines, game design, story development, and more—often lead video game designers to create sequels from existing games in hopes of ensuring a greater return on the game

development costs by marketing an already known commodity. In doing so, game sequels are often afforded a greater level of explorative potential in certain, confined manners. This exploration is allowed within the confines of the series because, while the game sequels continue and expand from the previous games, other aspects of the game's design may exist outside of the prescribed role of the sequel. Those elements in a sequel are often more negotiable and mutable because they exist within a familiar framework. The exploratory potential that arises in serialization is often radical, making sequels pivotal for video games in terms of design standards as well as design innovation. Like video games, other media and other genres similarly beget or are founded on series and seriality. Comics and television shows are, in many ways, founded in the notion of series and seriality. Similarly as a genre, horror is wedded to series and seriality because of its focus on repeated experiences or encounters with the uncanny or the monstrous and the tension engendered through those encounters.

While video games from all genres regularly result in sequels, these sequels take on different aspects than do the sequels in horror games. This chapter analyzes the plot, narrative, game design, and game-play in the typical game series type, as found in the *Mario Brothers* games, as well as in more atypical series, as in the *Resident Evil* games, to illustrate how game series function and how sequels and seriality reciprocally affect game design, game-play and game narrative. After providing an overview of the function of seriality in video games, I examine women characters as they develop inside ludic Gothic and horror game series to show how single games and game series—through their use of play and replay—function akin to serial narratives in the manner in which they defy closure particularly in regards to the development of women characters.

Ludic Gothic and horror game series—partly because horror games individually break the common mold for game design—further diverge from common game design conventions in each of their iterations in such a manner as to allow for multiple representations of the same character. Because ludic Gothic and horror games often include women characters, these multiple representations form constellations that constitute *l'écriture féminine* because the ludic Gothic horror sequels show these women characters in play repeatedly, but never in quite the same play and never towards any codified singular character identity.

Continuing Narratives, Closure, and Character Development

The complex framework within which many serialized forms, including video game sequels, exist is perhaps most akin to Donald Ault's articulation of aspectual interconnection. Ault uses aspectual interconnection to show how details localized to particular characters in William Blake's texts may negotiate through the text into the text itself and into alternate versions of the text in such a manner as to undermine any attempt at a codified definition (*Narrative Unbound*). While refuting any simple character definitions or definitions for story elements, aspectual interconnection still aids in bringing seemingly disparate and disconnected elements from the games as they are sequenced into relation. Aspectual interconnection underlies studies of serial and series texts because serial works have repeatedly been studied as rich intertextual objects, as with Linda Hughes' "Turbulence in the 'Golden Stream': Chaos Theory and the Study of Periodicals," where she argues for studying serial studies as an analogue to chaos theory because of the complexity of interrelated variables in any serial publication. While

Hughes directs her comments toward print literature, serial impulses also have cross-media effects.¹

Both aspectual interconnection and chaos theory present a method for examining texts that are intricately connected while also contradictory at points. Studies of video games require an approach that embraces both the connections and implicit contradictions because video games generally follow two sometimes conflated trajectories. The first of these serial or series trajectories is one in which the games strive towards a holistic version of the game world, game characters, or game narrative. The other is a trajectory in which the games undermine these attempts at holism using changing technology, changing game concepts, and in the case of ludic Gothic and horror games, through their repeated refusal to codify characters or worlds and instead present situations that can only be defined in terms of the relationship between the game elements. As shown in regard to games and concept art in my “Networking Power: Video Game Structure from Concept Art,” the trajectory towards holism attempts to incorporate all games and all aspects of individual games (including patches, expansions, texts in other media) into one larger holographic whole. That whole then codifies the game world and the game characters. While this codification is useful in terms of establishing certain

¹ Because video games are, in many ways, at the forefront of digital media, serial and series functioning for video games has implications for other digital forms, like hypertext narratives and visual computer interface representations as those representations change with subsequent software releases. Changes in computer interfaces for particular programs is especially relevant to video games as games in a series change their appearance based on the technology available for their presentation and as artistic gaming styles change. Further, changes in the physical interfaces have implications for various media types as for music using the iPod interface, games using different gaming interfaces, and television using digital video recording (DVR) interfaces. Subsequently, video game serial and series structures also have implications for other forms as they become digital, including film as films are encoded to DVD format with skipping and the inclusion of peripheral materials; television with DVRs like Tivo and Replay TV; for radio as Satellite radio and Podcasting changes the way people listen to radio broadcasted music and other programming, and for more print-aligned works like novels, as with the importance of the online discussion forum for the novel *House of Leaves*.

video game tropes, worlds, and characters, it also limits alternative character representations.

The second trajectory for video game serials and series follows a more typical serial narrative and character development in that it rejects closure. In doing so, the characters in these serially-functioning games escape the confines of the game and the game world to exist as characters in relation to, but not defined by, their environments. In ludic Gothic and horror games, these characters are women and the escaping of definitions is particularly important within the video game medium because video games generally attempt to codify women into stock or troped objects rather than allowing them to exist as full, changing characters. In order to show how games, even though almost entirely released as series rather than serials by definition, function as both serial and series texts, I now turn to the more significant aspects of serials and series in relation to video games and in relation to video game character development.

Serials and Series

Video games are one of the newer media forms to be serialized, and while their interactive or participatory properties alter the manner of the serialization, video games draw upon the history of serialized texts for their serial design and function. Thus, theories of serialization and series in print, comics, and television prove relevant and useful both for video games and for other digital media forms. Jennifer Hayward explains the serial in relation to print and television as, “an ongoing narrative released in successive parts,” that shares aspects like, “refusal of closure; intertwined subplots; large casts of characters (incorporating a diverse range [...] to attract a similarly diverse audience); interaction with current political, social, or cultural issues; dependence on profit; and acknowledgement of audience response” (3). Hayward’s definition clearly

applies to both serialized fiction and to serialized television shows like soap operas.

While video game sequels generally lack the immediate narrative connection found in serials and the open-ended closing segments or cliffhangers found in serial works, the family resemblances Hayward notes are shared within any particular game series.

Importantly, many series games also draw on shifts in contemporary political, social, or cultural issues as well as changes in game design for their successive releases. Ludic Gothic and horror games, in particular, present issues of gender through their iterations, and the conflation between serials and sequels allow ludic Gothic and horror games to present and trouble, rather than define, gender.

While viewing video games in relation to both serials and series can be provocative, the generally accepted properties of serials often do not apply to video games. The definition of serial itself becomes more problematic when applied to video games because not all video games are narratively based. For instance, *Mario Kart* is a racing game that has been released in multiple iterations. Each new game is an expanded, changed version of the first. According to Hayward's definition, *Mario Kart* would be a series, but not a serial because *Mario Kart* is closer in form to the *Little Nemo in Slumberland* comic strips of which Hayward remarks, "As a rule, they are series rather than true serials since they center on the activities of a consistent cast of characters but do not usually involve narrative continuity" (90). Jeremy Butler similarly argues that "Unlike the *series*, the *serial* expects us to make specific and substantial narrative connections between one episode and the next. In the series, the link between each week's programs is rather vague" (27). He continues to define the serial as those works where, "the connection is fundamental to its narrative pleasures. The main difference

between the series and the serial is the way that each handles the development of the narrative from episode to episode” (27). By requiring the serial to make specific and substantial narrative connections between one episode and the next, almost all video games become series instead of serials. On one level this distinction is a matter of form because the video games do not necessarily include narrative. In the emphasis on narrative, however, these distinctions negate many of the connections between serials and serial functions in other media and in video games.²

Situating video games with both serials and series, instead of a more constrained view of series alone, proves fruitful because of the manner in which serials have functioned in terms of design, reader and cultural reception, and market determinants. The medium of video games justifies this move because video game serials and series are particularly difficult to define in light of massively multiplayer online games (MMORPGs) like *Asheron's Call* and games with expansion packs like *Neverwinter Nights*, where the expansion of the game space is directly tied to the expansion of the game narrative or of the potential game narrative. Games like the *Grand Theft Auto* series function more explicitly as series according to this definition; yet, *GTA: San Andreas* does expand upon the main character's narrative from *GTA 3*. Further, *GTA: Liberty City Stories* returns to the space of *GTA 3*. Similarly, the *Fatal Frame* games do not linearly follow each other in terms of chronology, but they do follow from each other in terms of

² While tying the definition of a serial to the narrative proves sensible for many serial forms, video games are primarily spatial as Espen Aarseth and others have argued (“Allegories of Space”). Thus, video game notions of seriality may be better served by definitions that focus on expanding the space of the games rather than extending the game narratives. Amending this, Ndalianis argues that, for contemporary entertainment, seriality relates to the process of connection instead of the explicit narrative (33-4). Ndalianis' continues to suggest that seriality is an amalgamation of serials, series, and sequels. In addition to the changes Ndalianis addresses in seriality overall, particular video games still draw on particular aspects of series, sequels, and serials for different games, and the articulation of how video games draw on which aspects proves necessary for game studies and for studies of Gothic and horror games in particular.

establishing and developing women characters and of the significance of women from one game to the next. This process—if the games are taken separately as sequels—undermines the use of successive iterations to establish the importance of women, system of oppression, and forgotten histories that the games continually return to in their depictions of the characters and the game world.³

Aligning video games with serials also proves useful because of the manner in which serials are read and the manner in which video games are played, particularly in terms of audience reception. While the surface connections between video game sequels and the serialization of print texts alone are interesting, even more interesting are the connections based on the act of reading/viewing serials and the act of playing video games. Hughes and Lund define the serial as “a continuing story over an extended time with enforced interruptions” (1), and they stipulate that this differs from the reading of single volumes because, “Readers approaching stories within a single volume can ‘cheat,’ thumbing ahead to a mystery’s solution; serial readers could not” (4). Thus, they argue that not only is the textual form of the serials different with their enforced interruptions and their emphasis on narrative—as they are smaller texts that build into a single, larger work—it is also different because of the manner in which serials are read. Hughes and Lund summarize their position stating, “much of what made literature meaningful to the nineteenth century occurred during the reading of a work, before its ending had been

³ Further, viewing video game series as potentially serials aligns them with the rich history of serial fiction. In doing so, serial fiction studies may also learn something from game structures and gain an improved relationship with video games, a relationship already emphasized in other forms of new media, like hypertext and websites. As Hughes and Lund argue in their study of serial fiction, “we no longer live in the age of the literary. [...] But by examining an old frame of reference from our own place in time, we hope to illuminate both landscapes” (14). Similarly examining video games, which may appear as single volume publications may be enriched through an analysis of serial works. Seemingly singular games may benefit from serial studies because of the patches, mods, remakes, ported versions, stories, spaces, and even game play models that evolve within single games as well as throughout subsequent releases.

reached” (12). They thus argue that the act of reading itself was pivotal to serial works.⁴ Ludological trends in game studies similarly seek to emphasize the importance of video game play as a process with an intricate and intertextual network of variables that influence both game play, game reception, and game design itself, thus aligning the participatory or interactive nature of game play more closely with the reading process. While this could be said of any series works, the pacing of serial fiction also aligns itself with video game play because in many games players cannot skip ahead or “cheat” to discover the ending and players often play through new games in a similar playing community as serials had with their reading communities.

The interactive aspects of serial reading and game play are also factors in the actual time spent experiencing the text. Peter Brooks argues that serial reading’s pauses make “the time it takes, to get from beginning to end,” (20) a factor of the overall reading experience, so much so that the time of the reading experience is “very much part of our sense of the narrative [. . .] if we think the effects of serialization [. . .] we can perhaps grasp more nearly how time in the representing is felt to be a necessary analogue of the time represented” (20-1). Video games, like serial fiction, require an elongated amount of time for players to work through individual segments. The elongated time requirement stems from the fact that video games require play and replay for players to successfully complete and continue through portions of the game. This does not apply for all video games (certainly some puzzle games or computerized solitaire would be exceptions).

⁴ While Gothic and horror console games generally do not allow players to skip through the game play segments to reach the end, non-gothic games and computer games do frequently allow players to skip to the end using cheat codes that unlock later levels without the player needing to play those levels. This unlockable feature is important because it allows players to view the game and the game’s characters as synonymous with the ending, instead of viewing the game through the progression of individual increments during game play. Thus, the serial nature of game play can disrupt codification by positing game play and character development as a set of interrelated events rather than a linear, codified endpoint.

However, games generally do fit the model of repeated play and replay for progress in the game. Ludic Gothic and horror games, in particular, use this repeated play to disrupt codification and to continually transgress character boundaries and other borders.⁵

In addition to the longer time requirements for novels published in installments and for video games, serial works are also able to respond relatively quickly to garner market share and to influence their readers. Serialized fiction as well as series video games rely on the structure of serialization to capture and keep audiences. As Ndalians demonstrates in *Neo-Baroque Aesthetics and Contemporary Entertainment*, cross-media seriality dramatically affects marketing (41). Serialization and series function similarly in their ability to capture and keep audiences. Many individual games release patches, mods, and updates in order to improve, expand, or alter a particular gaming experience and to gain or maintain player-audiences. This can most often be seen with first-person shooter games like *Quake* and with massively multiplayer games like *Everquest*. These patches and mods do not expand the narrative of the game directly, and thus are not serial aspects

⁵ Like Brooks' connecting the pacing of time in serial novels to the pacing of the represented time, Patricia Okker demonstrates that the gaps in reading also lend themselves to a textual community. Okker argues that this community is based on the readers' experiences with the pacing of the texts: "One of the effects of having to put a serial novel 'down' at a particular moment is that readers experience the text together. [...] that sense of community—that social experience—is precisely what happens with popular serial novels" (15). The sense of community during the reading process is also fostered by video games. It is fostered not by the physical textual breakage between parts of the game itself alone, but because of the game text and the difficulty in game play, which Aarseth refers to a structure of aporia and epiphany (*Cybertext* 91, 125). These aporias in turn often lead players to seek advice and help through fan networks, including online forums and fan magazines. This is particularly important for difficult or innovative games—as with Gothic and horror games—because the fan communities aid other players in learning and succeeding in game play.

Okker notes that she has found, "no elaborate diaries detailing the thrill of receiving a new installment in the mail or the agony—and pleasure—of waiting for the next" (11). However, these logs are found for both new games in a series as well as for new segments of game play within an individual game because of the difficulty in accessing portions of the game. The function of serials and series in regards to the manner in which audiences consume them, then, is more than a function of the structure of the serial or series itself. It is also a function of the manner of consumption that leads to alterations in the time spent with the text and in the community that forms around the text. While for print and many other media forms, these divisions can be best elucidated through divisions based on narrative structures, for video games the divisions alter based on the use of the texts instead of the structure of the texts alone.

because serials are generally defined in relation to narrative expansion. However, these expansions function in the same manner for the audience and for the overall alteration and expansion of the game space.

In addition to market concerns, Hayward demonstrates that serialized media like comic strips have also been used for propaganda because of their ability to adapt within the individual serials; “Publishers and syndicate editors were well aware of the power of comic strips in reflecting and influencing American attitudes. Comics were often seen and used as propaganda weapons” (127). Video games have also been used as propaganda machines: for the US government with *America’s Army* which acts as a recruiting game; for hate groups with modified games often used to interest new members; for political and social change with many politicians using games during runs for office; and for serious gaming movements like Games for Health, the Learning Games Initiative, and other serious games that promote personal and social well being. The majority of the serious games are used for personal or social improvement (education, self-esteem, weight loss), and the majority of these games are single episodes in that they are often produced on a small scale for web distribution and they are often single games without subsequent iterations on the same topic. Unlike these pointedly political or socially oriented games, mainstream games often do not overtly include political or social arguments. However, the mainstream games that more often include political and social arguments are generally games in a series. Political arguments are more often embedded in series games because the base mechanics of the game narrative and game play are already established, thus leaving more space and time to further elaborate and include real world political referents. Ludic Gothic and horror games—

because of their inherent questioning of structures—specifically question gender and societal structures through their serial functioning. While many games could function as serials—due to game play and replay—many game series function instead as elaborate series texts. In order to illustrate the trajectories that both codify and refuse codification in the game worlds, a close examination of series games proves necessary. Following the examination of the more typical game series trajectory, I then examine to games that act as serials in defying closure.

Sequels, Prequels, and Seriality in Games

For many video games, sequels function in much the same manner they do in films, books, and comics. Video game sequels come in many forms, including those that are not narrative sequels.⁶ Types of sequels include games where the original story is enlarged, retold, or remade. Even these separations for sequel types are relatively vague because the lines between retellings and remakings of games often blur, and prequels and sequels often include information for the prior and subsequent games.

Because of the variation in sequel types and usage, video games align themselves most closely with the often confusing structure of sequentiality and seriality in comics. Within their often convoluted structure of sequence and seriality, games that are enlarged,

⁶ Video games iterations come in many permutations. Some are closer to sequels as they are most often defined in that they follow an earlier game narrative, including the same characters, within the same game world. Others are more of spatial sequels because they continue on in the same game world while not continuing the previous narrative or without connecting to the previous characters as occurs in the *Resident Evil: Outbreak* and *Resident Evil: Survivor* games.

Still other sequels follow the same game characters within the same game world, but not within the overall game series, as occurred with *Final Fantasy X-2*, which followed Yuna and her companions from *Final Fantasy X*, yet did not warrant the title *Final Fantasy XI*. The *Final Fantasy* series is a series known for creating each game as a self-contained story within a unique world, and with an original setting and characters. Within this series' framework, continuing the series from one game to another, in the case of *Final Fantasy X* to *Final Fantasy X-2*, actually broke the normal progression. The next game in the general series came after both *Final Fantasy X* and *X-2* was thus named *Final Fantasy XI* because it did not follow the earlier games as *X-2* did. In this case, actually following the characters and events from the earlier game led to a breakage in the series, and thus in the naming convention.

retold, and remade serve as a useful grouping to begin to trace serials and sequels in games, as well as the difficulty in applying typical notions of series and seriality to games. Enlarged sequels often take the form of a new game that creates a new episode which occurs either after the original story (a sequel), or before the newest game iteration (as in a prequel). Enlarged sequels would include both narratively and spatially enlarged iterations. Enlarged games could thus include the *Silent Hill* games, which take place in the town of that name, and in the case of the fourth game, for example, they unfold in the spirit of the world of Silent Hill. It could also include more narratively enlarged games like *Tenchu* as the series follows the narrative and characters from the first *Tenchu* game through their stories and the spaces of those stories.

Retold games are often situated within a revisionist frame where the game is retold through another character's perspective. However, this also includes stories that are cyclical and retold in the same game worlds with the same characters, but with new stories. The *Castlevania* and *The Legend of Zelda* games are perhaps the best examples of retold games. In the *Castlevania* games, the player takes on the role of one of the Belmont family members. Then, the player fights Dracula, or one of his permutations like Alucard. The game world is situated in the town around Dracula's castle and Dracula's castle. While the characters and setting are always effectively the same, the game permutations differ widely from the type of game (action, adventure, role-playing), the game platform (PlayStation, PS2, GameCube, Game Boy, DS, and more), in the game representation (two and three dimensional game versions), and the game narrative. The games thus change not just based on the narrative chronology, but also on the alterations in the game world and method of game play.

The Legend of Zelda games are even more difficult to place because they do not necessarily exist within a narrative chronology. Each game focuses on Link, who most often fights a form of evil in Hyrule to save Princess Zelda from Ganon (or a permutation of Ganon like Ganondorf). However, Link also exists as a young boy fighting to save his sister in *The Wind Waker*, and as a young boy fighting against an evil wizard with the help of the magical Minish in *The Legend of Zelda: The Minish Cap*. Each of these games is still a *Legend of Zelda* game, and are in a manner that exceeds a simple branding.

The Mario game empire, with such difficult to class games as *Mario Power Tennis* and its subsequent iterations is even difficult to class for its more explicitly narrative-related games of the main Mario series cannot be easily classed as sequels. “*Donkey Kong Jr.* is the only game in the Mario series that could be called a true sequel in terms of storyline, a continuation rather than a remake,” Chris Kohler remarks, also noting, “For the rest of the Super Mario Bros. games, the basic plot of the original—Mario defeats Bowser, saves Princess Peach—is retained, but there are more cinematic scenes and sometimes plot twists over the course of the game” (63). Even Kohler’s estimation of the Mario games as remakes focuses on the primary Mario games, and not the larger world of Mario game franchises like *Mario Power Tennis*, *Mario Kart*, the Wario games, and others. Each of these games exists within the world of the Mario games, yet few could be called sequels or serials in the usual sense. While each of these games is normally considered part of one of these very popular series, none fits the definition of serial nor series in its normative sense.

Remade games are more easily classed within the category of remakes, yet many remade games are also *not* remakes in the normal sense. Remade games often occur when games are redesigned for different platforms with additional clothing, characters, or areas included. Such games are often marked with an additional subtitle as with the added “X” in *Resident Evil - Code: Veronica – X* and the “Director’s Cut” subtitle for *Fatal Frame 2: Crimson Butterfly, Director’s Cut*. The concurrent, or nearly concurrent release of these games further ties video games to the workings of serials in addition to series works because serials often appeared in multiple forms simultaneously; “We need, then, to see the serial taking place amidst many different texts and many different voices. In fact, different versions of the same story sometimes even appeared concurrently” (Hughes and Lund 11). Seemingly simple series games like *Mario Kart* could also be classed under either retellings or remakes because the basic game structure does not change, nor does the game narrative. In games like the *Mario Kart* series—if it could be called a series—the changes occur in platform type, character options, race tracks, car options, and other similar factors. However, the narrative is not expanded, nor is the game world enlarged in a particularly narrativized or chronologically expanded sense. Remade games can also include augmented or altered games like games that are changed by patches or mods to have better graphics, enlarged game areas, and games that are ported to different platforms. Again though, the distinctions begin to break down because a modded version of *Quake* could expand the game space and the game narrative to such a degree as to be considered an enlarged version of *Quake*.

In each of these examples, the game series are defined and operate in relation to several key factors. These factors include expanding and developing spatially, and

sometimes also narratively and chronologically (as with the expansion packs for *Neverwinter Nights* which do both) and developing the characters, or the monsters, throughout each game iteration (as with the majority of games, including the Mario and the *Resident Evil* games where new characters and enemies are introduced in each). Other factors include developing and changing the game art style (as with the *Final Fantasy* and *Legend of Zelda* series)—changes that are incorporated into the larger system of the game world and its visual representation—and expanding through seemingly minor elements like patches and releases on additional systems. These factors and their impact, however, follow either the path towards or against holism for the series, game world, and game characters.

For either path, each of these factors within the series is received by the gaming community, especially the communities that follow the particular series such that the series is created through these expansions working in conjunction with the gaming audiences. In this manner, typical serials and series for games are like comics in their operations within particular worlds. For example, the “Marvel Universe” refers to all of the characters published by Marvel and to the potential for cross-overs when certain superheroes join forces with other superheroes while simultaneously existing independently in other comics’ series. Marvel normally separates its characters into single lines, like *X-Men*, *X-Factor*, and *Spider-Man*; however, cross-overs occur when different comics run parallel or intersecting lines and when the particular characters then cross into the other comics. While Mario exists within the Mario world, he also exists within the Nintendo Universe. This allows for cross-overs in games like *Super Smash Bros. Melee*, which includes all sorts of Nintendo characters in one game, including

Mario, Pikachu, Samus Aran, and others. *Super Smash Bros. Melee* is not a sequel or a serial in itself; however, it represents part of the serial world in which games exist and develop.

Given the interrelations inside the Marvel Universe, the question of seriality and series for comics quickly becomes one based on the world of a particular superhero or story, and on the operations of that world—like Spider-Man’s New York City—as a full and complete world unto itself. Video games similarly create series not as a continuation of an earlier story, but of a set of relations amongst an individual title or character from one game to another. While this presents a very broad working usage of serial and series for video games, ludic Gothic and horror games present more narrowly defined possibilities for game series, and they present a version that has repercussions for game serials and series particularly in regards to representations of women.

Defying Closure: Serial Functioning of Ludic Gothic and Horror Games

In addition to the many types of video game series already addressed, all video games are series or retellings in the sense that they are played and replayed in order to progress. Because games must be played and replayed, the individual play of the game follows the serial function. Further, the individual games are not the same within replay. For many narrative games, the games are not simply changed in the sense of the order of steps and events, but in the occurrence or lack of occurrence of those events. Games achieve these changes through randomization, and through the overabundance of objects—a particularly common factor in ludic Gothic and horror games—such that the player is (almost) guaranteed to experience different events during each play. These differences in game play escape the typical trajectory towards closure found in games to establish a trajectory that favors open-ended story, world, and character development.

The refusal of closure in these games parallels the refusal of closure from one section of a serial text to the next.

Serials and series in ludic Gothic and horror games present many of the same difficulties in definition and delineation as do serials and series in other games. However as genre texts, ludic Gothic and horror games do utilize a restricted implementation of serials and series. As a genre horror itself has come to imply series because horror—from the writings of H. P. Lovecraft to the zombie mutations in the *Resident Evil* games—constantly replays the tension between human and the Other. In discussing Universal Studios' horror films, Paul Wells notes, “It was necessary to create sequels, and to ensure that the terrors played out in horror films were sufficiently petrifying but acceptable conservative” (49). Ludic Gothic and horror video games operate in the same manner in that they beget sequels because they constantly replay the tension between the player-character and the Other and, in doing so, constantly trouble the character definitions and depictions in them by defining the characters only in relation to the other game elements.

The serial structure of horror video games allows for all of the characters to be developed to a greater degree than they could be in a single game iteration.⁷ *Resident Evil* proves a far richer example because it begins with the first game on two discs. This creates a concurrent serial structure within the first game, released on the first platform even before the game has sequels, a prequel, side stories, and re-releases. The first *Resident Evil* offers players the ability to play as either Chris Redfield or Jill Valentine,

⁷ Horror games almost implicitly rely on the serial structure in instances like that of *Eternal Darkness* and *Resident Evil*. *Eternal Darkness* is only a single game, and yet it relies on the serial structure of multiple stories within a frame story of one character who finds chapters of a book and journeys into different worlds through the characters in those chapters. While *Eternal Darkness* is a single game, it showcases characters of both genders, an oddity in a medium dominated by male player-characters.

and the second game offers the ability to choose to play as either Leon Kennedy or Claire Redfield. By offering players the choice to play essentially the same game from different perspectives, the games rely on their inherent serial/series/sequel structure to include women player-characters. Women player-characters are a rarity in most games, and yet the *Resident Evil* games use their format to include both women and men player-characters. Thus, the games were ensured of financial security through the use of a male character while also taking this risk and opening the game to women players who often do not want to play as male characters. The concurrent versions of essentially the same game with multiple discs for a single game, in addition to concurrent versions of the game on different platforms, also mirror the structure of print serials with their variants.

In addition to similar game versions simultaneously released, *Resident Evil 4* was also released in two different versions—the first for the Nintendo GameCube only included a male primary character, Leon Kennedy. The second version was released soon after for the Sony PlayStation 2. This second version included a long segment with the female character Ada Wong. Thus, the serial structure allowed for a timely revisioning that showed that even when women are not immediately included, they are not excluded or forgotten either.

By including women characters within a Gothic and horror serialized format, games like the *Resident Evil* games manage to escape the codification that comes with most game play and within the serial impulse which often strives towards a unified vision. Whereas games like *Tomb Raider* focus on an Lara Croft in different action-adventure settings to further establish Lara as a character, the *Resident Evil* games utilize their horrific worlds to focus not solely on the characters, but on the characters within and

in relation to particular worlds and scenarios. This means that each *Resident Evil* game—instead of contributing to a greater holistic vision of the characters as each *Tomb Raider* contributes to a unified version of Lara—contributes to the multiplicity of each character. The characters within the internal segments of each game and within each game version of *Resident Evil* constantly change in response to their horrific situations and thus defy any sort of codification or closure. They do not, as many games do, change only to better fit within a holistic version of their game worlds. *Resident Evil*'s serial functioning and use of women characters show that this resistance to closure is more than a simple factor of horror-based game worlds. While the horrific worlds allow for the situation and the characters to together determine the characterization of each character, the use of multiple male and female characters further showcases the multiplicity and uncodifiable aspects of the characters.

Reliance on serialization giving rise to greater opportunities for the depictions of women is far from new for Gothic and horror works. As Barry Keith Grant mentions of Romero's depiction of Barbara in *Night of the Living Dead*, "although it seems to have gone largely unnoticed, a crucial aspect of Romero's vision almost from the beginning has been his generally positive treatment of women, even a striking empathy with them" (203). As with Romero's revisioning of Barbara in the *Night of the Living Dead* films, the moment-by-moment revisioning of the characters in *Resident Evil* and other ludic Gothic horror games both expands the boundaries for women in games and expands them in such a way that the women characters can continue to escape the boundaries during play as *l'écriture féminine*.

L'écriture féminine, as writing the feminine, indicates methods that escape traditional limits of the masculine. Traditionally, the masculine as it is defined as a social and conceptual construct indicates a linear, logical progression towards a codified whole. *L'écriture féminine* seeks to exceed or transgress that closed linear set because such a set institutes biased and oppressive borders for people, forms, and concepts. The masculine can be seen as part of the holographic tendency, where each component exists to serve and support the overall closure of the defined whole. The masculine can be seen with the visual and narrative depictions of video game characters, as where each version of Lara Croft supports and further defines the general character of Lara Croft. The depictions—especially within the current media and its serial impulse—are supported by the games, the concept art, the films based on the game, the comics based on the game, and all other *Tomb Raider* items.⁸ The serial impulse for some games thus leads to the building of a holistic vision of the characters in those games.

Unlike the holographic tendency, the holograph(em)ic tendency eschews closure with each event supporting versions of the whole, but versions that defy a unified vision.⁹

For instance, none of the *Resident Evil* games present clearly defined character abilities or significant information in regard to a character's background. Instead, the games present limited information on each of the characters and then do not elaborate on elements intrinsic to those characters in the games. Thus, instead of learning more about

⁸ See Laurie N. Taylor, "Networking Power: Video Game Structure from Concept Art," in *Videogames and Art: Intersections and Interactions*, eds. Andy Clarke and Grethe Mitchell, (Bristol, UK: Intellect, Forthcoming 2005).

⁹ I take the term holograph(em)ic from Donald Ault's work. He first formally introduced the term at the International Conference on Narrative in his presentation, "Narrative Transformation through Holographic Reading: Blake, Comics, and Mathematical Notation," held April 4, 1997 in Gainesville, Florida.

the player-character through a game play that allows for the accumulation of abilities and information on the player-character, the *Resident Evil* games require players to work from limited information to escape from particular elements. The characters themselves are thus not defined intrinsically, but instead in relation to the temporary and changing constellation of elements they are trying to escape. Similarly, the *Fatal Frame* games present player-characters with limited internal definition. As players progress through the games, players learn more about the player-character's families than they do about the player-characters themselves. Further, because the *Fatal Frame* games focus on the flight from a particular place, the player-characters are presented *in relation to* a collection of changing elements rather than *as* a collection of unchanging elements. The game play in each of the individual games as well as the visual presentation—which obscures as much as it reveals—also contributes to a nonlinear, noncodified method of game play, and a method for representing game characters and game worlds. The remakes, sequels, and the serial function of each allow *Resident Evil* and other ludic Gothic horror games to function as *l'écriture féminine* in their depiction of women. This, in turn, allows for game play that relies on the transgression and mutability of boundaries in order to continue through each serial increment.

In addition to the focus on the characters and their worlds in building the interrelated depiction of characters in ludic Gothic and horror games, the use of technology also shows the incompleteness of any representation to reinforce the fact that the games, their characters, and representation itself are never finished, never whole. The technology in the games shows this, as does the narrative within the game serials which

builds not towards a limit or closure, but towards a literal escape from the horrific worlds so that the characters can begin to define themselves outside of their situations.

Video games in general often rely on a narrativized technology for saving—whether these are save crystals, save spaces, or another method—however, many games have transitioned to simple save options within game menus. These save methods generally operate under the rubric of technological transparency. However, ludic Gothic and horror games continue to rely on save methods that are direct uses of, and commentaries on, technology.¹⁰ For instance, the *Resident Evil* games utilize typewriters to save game play. They continue to use typewriters even in *Resident Evil 4* despite the fact that all of the *Resident Evil* games are set in a modern environment and are populated with computers. In a similar move to include anachronistic technology, the *Fatal Frame* games rely on saving through old cameras. The cameras in *Fatal Frame* are anachronistic not because of their form as older camera technology, but because they are too new for the world settings which transports modern day characters into the past. This is coupled with other technologies that are both too old and too new, as with radios that can

¹⁰ In addition to the narrativized use of technology in games, the games themselves comment on technology through their changes as they are released under different levels of technological ability. While the serial for any form has adapted to technological changes—with serialized fiction being packaged as novels, serialized television shows being packaged as seasons on DVD—Gothic and horror games have used their still required serial design to offer commentary on technology in each iteration. Perhaps most interesting in this regard is that as the technology has improved and the games could be adapted to better explore those technological possibilities, the games instead remained wedded to the older technological limitations. The *Resident Evil* games began by using relative movement, a process by which the directional commands change based on the perspective of a particular room (thus “up” on the controller correlates to different directions in different rooms). Relative movement was used in the *Resident Evil* games to account for the fact that the game spaces were designed as two dimensional spaces that were then restrained in order to make them appear as three-dimensional spaces. The spaces were designed as two-dimensional because the early game systems could not technologically process three-dimensional spaces. However, even once the game systems could process the three-dimensional spaces, the *Resident Evil* games retained relative movement, and this is even once the games were designed as full three-dimension games as with *Resident Evil – Code: Veronica* -.¹⁰ Similarly, *Silent Hill* relied on fog in the first game to obscure the graphics that could not be otherwise processed. *Silent Hill 2* was released on the PlayStation 2, which no longer required the fog, yet the designers chose to keep the fog in order to enhance the game experience.

broadcast the essence left in certain stones. The repeated use of old technology—both within the game world and as a repeated trope in gaming where the norm in gaming is to modify each game iteration to fit the newest and most powerful technology—shows that ludic Gothic and horror games repeat elements in order to establish seriality. However, the manner in which ludic Gothic and horror games repeat elements simultaneously subverts representations and uses of technology in order to establish seriality while also subverting a normalized serial function. The anachronistic use of technology and constant use of technology that has been replaced undermine traditional conceptions of technological progress towards a unified system in the same manner that the worlds of ludic Gothic and horror games refuse unified order in general and in the depiction of characters.

Depictions of technology within ludic Gothic and horror games foreground the technological nature of game serials, with changing game technology, as well as the changing nature of serials themselves. In doing so, the depictions of technology support the overall worldview which rejects holism and unity for the characters in each game and through the sequels and serialized sections of the games. Thus, ludic Gothic and horror games use their serial and sequel structures to repeat sequences in ways that focus on the difference, the repetition, and the impossibility of holism in the representations of characters, their worlds, and the act of playing.

Conclusion

As Ndalians rightly insists, “contemporary serials are multidirectional in that they fold and expand toward multiple paths” (123). Henry Jenkins suggests that media consumers view these interrelated paths within an overall structure, the “meta-text” within which each serial component acts as a supporting thread (*Textual Poachers* 98).

As contemporary serialized texts operate as serials, sequels, and series within an overall meta-text, the individual games themselves shift recursively with each iteration. This progressive and recursive shift operates in particular force for ludic Gothic and horror games where the radical potential of serialized works is realized both in terms of game design standards and in terms of radical narratives for character development, and especially for women. While ludic Gothic and horror games tend to be dismissed in much of popular culture for being sensational—in much the same way that Gothic and horror works are dismissed in other media forms—their serial functioning allows them to deal with social issues beyond their seemingly fantastic forms. These issues include the place of technology in society, the role of women in games and society, and even in their portrayal of contemporary issues like terrorism as with the game narrative in *Resident Evil 4* which repeatedly refers to the enemy as terrorists, and these terrorists are also involved in biological warfare through the creation of mutated creatures and biological mind-control agents.¹¹

In addition to altering the normal trajectories for game design and game narratives, serialized video games in general also present new possibilities for serial studies. In particular, envisioning serials, sequels, and seriality as intertwined concepts that can be

¹¹ The issues surrounding terrorism and warfare are still addressed within a sensational form, but a form in which many of the players would be familiar. As Anthony Antoniou explains of a similarly set and constructed text, the film *Battle Royale*, Fukasaka, the director, worked in a munitions factory with other classmates during WWII. Antoniou observes

in July 1945, the classmates were caught in a barrage of artillery fire. Just like the fictitious world Fukasaka would chronicle fifty-five years later, there was barely any chance of escape from violent and messy death. The survivors of the attack used the corpses of their friends as cover and, after the violence had passed, Fukasaka and his surviving friends were given the task of disposing of the body parts of their former classmates. Not surprisingly, this experience influenced both his worldview and the films he would make during the course of his career. (227)

Battle Royale would be a familiar text for many game players, and its method of communicating social issues housed within graphic displays of violence and blood and within a game like framework would also be familiar.

based on narrative or form, as Ndalianis does, proves useful in studies of video games and in studies of related media like websites, software versions, and comics (especially with the rise of the graphic novel which collects serialized comics and reformats them in specific ways). Conceptualizing serial works within this complex network enlarges serial studies which often exclude texts based on narrative restrictions. For instance, Paul Budra and Betty A. Schellenberg excluded from their definition of serials and sequels, “the related and fascinating category of non-sequential rewritings or adaptations, such as the numerous versions of Arthurian legends” (7). This is a much more difficult move to make for video games, software, and other digital texts because of the inherent capacity for change (often lumped under the category of interactivity for mods, patches, and updates that are more akin to serial processing). Including texts like adaptations in theorizing serials could benefit both serials and adaptations by providing a common ground for terminology and by providing a common, flexible network by which to view remakes, adaptations, serials, and other similarly iterative texts.

While video games are far from the first texts to be serialized, they are serialized in interesting ways that expand the current notions of seriality. Further, ludic Gothic and horror games use this expansion to explore possibilities in game design, character representations, and connections to contemporary concerns. Ndalianis’ conception of the serial as a fluid structure is exactly the form which ludic Gothic and horror games utilize to create more fluid variants in game sequels. The Gothic and horror are genres that have often been serialized and—in their most recent form as digital, interactive or participatory works—they further connect to serials from the past, enlightening and enlarging serials to encompass their formal and narrative properties as well as their significance for audience

and social impact. Further, the ergodic dimension of video game play and replay would clearly benefit from a model as complex as that afforded by serial studies. As Hughes posits, “chaos theory can serve as a useful model for rethinking some troublesome points—intellectual turbulence, as it were—within the field of periodical study” (117); similarly, game studies could benefit from a perspective that encompasses multiple iterations of games that both strive towards and away from closure. The serial nature of games (with remakes, patches, mods, and sequels), game interfaces, visual representation, narrative, and the relationship of games to other media and to social issues are all significant to game studies as a growing field. Game studies itself could also benefit from viewing its own structure as part of the complexity of interrelated factors and media like that of serials.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Laurie N. Taylor was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, but has lived in Florida since the age of three. Laurie has studied at the University of Florida for the past six years. Laurie is most interested in studying video games and new media, and this dissertation attempts to better understand new media in terms of atypical design. She lives with her partner, James (Pete) C. Taylor, in Gainesville, Florida, and with her brothers, Colin and Jeremiah.

