The Gothic, as Catherine Spooner asserts, 'lurks in all sorts of unexpected corners' (Spooner, 2006, p. 8), a fluid, viscous genre that seeps into other literary genres, and it is therefore not surprising that the Gothic that has 'escaped the confines of literature and spread across disciplinary boundaries to infect all kinds of media' (Spooner, 2006, p. 8). This includes Cinema, as explored by Xavier Aldana Reyes in chapter 28 of this volume, television, as Linnie Blake discusses in chapter 29, 'and new media' such as the internet, as Neal Kirk explores in chapter 32, which includes 'those methods and social practices of communication, representation, and expression that have developed using the digital, multimedia, networked computer and the ways this machine is held to have transformed work in other media' (Lister, 2009). The videogame an audio-visual media, which is part of the new media canon, utilises the Gothic in the construction, narrative, and aesthetic of many of the thousands of games that have been released since the medium of the videogame was born, with Gothic tropes and elements being found in a variety of games as Tanya Krzywinksa notes when she writes that 'a whole range of games certainly draw on Gothic patterns' (Kryzwinska, 2015, p. 58). Games such as *DOOM* (id Software, 1993) as Fred Botting (2002) argues, and more recently, the *Portal* franchise (Valve, 2007-2011), which Ewan Kirkland considers to have a 'distinctly Gothic theme and tone' (2014) are part of Gothic gaming, games that use the tropes of the Gothic in their construction—the 'torturous, fragmented narratives relating mysterious incidents horrible images and life threatening pursuits' (Botting, 1996, p. 2) that have been evident since the early Gothic found its voice in literature.

Discussing the relationship between the videogame and the Gothic, Krzywinska writes that 'Videogame makers select elements from established game grammar to construct the particular vocabulary of that individual game, something that she sees as a similarity between the Gothic and gaming, in that 'a set of conventions emerge cumulatively and proliferate from similar texts, sounding the structural beat to which story, style and theme

dance' (Kryzwinska, 2015, p. 58). Although she does point out that a 'superficial presence' is not necessarily enough to 'term a game Gothic' (ibid.). She cites *The Secret of Monkey Island* as a game that draws on the Gothic, but does not use it to inform game play or story, but rather uses it as an aesthetic only, highlighting the distinction between Gothic gaming and gaming that uses a Gothic veneer, with the former being the concern of this chapter. Gothic gaming is haunted by the texts that it draws its thematic, aesthetic, and narrative ideas from, blurring the boundaries of different media as it does so. This chapter will explore the role of Gothic in gaming to show how it enters into the wider Gothic framework, pushing the boundaries of technology to bring about an examination of what Gothic can contribute to gaming, and what gaming brings to the Gothic.

As this chapter is concerned with videogames, it is important at the outset to acknowledge a difference between videogames and other, non-electronic gaming such as board, card, and live action role-playing games (LARP) and their underlying structures. All game, whether they are electronic or not, have their own unique characteristics. This includes rules, which are required to successfully play and complete a game. For non-electronic games, these rules are visible and apparent to players. In a LARP game, for example there is usually a figure known as the GamesMaster (GM), who is responsible for the structure and implementation of the rules of the game being played. For a board or card game, there is likely to be a set of rules that the players are expected to adhere to, and that all players are aware of, generally in the form of a rule book, or a set of written instructions. These rules are present in electronic gaming too, as Kryzwinska explains that 'most videogames are composed of rules, progress, arcs, and winning conditions' (Kryzwinska, 2016, p. 264). However, rather than being explicit, with a GM enforcing them, or being visible, they are embedded in the programming, invisible to the player, but nevertheless present and more rigidly held than in games where a human is responsible for their delivery. Kryzwinska

considers that this hidden rule system has 'a secondary but important and evocative textual function when regarded in a Gothic context' (Kryzwinska, 2016, p. 265) with this structure intimating a Godlike power working behind the scenes to shape the behaviour and morality of the player, reflecting the constraint, entrapment and forced actions of the characters of novels such as *The Castle of Otranto* (Walpole, 2014) and *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (Radcliffe, 1998).

The rules embedded into a videogame shape the interactions the player has with a game, and both controls and underpins many aspects of the gaming experience. This can be seen, for example, in how difficult a game is, where the player can specify their experience and the challenge is adjusted accordingly within the program. It can also be recognised in how the game responds to the player's ability as it is played. Here, the Godlike power Kryzwinska talks of becomes explicitly evident, in the form of artificially intelligent elements of the gaming code, which constantly observes, interprets, and reacts to the players actions in a game. This lack of control is a familiar feature of the Gothic, and allows gaming to enter into the Gothic tradition through its game mechanics, even before any other elements are taken into consideration.

Videogames, whilst not an explicitly Gothic medium, offer a suitable way to represent its themes and tropes. Even the structure of videogames lends itself to the Gothic through its predominant method of representation: the player taking control of a character in a game, and using a controller or keypad, directing the movements and actions of a character. Isabella van Elferen considers this in relation to the first Silent Hill game, where 'the player has been assuming the role of an avatar that is not only her digital double but a phantom manifestation in the memory of another avatar' (van Elferen, 2012, p. 117). This is true for many games, through the player's physical representation onscreen. Neal Kirk (who also writes in this volume) finds this to be true of the internet, in the form of 'networked spectrality', which he

considers 'depends on a digital representation being afforded the same social place as the actual user' (Kirk, 2017, p. 223). Whilst there are differences between the role of the avatar in gaming and in cyberspace, this statement summarises a key concept of the relationship between the player and character in a videogame. In a videogame, the avatar becomes a visual representation of the player on the screen, being afforded the same (albeit virtual) presence as the player, and one of the key functions that the player carries out is to keep that character 'alive' for as long as possible, in order to progress through the game to its completion. This creates a mirroring, or doubling of the player and the character in the game, one where the interactivity of the relationship supports Anne Radcliffe's famous statement that horror 'contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates' (Radcliffe, 1826, p. 150) the senses of the player. For gaming, this becomes most explicit when the playable character is in danger; the player not only mirrors the characters responses to a monster or event in the game, but as Katrin Althans writes, 'the player becomes responsible for creating both original and mirror image' (Althans, 2013, p. 28). This is made explicit in the narrative game, *Dear Esther* (Pinchbeck, 2012), where the player takes the role of an unnamed narrator who becomes ill as the game progresses. Told through an epistolary structure, the player is introduced to several of the islands previous inhabitants through the words of the narrator. However, after being struck with blood poisoning (itself a Gothic theme in the game) the narrator begins to confuse his actions with those of the previous inhabitants, and the player too becomes confused about the veracity and verisimilitude of the narrators words, resulting in a doubling of the player and the character being controlled. As the controlled characters actions and thoughts become doubled with other characters, so too does the confusion of the narrator and the player.

Whilst the doubling of the player and the character is a Gothic trope in many games, the Gothic can be found in games that are not considered to be so, on a more explicit level, with fantasy games such as *Skyrim* (Bethseda, 2011) featuring Gothic settings, characters,

and tropes. The action adventure games in the *Batman: Arkham* series similarly invokes an urban-gothic tone, with the first instalment, *Arkham Asylum* (Rocksteady Studios, 2009) situating the player as the Batman as he explores the corridors and dark passageways of the asylum, learning its ghostly and ghastly history as he defeats the Joker. Laurie Taylor in her essay *Gothic Bloodlines in Survival Horror Games*, calls this concept 'ludic-gothic' (Taylor, 2009, p. 48), explaining that the expression 'refer[s] to games that may be classified as horror or Gothic but which are dependent on the boundary crossing that is definitional to the Gothic in other forms', which also highlights the relationship between Gothic across media, to which this volume attests. Added to the technological advancements in contemporary videogames, which now routinely include narrative and rhetoric as part of their construction (both Gothic and non-Gothic), the fusion of play and Gothic allows an exploration of the genre from 'within', enabling the player to take a more intimate role in the narrative being engaged with, through action and play, rather than observation and interpretation. The videogame industry has embraced the Gothic; both at times are concerned with 'the legacies of the past and it's burdens on the present; the radically provisional or divided nature of the self; the construction of peoples or individuals as monstrous or other; the preoccupation with bodies that are modified, grotesque or diseased' (Spooner, 2006, p. 8), as Spooner notes. This relationship produces a genre of games, where players are already familiar with many of the constituent elements, and which challenge the players understanding of the real world.

The Gothic then, permeates a range of games: it can be found in the simple structure of casual games, such as the *Ravenhearst* trilogy, which Shira Chess examines in the article *Uncanny Gaming* (Chess, 2015), in which she explains that these games juxtapose 'play with [a] Gothic storytelling style, yet push against some traditional conventions of the genre' (ibid.). The Gothic can also be used in a more explicit way, with a Gothic narrative being central to some games, such as *Alan Wake* (Remedy Entertainment, 2010) and *Beyond: Two*

Souls (Quantic Dream, 2013), whose narrative is considered by Eric Riddle as being 'typical of classic Gothic narratives' (Riddle, 2016, p. 59) and notes that the narrative content of the game is the same as that of many traditional Gothic texts: 'a blending of supernatural and natural events' (Riddle, 2016, p. 63). The narrative aspect of Gothic gaming is also central to games such as *Dear Esther,* and *Everybody's Gone to the Rapture* (The Chinese Room, 2015), both of whose narrative is delivered through the exploration of a deserted landscape, where the ghostly presence of the previous inhabitants is important to the way the storyline is delivered.

A facet of the Gothic that videogames excel at is the use of setting. As Spooner asserts 'a certain Gothic 'look' has become visible across media' (Spooner, 2017, p. 49), and although care should be taken to differentiate between those games that use the Gothic as a thin veneer and those that are more actively engaged with the Gothic, there can be little doubt that, from the mediums first foray into visual gaming, the Gothic has been a source of inspiration. The first videogames to feature the Gothic were those of the haunted house, a common and instantly recognisable trope of the Gothic, and one that is featured in countless novels, films, and television shows. The Magnavox Odyssey, an early games console released *Haunted House* in 1972, at an early point in the history of the video game. This console contained 64 bytes of RAM (the iPhone 6, in comparison, has 1GB, or 1,073,741,824 bytes and this is used to run any programs or apps on the device), and as such the capacity to represent visual images was restricted. Therefore, games were issued with transparent overlays that were placed directly on a television screen, and the console used a blinking light to represent movement on the screen beneath; these early games also used physical artefacts, such as tokens or cards to play. The overlay for *Haunted House* was a four storey house, complete with spider webs, skeletons, graves, and bats, rendered in purple. The game involved the players hiding and retrieving a treasure from the house using accompanying

game cards. Whilst this game is simple by contemporary standards, it is one of the first instances of the Gothic being used in gaming. Following this, the Atari 2600, one of the first consoles to use the microprocessor, released another game called *Haunted House*, in 1981. Instead of relying on external visual representations as had been the case for the Odyssey, this console used its simple graphical capabilities to create the haunted mansion, which the player could explore. The aim of this game was to retrieve 3 pieces of an urn that belonged to the dead houses owner, Zachary Graves (and it must be noted that the name of the character draws attention to the undead condition that Graves resides in), and to do so, the player had to navigate the darkness of the mansion using matches, and avoiding 'a vampire bat, hairy tarantulas and the ghost of old man Graves himself' (Chance, 1998). Whilst these early games were necessarily simple, they nevertheless tried to use the aesthetic conventions of the Gothic in their construction, creating 'a world' as Botting notes 'of ghosts and monsters rendered palpable' (Botting, 2002, p. 278) and marked the beginning of the audio-visual relationship between the Gothic and gaming.

Haunted houses continue to be a frequent source of game inspiration: *Alan Wake* uses the haunted house to begin and end its narrative heavy gameplay, and more recently, the 2017 game *Resident Evil 7* (Horicuchi & Yamakawa, 2017) uses the haunted house as the backdrop for its horror inspired gameplay, but in the years following these initial, almost tentative, forays into the Gothic, the setting of games has widened: much like the heroines of the first Gothic stories, games are no longer restricted to the confines of the house; instead they are able to make use of advances in technology and can use the larger environments to 'invoke horror and terror' (Botting, 2002, p. 278). Labyrinthine passages began to take on larger roles in games and can be found in games ranging from the early text-based game *Adventure* (Crowther & Woods, 1976) to the 2016 game *Here They Lie* (Tangentlemen, 2016), which uses the concept of 'trudging further and further down an infinite series of

tunnels in a mysterious grey city' (Robertson, 2016) as game critic Adi Robertson explains. As well as becoming increasingly photorealistic, one of the key differences between these games and other media is that in games, rather than observe a character navigate these corridors, alleyways, and mazes, it is the player that is doing so – physically guiding the character through the twisty little passages and trying to ensure their safety as they do so, and having to (quickly) physically react to events taking place on screen in order to do so.

Whilst initially, the corridors and passageways could be used as a way of limiting the processing power that games need to run games, limiting what was on screen, ongoing technological advances allow game designers to invoke the sublime: the use of the beauty and majesty of nature to inspire terror in the player. Edmund Burke states that 'greatness of dimension is a powerful cause of the sublime' (Burke, 1827, p. 67) and this is a concept that videogames represent ably, both in Gothic gaming, and out. *Dear Esther's* landscape, which is also its primary play areas, is a deserted island that the player crosses, and is as awe inspiring as any that is represented in other media, or even in reality. In this game, 'remnants of the past' (Botting, 2002, p. 277) are juxtaposed with a contemporary narrative to construct a ghost story, in which the player invokes a repeated haunting of the landscape, a setting that is 'comparable to eighteenth-century aesthetic notions, in which a sense of the sublime occurs in an encounter with an immensity the mind cannot comprehend, a natural and divine power found in the sovereign shape of rugged, mountainous landscapes' (Botting, 2002, p. 277).

The conventions of the Gothic to convey a particular aesthetic—one that is associated with 'mysterious incidents, horrible images and life threatening pursuits…spectres, monsters, demons, corpses, skeletons' (Botting, 1996, p. 2) is upheld by Botting in the introduction to *Gothic*, where he describes the Gothic text as one that is 'exciting rather than informing' (Botting, 1996, p. 2) noting that Gothic texts of the Eighteenth Century 'chilled their [the

readers] blood, delighting their supernatural fancies and fed uncultured appetites for marvellous and strange events' (Botting, 1996, p. 4). Whilst this is true, it is also the case that the Gothic text is a form 'which allows potential for social commentary' (Beville, 2009, p. 59) a notion that videogames enter into. *Portal* and its sequel, *Portal 2*, for example interrogate common gothic themes of madness, femininity, and the ethics of post-humanism under the veneer of a puzzle solving game (Stobbart, 2017).

Videogames join with other media in the ability to excite the player as part of their basic construction. Emotional responses to events in videogames are an important facet of the medium: the 'jump scare' has become a staple of game play, transitioning from film to gaming with great success. One of the key differences between watching or reading a horror narrative and playing a videogame comes from the interactivity of playing a game. Although the user of a 'traditional' audiovisual horror story is mentally engaged with the action, it is a physically passive activity; the action happens to someone else, rather than the user. However, this is not true of a videogame story. In a videogame, the player controls the momentum of the story; nothing will happen if the player does not continue the game, and this includes during moments of horror. When something happens, such as a jump scare, the player has to react to this in a physical manner. This is not the same as when watching or reading; when a jump scare happens in film, for example, and the viewer is scared by it, the reaction has no consequences; when playing a game, however, this is not the case. The player must react to the event as if it was real – avoiding having the protagonist being killed by the monster, for example. Here, the connection between the player and the character being controlled comes to the fore, as discussed earlier. The monster that initiates the jump scare cannot physically harm the player, just as with film, but for videogames, the response must be a physical one, with the player's response to the event mirroring that of the character in order to keep that character from dying.

Death itself is an important aspect of videogame play. One of the most basic human fears is that of death—both in a literal sense, and in a spiritual sense—and the Gothic provides a way of exploring this fear. Videogames across the medium use death as a learning device: in videogame play, death is a temporary measure, whereby the player is able to repeat mistakes, and to learn from them in order to successfully complete a task and progress. However, death has become an ingrained, expected aspect of gaming; it is often considered as an inconvenience to play, rather than an integral part of the learning process. As with other media, death is more than the end of a life, and Gothic gaming allows the player to explore the fear of death through play, and to recognise the importance of death, both as a gaming construct, and as a manifestation of the fears of a contemporary audience.   Videogames are saturated with the presence of monsters, which Rick Worland considers 'can be seen as a personification of death itself which, like the traditional figure of the Grim Reaper, is an ultimately unstoppable opponent (Worland, 2007, p. 7). This can explicitly be seen in *Dante's Inferno* (Electronic Arts, 2010), a loose adaptation of *The Divine Comedy,* in which the first monster to be defeated is death itself, and the reward for doing so being the infamous scythe that the reaper carries, but who then becomes death; even after defeating death, in descending through the nine circles of hell, Dante (the playable character) has the power to kill, to damn, and to absolve sin as he travels; death remains an unstoppable force.

Death in many Gothic texts, as *Dante's Inferno* highlights, does not mean the end of a life, but often is the beginning of a more terrible fate. Zombies, vampires, and ghosts straddle the divide between life and death, existing in a purgatorial state between the two—both living and dead, or undead. Videogames featuring these monsters are manifold, with zombies in particular becoming an almost mainstream presence in games that are not concerned with The Gothic, such as the *Call of Duty* franchise, and *Red Dead Redemption* (Rockstar Games, 2010). More relevant to the Gothic are the ghostly presences that are used for storytelling

purposes in *Bioshock* (2K Games, 2007), where the player can watch the interaction of dead inhabitants of the underwater city, Rapture, talk about their lives. Ghosts appear in games across the medium; they can appear as cute renditions in the Mario series, where Boo the ghost will only chase Mario when he cannot be seen by the character, or the Pokemon games, where Gengar is a ghost Pokemon that likes to play practical jokes. *Beyond: Two Souls* uses the concept of the ghost, which the player can control at times, through the presence of Aiden, an incorporeal entity that is linked psychically linked to the central character, Jodie. The game differentiates between playing as the two characters through a change in the colour palette from colour to greyscale, the player can see a coloured ropelike link between the two players, and the game can only be completed by playing as both characters. The player is also able to take on the role of a ghost in *Murdered: Soul Suspect* (Square Enix, 2014), which takes place in a fiction version of the US town of Salem. The central character, Ronan, is murdered at the beginning of the game, and the player controls him as he tries to discover the identity of his killer, in order to progress to the afterlife, where he will be reunited with his wife. Playing as a ghost allows a set of abilities that the player can access, such as being able to teleport, and possess living characters, which are used to aid in the completion of the game. Gothic gaming lets a player explore what it is like to be a ghost: to have little or no influence on the surroundings, to be unseen, and to have to rely on the living to bring about closure, even of one's own life.

Murdered: Soul Suspect also explores the historical representation of the witch (another common Gothic character), through the presence of the central antagonist of the game. This character is the ghost of a child, Abigail, who was (in the fictional account of the game) used in the Salem witch trials to accuse other members of the community, and who was put to death as a result of her obsession with accusing people of witchcraft in 1693. This character is based on a real child, Abigail Williams, of the first accusers in the trials, but

unlike the game, it is not known what happened to the real child. Engaging with the events of the game then, allows the player to consider the role of the children in the Salem Witch Trials, and the continued effect that this would have on them, whilst at the same time engaging with a leisure activity.

On a meta-textual level, the videogame enables the player to bring about a haunting of a game-space. In *Dear Esther*, for example, the game ends with the suicide of the narrator, and every time the player begins the game anew, he is forced to repeat his final journey and suicide; the player is complicit in the purgatory the narrator is forced to reside in. *Limbo* (Playdead, 2010) also takes place in a similar space; based on the Catholic notion of the place between life and death, this puzzle game features a nameless young boy that wakes in the middle of a forest on the edge of hell, and spends the game searching for his sister, and avoiding traps and enemies. Here again, the player is complicit in the boys presence in limbo; as with *Dear Esther*, the game ends with the boy at the same place he began, having to begin his journey again, to eternally search for his sister every time the game is replayed. In these games, the divide between the fictional world of the game and the real world of the player collapses, as the player brings about the continued haunting of the game space.

The Gothic is more than a setting or aesthetic tone, and as Taylor states 'Gothic texts transgress boundaries to question, define, and redefine them' and this includes the boundaries of media itself. Gothic texts can be found on a variety of media, including the videogame, as *Dear Esther*'s narrative heavy content attests. Survival horror games, a popular videogame genre draws heavily on the Gothic, as Alice Davenport notes, writing that these games are 'based on the player's emotional response to feeling helpless and threatened within the game world, a fictional construct that takes us back to trapped and terrified Radcliffean heroines' (Davenport, 2016, p. 88). This can be seen in games that initially do not appear to be Gothic, such as the *Portal* games. Ewan Kirkland rightly notes that this game, set in a ruined facility

known as an enrichment centre, is not typical of a Gothic narrative, with its 'high-tech world of white, featureless test chambers, artificially intelligent super computers, laser targeting security robots and the portal gun itself, an elegant device allowing the player to pass through one flat surface to another' (Kirkland, 2014, p. 454). Initially appearing to be a science-fiction puzzle solving game, the underlying narrative of this game is one of female imprisonment, trauma, and emancipation, a concept that Gothic fiction has been concerned since its inception.

A whole range of videogames draw on the Gothic; *Dear Esther* uses the Gothic to inform its aesthetic narrative and even its limited interactivity (I hesitate to call it gameplay, because it consists solely of walking around the landscape). The player controls an unnamed character as he traverses a deserted Hebredian island, and 'the player, in order to understand the narrative fully, must repeatedly force the narrator to relive his suicide, haunting this landscape with his continued presence each time the game is switched on and the journey begun anew' (Stobbart, 2018) in the wake of the death of his wife, Esther. This game transgresses the boundaries of play, storytelling, and even interactivity in its delivery of this narrative – with the age old Gothic trope of madness being increasingly present as it goes on. The influence of the Gothic as a visual representation can be clearly seen in *Bloodborne's* (FromSoftware, 2015) Gothic, Victorian setting. Alongside this, the influence of Gothic literature is as easily seen. *Bloodborne* draws on several classic Gothic novels as part of its inspiration, including *Jekyll and Hyde*, *Frankenstein,* and *Dracula*. The story of the game is complicated, but essentially, the fictional city of Yharnam is cursed with an illness that transforms its residents into a variety of monsters and beasts. Blood, the central premise of the game is both the cause of this disease, and its cure, and as the game progresses the player learns of medical experimentation on Yharman's inhabitants, the art of 'blood ministration' for healing and longevity of life. The familiar Gothic notions of blood and medical

experimentation lie at the heart of the game, and its vast lore. The *Silent Hill* series also contain an explicit notion of the Gothic, through the tropes of forgotten memories, the hidden past and doubling. Ewan Kirkland considers that 'a key dynamic of *Silent Hill* is the shift from this ordinary space to a dark doppelganger other world where walls become covered in dirt and rust, floors are transformed into rotting scaffolding, corridors are now littered with soiled mattresses and broken wheelchairs. The familiar becomes unfamiliar' (Kirkland, 2009, p. 3), a facet of the Gothic that the reader, viewer, or player is accustomed to.

Whilst the *Silent Hill* games are considered as survival horror, rather than Gothic, there is a distinct overlap between the gameplay genres. Simon Niedenthal comments that 'echoes of the themes, settings, and ambience of Gothic literature are so frequent in games from the *Silent Hill* and *Resident Evil* series that it is possible to argue that survival horror games constitute a new form of the Gothic' (Niedenthal, 2009, p. 168). There are similarities between the genres; for example, the psychological effect on the player and the reader, as Niedenthal explores, 'is central to both the Gothic and survival horror genres' (Niedenthal, 2009), and both share the use of the supernatural and claustrophobia as basic traits. Once again, the permeable nature of the Gothic is apparent; Gothic gaming straddles genres.

Gothic gaming enters into the wider Gothic landscape as a method by which an individual can not only consume Gothic spaces and texts, but allows a player to inhabit that space, albeit on a virtual level. This in turn, allows the player the ability to perform as a Gothic character, and to influence a narrative. In performing the Gothic through videogame play, the individual is able to explore the way Gothic is constructed in a game space, to seek out the hidden elements of a narrative, and to construct a narrative from the fragments that are found. Videogames utilise existing structures of the Gothic, both in terms of the tropes and content of Gothic texts, entering into a discourse, which as this volume attests, is wide

ranging and complex, transgressing the boundaries of the media it exists in. Gothic gaming allows a transformative ability for the player to not only enter into a Gothic space, but to influence that space in a way that is not available in other media, immersing the player inside a narrative as a participant, rather than an observer.

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