JYU DISSERTATIONS 37

Sari Piittinen

Reconstructing the Gothic in Games and Gaming

Gothic monsters and ideology in the story world and player experiences of Fallout 3

UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation research investigates the deployment of Gothic elements in digital games and player experiences of Gothic monsters. The Gothic is a rich and popular resource for games that, through representations of monstrosities and injustice, aims to induce in players a pleasurable feeling of discomfort, yet also reflects contemporary anxieties. The dissertation comprises three case studies of which the first two are close readings of the action role-playing game *Fallout 3* and the third discourse analysis of transcribed player narration from Let's Play (LP) gameplay videos. More specifically, the case studies discuss the dual role of Gothic monstrosities as a cause and consequence of the dystopia represented in the game world, Gothic ideology conveyed through multimodal means in the game and the players' moral evaluations of its quasi-human Gothic monsters. The data for the first two case studies consisted of notes and screenshots systematically collected from the game, while the third case study examined transcribed narration from 20 different LP series of the game uploaded on YouTube. The findings show that, as well as monstrosities that are to be defeated and feared, games can also feature complex Gothic villain-heroes and sympathetic monsters whose actions and characterization are actively evaluated by players, as demonstrated in gameplay videos. These evaluations are influenced by whether the monsters are perceived as victims of injustice, making certain actions forgivable, or treacherous and therefore abhorrent. Their existence must make sense socially and biologically and be contextualized by the game world so that they can potentially enlist player sympathy. Spatial storytelling – such as items and notes left in the game space – can be used to convey narratives of past ideological horrors. Games can also reproduce traditional Gothic ideology such as othering, which takes on a dual role: players distance themselves from characters perceived as tyrannical, whereas characters ostracized by society evoke their sympathy. Players are morally autonomous and negotiate morality via humour, gossip and swearing in LP discourse. The Gothic continues to be complex, ambivalent, even contradictory in digital games, producing a sense of uncertainty during play.

Keywords: Gothic, digital games, monstrosity, dystopia, gaming, gameplay videos, morality, play experience, Fallout 3

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Gotiikan jälleenrakentamista peleissä ja pelaamisessa: Goottilaiset hirviöt ja ideologiat *Fallout 3* -toimintaroolipelin tarinoissa ja maailmoissa sekä pelikokemuksissa

Tämä väitöskirjatutkimus tarkastelee goottilaisten ainesten käyttöä digitaalisissa peleissä ja pelikokemuksia goottilaisista hirviöistä. Gotiikka on rikas ja suosittu voimavara peleille, jotka hirviömäisyyksien ja epäoikeudenmukaisuuden esittämisen kautta heijastavat ajankohtaisia ahdistuksen aiheita ja pyrkivät herättämään pelaajissa samanaikaista nautinnon ja epämiellyttävyyden tunnetta. Väitöskirja koostuu kolmesta tapaustutkimuksesta. Kaksi ensimmäistä ovat lähilukuja toimintaroolipelistä *Fallout 3*, kun taas kolmas on diskurssianalyysi Let's Play -pelivideoista litteroidusta pelaaja-kerronnasta. Nämä tutkimukset käsittelevät goottilaisten hirviöiden kaksoisroolia pelimaailman dystopian aiheuttajina ja seurauksina, pelissä multimodaalisin keinoin viestitettyä goottilaista ideologiaa, ja pelaajien moraalisia arvioita sen ihmismäisistä hirviöistä. Kahden ensimmäisen tapaustutkimuksen aineisto koostui pelistä järjestelmällisesti kerätyistä muistiinpanoista ja ruudunkaappauksista, kun taas kolmas tutkimus tarkasteli litteroitua kerrontaa 20:sta *Fallout 3* -pelistä tehdystä, YouTubeen ladatusta Let's Play -pelivideosarjasta. Löydökset kertovat, että vain päihitettäviksi ja pelättäviksi tarkoitettujen hirviöiden lisäksi pelit voivat sisältää moniulotteisia goottilaisia sankari-roistoja ja sympaattisia hirviöitä, joiden toimintaa ja hahmokuvausta pelaajat arvioivat aktiivisesti, kuten pelivideot osoittavat. Näihin arvioihin vaikuttaa se, tulkitaanko hirviöt epäoikeudenmukaisuuden uhreina, minkä seurauksena jotkin moraalisesti kyseenalaiset teot ovat anteeksiannettavissa, kun taas pelaajaan kohdistuva petollisuus tuomitaan erityisen vastenmielisenä. Hirviöiden olemassaolo tulee olla sosiaalisesti ja biologisesti selitettävissä pelimaailman kontekstissa, jotta heidän on mahdollista herättää pelaajan myötätuntoa. Tilallista tarinankerrontaa - kuten pelin tiloihin jätettyjä esineitä ja viestejä - voidaan käyttää kertomaan menneistä ideologisista kauhistuttavuuksista. Pelit voivat myös jäljentää perinteisiä goottilaisen ideologian piirteitä kuten toiseuttamista, joka saa kaksoisroolin: pelaajat etäännyttävät itsensä hahmoista, jotka nähdään tyrannimaisina, kun taas pelimaailman yhteiskunnan hyljeksimät hahmot herättävät pelaajien myötätunnon. Pelaajat ovat moraalisesti itsenäisiä ja neuvottelevat moraalisuutta sanallisesti huumorin, juoruilun ja kiroilun kautta Let's Play -diskurssissa. Gotiikan monimuotoinen, jopa ristiriitainen kerronta jatkuu digitaalisissa peleissä, tuottaen epävarmuuden tunnetta pelin aikana.

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Article 1 Piittinen, Sari Constructing a dystopian game world: Gothic monstrosities in the digital role-playing game *Fallout 3*. Submitted for publication

Article 2 Piittinen, S. Injustice in the ruins and a disordered post-apocalypse: Gothic ideology in the digital game world of *Fallout 3*. Accepted for publication in *Studies in Gothic Fiction*. https://doi.org/10.18573/sgf

Article 3 Piittinen, Sari (2018). Morality in Let's Play narrations: Moral evaluations of Gothic monsters in gameplay videos of Fallout 3. *New Media & Society*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444818779754

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ORIGINAL PAPERS

1 INTRODUCTION

This research discusses the continued cultural relevance and complexity of the Gothic in a relatively new medium with storytelling potential: digital games. Digital games are an increasingly popular hobby and commercial enterprise: global gaming revenue in 2017, including mobile games, was on par with sports and generated over three times more revenue than movie ticket sales (H. Taylor 2017). This also means that the cultural significance of games is growing and that messages and ideologies conveyed through gaming are an important subject of study. Games, like other media, reflect the society in which they have been created and are impacted by the cultural background of the designers. One tradition of storytelling that has had a considerable cultural influence on games is the Gothic, a mode of storytelling that, through portrayals of injustice and disturbing elements, can reflect contemporary sources of fear and concern (Punter 1996: 179) and be a channel for political criticism (A. Smith 2007: 3). This dissertation explores Gothicity in games and gaming through three interrelated case studies with the all-encompassing goal of examining how Gothic elements have been adapted into games and how they influence play experiences. Studying these topics has wider implications for understanding the popularity and role of Gothic storytelling, especially (but not only) in the Western media and play and gaming culture, and how literary traditions can be adapted to games in meaningful ways. Therefore, its importance extends beyond the scope of the Gothic and games, while nevertheless underlining their complexity and cultural significance. This introduction describes the aims of the study and the steps taken to achieve them, the theoretical background required to understand how the study links to the wider framework of Gothic and game studies, and its key findings and implications.

In this chapter, I first give a brief general description of the Gothic in the context of gaming. I then describe the motivations for my research and the general aims and research questions set for the study. The more detailed research questions for each case study are presented in Chapter 3. Finally, I describe the organization of this dissertation, which is based on three research publications.

1.1 Gothic elements in digital games and gaming

Gothic elements can be found in a variety of digital games, and range in function from superficial stylistic representation to games in which suspense and horror are central to the play experience and narrative (Krzywinska 2015a: 58). Often associated with dangerous, yet enticing characters like vampires, gloomy locales like abandoned castles, images of death and violence, or even certain types of fashion and music, the Gothic thrives in ambiguity and transgression. As a mode of storytelling it is extremely flexible and adaptable; Gamer (2000: 4) describes it as organic and draws attention to its ability to transplant itself across forms and media. In line with this, Smith (2007: 4) argues that the Gothic "mutates across historical, national, and generic boundaries as it reworks images drawn from different ages and places". My study explores such 'mutations' of Gothicity in digital games, in which Gothic elements become something that a player must personally face, address, and survive. The player may, for instance, have to navigate his or her way through a claustrophobia-inducing maze or defeat or negotiate with a tyrannical Gothic monster. Gothic elements are thus adopted and adapted in games in ways in which they can become meaningful for the play experience.

Gothicity in games is an emerging area of research, and my article-based dissertation joins previous and on-going attempts at marrying Gothic studies and game studies (Krzywinska 2013 & 2015, Niedenthal 2009, L. N. Taylor 2009, Teofilo 2010). This is done through three case studies, two of which analyse Gothic elements in the action role-playing game *Fallout 3* and one of which touches on the impact of Gothic elements on play experiences in the investigation of YouTube's gameplay videos called Let's Plays (LPs).

1.2 Motivation for the study, aim and research questions

The original motivation for my study comes from a very specific source. In fall 2011, I completed a free online course organized by Vanderbilt University and Coursera.org, entitled *Online Games: Literature, New Media, and Narrative*. On this course, links were examined between the Romantic poetry that had inspired J.R.R. Tolkien's fantasy fiction and the massively multiplayer online game *Lord of the Rings Online* (Turbine & Standing Stone Games 2007–present), based on the world created by Tolkien. These links were insightful, but I felt they could be examined in more detail, especially since, based on my experiences and observations as a player, it seemed that the fiction of the Romantic era had influenced game narratives and their heroes far beyond the Tolkienian games. My exploration of the Romantic era fiction eventually led me towards the Gothic - a complex mode of storytelling whose impact could be seen in digital games of all kinds, but at that time had hardly been studied in this context. I was especially intrigued by the fact that Gothic elements were often combined with elements

from other narrative genres – such as science fiction and dystopia – to the extent that players were unlikely to recognize these elements as ones of Gothic origin. This directed me towards choosing for analysis a game that had Gothic elements but was not overtly described as Gothic either by its designers or its fans – a role that to which *Fallout 3* was well-suited. (The choice is discussed in more detail in section 3.1.2 *Why Fallout 3?*) An early motivator for the study was thus to explore the continued significance of the Gothic tradition in games and gaming in its newly adapted forms: to give a name to features that many gamers are familiar with, but whose origin may have been forgotten or which may have become so ingrained in our storytelling culture that they are taken for granted. At the same time, few studies had sought to address how players experience such game elements. As a key aspect of the Gothic resides in affect, the concrete impact of Gothic elements on gameplay experiences merits study to understand how Gothic affect functions in games.

There is much to be gained from focusing specifically on Gothic elements in games. Through such investigation, for example, the role and purpose of monstrosity, horror and terror, ambiguous and discomforting elements, and even violence in games can be understood. Not all games with these elements are Gothic and not all manifestations of these elements are Gothic. However, Gothicity can be identified in the specific contexts and combinations of coordinates (see Krzywinska, 2015a) that produce it and that also produce a certain type of anxious and paranoid reading of the Gothic game world. In such cases, links can be explored between narrative and action; the construction of the game world's ideology can be examined; and the reasons for the presence of Gothic elements (such as monsters) and the options available to the player for dealing with them can be investigated. To do this requires drawing on Gothic theory as well as an understanding of how games as a medium (re)construct Gothicity.

The general research question for the dissertation is: What kinds of Gothic elements are present in the world of *Fallout 3*, and how are they interpreted by players? This admittedly broad question is more narrowly focused in each of the three interrelated research articles which together aim towards building a multi-dimensional picture of the Gothic as a vibrant cultural and aesthetic mode that continues to have an emotional impact on audiences. The first case study explores Gothic monstrosities in *Fallout 3* and their links to the dystopian narrative of the game world. The second article examines Gothic ideology and its construction in the game. The third article explores players' moral evaluations of the ambiguous Gothic monsters in their real-time commentary on the game in LP gaming videos on YouTube. Through these case studies, rather than mapping all the Gothic elements employed in the design of the game world and player experiences of them, this dissertation aims to provide detailed examples of the complexity of the Gothic in games and the complex interpretations of Gothic ambiguity in games.

1.3 Structure of the dissertation

This dissertation begins, in Chapter 2, with a description of the theoretical framework for the study. The two core influential fields are Gothic studies and game studies, whose respective sections begin with a more general look at the Gothic as a mode of storytelling and at game studies as a field of academic study. The discussion quickly narrows down to concepts that are of specific interest for the present study, a choice that is both practical and necessary considering the breadth of both fields of study. The two fields come together in the discussion on Gothicity in games, before proceeding to the theorising on player experiences and LP videos and how these have previously been studied.

The theoretical framework is followed, in Chapter 3, by a description of the study set-up, i.e. the decisions made concerning the research questions, data to be collected, and methodology. Since the same data and methods were employed in the first two case studies, they are discussed together rather than repeating largely the same information twice. This is followed, in Chapter 4, by a discussion on the key findings of each article. Chapter 5 then discusses and evaluates the research as a totality. The original, peer-reviewed research papers accepted for publication are appended at the end of the dissertation.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter, the theoretical framework for this study is presented in two main sections: one on the concept of Gothic and the other on game studies. First, Gothicity is defined in relation to the present study to provide background needed for understanding the kinds of game elements in *Fallout 3* that have been identified as drawing on Gothic traditions of storytelling. (This process is explained and justified further in Chapter 3, *Set-up of the study*.) Second, the narrativity of digital games is examined via a discussion on game studies as a field of research. The chapter ends with a discussion on previous studies on play experiences and Let's Plays (LPs).

2.1 The Gothic

The Gothic, typically associated with darkness, monsters, and imageries of ruins and castles, is rather challenging to define owing to its complex and even contradictory aspects. This section has three main purposes. The first two are to discuss the Gothic and what is typically understood as Gothic, and how Gothic is understood in the present study. This is important, since the word 'Gothic' means very different things to different people; for some, it means classic fiction from the Romantic era, for some a type of architecture, and for others it is merely a dark stylistic choice. Third, the key terms and concepts of Gothic most influential for the study are explored in more detail. Even when considered simply as a mode of storytelling – the approach taken here – the Gothic is multidimensional, and to explicate all its concepts would be a task well beyond the scope of this study. This section aims to help the reader to understand the complexity and ambivalence of the Gothic and provide a framework for the analysis of the Gothic elements identified in *Fallout 3*.

2.1.1 What is the Gothic?

> "The gothic sensibility takes pleasure in the bizarre and the wild, the magical and arabesque: in architecture, it was expressed in a revived taste for the medieval, while in literature and painting it was expressed by dealing in the supernatural, with the inexplicable monsters of the forest and castle – spooks, witches, damned souls and corpses that rise at midnight; it is interested in science and invention, but turned on their heads as the weird productions of necromancers – doctors in strange laboratories dealing in forbidden knowledge; it is fascinated with the abnormal and the hallucinatory – drug abuse, torture, terrorization, the fear of the victim – the pleasures of being insane!" (Bloom 2010: 3)

Bloom's colourful characterization of the Gothic quoted above perhaps explains why the most frequent questions that arose when I was planning my study were what aspect of the Gothic I was interested in and what Gothic even meant in the context of my study. These questions, along with Bloom's description, reflect the complexity and richness of the Gothic as a concept and term, as well as its links to the ambivalent, the strange and the intriguingly horrifying. In contrast to the artistic representation of the Gothic in architecture, or in fashion and music that emerged in the 1980s (Punter 1996: 145), the focus here is on the Gothic as a distinct form or manner of expression that employs "images of disorder, alienation and monstrosity for the purposes of both entertainment and ideological reflection" (Cavallaro 2002: 8). Gothic theory draws heavily on the literature of the Romantic era, i.e. between the 1760s and the 1820s (Punter 1980: 1). For this reason, it is worth examining the context in which the Gothic mode came into being – all the more so since it continues to function as transgressive, critical and horrifying, as it did in its early days.

What is significant about the emergence of Romanticism and the Gothic is its reactive nature. It was a response to the dominant cultural movement of the Enlightenment. New artistic preferences challenged the Enlightenment and its confidence in the power of human reason and rational criticism (Love 2008: 2). Both Romanticism and the Gothic challenged the certainties of the Enlightenment by placing more importance on "the inner worlds of the emotions and the imagination" instead of natural philosophy, as the Enlightenment had done (A. Smith 2007: 2). This was manifested, for example, in the attraction many Romantic poets felt towards exploring non-rational states (A. Smith 2007: 52), giving rise to Gothic modes of literary expression. The artists of the era shared a newly awoken interest in emotions, imagination and non-rationality that had been overlooked during the Enlightenment.

The 1790s in Europe was characterized by both fears of and enthusiasm for revolutionary ideas. In this situation, Gothic texts and their demonization of certain types of behaviour enabled implicit political criticism (A. Smith 2007: 3). For instance, by portraying powerful individuals and institutions as monstrous, such as the tyrannical father figure in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (Radcliffe 2009/1794) whose unjust treatment of the female characters in the novel also functions as commentary on women's rights; or the moral corruption of the monk Ambrosio in Matthew Lewis' *The Monk: A Romance* (2009/1796), Gothic texts questioned existing social hierarchies, and hence advocated revolutionary

thinking. In many publications of the time, "gothic fiction and drama were perceived as threats to political and social order" (Gamer 2000: 31), and were criticized for it. Gothic writings were also associated with tastelessness in both the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, as developments in the production, distribution and marketing of fiction led to increasing consumerism and a rise in the appetite for Gothic tales. The latter was perceived as an instance of cultural degeneration by the literary elite (Cavallaro 2002: 9–10). At worst, the Gothic was considered "an embarrassing and pervasive disease destructive to national culture and social fabric" (Gamer 2000: 8). Such a view persisted up to the 1970s, and thus it is no surprise that many early nineteenth century writers denied any association with the Gothic even when such a connection was arguably in evidence (Gamer 2000: 7–8). Although some Gothic fiction at the time - and some since then - was written in a sensationalist manner, it is arguably its ability to transgress, produce discomfort, and question socio-political establishments that inspired such widespread criticisms.

As the present topic is the origin of the Gothic tradition in fiction, it would be helpful to give some examples of classic Gothic novels. Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (2009/1764) is arguably the earliest Gothic novel, featuring a tyrannical father, supernatural elements, a surprise heir, and an ambivalent ending in which justice is restored, but the innocent love interest of the hero has died. The story does not take itself seriously and can be viewed as containing elements of parody, which was to become a persistent element of the Gothic mode (Spooner 2006: 35–36). This is further underlined by the fact that Walpole originally published the novel with a preface falsely claiming that the story had been printed in 1529 in Naples and had only recently been discovered in the library of an ancient English, Catholic family. Although this preface was deliberately misleading, Gothic novels came to embrace obsession with the past (Punter 2014: 7); for example, Brown's *Wieland* (2008/1798) shows how "the present is ghosted by the past" by portraying post-revolutionary America as cyclically unstable (A. Smith 2013: 36). The Gothic mode has generally continued to recycle "familiar images and narrative structures" of earlier Gothic works (Spooner 2006: 10).

Of the novels mentioned above, *Udolpho*, *The Monk* and *Wieland* represent arguably the peak classic period of the Gothic novel. However, a later influential novel was Shelley's *Frankenstein*, published in 1818. Frankenstein's Creature in the novel is discussed in more detail below in the section on monstrosity. However, *Frankenstein* was published towards the end of the peak period of classic Gothic literature and was also the earliest science fiction novel, featuring the archetype of the mad scientist (Crook 2012: 114). Gothic and science fiction have since become closely linked, as is evidenced by the plethora of comics, films, television series and digital games whose narratives combine horror elements with technology and thus testify to the persistence of traditions from the early Gothic novels onwards. The Gothic era was crowned by Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* in 1820, which Bloom (2010: 81) considers "the last great gothic novel of the Romantic era, and perhaps, the last truly gothic novel". Bloom (2010: 83) argues that unlike the earlier Gothic novels, *Melmoth* deals with hor-

rors that originate from casual institutional cruelty, human indifference and violence in a bureaucratic world. Although in Bloom's view this is perceived as the endpoint of the 'truly' Gothic novel, it can also be perceived as the beginning of a shifting Gothicity that is able to adapt to new cultural contexts.

This leads to a discussion of what has happened to the Gothic between the 1820s and today, especially in popular culture, which has embraced the mode. Although the classic novels had already experienced popularity, it was around the 1850s that Gothic elements came to be recycled in the so-called 'penny dreadfuls' and 'shockers' that were available to a wide audience of working-class readers, featuring quickly-paced narratives and introducing werewolves, vampires and real murderers to the mode (Bloom 2010: 100–103). The vampire, of course, had been part of folklore to Western readers since the 1730s (Gibson 2013: 9); however, the figure became popularized during the era of the 'penny dreadfuls'. Notably, Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, which has since become a classic of vampire fantasy, was published in 1897.

Gothic has continued to sell since its early popularization. A re-emergence of Gothic literature, which could be considered the beginning of the contemporary Gothic, took place in the 1970s, led by the best-seller novels of Stephen King (Williams 1995: 2), not to mention the success of the adaptations of his novels into film, television drama and comics. The 1970s also saw the return of the vampire in Anne Rice's novels, most famously *Interview with the Vampire* (1976) which was also successfully adapted into a film in 1994. Thus, what contemporary Gothic does is to recycle, reinvent, and adapt the traditional monsters and sources of anxiety; they no longer merely haunt the pages of books, but have entered films, television, comics, and digital games. Gothicity has thus taken over popular culture. It is worth noting that in its commercialized forms, Gothic elements are sometimes only employed on a superficial, stylistic level. This is evidently the case with 'cutified' horror, such as the design of the *Munchkin Cthulhu* card game by Steve Jackson Games (2003). Cthulhu is a monster originating from H.P Lovecraft's horror short stories, written between the 1910s and 1930s. This card game, however, is a humorous game designed for adults that does not aim to frighten or disturb the player; instead, it satirizes role-playing games (Ward 2013). Gothic elements can also be present and made humorous in cartoons and films targeted to children, such as *The Addams Family* (Sonnenfeld 1991), which features a quirky family and many supernatural elements, or Pixar Animation Studios' *Monsters, Inc.* (Docter 2001) in which the monsters not only have a cute appearance, but also stop scaring children after discovering that the power of laughter is stronger than fearful screams. Thus, some uses of Gothic elements have been disconnected from the Gothic mode of storytelling characterized above, and monsters represented as attractive, safe, and funny. This aspect is not discussed further in this dissertation, but it is important to note that merely referential or stylistic adaptations of the Gothic do not necessarily carry the same socio-cultural meanings and critical commentaries as the traditionally discomforting tales, although they are culturally reflective in other ways.

Today, the Gothic continues to reflect "preoccupations of our times: capitalist inhumanity, information overload, child abuse, serial murder, pollution and corruption" (Punter 1996: 179). The Gothic always appears to be concerned with what is contemporarily frightening and is ideologically or politically loaded. Morevoer, as Spooner (2006: 8) argues, many of the Gothic themes that were pertinent during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries remain so today:

> "the legacies of the past and its 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".

One example of this is the resurgence in the popularity of zombie films and television shows, following the attack on the World Trade Center (Doyle 2015: 2), that promote anthropocentric beliefs in a world in which what is 'human' is defined politically. Although the early zombie film *White Zombie* (Halperin 1932) was set in Haiti, the zombie films of the 1960s and 1970s were set in the United States and are "lauded for their unflinching exploration into the disintegration of American society and traditional, conservative values" (Doyle 2015: 1–2). Thus, the Gothic, through recycling familiar elements, continues to provide a symbolic language for discussing cultural sources of fear and anxiety while also successfully spreading across different media and aspects of culture. It is a mode that since its emergence has been reactive, oppositional, reflective and critical, sparked by the cultural context of its birth, and that continues adapting to reflect contemporary issues. This is how the Gothic is perceived in the present study: not merely as something that entertains through tales of terror and horror, but also as something culturally impactful and reflective.

2.1.2 Key concepts of the study

Since the Gothic is such a challenging mode to define, and owing to the scope and focus of this study, only some of the central and related concepts will be discussed in detail here. Although some elements of the Gothic appear in many Gothic works, none seem to be universal. For instance, many Gothic tales feature elements of the supernatural, but this is not always the case, and belief in the supernatural may even be ridiculed. An example of this is Radcliffe's English novel *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (2009/1794). At first glance it includes supernatural events, but these are later revealed to be a result of misunderstandings or deliberate deceptions. Thus, in *Udolpho*, the supernatural is represented as an embarrassing creation of superstition and fear, rather than the realized presence of ghosts, vampires, or other supernatural elements. To give an example of another type of Gothicity, Edgar Allan Poe's tales were psychological rather than supernatural: "his horrors are those of the mentally ill, the dreamer and the drug addled" (Bloom 2010: 88). The supernatural is, thus, an example of a Gothic element that is commonly used in a flexible way, but it is not by any means a necessary feature for a work to be considered Gothic, while not all tales that feature supernatural elements can be considered Gothic. In sum, it can be ar-

gued that all Gothic elements are similarly adaptable and contextual and are identifiable based on how they make the audience feel and think: disturbed, horrified, anxious, or suspicious and paranoid, but to an extent that remains pleasurable.

Consequently, a concept that seems worth considering in the context of the Gothic is the concept of taboo. It is defined by Punter (1996: 184) as "areas of socio-psychological life which offend, which are suppressed". In practice they can be understood as actions or events deemed so depraved that people avoid discussing them at all; however, what is considered taboo also changes over time. Punter (1996: 190) continues to argue for the complexity of taboo:

> "The fundamental structure of taboo, as Freud points out, is emotional ambivalence: tabooed objects are those to which we summon up not a simple emotional reaction but a dialectical one in which the mind oscillates between attraction and repulsion, worship and condemnation."

This is linked to the capacity of the Gothic to be simultaneously attractive and discomforting to audiences: it explores taboos that both arouse the curiosity of the audiences and repulse them. Cannibalism, rape, incest and violence towards or committed by children are only some examples of condemned behaviour that in Gothic fictional works nevertheless attract an audience. *The Monk: A romance* (Lewis 2009/1796), for example, depicts rape, incest, and the entrapment of a pregnant woman who is nearly starved to death and whose child does not survive. These story events are heinous, yet the reader is typically not deterred from continuing. For the investigation of digital game stories, the taboo is a fruitful concept since, as Rouse III (2009) suggests, players can safely face taboo subject matter in games. This is because actions taken in games do not typically have consequences beyond the context of gaming.

The following subsections discuss monstrosity, dystopia and Gothic ideology, and the key concepts linked to them, since these were the main themes of the first two case studies and analyses of *Fallout 3*. Of these, dystopia is not part of the Gothic, but rather refers to a genre of storytelling that bears many similarities to it and might be considered a close relative. How these key concepts link to game design is also discussed, as this is relevant to the focus of the present study.

2.1.2.1 Monstrosity

Monstrosity is often included in descriptions of the Gothic (e.g. Cavallaro 2002: 8, A. Smith 2007: 4). While it may appear simple to define a monster as a creature that is distorted, fearsome and repulsive, a monster may also manifest more complex forms – and in Gothic fiction, often does. In this subsection, I will first look at the concept of monstrosity through terror and horror, which are key elements of the Gothic. Next, the connection of monstrosity with the uncanny is examined. This is followed by a discussion on some of the more recognizable Gothic monsters: the ambiguous Frankensteinian monster and the Gothic villain. These discussions explain how in my study Gothic monstrosity is under-

stood. This is necessary, since like the Gothic, monstrosity is challenging to define due to its adaptability and constant metamorphosis across time, cultures and media forms.

Gothic novels can be superficially divided into the schools of terror and horror, where terror "seeks to evoke by suggestion, by suspense" and horror "displays in the hopes of producing disgust" (Bloom 2010: 3). This division has been especially popular, as mentioned by Cavallaro (2002: 2), who also argues that horror is easier to define than terror, since it is linked to "identifiable objects, most notably the body, and to visible disruptions of the natural order which cause intensely physical reactions". Terror, in contrast, disturbs "because of its indeterminateness: it cannot be connected with an identifiable physical object and the factors that determine it accordingly elude classification and naming" (Cavallaro 2002: 2). From this, it can be deduced that, for instance, a deformed monster in a film appearing to chase a protagonist and causing the viewer to shudder is a source of horror, whereas a threat that is not seen and whose existence is shrouded in mystery is a source of terror. What lames the distinction between horror and terror is that they are closely interconnected and may both be evident in one story (Cavallaro 2002: 5).

Nevertheless, horror and terror provide a lens through which to observe monstrosity in material, disturbing forms, or as intangible and unknown. In digital games the former types of monstrosity are typically the kind that "can be analysed and defeated" (Švelch 2013: 194), i.e. monsters that are perceived and encountered by the player. Since monsters in games follow rules, these rules can be identified by the player and this information used to defeat them. Švelch (2013: 195–196) argues that this suggests a shift in the conceptualization of monstrosity from ambiguous to knowable, to puzzles that can be solved. This argument makes sense when monsters are clearly positioned as opponents in a game. However, when the player is given other alternatives with which to address and deal with monsters, the conceptualization becomes more complex. Moreover, although rare, it is also possible for games to feature intangible sources of terror that even the player is unable to defeat. For example, not all games have a happy and triumphant ending with the player defeating the final boss, i.e. the main enemy. This is at the very least suggested by game series with Gothic elements in which the same injustices are continued from one game to the next; the monstrosity encompasses more than a specific villain or army. Thus, the design of monstrosities can draw on the concepts of terror and horror in a variety of ways also in the context of digital games.

The uncanny is a central Gothic concept because it can be explained as a common, perhaps even primary source of fear. Explored by Sigmund Freud (Freud & Dickson 1985: 339–376) as the concept of *unheimlich*, it is related to what arouses dread and horror, and is closely associated with images of death (A. Smith 2007: 13). Freud argues that *unheimlich* is a subspecies of *heimlich*: *heimlich* is ambiguous in the sense that it has both the meaning of 'familiar and agreeable', and the meaning of 'concealed and kept out of sight'. Its meaning "develops in the direction of ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its op-

posite, *unheimlich*" (Freud & Dickson 1985: 347). As a result, the uncanny can be described as "a sense of weirdness, created when something that seemed safe and familiar suddenly becomes strange, or something that should have remained hidden is revealed" (Crow 2009: 7). The uncanny, thus, involves the merging of familiarity and strangeness (Cavallaro 2002: 4). A fundamental characteristic of the uncanny is repetition, where the uncanny is associated with urges to relive past experiences and the desire to confront unresolved and repressed Oedipal dramas (A. Smith 2007: 14). Indeed, Freud's list of situations that can produce the uncanny includes familiar devices of Gothic literature: coincidences, odd repetitions and doubling (Crow 2009: 7). The uncanny can be concretely observed, for instance, in the many monstrous creatures that inhabit digital game worlds whose design is based on creatures originally safe and familiar to us – from insects and animals to humans. Transformations of the human body are arguably the most significant, since we can see similarities to ourselves in uncanny bodies - similarities that remind us of the vulnerability of life, of death and decay (D. M. Higgins 2008: 69–70). The uncanny is central to why monsters produce such ambivalence by being simultaneously familiar and strange, intriguing and repulsive.

Frankenstein's Creature in Shelley's classic novel of 1818 is probably the most famous example of a Gothic monster and has inspired the creation of many a monster since, to the point that these monsters can be described as Frankensteinian. Frankenstein's Creature is a complex character, combining elements of horror, the uncanny, and an equivocal physicality and psychology. In the novel, he is deemed as a monster purely based on his appearance, which is, disturbingly, both natural and unnatural (A. Smith 2007: 43); he is alive in a body that has been created from dead parts. His own creator, Victor Frankenstein, is horrified by his appearance and refers to him in many different ways, as there is no one name "for a being who questions the very logical categories created by human language" (Allen 2008: 52). The Creature is intelligent, well-read and well-spoken, and elicits the reader's sympathy and empathy with his story of "ostracism, prejudice and withheld human contact" (Spooner 2006: 70). The novel portrays the social process of othering with the rejection of the Creature as a non-human threat to the dominant social order; the Creature is not only othered by his creator and other people, but also learns that this is something unavoidable in human societies (Allen 2008: 2–3).

Although the Creature is initially innocent and kind, subsequent rejection by a family that he perceived to be generous and sympathetic is too great a disappointment, resulting in hatred towards humanity and himself. He becomes a murderer - which, interestingly, may not greatly change the reader's interpretation of him, since the Creature speaks of his sufferings in such an eloquent way and the reader is never brought face to face with his monstrosity (D. M. Higgins 2008: 87). Thus, the Creature remains a sympathetic character. In line with this, Punter (1980: 127) argues that Frankenstein's monster is a symbol of "injustice and malevolent fate". Through a representation of othering, Frankensteinian monstrosity criticises the exclusion of those who challenge existing categories

and the notion that monstrous appearance inherently leads to monstrous behaviour, while simultaneously presenting a story in which human society turns such a being into a violent monster. Some of the unanswered questions presented by the novel become where to place the blame for producing such monsters (Punter 1980: 255), and who are the true monsters – those who are rejected, or those who violently reject others?

Whereas Frankenstein's Creature makes for a complex and interesting 'hero', complex and interesting villains are also typical of Gothic storytelling, which also typically features humans as monsters. The Gothic villain embodies the mode's insistence that individuals and societies cannot be perfected; instead they remain "flawed and capable of evil" (Crow 2009: 2), and, without the help of external restraints, cannot govern their own passions rationally (Kilgour 1995: 11). For instance, Ambrosio in *The Monk: A Romance* is arguably the most complex and interesting character in the story, but also horribly villainous: selfish, cowardly, and capable of rape and murder. Like Frankenstein's Creature, complex villains may be conflicted or have seemingly understandable, albeit selfish motivations for their actions which have horrific consequences. In such cases, the Gothic villain may be perceived as a villain-hero (Crow 2009: 9); a troubled intellectual who commits abhorrent deeds, but whose reasoning makes sense to the reader or whose goals are perceived as noble although the means used to achieve them are misguided. The difference between pure horror and the Gothic mode might partially lie in the type of villain: horror typically features obsessive murderers whose only motivation is to kill, while Gothic stories feature conflicted individuals, monsters that are also victims, fuzzy boundaries between life and death, and corrupt governments that function based on a deviant sense of morality. In games, the former kinds of monsters are opponents to be defeated; the latter kinds, depending on the game, may receive more complex handling in the narrative.

One example of a Gothic villain is the vampire. Vampires became a part of the Gothic aesthetic in the penny dreadfuls of the mid-19th century (Bloom 2010: 100–103) and were particularly established in the 1890s with "the new, improved vampire of *Dracula*" (Punter 1980: 239). Vampires have since become a Gothic figure with longevity, as the figure has been further popularized and reinvented in Anne Rice's vampire novels starting in the 1970s, and more recently in television series such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Mutant Enemy Productions 1997–2003), *True Blood* (HBO 2008–2014), and the *Twilight* books (Meyer 2005–2008) and movies (Summit Entertainment 2008–2012). Punter (1980: 119) describes the vampire in English culture as "elegant, well dressed, a master of seduction, a cynic, a person exempt from prevailing socio-moral codes". Moreover, Gibson (2013: 10) points out the 19th century vampire's emphasis on carnality and the ineradicable processes of history. The vampire can then be understood as a charismatic outcast who provides a means for discussing the past as cyclical. However, one might argue that the character-type of a vampire also influences villains that are not of the blood-consuming, immortal kind. Overwhelmingly charismatic, powerful outcasts, who thrive on transgressing

boundaries and have a loyal following, are plentiful in different storytelling media. It may not be justifiable to describe them as vampires, but the definition of a vampire offers one lens through which to perceive and identify their Gothic villainy.

To summarise, Gothic monstrosity can take many forms – the materially horrific or terrifyingly intangible. Often Gothic monsters have elements of the uncanny, appearing simultaneously strange and familiar. This is especially in the case of transformed human bodies. These characters can also be psychologically complex, like Frankenstein's Creature who has to confront his own monstrosity and is unable to deal with it, and villains who believe their cause to be worthy of morally dubious actions. They are excluded from society, which often generates their contempt and hatred towards humanity, thereby giving them a justification for their actions – at least to themselves. Thus, Gothic monstrosity encompasses the body, the mind, and the socio-political context, prompting uncomfortable questions about humanity, blame, and justice.

2.1.2.2 Dystopia

In my first research article, monstrosity and dystopia became intertwined in the investigation of how Gothic monstrosity constructs and is constructed by the dystopian game world of *Fallout 3*. During this investigation, many similarities and links between Gothicity and dystopian fiction were identified, although these terms cannot be used interchangeably and Gothic works are not necessarily dystopian, or vice versa. Still, because of its importance to the first case study, dystopia is examined here from the viewpoint of the Gothic mode. In this subsection, some of the connections between the Gothic mode and dystopian fiction are discussed: the tyrannical imbalance of power, the use of distancing methods, human responsibility, the function of producing critical cultural commentary, the significance of transformed and othered human bodies and the character type of an individual who is detached from society. It is possible to identify more similarities; for example, ruins and abandoned locales are a popular setting for both Gothic and dystopian stories, especially of the post-apocalyptic kind. However, given that my case studies specifically discuss monstrosity and ideology, the aspects presented here are those most relevant to the overall work.

Although in its lay meaning a dystopia is an unwanted society that is the opposite of utopia, it is more useful to define dystopia as a utopia that has gone wrong or is only utopian for a specific part of society. A "true opposite of utopia" would be an unplanned or deliberately horrifying society (Prakash, Tilley & Gordin 2010), but in a dystopia, there is typically someone or something that benefits from the status quo, such as "a power-crazed elite" in an unjust society (Gottlieb 2001: 3), or a force that "may be human, natural, superhuman or utterly artificial" (Claeys 2013: 17). Thus, like Gothic fiction, dystopian tales often feature oppressive, tyrannical villains who for their own benefit strip away freedom from those less powerful. At the same time, dystopias may also represent the hell of nearly complete anarchy: the disestablishment of military, police, and social hierarchies, and their replacement by an anti-political state and new

micro-scale power structures (Olkusz 2016: 91, Claeys 2013: 17). In this kind of setting, powerless people have no-one to protect their rights or lives from threats, whether human or non-human. Thus, through injustice, societal control and lack of control can have both Gothic and dystopian implications for a narrative.

Both Gothic and dystopian fiction employ distancing methods in their narration. What this means is that contemporary sources of concern are located in contexts that are temporally and spatially different from the author's present (Sargisson 2013: 40–41). Thus, although the contexts represented in the fiction may in some ways be like ours, the terrors are experienced from a safe distance and with the knowledge that the events are not happening to us directly. In line with this, Burke (1990: 36–37) also argues that danger and pain become delightful when they are experienced at a certain distance and with certain modifications. For classic Gothic texts, placing terrors in the past juxtaposes the 'present enlightenment' (Spooner 2006: 19) with a less civilized past, meaning that the danger is largely over. Interestingly, however, many dystopian works are placed in futuristic settings; the terrors represent an undesirable future that may become reality unless we are able to stop it in time. In these situations, the distancing method provides only a temporary feeling of safety; rather, it may even be a source of discomfort if the gap between now and an undesirable future appears to be narrowing.

Dystopias typically represent the harmful outcomes of human behaviour, and thus human responsibility for all the horrors and terror. However, this responsibility simultaneously communicates a potential for change (Sargent 2013: 12). Thus, the location of a dystopian world in the future can have ambivalent meanings for the audience, such as threat and opportunity. In any case, the role of humanity typically looms large in the formation of dystopian worlds and societies in which, especially in digital games, the actions of individual characters are highlighted. The role assigned to the player is sometimes that of the one individual who can change the status quo. However, this glimmer of hope may also turn out to be an illusion, as is the case in *The Last of Us* (Naughty Dog 2013); in this game, the chance to save humanity would require the sacrifice of a teenaged girl that the player comes to know personally during the game, not only when avoiding and battling zombie-like infected people, but also hostile and deceitful human NPCs (non-player characters). In the end, the cost of saving humanity is too great and the player comes to question whether humanity is even worth saving. In contrast, in games like *Fallout 3* that offer great player freedom, the player can choose his or her version of a utopia/dystopia by playing a heroic or a villainous character.

The location of dystopias in futuristic settings shows that they "help us to imagine and envisage how the present can change into something very nasty" (Sargisson 2013: 40). This leads us towards another key link between dystopias and the Gothic: they both enable critical cultural reflection. The elements that produce fear in Gothic fiction are effective because they represent concrete contemporary sources of concern and their representation as horrific also becomes

critical in its nature. Similarly, dystopias are most effective when they feature aspects of our cultures that are recognizable and horrifying, although often in exaggerated forms. For example, Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1996/1985) combines things that have historically occurred in our world, from childbirth quotas and sumptuary laws to slaves not being allowed to read (C. Higgins 2016). Thus, dystopian and Gothic fictions enable the critical examination of culture. In line with this, Gottlieb (2001: 13) argues that while dystopian novels have tragic elements, they are also political satires exhorting us to avoid "potentially monstrous consequences in the future".

It has been argued (Cartwright 2005: 207) that the reshaping and othering of human bodies is a Gothic convention that is central to dystopian fiction. This makes sense, since othering like the transforming of bodies is typically linked to power. Othering is a means of upholding the current social hierarchy, which can be exercised by those in positions of power. Reshaped bodies, in turn, may be linked to a class or racial hierarchy, or be an unjust consequence of a tyrannical misuse of power. The former may be the case when, for instance, the population is exposed to pollution and only some are privileged enough to be protected from it. An example of the latter is when obsessive scientists conduct experiments on their test subjects. Gothicity and dystopia are, nevertheless, closely linked through monstrous changes in human bodies.

Some of the Gothic character types that exist outside or on the margins of society have been discussed above. Dystopian fiction, similarly, features characters who are disenchanted individuals and raise "concerns about the imbalance of power", especially when they are "in a detached situation, both within and outwith the society about which they are expressing discontent" (Cartwright 2005: 10–11). These dystopian characters are, thus, not entirely unlike complex Gothic villains who feel betrayed by society, or Frankenstein's Creature who comes to recognise the flaws of human character, not only as their victim, but through learning about the history of othering. Although these Gothic and dystopian characters may also be guilty of committing morally dubious deeds, they seem especially aware of the injustices experienced in everyday experienced life. In the Gothic tales, they often become resentful and attempt to exact a measure of revenge; in dystopian tales, they may attempt to strive towards change by any means available, but success is not guaranteed.

Consequently, Gothic and dystopian fiction share the function of asking discomforting questions, typically those concerning humanity and human societies. This is achieved with representations of the misuse of power, horrific consequences of human actions, the othering of transformed human bodies, and of complex individuals whose resentment of society is understandable. These representations are typically placed in temporally and/or spatially distant contexts, allowing the exploration of horror and injustice from the outside while retaining some similarities to the reader's present world. For research purposes, the connection between Gothicity and dystopian fiction is a close and fruitful one, since both traditions of storytelling feature aspects and elements that support the function of being culturally critical and reflective through portrayals of hor-

ror and terror. However, while the focus here was on investigating the links between the two types of fiction, they are nevertheless far from being synonymous.

2.1.2.3 Gothic ideology

In this study, ideology is understood as forms of thought and behaviour that are inherent in our political and social worlds and offer means for making sense of the worlds that we inhabit (Freeden 2003: 2). Rather than as political -isms, ideology is understood here as a phenomenon that penetrates "the whole fabric of societies or communities" and results "in normalised, naturalised patterns of thought and behaviour" (Blommaert 2005: 159). The Gothic is a mode that transgresses or challenges what is considered normal (A. Smith 2007, 3, L. N. Taylor 2009) by the deployment of elements that are terrifying, yet intriguing. It follows that a Gothic ideology can be emotionally and critically effective, because elements of it disrupt naturalised patterns of thought or behaviour. When the Gothic novel became popularized in print form, its ideology encompassed political, religious and social agendas targeted, in particular, to lower-middleclass readers with rehearsed "tales of usurpation, false identities and contested wills" (Hoeveler 2014: 7–8). Many of these novels were anti-Catholic; however, even if anti-Catholicism is no longer a central driving force for the Gothic, it continues to provide critical representations of those in power, or of those whom we fear to see in power. This critical aspect can be considered inherent to Gothic ideology.

Arguably, ideology can also be Gothic itself and thus become dangerous if it is taken so much for granted that it becomes invisible and unrecognizable as an ideology (Blommaert 2005: 160). Something that is hidden cannot be evaluated critically and changed. This can, for example, result in a situation where injustices are not recognized as such, despite the suffering that they cause, because they are an inherent part of a dominant ideology.

In addition to the above, at least two other aspects of Gothic ideology can be identified. The first is the positioning of specific groups or belief-systems as other by portraying their ideology as false or misguided, as can be seen in the way that Catholicism was represented in Gothic novels during the religious anxieties of the Enlightenment period (Hoeveler 2014: 13). This is linked to the ability of the Gothic to be culturally critical and reflective, although Gothic works may equally reproduce and propagate as resist dominant ideologies (Ellis 1989: xii), meaning that Gothic works' positions can be ideologically contradictory (Hoeveler 2014: 10). The second aspect, which follows from the first, is that Gothic works often position ideological stances as rivals. This shows in Cavallaro's (2002: 8–9) listing of Gothic ideological connotations in the form of binary conflicts, such as archaic disorder versus modern discipline, crudeness versus elegance, and savage paganism versus refined morality. Although these conflicts are present and may portray one category as horrific in comparison to another, it is also possible that neither one of a binary category is portrayed as desirable: for example, characters that are portrayed as elegant may be just as dangerous and unjust as crude ones. If we look at the separate spheres of

worldly men on the one hand and women tied to the homes on the other, especially as portrayed in early Gothic novels, we notice that Gothicity is critical of this ideology of gendered separated worlds and represents exiles from both as disempowered (Ellis 1989: xv). Thus, we can argue that ideological stances are juxtaposed in Gothic works and that by placing two binary categories side-by-side and identifying similarities between them, an ideology that concerns both can be deconstructed and critically addressed. To expand on the example given above, both men and women (when a binary gender system is represented in a story) can suffer from an ideology that separates them into different worlds, suggesting that this kind of binary distinction is harmful. At the same time, those who are often depicted as pious moral leaders, such as priests or monks, may be portrayed in Gothic works as horrifically tyrannical, in the manner of merciless bandits, which shows that although these two worlds may be considered ideologically separate, they are not too different, as both are driven by selfish motives, greed and calculated cruelty. Thus, in the case of Gothic ideology it becomes important to explore the boundaries between seemingly conflicting pairs, which may be unexpectedly fuzzy.

In conclusion, ideology is yet another complex aspect of the Gothic, as it may function to reproduce or to challenge dominant beliefs, and portray even rival ideological stances as equally horrifying. However, what enhances the impact of Gothic fiction is its ability to disrupt normalised and naturalised patterns of thought and behaviour by introducing characters and situations that are unusual in a discomforting way and asking questions for which there are no simple answers. Also, despite its complexity, Gothic ideology is recognizable when we investigate who are being othered by the text and in what way; are they others to the characters in the story, or to the reader, or to both? Moreover, as a Gothic text is likely to feature an ideological conflict, it is fruitful to analyse what types of ideology might be participating in such a conflict. Although ideology appears an intangible and difficult concept to grasp, it is an ideational phenomenon that is materially mediated (Blommaert 2005: 164) in a range of practices - such as digital games - and this materiality makes it possible for it to be observed.

2.2 Studying the Gothic in games and play experiences

The aim of this section is to provide a brief introduction to the field of game studies and to discuss those of its central concepts that are relevant to the present study. Where this is deemed an aid to understanding, the theory is illustrated by reference to *Fallout 3* both to provide examples of these gameplay aspects in concrete use and to place observations about the game in the wider context of game studies. A more detailed description of *Fallout 3* can be found in section 3.1.3 *Why Fallout 3?*, in which its selection as the data source for the examination of Gothicity in games is also discussed.

Since digital games have typically been perceived as trivial, innocuous entertainment or as instruments for desensitizing gamers to violence (Aarseth 2003, Peterson, Miller & Fedorko 2013: 34), and are often targeted by prejudice outside the field of game studies (Fromme & Unger 2012: 3), it was not until the early 2000s that the academic study of games began to gain traction. This is a relatively recent development, considering that the earliest video game, "A Cathode-ray tube amusement device", was developed in 1947 by Thomas T. Goldsmith, Jr. and Estle Ray Mann, and that the earliest home consoles entered households, particularly in the United States, in the 1970s (Orlando 2007). Much of the earliest academic interest in games had to do specifically with the impact of violent games on children (Consalvo 2003: 322). However, this scope of research began to widen quickly with debate on how to analyse games and case studies that increase understanding on various aspects of games and gaming culture.

This section pays special attention to the debate on and theories of games and gaming that have been most relevant to the formation of my study. Specifically, agency is discussed first as it is an aspect that functions differently in games than in other storytelling media and impacts how narratives in games are constructed and experienced. Second, the potential narrativity of games is discussed, since it is only possible to examine Gothic influences in games if we recognize that games can tell stories. A third aspect is spatial storytelling in the forms that it takes in games. With the player perceived as a participant in the game space and narrative rather than as someone reading or watching from the outside, these aspects of games also form the basis for the examination of how Gothic elements are employed in games. Therefore, this section also provides a theoretical background for the discussion in section 2.3 *The Gothic and digital games*.

2.2.1 Games and agency

Games as a medium that requires actions from a player deserves some attention, since without a player to interpret a game's rules and interact with it, a game is not a complete text (Fernández-Vara 2015: 7). A story exists in a book even if it is not read; a game without a player exists only as a set of rules and unexplored possibilities for action and narrative. Yet experiencing a game typically demands considerable effort. This aspect of games is taken up by Aarseth (1997: 1), with the concept of ergodic literature: "non-trivial effort is required to allow the reader to traverse the text". The key word here is "non-trivial", as the effort put into eye-movements or the turning of pages to traverse text, such as when one reads a book, is perceived as trivial. Aside from digital games, hypertexts, for example, are also ergodic. Their readers make choices that necessarily make other paths inaccessible; this is something that book readers or film viewers do not experience, as the only path available to them is the one that the writer intends them to witness. Although Aarseth does not mention agency in this context, decision making and path choosing are key examples of it in games.

Agency is a central concept of the gameplay experience and, for the reasons described above, is necessarily conceptualized differently in games than in the more traditional media. An interesting example of this is the difference between how the death of allies is treated in games and literature. Whereas literature provokes empathy, games typically provoke remorse, since it is implied that the player as agent has caused the ally to die by failing to protect him or her (Mason 2013: 32–33). With agency comes a sense of personal responsibility that other storytelling media are not able to convey as effectively. Most typically, agency is linked to meaningful action and the satisfying power of making meaningful choices in games (Murray 1997). However, the concept of agency has been a much-debated topic, as scholars have variously perceived the roles of choice making, rules, and the predictability of consequences during play. For example, in contrast with agency being linked to making choices whose consequences can be predicted, Mason (2013: 31) has suggested that not knowing the consequences of our actions does not necessarily diminish agency; instead, "agency involves a great deal of uncertainty". This makes sense, since if we compare gameplay to situations outside it, we do not claim to lack agency simply because we cannot know the consequences of our actions.

Mason (2013: 32) differentiates between agency and affect. She first conceptualizes diegetic choices as those made by a player as a character or a presence within the story world – not as a removed observer – that also affect the narrative (2013: 28). Therefore, diegetic agency and diegetic choices allow changes to be made to a game's narrative, whereas movements through and actions in space concern affect, not agency. On such a view, much of the mechanics of movement and action are not concerned with agency, but only with the ability to change the narrative. What makes this differentiation problematic in my view is that, at times, it is not possible to draw a line between a mere action and an action that is linked to a player's narrative purpose. A player shooting a NPC is an action that does not necessarily impact the game narrative, but to the player, it may, for example, be a choice made to avenge something that happened earlier. Thus, the line between affect and agency appears to be a fuzzy one.

Bizzocchi and Tanenbaum (2012: 394) argue that a player can also gain pleasure from participating in, playing along with, and submitting to the narrative instead of "authoring an outcome", and call this bounded agency, meaning 'bounded' by the intended narrative of the game design. A similar conceptualization is also discussed by Tanenbaum and Tanenbaum (2009: 1); they suggest that instead of the desire to act freely, "agency is better understood as a *commitment to meaning*" (authors' original emphasis). They argue that unrestricted agency would undermine a game designer's authorial work and ability to convey meaningful and pleasurable experiences through constraints, i.e. the rules (K. Tanenbaum & Tanenbaum 2009: 3). Instead, it would be more fruitful to perceive the player and designer as collaborators: players, in some situations, are willing to give up options and the ability to choose in favour of committing to the story. Even with a loss of choice, the player is still experiencing agency in

the cognitive process of commitment rather than interaction (K. Tanenbaum & Tanenbaum 2009: 7–8). However, these commitments ought to be mapped on to meaningful outcomes in the game for agentic pleasure to take place (J. Tanenbaum 2015: 88). Thus, agency can be characterised as making meaningful diegetic choices or committing to meaning within the constraints of the game, which in turn leads to meaningful outcomes and consequences that may or may not be predictable.

2.2.2 Games and their narrative potential

The academic study of narrative potential in digital games was initially both challenged and challenging. This is because in early critical discussions of game studies, concerns were expressed that the field was relying too much on adapting tools from narratology and film studies instead of developing and establishing tools specifically for analysing games (Frasca 2003: 222). The result was a short-lived 'debate' between the ludologist and narratologist approaches to analysing games; ludology is defined as "a discipline that studies games in general, and video games in particular" (Frasca 2003: 222) and narratology as the study of games as narratives. The debate was probably unavoidable and necessary, since it highlighted the fact that games can and often do include narrativity, but that their narrativity cannot be examined with the exact same tools as used with other storytelling media or as something disconnected from gameplay and simulation. Game scholars were thus forced to evaluate the relationship between rules and stories and approaches to analysing the narrative potential of games. However, the debate also discouraged other studies on the more niche aspects of games within the Arts and Humanities (Krzywinska 2015a: 55), such as the adoption of Gothic elements. Even today, it seems necessary to underline the point that despite their great narrative potential, not all games strive to tell stories, and that the poetics of digital games lack polish (Bizzocchi & Tanenbaum 2012: 293). However, in role-playing games like *Fallout 3* narrative potential is significantly utilized, since action is often linked to narrative meaning. For example, one does not merely shoot targets, but also defends oneself or allies from enemies, takes revenge, invades areas by eliminating hostiles, and plans murder or rescue missions. Actions such as these have meanings beyond the base game mechanics, which are closely related to narrativity although sometimes perceived as a separate aspect of game design. In line with Pearce (2005: 1), the question of greater interest here concerns the ways in which games are narrative and not whether games are, or are not, narrative.

Digital games comprise many aspects, each of which could be analysed in detail; however, for the purposes of answering a specific research question, such as mine on what types of Gothic elements are to be found in *Fallout 3*, they are not all of equal importance, although everything is arguably linked. For instance, Consalvo and Dutton (2006) have identified four areas of interest for a qualitative critical analysis of games: Object Inventory, Interface Study, Interaction Map and Gameplay Log. The first of these concerns the role of objects: for

example, how they can be used and interacted with, and what the economic structure in the game is like. Objects are important in most games, including *Fallout 3*, in which the player is collecting and using the best possible armour and weapons, and looting and trading with NPCs are encouraged. Objects are therefore closely linked to character progress. However, it would be unnecessarily challenging to argue for the Gothicity of the Object Inventory especially since many of the items, by increasing the player character's (PC) protection and strength, function to increase the power of the 'hero' and make the game less challenging, and thus less scary. A similarly less interesting area of the game for my research goals is the Interface Study, which concerns on-screen information and other control screens: for example, information that the player should be allowed access to. For example, *Fallout 3* is clearly a violent action game, since the information on its main interface is geared towards combat. It includes a compass that reveals the direction of nearby NPCs, marking hostiles in a different colour; the amounts of remaining ammunition and current condition of weaponry; and the health and ability points of the PC. Although this suggests violence, it is not necessarily Gothic, especially when combined with the powerfulness of the PC. In contrast, the Interaction Map and Gameplay Log include choices in interaction with NPCs, the world of the game and possible emergent gameplay, aspects that may contribute to the (re)construction of Gothicity in games. Key examples of this are how players can interact with monsters or villains, and different types of intertextual references to Gothic fiction. However, for examining the Gothic in game narratives, the model proposed by Consalvo and Dutton does not offer a rigorous and systematic guide for addressing all the narrative aspects of the game.

More recently, approaches have emerged in which games are perceived as 'playable texts' (Carr 2009), allowing also the close analysis of game elements that are linked to narrative. Instead of as "simple expressions of culture or products for consumption", games have become perceived as texts that can be read critically (Grey 2009: 1). One approach for doing this is close reading, a method adapted from the humanities tradition of literary criticism which involves the careful interpretation of brief passages of text. During close reading, the goal is to identify the game design elements that support the play experience by oscillating between stages of immersion and objectifying the game experience (Bizzocchi & Tanenbaum 2012: 396). Close reading can also include playing the game as a kind of imagined naïve reader or as a performative player stereotype (Bizzocchi & Tanenbaum 2011: 287) to examine the game as if the player was experiencing and exploring it for the first time or taking on a specific role. These different approaches make it possible for the researcher to identify key game elements that otherwise might be taken for granted or to unlock game elements that can only be accessed by making specific gameplay decisions. In a game like *Fallout 3*, the former – playing the game as a naïve reader – would, for instance, involve noting which aspects would be surprising or even shocking to a new player and how the game design makes information available to players. The latter would consist of, for example, completing the game twice, playing as

a heroic and as a villainous character, to experience different types of conversations and resolutions to quests, as was done in my study. A third gameplay aim would have been to play as a morally neutral character, although this would have involved alternating between making heroic and evil choices and thus would not have unlocked narrative content that was inaccessible through the other two playstyles. In addition to these, player stereotypes might include different types of challenge plays of the game, such as attempting to kill as many NPCs as possible or collect specific sets of special items. However, in the context of my study, these approaches would not have revealed relevant new narrative information about the game design, unlike the heroic and villainous approaches.

Fernández-Vara (2015: 209) considers close reading a part of interpretative analysis which also allows the selection of sections that concretise specific points about the game. Somewhat similarly, Bizzocchi and Tanenbaum (2011: 279) have suggested choosing an analytic lens to focus the close reading of a game, enabling the explication of smaller sections of gameplay experiences. Its value as a method of analysis is to produce careful interpretations of specific sections of games that are relevant in terms of the research question, and is especially useful for the examination of games that initially appear overwhelming in the richness and vastness of their game world and narrative design. Therefore, close reading was chosen as the method for analysing Gothic elements in *Fallout 3*: the analytic focus has been the Gothic, which has then been further narrowed for each research article. This means that rather than analyse the entirety of the game in detail, I have selected sections of the game that concretely exemplify how Gothicity is (re)constructed in the game. Without such a focus, it may have been possible to find other interesting aspects about the game, but not aspects relevant to my research questions.

The study of game narrativity and its potential impact on players is founded on the argument that games can contain meaningful messages in a significant way. One way of exploring this argument is to begin with Bogost's (2007: 3) concept of procedural rhetoric, which, while fundamentally unconcerned with narrative, addresses meaning-making in games. Procedural rhetoric means "a practice of using processes persuasively"; "a technique for making arguments with computational systems and for unpacking computational arguments others have created". Arguments are made "through the authorship of rules of behaviour" (Bogost 2007: 29), and in games, through programming code. Meaning is thus conveyed through rules. Fernández-Vara (2015: 131) argues that procedural rhetoric can be linked to values, since the game rules explicitly allow or prevent the player from doing certain things, and thus indicate that they are morally right or wrong. For example, *Fallout 3*'s rules prevent the PC from killing child NPCs. Rules like these are not only persuasive in the sense that specific actions, such as killing children, are treated as forbidden and unethical, but also protect the game from controversy and backlash (Fernández-Vara 2015: 131). Sicart (2011), however, has criticised proceduralists for arguing that "meaningful play is playing following the rules, and the meaning of the

game comes from the meaning of following the rules". Sicart (2011) suggests that to be productive, play should instead be "a free, flexible and negotiated activity, framed by rules but not determined by them". My position resembles Sicart's, since, during gameplay, partially restricted freedom allows the player to create their own story, one which may be far from that originally intended by the game designer but no less meaningful. This type of player narrativity can be seen, for instance, in online gameplay videos and streams in which unexpected interpretations and creative play may take place. It is also evidence of the centrality of player agency to how narratives are constructed and experienced during play, both during moments of 'playing along' with the game narrative and diverging from it.

2.2.3 Game spaces tell stories

A significant, even central way of influencing the narrative of a game is the use of space, via the making of worlds and sculpting of spaces. Jenkins (2004: 123) calls this environmental storytelling and identifies four ways in which it creates preconditions for immersive narrative experiences: "spatial stories can evoke pre-existing narrative associations; they can provide a staging ground where narrative events are enacted; they may embed narrative information within their *mise-en-scène*; or they provide resources for emergent narratives". For instance, In *Fallout 3*, the post-apocalyptic destruction of the surface of the world creates associations with dystopia and provides fertile ground for such storytelling. The destruction itself is a story of a world that *was* in contrast with the world that *is*. Narrative information is conveyed through the *mise-en-scène* of ruins, strange laboratories and shack settlements, and the open areas of the game world map allow the random spawning of NPCs – their sudden appearances – which at times result in the player witnessing unexpected scenes, such as a robot fighting a mutated bear in a desolate landscape. In these ways, game spaces both tell stories and enable storytelling.

It has been argued (P. Martin 2011) that in games in which the PC remains narratively undeveloped, the PC's main function is to discover the character of the landscape. PCs often remain undeveloped in role-playing games like *Fallout 3* in which the player controls the character's design, motivations and decision-making; the PC becomes an avatar who may possess little individual personality but who explores a world and landscape that is rich in details. While the hero is rarely seen, since these games are often played out from a first-person camera viewpoint, the landscape and other spaces in the game world demand the player's attention and become intimately known. Thus, the role of environments and spaces becomes increasingly significant in games that feature such avatars, especially when the space implies that important past events have taken place that the PC cannot have influenced. In a way, the avatar becomes a tourist who is visiting this world for a moment. In this case, the real star character of *Fallout 3* might be the Capital Wasteland, as the game world's area is referred to in the game: unlike the PC, it has unique, recognizable characteristics that become intimately known by the player, and although the PC can do heroic or villainous

deeds, the Capital Wasteland is the most memorable and famous aspect of the game as it remains characteristically untamed.

In games, the ability to read and write "in the language of spatial communication and spatial narrative" can be called spatial literacy (Pearce 2009: 20). For example, Jenkins (2004: 127) argues that artifacts can shed light on past actions in the game world; something that has been also discussed by Krzywinska (2013: 304–306) and Fernández-Vara (2011). Krzywinska notes the significance of signs in the form of hidden 'lore' fragments that tell the history of the game world. They are left in the game space to be discovered, and therefore enable a conspiracy-style approach to the reading of the game. This involves the collection of lore pieces and their assembly in order to unravel a mystery; the discovery of secret information and belief in its factuality. A specific investigative, suspicious mood is produced by such gameplay design. She argues that this kind of investigative play works especially well in American Gothic games. In this context, the close reading and decoding of signs are necessary for making progress in the game or for discovering the back story of the game world. Spatial signs are also seen as important by Fernández-Vara (2011). She introduces the concept of indexical storytelling as a means with which either the designer or the player can construct the narrative of the game by leaving traces and thus affecting the space of the game world. Drawing on Charles Peirce's (1998) philosophy of language, Fernández-Vara (2011) argues that indices in games invite players to reconstruct what has happened by relating or pointing to an event, and often being consequences of events. They do not merely give the player cues about what to do next, but also encourage interpretations of past events; players may also produce narrative gameplay by leaving their own indices on the space. According to her, the history of the game world and the history of the player form the two main types of stories in games, and indexical storytelling is a potential device for both. Typical examples are remains, i.e. objects modified by other agents in the game world.

FIGURE 1. Graffiti and mutilated corpses hung by Raiders.

FIGURE 2. Gore bags hanging from the ceiling, as placed there by Super Mutants.

In a hostile game world like that of *Fallout 3*, many of these indices are warnings or territorial markers, such as the graffiti and corpses hung by violent and drug-addled Raiders, as depicted in Figure 1, or the gore bags (netted bags filled with human intestines) hung by Super Mutants, as depicted in Figure 2. Remains can

also be used for dark humour. An example of this is depicted in Figure 3: in one of the underground sewer tunnels in *Fallout 3*, the player can find an intersection with two ramps, with a car placed in between. A motorcycle lies on the ground some way in front of it, and a partial skeleton is hanging from a lamp fixture on the ceiling above the car – the indication being that someone's motorcycling experiment in the tunnels has come to a morbid end. This little story is not important in the grand narrative of the game, but because of its absurd comicality, it stands out to players who notice it and reconstruct a story based on these remains. In addition to these examples above, indices include signage and tutorials - signs that provide information, such as the names of areas or posters and advertisements that help the player to orient to the game world.

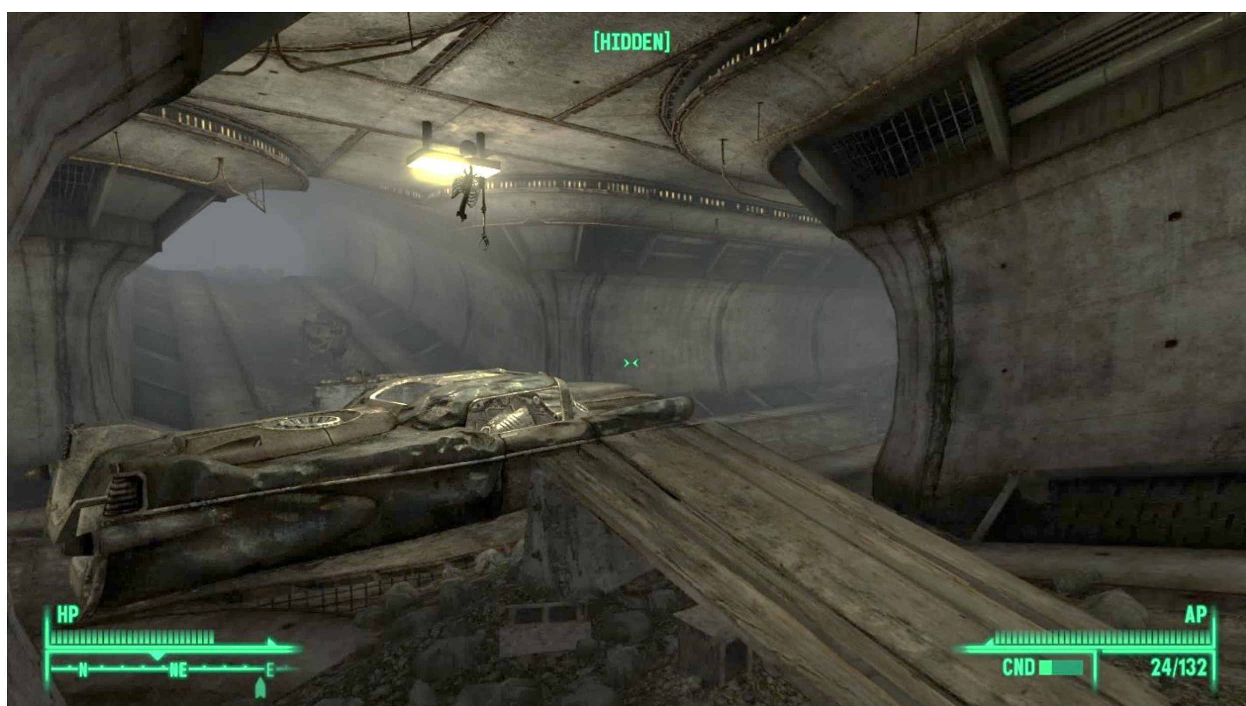

FIGURE 3. A failed motorcycling experiment in the sewer tunnels.

Fernández-Vara (2011) notes that for a player to be able to leave indices behind, the game world needs to be 'persistent', i.e. not immediately reset after the player leaves the area. This means that killed enemies will remain dead and items left behind will stay where the player left them. As Fernández-Vara argues, a somewhat unexplored game design aspect has been to have other agents in the game world interpret the signs left behind by the player, and modify their behaviour accordingly. For instance, in *Fallout 3* the NPCs will not react in any way if the player picks up a corpse and dangles it in front of them or places it in the middle of a street. In newer games, there have been attempts to remedy this to some extent: for instance, in *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* (Bethesda Game Studios 2011), developed by the same game company as *Fallout 3*, NPCs may stop and kneel beside a body in a public place and audibly wonder what happened. For Gothic storytelling, having NPCs authentically respond to signs left

by the player opens new opportunities, such as for the PC to become the villain of the story: by deliberately misplacing items or leaving horrifying signs behind – such as corpses or messages written on the wall in blood – the PC could become a source of terror to NPCs. For the player, such actions and their results would likely be a source of dark humour.

Thus, although due to limitations of space it has not been possible to focus on spatial storytelling in *Fallout 3* in detail in my research articles, there are many aspects of spatial storytelling that can be fruitfully used in digital games, including games with Gothic elements. Different types of indices can be used by the game designer to create mystery, terror, or even dark humour, while in some games the player is also invited to participate in building his or her own stories. In *Fallout 3*, one way for players to discover that they have already visited a certain location is to see the trail of bodies left behind as a result of their previous actions. This sight could be horrifying to NPCs, and from a Gothic viewpoint, it is a missed opportunity that NPCs do not recognize the PC as the killer that s/he is – even if all the PC's victims were hostile enemies.

2.3 The Gothic and digital games

The aim of this section is to discuss previous research on the Gothic in games. First, we look at the digital game genres of horror and survival horror which – although not typically termed Gothic – are genres in which Gothicity thrives not only in their representational elements, but also in their concrete gameplay and rule systems. Thus, by examining horror games we can learn something about the forms that the Gothic takes in digital games. This leads us to a discussion of studies in which the Gothic in games has been specifically addressed and consequently comes closest to the aims of this dissertation.

What is interesting about the relationship between the Gothic and digital games is that both have faced challenges in gaining acceptability as cultural products with unique merits and qualities, and worthy of research and discussion. Both have also been considered inconsequential owing to their association with specific audiences – Gothic literature with female readers (Cavallaro 2002: 10) or children and teenagers (Kilgour 1995: 33), and digital games with teenage boys (Romano 2014) – whereas in fact the audience for both is much wider. For example, in 1989, the software company Sierra On-Line estimated that 35% to 40% of the players of its popular adventure game *King's Quest IV* were female (Adkins 2017). Recently, it was found that the number of women age 18 and older playing games in the US (31%) has significantly surpassed that of boys under age 18 (18%), and that the average gamer is 35 years old (Entertainment Software Association 2017). Meanwhile, Cavallaro (2002: 10) points out that it has never been proven that the principal consumers of Gothic novels were women; the pleasure of witnessing frightening stories from the safe distance of a spectator is neither age nor gender-specific.

Despite the above criticisms, the Gothic mode and digital games have been popular on a broad front and their popularity appears to not be waning, as the increasing commercialisation of the Gothic (Spooner 2006: 23) and the rapidly growing commercial significance of games (H. Taylor 2017) testify. Moreover, Gothic elements that may have led certain novels to be condemned as low brow in the past – the supernatural, the grotesque, and shocking transgressions, all of which all stir the imagination – tend to fit neatly into the worlds and stories of digital games, which continue to be subjected to moral criticism. The reason why Gothic elements are popular is because they function as narrative motivations for player actions: monsters that must be defeated, injustices that must be corrected, or the players being invited by the game design to become Gothic villains (although this last option is still rarely explored). While the similarities that exist between the Gothic and digital games in their reception and evaluation by the 'high culture' elite and moral guardians are not a primary motivation for the study, they show how despite being victims of cultural elitism, both have been able to flourish, adapt and remain culturally relevant, and hence form a fruitful topic of research. By reflecting contemporary sources of anxiety, Gothic storytelling remains topical, while digital games offer the thrill of experiencing horror and terror personally but with the safety net of being able to retry or quit the game if it becomes too stressful. This renders the union of the Gothic and games a valuable resource for producing ambiguously pleasurable gameplay experiences.

2.3.1 Horror and survival horror games

The use and influence of horror in digital games has been previously studied and although horror and Gothic are not synonymous, some of the reasoning regarding how horror is implemented in games apply to the Gothic or draw directly on it. These links and similarities are explored here. For instance, Rouse III (2009) argues that the horror genre has influenced digital games for almost as long as they have existed, that games provoke emotions of tension and fear better than other media – since there is something at stake for the player in games – and that in games players can safely confront taboo subject matter. These arguments also apply to the Gothic, since it is a mode that deliberately employs taboos, is emotionally and psychologically impactful and has a long history of influencing digital games, especially from the perspective of style.

Rouse III (2009) suggests that since horror movies have evil characters whose presence is little explained, and that the hero cannot be faulted for killing them, the horror genre fits naturally into games where the player's actions can be similarly justified. Such a view contrasts with the view on the complexity of Gothic villains and monsters discussed above, although not all Gothic products feature complex villains. Nevertheless, in my view a difference between a game that primarily draws on horror and a game that primarily draws on the Gothic is that the former is likely to feature an evil opponent that the PC is given a moral justification to defeat, whereas the latter will complicate matters by featuring undefeatable opponents, or by revealing something surprisingly sympa-

thetic about an opponent or an ally as the 'true' nemesis. For example, in *Silent Hill 2* (Konami 2001), which can be characterized as both a Gothic and a horror game, the PC himself is responsible for the horrors that he faces, for they are a supernatural manifestation of his guilt and remorse for having killed his bedridden and helpless wife. Thus, the 'hero' is revealed to be simultaneously villainous, and the 'enemies' are the product of his personal predicament, although facilitated by the dark, supernatural powers in Silent Hill. Thus, in addition to featuring monsters that the PC must defeat, as is typical of the horror genre, it also has a complexity that draws on the Gothic mode.

Rouse III (2009) notes that horror games are often set in recognizable and identifiable locations that have been altered by an evil force. This can be viewed as a manifestation of the uncanny collusion of the familiar and the strange, a well-represented concept in Gothic fiction that has been discussed above. Although *Fallout 3* is not a horror game per se, it employs this technique by placing the events in recognizable locations in the United States, featuring, for example, the Washington Monument in ruins. In this case, the evil force that has altered the landscape has been human error; a nuclear war. The same design approach that works for horror games, thus, appears to be effective in creating discomfort in post-apocalyptic narratives by adapting the Gothic sense of the uncanny.

As an addition to his arguments on environmental storytelling in games, Kirkland (2009) suggests that in horror games, spaces and the documents in them tell stories about terrifying past events in a prescriptive manner, since the player cannot disruptively interact with or participate in environments that are designed in this way. For example, bloodstains on the wall cannot be wiped away or in any way modified by the player; they are only meant to be seen and interpreted as a sign of violence and sometimes as a warning. This suggests that the horror is ineradicable, and, consequently, inescapable for the player. While non-horror games also feature unmodifiable design features, an ordinary painting on a wall, for example, will not have the same horrifying emotional or psychological impact as a hanging skeleton. This element of horror games also bears a similarity to Gothic fiction, in which heroes are often trapped in horrifying spaces and encounter signs of past horrors that increase their distress. In line with this, horror games also implement limited information techniques which give the player some information about approaching danger without revealing too much (Rouse III 2009). This produces a sense of anxious paranoia, as the player anticipates horrifying encounters and events.

As already mentioned, survival horror is a gaming genre in which Gothicity is able to thrive both stylistically and in the mechanics of the game. The formation of the genre began in the 1990s, with *Alone in the Dark* (Infogrames 1992), *Resident Evil* (Capcom 1996) and *Silent Hill* (Konami 1999) as notable first releases (L. N. Taylor 2009). The reason why Gothic influences function well in this genre is that in addition to using horror elements the gameplay emphasizes survival instead of thriving and mastery (L. N. Taylor 2009, Krzywinska 2015b: 296). What this means in practice is that the PC's ability to defend him or herself is limited; the PC is not given an endless supply of weapons and ammunition

but must use what is available strategically. Typically, the PC is not afforded guaranteed safe spots, such as towns with friendly NPCs. As Taylor (2009) argues, mastery of the game controls and full vision are prevented, in much the same way as Gothic texts may obscure vision or reveal it to be unreliable. Some survival horror games do not offer the PC any means for engaging in combat, but instead encourage the PC to run and hide from threats. However, some survival horror games combine heavy action with horror elements, such as the shooter games *F.E.A.R.* (Monolith Productions 2005) and *Dead Space* (EA Redwood Shores 2008). In these cases, 'survival' is more of a narrative than a gameplay concept. That is, the character is placed in a narrative setting of survival but is also furnished with ample tools to succeed. This means that the genre includes games that are distinctively different from one another in their concrete gameplay approaches to dealing with elements of horror, which, in turn, renders the definition of the genre challenging. Nevertheless, these games are heavily influenced by the Gothic and currently may be the game genre most representative of Gothicity.

Thus, it is no surprise that some researchers have noted a link between survival horror games and the Gothic. For example, in discussing the genre, Taylor (2009) uses the term ludic-gothic for games that are dependent on boundary crossing. Taylor argues that boundary crossing defines the Gothic in its other forms. Survival horror crosses boundaries not only by featuring taboo narrative elements, but also by focusing on survival instead of mastery. Niedenthal (2009), in turn, suggests that survival horror games potentially constitute a new form of the Gothic, and that survival horror games and Gothic fiction both enable the exploration of extreme emotions. For instance, he discusses strategies of obscurity as well as the use of spaces in the form of castles, labyrinths and vertical descents - concrete examples of how the Gothic can influence a survival horror gameplay experience. Bearing these viewpoints on horror games, the survival horror genre, and their relation to the Gothic in mind, I will now further examine the studies that have focused on the Gothic in games.

2.3.2 Gothic games

As we have seen above, the Gothic in games has previously been discussed in the context of horror and survival horror games. More recently, Krzywinska examined Gothic 'grammar' in the context of American Gothic games (2013) and identified five Gothic coordinates in games (2015a). In the former study, she noted several Gothic influences in *Alan Wake* (Remedy Entertainment 2010) and *The Secret World* (Funcom 2012), including the use of light as a source of safety in the more linear narrative of the former, and the fruitfulness of 'conspiracy-style' reading (as discussed above in section 2.2.3 *Game spaces tell stories*) in the more open-world Gothicity of the latter. That is, *The Secret World* features a large game world for the player to explore and makes use of this space with lore fragments that are scattered around it instead of the player following a streamlined narrative by progressing from one location to another in a predetermined order. These pieces of lore build up the back story of the game uni-

verse and include signs that guide the PC towards solving investigation quests. As argued above, this type of narration can be considered indexical storytelling. The uses of fragments of language in the form of, for example, letters, warnings, prophecies, oaths, curses, lost wills and marriage lines to further the plot are a commonly employed device in Gothic fiction (Williams 1995: 67). In addition, the presence of hidden stories in Gothic game narratives has also previously been noted (L. N. Taylor 2009). However, in Gothic fiction these fragments may often be misinterpreted and may "deceive or betray the interpreter" (Williams 1995: 67). While it is possible for fragments in games to be similarly deceptive or misunderstood, their function is typically to guide the player further in the game and draw them into the narrative of the game world, including in Gothic games. If they mislead the player, this is also done on purpose to lead them towards more horrifying events and challenges, such as luring players into a trap that they must escape. Even in this case, their ultimate function is to progress the game experience rather than hinder the player; the players are not stripped of agency and are still in control of their fate. In Gothic novels, for instance, the entrapment of heroes elicits a different type of response from the reader whose only option is to continue reading to find out what happens. In line with this, Rouse III (2009) has suggested that although horror fiction typically features a power imbalance, in video games the player should not be left feeling totally powerless in the face of evil, and that even horror games are in some way power fantasies. Thus, I argue that although mysterious and fragmented signs similar to those found in Gothic fiction in other media are also employed in games, they almost always serve as a means of progressing or building the story and therefore that the player's ability to interpret them is a source of power.

Krzywinska (2013: 308) argues that since it makes extensive use of conventionalized tropes, especially in its settings, Gothicity is much easier to identify in American Gothic than games more generally. She tackles this latter challenge in her investigation of the gamification of Gothic (Krzywinska 2015a), in which she identifies afore-mentioned five coordinates of Gothic material in games and assesses what types of games might most meaningfully be considered Gothic. The coordinates are the false hero, the *mise-en-scène*, psychological and emotional affect, style, and function. Of these, Krzywinska (2015a: 66) considers the false hero "a pivotal feature for defining and evaluating Gothic in games"; a hero who appears powerless and whose ultimate triumph is not guaranteed. That is, instead of the sense of mastery that players typically experience in games through being given skills, equipment and opportunities to conquer obstacles, the false hero has very little to work with and may have to flee instead of fighting his enemies. S/he is helpless and vulnerable and does not necessarily experience the relief of a happy conclusion at the end of the game. Such heroes are featured, for example, in the *Silent Hill* (Konami 1999–2012) game series, and in *Amnesia: The Dark Descent* (Frictional Games 2010), which include several possible endings depending on player choices, thereby highlighting the uncertainty of the conclusion.

Mise-en-scène and style reproduce Gothic in the representational and aesthetic aspects of the game, including spatial storytelling. This means the employment of typical Gothic locations, like eerie graveyards, maze-like castles, haunted houses or dark cellars, as well as specific types of lighting, colour palette, auditory and visual elements, and various other components that may not singly be Gothic, but become so when combined to deliver the story. While these are the coordinates that are most easily found in games, they are not enough to constitute a 'Gothic game' without links to the other coordinates and mechanics of the game. Gothic affect, in turn, is perhaps manifested most strongly in the sense of claustrophobia and inaction that ensues when the player's freedom of movement in space is limited either temporarily or as a core feature of the game. It is also present in situations of tension, such as the expectation of a dangerous encounter. Finally, function refers to the reason why Gothic elements are used. As has been argued above, the Gothic is often employed to provide socio-political criticism and cultural commentary, which shows that it has other functions beyond merely producing discomfort and fear. Therefore, it is important to assess the function of Gothic materials in games. Krzywinska's coordinates are in line with how the Gothic has been understood and approached in my work and enable the identification of concrete means by which Gothicity is reproduced in games. These insights were especially valuable in my second case study, which analysed the different means by which Gothic ideology is reconstructed in *Fallout 3*, since this reconstruction draws on multiple game design aspects. This holds even if *Fallout 3* is not considered a wholly Gothic game due to its game mechanics and the triumphant nature of the gameplay: since the PC is anything but a false hero, the game lacks a feature that Krzywinska understandably considers a necessary condition for a Gothic game. Instead of feeling helpless, players playing *Fallout 3* come to believe that they can defeat anyone and anything thanks to their accumulating skills, perks, weapons and healing items. Therefore, a specific source of Gothic anxiety is absent from the game's design.

However, the game produces a different kind of Gothicity that is especially prominent in my second case study. In *Fallout 3*, the player comes to continuously witness and even experience secretiveness and deception: places and characters are not what they have thus far seemed or claimed to be. Therefore, players become increasingly paranoid and distrusting of NPCs; they begin to expect the uncovering of dark secrets, betrayal, and all good things to be tainted. This is an experience that reflects the solitary Gothic hero who is forced to act alone in a world whose morality mismatches theirs: players can only trust their own judgement. The Gothic in games thus may be identified not only through specific elements or coordinates, but also the kinds of readings of the world that they evoke. (Drawing on the concept of conspiracy-style reading mentioned above, Krzywinska has also addressed this topic). It follows that Gothicity in games is a combination of elements (or coordinates) that produce a Gothic reading that can be paranoid, suspicious, cynical, alert, or wary. Although some of these overlap with Gothic affect, here these different types of responses do not

merely describe how players feel, but how they orient themselves towards the narrative and plan their actions in the game world. In the analysis of Gothic elements, it is therefore important to consider what kinds of interpretations of the game world they produce that induce an experience of Gothicity.

2.4 Gaming and play experiences

My third case study is centred on the topic of play experiences by analysing players' moral evaluations of NPCs in LP gaming videos of *Fallout 3*. Players' moral evaluations are concrete verbalisations that indicate how players are experiencing, evaluating and acting upon the Gothic game elements in focus. This section aims first, to briefly discuss previous approaches to studying play experiences, and second, to investigate what LP narration is like as discourse and how LPs have been studied thus far.

2.4.1 Studying play experiences

This section discusses the data and methods that have been employed to study gaming and play experiences in the past. These studies are plentiful and have approached games from a variety of viewpoints, including the social, moral and discursive. It is, therefore, not possible to examine them all in detail; nor are all of them directly relevant to the aims of the present study. Those that specifically deal with morality in play experiences, such as the study by Weaver and Lewis (2012), are discussed in more detail below. It will become clear through the discussion in this section what my data set and methods can add to the existing research. These methods are discussed in further detail in section 3.2.

Massively multiplayer online games (MMOGs) and especially role-playing games (MMORPGs) have been a data source for many studies seeking to understand play experiences. The methods used have included focus group interviews that have been conducted with *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard Entertainment 2004) players on their experiences of the worldness of fantasy games, that is, how they inhabit such vast game worlds and how this experience spans multiple media through a fantasy media matrix (Toft-Nielsen 2014); textual analysis of *World of Warcraft* chat logs, which demonstrates the entanglement of collaboration, competition, pedagogy and aggravation during play, as players interpret the game in different ways, with some instructing others to adopt their interpretation through (often unsuccessful) player-to-player pedagogy (Carr 2012); questionnaires, interviews and participant observation of 'pen and paper' RPGs and MMORPGs to examine interaction between reality and the game space, showing that these are increasingly blending together and that players shape the culture of these spaces by developing rules and language (Hemminger & Schott 2012); and observations of social play in *EverQuest* (Sony Online Entertainment 1999) based on the researcher's extensive experience and knowledge of the game, as well as discussions and meetings with other players (T. L. Tay-

lor 2006). The latter study highlights the social and constructive aspects of gaming culture and the situational diversity of play forms (for example, playing together or solo). Because of the nature of multiplayer games, it makes sense to examine player experience in them from the viewpoints of social interaction, whether that interaction involves building an enjoyable game world together, competition and cooperation, or the blurring of the borders between virtual life and 'real life'. Although my research focused on a single-player game, these studies are relevant to it by highlighting gaming culture as social and productive, therefore also suggesting that LPs and their viewers together construct a game world that is larger than the game alone. Through LPs, new meanings are constructed together by the LPer and the audience, and in this way the experienced reality and the game space also become blurred.

However, the difference between these studies and mine is that my data derive from gameplay videos of a single-player game, and hence the sociability of LP comes from performativity and interaction between the player and the assumed audience watching the video rather than from dealing with others during the gameplay or, say, in organized fan meetings. There is a considerable delay between the player playing and the viewer watching the video after it has been uploaded on YouTube. This is, of course, a quality that is specific to the nature of my data; live streaming is also afforded both by YouTube and specialized gameplay streaming services such as Twitch, featuring almost instant feedback from the audience. The relationship between LPers and their audiences is also closer to that of entertainers with their fans rather than peers participating in a multiplayer game, since although viewers can comment on the videos and thus impact future ones, they willingly return to watch them instead of moving on to another content producer. Therefore, through LPs, single-player gameplay can also become social and shared, but in ways that are distinct from playing with peers.

Similarly, there are conversation analytic studies that have focused on gameplay situations in which the participants are interacting in real-time in person whether in private settings (e.g. Piirainen-Marsh & Tainio 2009, Mondada 2012) or in public spaces such as Internet cafés (Sjöblom 2011), with interests in second or foreign language learning, situated switching in and out of the game, and players' communicative practices and methods for meaning-making in co-located interaction, respectively. Thus, the social experience of play in these settings takes place in real-time in a non-virtual shared space. This means that the relevance to my study of previous discourse-focused studies on play experiences is limited; the play context, type of discourse examined, and research aims of the latter are very different from those involved in examining the narration produced by a LPer, even if it is socially oriented. I have taken this different approach to the study of LP discourse to show how analysis of the discourse of a single-player gaming experience that is shared as a performative gameplay video online is useful for understanding gaming culture as something that extends and creates meanings beyond a shared non-virtual space.

As can be seen above, many studies have employed interviews, questionnaires or other means of asking players about their experiences. LPs differ from this in the sense that, although performative, they are naturally occurring data; no-one has instructed the players to create and share their gaming experiences, and thus the video content is not influenced by a researcher's goals. This means that my data can answer questions that cannot be answered by data on play experiences collected by other means. For example, it becomes possible to examine what players choose to highlight in their narration, and thus what they (sometimes unknowingly) find important to share with others; the concrete means by which LPers interact with the viewers; how their interpretations of the game concretely impact their play decisions; and evidence of their moment-by-moment interpretations and evaluations of the game without direct influence from another person. The insights gained thus complement those of previous studies on play experiences by underlining the importance of the creativity of play and showing how players are constantly engaged in the critical evaluation of games and how they formulate their own experiences verbally (or with gestures, if a video feed of the player is also included) as these are taking place.

In the context of morality, concerns that video games increase aggression through the immoral and violent actions taken in games have been expressed. Consequently, play experiences have been studied from the sociopsychological viewpoint of desensitization to violence (Carnagey, Anderson & Bushman 2007, Funk et al. 2003) and the impact of video games on aggression (Anderson & Dill 2000, Carnagey & Anderson 2005, Irwin & Gross 1995). For example, Sherry's (2001) meta-analysis shows that violent video games have only a small effect on aggression that appears to be determined by what kind of violence, for example human or sports violence, the game features. My research aims were oriented in a different direction: instead of being concerned with whether games are potentially harmful, I was interested in the moral evaluations that players verbally express during gameplay. These moral evaluations ranged from expressions of frustration and anger to sympathy and the joy of successfully helping NPCs, thereby highlighting the complexity of play and how it produces a range of responses. My approach is more in line with more recent studies in which researchers have come to pay more attention to the potential of games to increase prosocial thoughts and behaviour (Gitter et al. 2013, Gentile et al. 2009) as well as teach moral and ethical values (Schrier & Gibson 2010). Thus, although it cannot be denied that in some situations games increase aggression, it is reasonable to argue that games can also impact players in positive ways. Drawing causal conclusions, however, is beyond the scope of my study: instead, my findings focus on how moral evaluations are expressed by LPers and testifies to their activity as moral agents. While this may support the idea that, through such activity, players can be motivated to think about moral dilemmas, my study does not allow conclusions to be drawn about lasting, desirable or undesirable effects on players.

A study with some notable links to mine is that by Weaver and Lewis (2012), who analyse moral choices made during gameplay. In their study, par-

ticipants completed a questionnaire (MFQ: Moral Foundations Questionnaire) before and after playing the opening segment of *Fallout 3*. The gameplay was recorded, but not the players' responses and interpretations during play; the players were left to play the game alone. Their decisions were then compared on the basis of the questionnaire data. The authors' goal was to examine moral decision making and its emotional effect on the play experience. They found, for instance, that players typically made moral decisions as if they were engaging in actual interpersonal interactions and that making anti-social decisions increased guilt, although it did not decrease enjoyment. As my study concerns moral evaluations, it complements Weaver and Lewis's study by offering possible reasons why players might be making specific choices, since they typically express these justifications implicitly or explicitly during LP narration. However, my data set was considerably wider than theirs. In section 3.1.2 *Why Fallout 3?* I discuss the narrativised character creation process of *Fallout 3* which also shows that the whole of the opening sequence of the game takes place inside a security bunker. Thus, the gameplay recorded by Weaver and Lewis did not include player experiences of what is arguably the most memorable feature of *Fallout 3*: the post-apocalyptic world outdoors with its many monsters and dangers. For their purposes, and for practical reasons, limiting the recording solely to the introduction is adequate; however, once the Gothic viewpoint is added to the study, it is reasonable to extend the collection of gameplay data beyond the opening of the game, since that is where many – for my purposes – fruitful moral concerns, such as injustices and monstrosities, can be found.

It is also interesting that Weaver and Lewis (2012: 610) did not find moral disengagement particularly impactful in their data, since this in contrast with other studies in which its power in diminishing guilt has been found significant. For example, Hartmann (2017) found that violent video games typically frame violence against other characters as acceptable action, which morally disengages players. This difference in results suggests that, unlike in Weaver and Lewis's study which only included the beginning of the game, as a player remains longer in the game world and becomes familiar with the game world's (im)morality, moral disengagement is also more likely to take place. For instance, at the very beginning of the game the player has no reason to perceive NPCs as suspicious or dangerous enemies, and thus is more likely to view them sympathetically. From the anecdotal experience of watching 20 LPers play *Fallout 3* for a significant amount (anecdotal in the sense that I was not focusing on their moral choices, but responses to Gothic game elements), I witnessed their process of becoming more comfortable with making both morally good and dubious choices during play and justifying them within the rules of the game world which, for instance, encourage the survival of the fittest, looting, even stealing, and murder as a suitable form of revenge. Therefore, it may not be enough to study a short play segment of a game to examine moral disengagement during play, since it is shaped and changed by the player's increased knowledge of the game world.

In conclusion, varied aspects of play experience have previously been examined through interviews, questionnaires, ethnographical approaches, and gameplay recordings. However, naturally-occurring data that features real-time responses, like LPs, appears to have been little utilized, although the analysis of, especially, a longer sequence of gameplay could provide new insights and possibly modify previous findings on play experiences.

2.4.2 Let's Play as discourse

Let's Plays are recorded gameplay intended for audiences to view online. They originate from a casual desire to share gaming experiences at the Something Awful forums in the mid-2000s, initially featuring experiences of games from the 1980s and 1990s both out of nostalgia and because these games could be easily emulated on newer systems (Hale 2013: 22). The earliest LPs were in written form, featuring screenshots of the game and text narration or commentary by the player. Although this original form of LPs has not disappeared, they have since become more widely known as YouTube videos and live streams on platforms such as Twitch.tv. These videos and streams typically feature real-time narration by the LPer, but this is not always the case; sometimes a video feed of the LPer playing the game is also available, but not invariably. Therefore, many forms of LPs are available and its use as research data requires clarification of what type of LP is in question. LPs also represent different ways of playing games, such as the 100% or completionist run (attempting to complete every challenge offered by the game), casual playthrough, expert run, challenge run (in which the player has a specific goal to reach) and speedrun (trying to complete the game as fast as possible) (Hale 2013: 6 – 8). Consequently, the goals of LPers differ greatly, as also noted by Ligman (2011: 8) in an early operational taxonomy of an LPer's key characteristics. Although these differences in the forms and gameplay approaches of LPs have been widely noted, work remains to be done in the systematic identification of their unique formal or narrative aspects, or, in contrast, of those aspects that often and easily overlap across different ways of making LPs. This subsection first describes the links of LP to the gaming culture more generally, how it has been previously studied, and LP as discourse – a discussion that is necessary for the analysis of LP narration.

While LPs may remain unfamiliar to those who have no personal connection with gaming communities, their cultural importance is clearly increasing alongside the popularity of games and gaming as a hobby. One sign of this has been the emergence of professional LPers: self-employed content producers who upload videos on a frequent, often daily, basis, and are popular enough to use them as a considerable source of income through monetization (advertising revenue), donations from fans, or the selling of merchandise related to their channel. Most typically, their videos are hosted or streamed on YouTube or Twitch.tv. The most popular LPers can even become visible in the public arena through media attention (Radde-Antweiler, Waltmathe & Zeiler 2014: 18).

However, turning LPs from a hobby into a career on websites like YouTube remains a great challenge (Hale 2013: 59), and those who manage to

do this often also rely on external sources of income, such as sponsorships or Patreon subscriptions. Through Patreon, fans can 'subscribe' by paying a monthly or per-release support fee. Patreon is an important resource for many professional or semi-professional LPers, since although YouTube offers ad revenue, this is an unstable source of income. Not only does its amount vary greatly from month to month, but YouTube's requirements for monetized content may also suddenly change, resulting in ad revenue being removed from falsely 'flagged' videos without giving the content creators any explanation (Kulp 2017, Rozen 2017, Ruppert 2017). That is, videos may be falsely flagged as offensive through an automated process, causing the content creators to lose any income to be gained from said videos. Thus, services like Patreon can provide additional financial stability if a LPer is able to attract a dedicated fanbase, but due to the amount of competition for views, this is also a challenge. Pietruszka (2016), for instance, has examined the techniques that influence the popularity of gameplay videos on YouTube, including aspects of editing and audio narration. Nevertheless, for some the making of LP videos is no longer a hobby, but a career, which has arguably helped LPs spread beyond specific gaming communities and into a wider cultural consciousness, as some creators are able to work on their videos full time and set professional standards for the genre (for example, high sound quality, editing, brand management and an identifiable style). At the same time, those who produce LPs more casually, for fun, also remain prolific content creators. LPers end up benefiting game studios by advertising their games, some of which might otherwise receive little attention (Menotti 2014: 89–91); this is perhaps why most game studios have chosen LPs to continue in existence despite infringements of copyright (see, e.g. Pfeil 2015, Vogele 2017 for a discussion on LP copyright issues).

The boundaries between a LP video and its cultural surroundings are extremely fuzzy and can examined at three levels. First, it is well-established that LP videos are performative and thus cannot be considered 'neutral' recordings of gameplay (Nguyen 2016, Nylund 2015: 57). Even a LPer who is aiming to produce authentic and unexaggerated narration is speaking to an assumed audience, which inevitably influences narration and gameplay. Yet the LPer's narration, by revealing the LPer's humanity, can also evoke a viewer's sympathy and produce a feeling of complicity, like watching a friend or sibling play (Menotti 2014: 89). Thus, a second important aspect of LPs is its attractivity to audiences, enabling them to establish a bond with the LPers whose videos they watch. Third, in a more general cultural framework, LPs are fan productions, a kind of textual poaching (Jenkins 1992) of digital games. LPs, thus, are yet another contribution to a participatory fan culture that has long been well-established among fans of earlier entertainment media, such as literature, movies, television series, and comics. Thus, LPs are connected to a wider framework of fan culture and gaming culture, and on an individual level include the LPer's performative relationship with the viewers and the viewer's consumer-fan relationship with the LPer. As my study concerns moral evaluations expressed by LPers in their LP videos, it recognizes LPs as a space where fans of digital

games can (re)produce morality in a performative manner, aware of an audience whose morality may be similar or different from the LPer's.

As we can see above, LP is a complex and for the researcher a fruitful form of recording and sharing gameplay. In academia, interest in LP as a research subject has risen steadily during the 2010s, including among researchers who recognize that it has a diversity of potential uses. For example, its potential for learning and teaching has been evaluated (P. A. Smith & Sanchez 2015) as has its potential as a tool for preserving digital games (Nylund 2015). One of the biggest challenges regarding the preservation of LPs would be to decide on what type or whether a range of types of gameplay should be preserved. This, again, shows that LPs have meaningful functions beyond entertainment, although even as a source of the latter they can be greatly impactful. LPs also have social meaningfulness for their creators. For example, Hale's (2013) master's thesis, in which he calls for the study of LPs, features comments from early creators and viewers who express some anxiety about the legitimacy of LPs as a hobby, but also recognize its social potential. Anecdotal evidence can be found in LPers' discussion websites, such as the *Let's Play!* reddit page (reddit.com/r/letsplay), of LPers becoming more confident and skilled in expressing themselves verbally after learning to explain their actions and interpretations during the recording of gameplay videos. The ways in which LPs can function as a self-improvement tool for verbal communication and other skills, including technical and visual design skills – even to LPers who do not achieve great popularity – is an aspect that ought to be studied further.

A few academic suggestions have been made on how to analyse recorded and uploaded gameplay. One of these is Recktenwald's (2017) design of a multi-column transcription scheme for analysing online live streams of gameplay, including a timestamp, a brief description of significant game events, the player-streamer's narrative and body movement on camera, and chat messages from viewers. This scheme is promising for analysing gameplay live streams on online services such as Twitch, which often - though not always - also feature a video feed of the player who is playing the game, while managing also to include the almost immediate chat responses from viewers. These kinds of live streams can also be called LPs even if the content to be analysed is different from that of LPs uploaded on YouTube 'after the fact'. Since my study focused solely on verbal communication by the LPers, Recktenwald's scheme was unfitting, as neither viewer comments nor the LPer's possible movements on camera were collected. Moreover, in my data, only two of the 20 LPers featured a video feed of themselves while playing. However, although not applicable to my study, Recktenwald shows how the multimodality and socialness of live stream LPs could be studied in a systematic and detailed way.

Although some LP videos, usually referred to as long plays (Kerttula 2016: 2), do not feature narration, it is a significant component of most LPs and deserves closer examination as a part of LP discourse. For example, moral evaluations, which are investigated in the third case study of this dissertation, are also a part of LP narration. Thus far, Kerttula (2016) has examined the narrative el-

ements of LP and how the narrative of the game can be altered by the LPer's narration. He identifies seven key thematic elements: descriptive narration, story narration, audiovisual narration, game mechanics narration, intertextuality, reflective narration, and alternative narration (Kerttula 2016: 7). These encompass narration on what the player sees during the gameplay and knows about the game; the original, designed storyline of the game; the game's sounds and images; the technical aspects and the 'feel' of the gameplay; connections to other forms of popular culture; reflecting together with the audience; and the LPers' creative moulding of the narration in their own direction. A single line of narration can encompass several of these elements, and thus instead of clearly separate categories they form a web of connections (Kerttula 2016, 16). Although Kerttula's elements were not explicitly employed in the present study as its focus was on identifying types of moral evaluation rather than narration, they were evident in the data and are in line with the observation that moral evaluations are expressed in different ways in LP videos. Moral evaluations can include, for example, players describing a moral event in the game, commenting on the moral of the game's storyline or what the game mechanics morally allow them to do, explaining moral decisions to the audience, or disagreeing with the morality that the game represents and creating their own versions of how things are or should be.

In LP discourse, two main levels can be identified: the level of play and the level of narration. In line with this, Kerttula (2016) refers to LPers as player-narrators. As players narrate, they are simultaneously engaged in a context of action, commenting on the gameplay and the consequences of actions, their ability to influence game events, and so on. LP discourse is also sequential in the sense that what happened before informs what LPers do/say now, and what they will do/say next. At the same time, the narration is influenced by the performative nature of the videos. To summarize, LP discourse is sequential performative action that comprises the levels of play and narration. In my view, as a wider phenomenon, LP influences the gaming community and the individuals making and watching the videos, not only as a source of entertainment, but also financially and as a learning tool. It also underlines the sharing and sociality of gaming. The contribution of the understanding of LP as something complex to the field of game studies is that it becomes possible to explore a variety of aspects of gaming culture and play experiences via the analysis of empirical evidence provided by LPs and, in future research, conducting interviews with or administering questionnaires to LPers.

3 SET-UP OF THE STUDY

This chapter describes in detail the study questions, methodological decisions, data collection and analytical methods used in this dissertation research. As the first and second case study articles employed the same data and largely the same methods, I discuss them together. First, I describe the decisions made in the early steps of the analysis of Gothicity in games and discuss the research questions that guided the case studies. I then explain the choice of *Fallout 3* for the analysis. This is followed by a discussion of the data collection from the gameplay, referring only briefly to the method of close reading, which has already been described in detail in Chapter 2.2.2 *Games and their narrative potential*. In the latter half of the chapter, the set-up for the third case study on player experiences of the Gothic in LP videos is described. After discussing the study questions and data selection and collection, I discuss my search for the right methods for analysing the Let's Play (LP) discourse and how I approached the topic of morality in discourse. I end by considering LP as research data – and the challenges this poses along with the relevant ethical considerations.

3.1 Analysing Gothicity in games

As noted above, the analysis of Gothic elements in games requires both a well-informed understanding of what the Gothic is – or at least, what it *can* be in a narrative sense – and how digital games function as a potentially narrative medium. Thus, the data collection from *Fallout 3* was not started until after I had gained a deeper familiarization with the theory on both classic Gothic fiction and Gothicity in relation to the more recent Gothic-influenced cultural products and with theory in the field of game studies. Initially, the goal was to focus specifically on the influence of early Gothic traditions on gaming. This directed my reading towards classic Gothic fiction; however, it soon became evident that the evolution of Gothicity visually and in other non-literary storytelling media was very relevant to how these elements were employed in games. This accumulat-

ed background information both guided the analysis in what to look for and how to interpret narrative content in games and made visible the ways in which narrativity is constructed in games. This chapter focuses on the steps that followed my reading on theory: the formation and narrowing of the research questions, the selection of the data, specifically the selection of *Fallout 3*, and the methods of analysis to be used.

3.1.1 Research questions for case studies 1 & 2

The main research question at the beginning this research was a rather general one: What kinds of Gothic elements are present in the world and stories of *Fallout 3*? By 'elements' I mean characteristic components of Gothicity; the term was deliberately left open to allow the inclusion of game characters, spatial design, and other narrative, mainly representational, aspects of the game that draw on Gothicity. It was also necessary to focus on both the game world and its stories, since the world of *Fallout 3* is designed to have a rich history and a pervasive, post-apocalyptic atmosphere that allows for micro-narratives and stories to emerge. Both of these aspects merit analysis if we are to understand how the Gothic tradition is employed in the game. The breadth of the question had two consequences: first, any design aspects that might be Gothic or linked to a Gothic narrative in the game were considered for inclusion in the data collection, making this research step both multi-faceted and extensive. Second, it was possible to generate a general understanding of how Gothicity is employed in the game before narrowing the focus to case studies that discussed specific adaptions of the Gothic that were both typical of the game and interesting because of their complexity. Thus, the research question had advantages and disadvantages: on the one hand I gained a detailed understanding of how Gothicity works in *Fallout 3* and what kind of a role Gothic elements play in the game world overall, while on the other I was also left with a lot of material that I would not be able to discuss in dissertation based on single articles.

Monstrosity emerged as an aspect of the Gothic that was especially fruitful in the investigation of *Fallout 3*. This is because the post-apocalyptic and dystopian narrative setting of the *Fallout 3* game world provided ideal conditions for monsters to be born, whether as victims, villains, or as representing aspects of both. Additionally, monsters were NPCs that the player had to deal with, whether it was simply to defeat them, or to reason or work with them. These aspects led towards two more highly focused research questions for the first case study: first, what types of monsters and monstrosities exist in the game world and, second, how do they construct dystopia? These questions would allow not only examination of Gothic monsters in the game, but also of the narrative aspects that make their existence logical in the fictional timeline of the game.

Since Gothic fiction has strong potential to be socio-politically critical (as discussed above in Chapter 2), it made sense in the second case study to examine how this might be done through ideology in the game world, specifically

ideology that is arguably Gothic. Thus, the more specific research questions finally became: what kinds of ideological aspects of the Gothic are present in *Fallout 3* and how are ideological meanings constructed in the game? These questions directed me towards understanding the multimodal means by which Gothic ideology is communicated to players and how Gothic ideology is meaningful for games with a high amount of narrative content that dwells on injustice and discomforting notions.

3.1.2 Why *Fallout 3*?

This section has two main purposes: to describe *Fallout 3* (Bethesda Game Studios 2008) in more detail than it was possible in the research articles and to also justify in more detail why this game was chosen as the data source for the first two case studies. This decision is an important one, since the game also serves as the main data source for this dissertation, and thus the choice of this game for analysis is given careful and lengthy consideration in this section.

Fallout 3 is a popular action roleplaying game, featuring a post-apocalyptic and violent game world and is one of a series of *Fallout* games. *Fallout 3* has been of academic interest to many scholars (e.g. Cutterham 2013, Games 2011, Grey 2009, November 2013, Pichlmair 2009), which testifies to the richness of its world and game mechanics for research purposes. Its popularity has also given it a level of visibility that makes it easily approachable: in its first month after being released, 4.7 million units of the game were shipped (Thang 2008) and with the announcement of *Fallout 4* in June 2015, its sales peaked again (Makuch 2015). It is reasonable to argue that among computer and console gaming communities the *Fallout* series, and this game specifically, are internationally well-known. *Fallout 3* has been released on several gaming platforms; my study analysed the Microsoft Windows version of the Game of the Year Edition (which includes all additional downloadable content published after the release of the game). It is the first first-person action game in the series and the first one in the series developed by Bethesda Game Studios, based in the United States. The previous two games in the series were developed by Black Isle Studios in 1997 and 1998, which means that *Fallout 3* was a highly awaited addition to the series at the time of its release. While some central game mechanics, the logistics of the game world, stylistic details, and narrative aspects differ between the games - which has given rise to criticism by some fans - the grand narrative setting of the series has remained unchanged and features the same types of characters. These include mutant people, animals and insects, Gothic villains (although not described as such in the game or by the designers), and innocent people trying to survive in the post-apocalyptic United States.

Fallout 3 was chosen for this study primarily based on my earlier observation as a gamer that it employs Gothic elements in meaningful ways even though it is not a 'Gothic' game per se. The reason why *Fallout 3* is not considered a Gothic game in the fullest sense is that with its focus on action and combat, the PC, or the 'hero' of the game, becomes very powerful, even undefeatable, and is able to influence the game world in significant ways. This is a quality

that differs drastically from a traditional helpless, 'false' Gothic hero who can often only hope to survive (Krzywinska 2015: 59). For example, the protagonist of the horror game *Amnesia: The Dark Descent* (Frictional Games 2010) can only flee and hide from monsters instead of facing them head on. In Gothic fiction, the heroine of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (Radcliffe 1794) is largely left at the mercy of the male characters of the novel. Even the ability of the player to save the game at any point in its progress disrupts Gothicity; the knowledge that the game can be saved and reloaded at any time creates a sense of security and lowers the sense of risk. This kind of security is something that Gothic games strive to avoid, focusing instead on creating moments of suspense and terror. Since gameplay is so central to the experience of the game, it seems reasonable to characterise *Fallout 3* as an action game with Gothic elements rather than as a Gothic game that is uncharacteristically action-heavy. This further makes sense when we note that the universe of *Fallout* also draws stylistically and narratively on science fiction and dystopian fiction, and thus Gothicity is only one of the three observable key influences on its storytelling approach. Despite these caveats, a game such as *Fallout 3* can usefully be studied from a Gothic viewpoint. This is because the analysis will more likely reveal different means of adapting Gothic into games than, for example, the analysis of horror games, which, typically, are more readily identifiable as Gothic. Additionally, finding that Gothic influences take various complex forms even in games that are not primarily concerned with achieving a certain level of Gothicity is all the more surprising and has the potential for producing new information.

In addition to the game's qualities, the decision to choose *Fallout 3* was influenced by the context of the game and paratexts surrounding it. It seemed that in conversations about the game players would highlight some of its horror aspects without naming them as Gothic. Furthermore, in gameplay videos of *Fallout 3*, it became apparent that players could produce interesting interpretations of its narrative elements and responses to elements that were disturbing and discomforting. Thus, through the paratexts I noted that although the game had Gothic influences, players did not recognize them as such but were nevertheless intrigued by them. Consequently, *Fallout 3* appeared to be an interesting choice for studying both Gothicity in games and player experiences of Gothic elements.

The post-apocalyptic narrative setting of the *Fallout* universe gives the games a recognizable flair and makes them worthy of analysis. The events of *Fallout 3* take place in the year 2277, two hundred years after a nuclear war between China and the United States has destroyed the surface of the earth. The main location of events is the east coast of the United States. Many creatures have mutated as a result of radiation or scientific experiments, and some people have gone insane, violently or otherwise. The *Fallout* game series is based on the lore of an alternate timeline: its history diverged from ours approximately in the mid-to-late 1940s (November 2013: 298). The game world appears simultaneously futuristic and stuck in the past, which gives it a unique character. One key difference between the timelines is that in the *Fallout* universe, the "Ameri-

can High" of the 1950s that also took place in our timeline – a belief in the essential goodness of American society – lasted for over a century (November 2013: 299). Culturally, as well as ideologically and stylistically, their society never moved past our 1950s. For example, the advertisements to be found in the ruins of the game world highlight traditional nuclear families and gender stereotypes, using the style of 1940s advertising art. Ethnic minorities are nowhere to be seen in them, apart from anti-Chinese propaganda posters. Many of our current technological advances are also missing in this universe, although it has some that we do not have: "nuclear-powered cars and homes, cybernetic medical technology, talking and walking robots, and a staggering variety of death-ray-like weapons" (November 2013: 299). The robots were household items that appeared to be available to anyone well-off enough to live in the suburbs. These inventions carry an element of danger, as the player can see when nuclear-powered cars explode lethally, resulting in mushroom clouds; cybernetic technologies are misused by villains; robots are just as capable of combat as housekeeping; and weapons, of course, are tools of war.

The PC of *Fallout 3* is a teenager who has been brought up in a Vault. Vaults are security bunkers built before the nuclear destruction by the government in cooperation with private high-tech companies. They were advertised to people as safe havens in which to survive the apocalypse, but many were also designed as laboratories for social and scientific experiments that the residents were unaware of. These experiments were unethical and most of them were also, eventually, lethal. Because they were closed before the war, the Vaults maintained "a conserved view of the world before the bombs dropped" and could be characterised as "cosy and comfortable prisons" (Pichlmair 2009: 110). This is most obviously the case in Vault 101, the PC's home, which is led by a tyrannical Overseer who, among other things, lies about no-one being allowed to leave or enter the Vault. The Vault residents are intended to follow rules based on the world that existed before the destruction rather than to act in accordance with its current state (Pichlmair 2009: 110). Vault 101 is essentially a bubble in which its residents lead a life that is very different from survival outdoors. When the PC's father suddenly sneaks out of the Vault at the beginning of the game, the Overseer sends guards to attack the PC who has no choice but to escape and follow in his/her father's footsteps.

The beginning of the game and the events in Vault 101 function as a narrativised character creation process (J. Tanenbaum & Bizzocchi 2009: 11): the PC is shown being born, which is when the name, gender (male or female) and appearance of the character are chosen. Soon afterwards the screen goes white, an explanation of a jump in time is shown on screen, and the PC then appears as a toddler. At this stage, the PC reads a picture book that allows the player to set the character's basic skills. Time passes again, and as a child the PC receives a Pip-Boy – a tool that will become very important for the player as it tracks the PC's skills, quests, and other relevant information – as well as interacts with NPCs and practices shooting with a BB gun received as a birthday gift. As a teenager, the PC takes an occupational aptitude test the outcome of which sug-

gests three skills to be tagged, enabling the PC to have specialist areas in her/his gameplay abilities. Finally, during the escape from the Vault, the PC faces hostile enemies that s/he may try to avoid, or defeat. Thus, from the very start, game mechanics and gameplay are linked to storytelling, and are concretely taught to the player in this manner.

As mentioned above, *Fallout 3* can be classified as an action roleplaying game (RPG). A central element of roleplaying games is character advancement (Arjoranta 2014). For instance, in *Fallout 3* the character attains levels through accumulating experience points, and thus access to a selection of skills and perks from which to choose. Via these selections, players can customise their characters and the gameplay experience. For example, certain actions only become possible through them, and certain weapon types become more useful than others. The cost of this customizability is that the PC becomes "a conglomeration of stats and types" (P. Martin 2011); the PC may have a complex set of combat skills or wear flashy cosmetic armour but lacks a unique personality to speak of. This also explains why LP narration of *Fallout 3* often focuses on what the PC does in the game, rather than who they are or what they are like beyond 'good' or 'bad'; commentary on narrative aspects typically concerns NPCs in the game, not the PC. The dialogue tree, which appears when the PC converses with NPCs, also leaves few opportunities to "inject the hero with a unique personality" (P. Martin 2011). Dialogue with NPCs is a significant part of the game in addition to combat and for that reason is worth describing. Although the player is given some options on how to reply in a conversation with different NPCs, the dialogue tree is limited, allowing no consistent personality to be constructed via the dialogue. That is, a PC can respond rudely to one NPC and be friendly to the next, and unless these choices influence karma points (see below), they have no lasting effect on the PC. Aside from rare skill- or perk-based dialogue options, the same dialogue options are available to all players regardless of the personality, attitude or morality that the player is attempting to represent as the PC. Thus, when it comes to single-player RPGs, the most fruitful aspects are the action of the game and player responses to this, along with the game design, rather than the playable 'hero' who is often a superficial carrier of selected attributes. Even for LPers, based on my data, it is very rare to be able to construct a memorable, unique personality for the PC for entertainment purposes. Typically, the action and choices made by the player and the PC are prioritized.

The function and purpose of dialogue with NPCs in *Fallout 3* can be discussed further. Almost always the goal of dialogue is to gain information, whether this is narrative information or information that would progress the game or start a new quest. In my LP data, it became apparent that some players perceived purely narrative information as 'useless', since it could not help the LPers to proceed on their quests. As in many games, activating dialogue in *Fallout 3* with a NPC freezes the game world, resulting in a different game mode (Brusk & Björk 2009). Players are given a set of conversation options to choose from and, because the rest of the world is 'frozen', they cannot simply walk out

of a dialogue situation, although they can often hurry it along and end the conversation. Typically, but not always, players are the only agents in the game who can initiate and control dialogue, a situation termed a single-initiative, turn-taking system by Brusk and Björk (2009). The rare times when dialogue is initiated by a NPC, and is thus forced upon the player, may be surprising. Such a departure from the typical dialogue game mode could be used to mark a situation as unusual, and even unpleasant, since the player has briefly lost agency as an actor.

Significantly for the purposes of my third case study on moral evaluations by players, *Fallout 3* employs a karma system that judges and tracks the player's actions as 'good' or 'evil'. That is, for specific actions, players either gain or lose karma points, and, in some ways, this influences how the PC is perceived in the game world. The feedback from the karma system is immediate, as an audio cue and a message in the upper left corner notify the player about how a specific action has been judged. The karma system is introduced to the player early during the narrativised character creation segment in the Vault. The consequence of the karma system is that ethics and morality become explicit during play, revealing what is considered 'good' or 'evil' in the context of this game world. The decision to be heroic or villainous also becomes significant in guiding the gameplay, while the karma system keeps the players updated on how they are doing on their chosen path. Of course, players may also choose not to stick to either playstyle, or disagree with the karma system's evaluation. Typically, however, the karma system notably shapes gameplay experiences of *Fallout 3*.

To summarize, this section aimed to introduce narrative aspects and game mechanics of *Fallout 3* that provide the necessary context for understanding what type of a game it is, the analysis of the game and its selection as the research subject. Because of the scale of the game world's post-apocalyptic narrative, its cultural links to the 'real-life' United States, and the complexity of the gameplay mechanics, it is no surprise that *Fallout 3* has been of interest to researchers. Here, however, it is also perceived as an interesting resource for examining the Gothic in games and player interpretations of Gothic elements, despite not being a 'Gothic' game.

3.1.3 Data selection and collection

The practical concerns of selecting and collecting data are discussed in this section. To begin with, analysing a game typically requires that the researcher play it. This raises questions such as how many times to play it and why, and in what mode and why. *Fallout 3*, for instance, has different difficulty modes, but changing these does not significantly – if at all – alter the narrative content of the game, and thus would not influence the data collected for the purposes of answering my research questions. Therefore, the difficulty setting was retained at the standard 'normal' level. However, the game also provides opportunities for different playstyles that significantly influence the narrative. Since a player can complete the game playing as a heroic, morally neutral or villainous charac-

ter, and because the different playstyles invoke different types of responses from NPCs and resolutions to quests, it was considered reasonable to play the game twice for the purposes of data collection. Data were thus collected from two completed plays of the game, one as a hero and the other as a villain. These playstyles generated different types of Gothic events in the game that had only a minor impact on the game world on some occasions but a major impact on others. In *Fallout 3*, for instance, the survival or destruction of the town of Megaton is wholly in the hands of the PC.

The question then turns to what type of data to collect. The three major concerns were (i) how to take the multimodal means of storytelling in games into account, (ii) how to organize data drawn from a large open game world in a systematic, practical manner, and (iii) how to evaluate the Gothicity of the narrative in selecting the data. The first concern was addressed by categorizing the narration as either character-based or indexical. Character-based narration is based on conversations, that is, dialogue with NPCs, which is a significant source of narrative information in the game. Systematic notes were made of the conversations and screenshots extracted when characters or their dialogue were in some way Gothic or linked to a Gothic storyline. As discussed in detail in section 2.2.3 *Game spaces tell stories*, indexical storytelling (Fernández-Vara 2011) refers to verbal and non-verbal signs in the game world that are left for the player to interpret. I further separated these into indexical storytelling and indices with storytelling, the former referring to signs that were immediately 'readable' in the game world (such as blood spatter, skeletons, messages written on the wall) and the latter referring to objects such as computer terminals and notes found in the game world that featured written information and needed to be 'opened' to access their content. These objects were, thus, mechanically accessed in different ways, but nevertheless indexical. As in character-based narration, screenshots and notes were taken when some evidence of Gothicity was present.

With respect to the second concern, *Fallout 3*, like many other western roleplaying games, is a single-player open world game. These games (and game worlds) are big, complex, and open-ended, and consequently contain rich material for researchers. However, it also becomes very challenging to "focus an analysis on any one facet of the experience" (J. Tanenbaum & Bizzocchi 2009: 2). It is also challenging to organize data collected from an open-ended structure. In line with a suggestion from Fernández-Vara (2015: 62–63), it seemed reasonable to map the game's story structure based on locations. This meant paying attention to what kinds of characters, events and spatial storytelling were present in each named (or in some cases, unnamed) location in the game, and whether these had Gothic elements or produced Gothicity. In some locations, it was possible to collect a large amount of data from dialogues with NPCs and indexical storytelling that was either Gothic itself or linked to a broader Gothic framework of storytelling. In others, where there was little to say in terms of Gothicity, only a small amount of data was collected.

The third concern, the evaluation of Gothicity, required not only a thorough familiarity with the Gothic, but constant comparison and referral to the theory of Gothic. Questions like "How is this Gothic" and "Does this remind me of something traditionally Gothic" accompanied the data collection. Some notes from the game were included even in the absence of any obvious link to Gothicity in case such a link might emerge later, since some game locations were linked in such a way that visiting a new location revealed something new about a previous one.

Methodologically speaking, the data collection and analysis – making sense of Gothicity in the game by developing and applying codes and categories – drew on applied thematic analysis. It follows that categories for coding the data were identified in increasing detail following the repeated analysis of data and its comparison against Gothic theory. All the resulting codes were recorded in a codebook (Guest, MacQueen & Namey 2012b), including the definition of each code and the contexts in which the code was to be applied. It is worth noting that individual codes may not necessarily reflect the Gothic, but rather elements that could become Gothic in certain contexts: for example, "civilization" was recorded as a code because some Gothic tales contrast a wild, barbaric society with a culturally and technologically advanced one. In *Fallout 3,* a few characters and societies were interested in keeping records of historical events, and this code was used mainly to tag them. The use of a codebook made the process of both analysing the data and making sense of the Gothic in a schematic form more systematic and rigorous, although, as in grounded theory, in an evidence-based manner, meaning that codes were established over time based on what was found in the data instead of applying an existing set of codes or categories. A thematic analysis requires a significant amount of interpretation from the researcher and focuses on "identifying and describing both implicit and explicit ideas within the data" (Guest, MacQueen & Namey 2012a). These ideas are considered as themes; here, however, applied thematic analysis was used to identify and describe Gothic elements. Interpretation and the identification of implicit and explicit meanings of storytelling elements occupied a significant role because, as mentioned above, these elements were not necessarily inherently Gothic, but could be interpreted as such in specific contexts. Therefore, in my study Gothicity is the overall theme and the identified elements are adaptable, contextual manifestations of it.

Although aspects of applied thematic analysis were employed in the study, the main research method for cases 1 and 2 was close reading. This method has been discussed above in Chapter 2.2.2 *Games and their narrative potential*, and hence will not be repeated here. However, in practice collecting data through close reading meant that I took on the role of a hero and a villain in two separate playthroughs of the game and, during each, attempted simultaneously to immerse myself in the game and objectively identify the elements that produce Gothicity. The combination of close reading with other approaches described in this section worked well in maintaining the Gothic focus through which the game was analysed and organizing the information gained during the process.

3.2 Analysing Gothicity in player experiences

While the first two case studies focus on Gothic elements in *Fallout 3*, it is also important to examine their concrete meanings for play experiences; whether they successfully produce complex and at times ambiguous responses and moral dilemmas for the players. My motivation was especially influenced by the fact that although previous studies on Gothic games, horror and survival horror games have speculated on the impact of discomforting elements on players, there was no evidence of gameplay analysis that would support or challenge these arguments. This left a notable gap in research given that affect - the experience of certain strongly felt feelings and emotions, such as terror and horror - is central to Gothicity. For these reasons, in exploring the meaning and uses of Gothic elements in games, it was important to analyse both the game and experiences of playing it. Consequently, the play experience became the focus of the third case study comprising this dissertation. In this section, I first discuss the research questions that guided the analysis of player experiences, as narrated by players in LP videos, and the decisions made in selecting and collecting the relevant data. Second, the insights and methods provided by discourse studies that were employed in analysing the data are discussed: the discourse theory of morality, stance-taking, casual conversation, and to a lesser extent, appraisal theory. Third, although LP as discourse has been discussed above, here I evaluate its advantages and challenges as research data. Finally, as LP videos are materials that have been personally made and uploaded by people on the Internet, some relevant ethical considerations are also discussed.

3.2.1 Research questions, data selection and collection

The initial general research question for the third case study was: How do players experience and interpret Gothic elements in *Fallout 3*? Instead of employing questionnaires and interviews, I decided to approach this question by examining naturally-occurring player responses to game elements. Initially the goal was to analyse both LP videos (see section 2.4.2 *Let's Play as discourse* for a definition of LP) and fan discussions on gaming websites (such as reddit.com/r/fallout) concerning Gothic elements, but LPs alone proved to be such a rich source of data that the plan to analyse fan discussions was abandoned. With naturally-occurring data, the goal was to examine player evaluations of Gothic elements in fan-made material produced without interference or suggestions by the researcher. In this specific data set, the evaluations were immediate, taking place during play, although coloured by the performativity of the LPs. It is important to note that, with this data set, it is neither possible, nor was it my goal, to examine moral *thinking* as such; instead, I examined how players articulate their moral evaluations in these situated performances, and what kind of (shared and public) morality is constructed through them.

YouTube was chosen as the source for the LP videos not only for its popularity, but also for its convenient storage and browsing capacities. The LPs in-

cluded in this study were located by searching for "Fallout 3" playlists. Although not all these video series were clearly titled as LPs, owing to their format and the organization of the series as a playlist they were considered to fall into that category. Any playlist starting from the top search results that met the data collection criteria, as discussed below, was included in the study. YouTube's search algorithms influenced the order of search results, but this did not appear to adversely influence the data collection; the series that appeared were diverse, featuring popular and less popular series, players from different countries, and heroic and villainous playthroughs. Only one of the LPers, however, was female. This meant that my study could not address player experiences of the Gothic from a comparative gender perspective – a limitation worth noting on account of the traditional gendered view of the Gothic as something that women particularly enjoy. Thus, nearly all the player experiences and emotionally charged articulations examined here were collected from male players, perhaps suggesting that video games and LPs allow them to express emotions in a way that might otherwise be considered unmasculine. However, not only would making such a claim require further empirical research but would also involve consideration of the fact that the ways in which emotions are often expressed in LPs, such as via swearing and bandying insults, are also considered masculine in the Western cultures in which the LPs were recorded. Nevertheless, future studies using LP as a data resource might benefit from making a conscious choice of obtaining material from people differing in gender and other demographics. Altogether, 20 LP series of *Fallout 3* were included in this investigation, amounting to more than 72 hours of gameplay obtained from five preselected game events; these are described below. The LPs were recorded between 2008 and 2015, with many of the more recent LPs being inspired by the announcement of *Fallout 4* in June 2015, as these LPers expressed interest in completing *Fallout 3* before the release of the sequel.

There were six main criteria for a LP series to be included in the study. First, it had to have clear and uninterrupted audio and a commentary in English. For instance, one LP was omitted because due to recording issues the entire audio had been cut in places for up to minutes at a time, making data collection impossible. Second, the videos should not have been heavily edited, and the commentary should occur in real-time instead of being edited after the fact. This ensured the possibility to observe responses and commentary to the game elements as immediately as possible and to avoid having relevant content edited out. Third, only one player-narrator could be in the video. This is because *Fallout 3* is a single player game with no competing players. Moreover, if the commentary is a conversation between two or more players, it will be too different from commentary collected from a solo player addressing an audience. Fourth, the series must feature players either completing the game or playing it for a significant amount of time. This would increase the likelihood of them having experienced all the five game events chosen for the data collection. In practice, because of the great size and complexity of the game world, this meant that that the series should comprise at least 70 videos included in a playlist for

the LP; any shorter series would be unlikely to include comprehensive gameplay, especially if these parts of the series ranged from 10 to 45 minutes in length. Some of the series contained well over 200 parts, showing just how extensive LPs of *Fallout 3* can be. Fifth, the content must have been created originally for YouTube or a similar video host, and not be re-uploaded from a live Twitch.tv stream. This is because the Twitch stream format is very different from that of a typical YouTube LP where a player is only providing narration on the game. On Twitch, the player typically interacts with the in audience real-time, greeting viewers, thanking them, answering their questions, and possibly adding sound and on-screen effects that are disconnected from the game events. These are distractions from play and the actual game, as they not only make data collection for my purposes challenging, but also change the narrative content too greatly in comparison to that of the other LPs included in the study. Finally, some LPs included a view of the player's expressions as he is playing, typically in a corner of the video. While this did not lead to the exclusion of the LP from the study, it is worth noting that these players' expressions are not included in the analysis or data collection. Their speech alone is transcribed so that the data can be compared to that of audio-only LPs.

The study draws on an ethnographic sampling strategy in which relevant situations are chosen for analysis. Relevance is assessed based on the research questions and "characteristics of its typicality and relevance, and contrasted or compared with other situations" (Knoblauch, Tuma & Schnettler 2014: 445). In this case, the relevant situations were five pre-selected events in the game with Gothic elements that were also typical examples of how Gothicity is integrated into the game design. Thus, examining player responses to these events would produce knowledge on player experiences of the Gothic. The data were extracted and coded in a digital content logbook which "contains the temporal sequence of events, a rough transcription of activities, gestures and talk, reflections and coding of sequences according to the research topic" (Knoblauch, Tuma & Schnettler 2014: 445). In practice, each logbook featured event-specific questions that had more of a categorical purpose for organizing the transcribed narration; for example: "How does the player resolve the Ghoul situation and why?". To provide context for the narration, they also include brief notes on the temporal sequence of the LPer's gameplay actions in relation to each Gothic event, for instance:

> "The player speaks to Gustavo and offers to take care of the Ghoul problem. He goes to meet the Ghouls. After meeting Michael, the player first goes the wrong way. He talks to Roy and gets the quest."

In this way, I was able to follow the progress of the narration without accessing the videos. Here, for example, the player going the wrong way would explain the frustration expressed by the player over Roy not being in an easily found location instead of it seeming as if the player is angry at Roy for an inexplicable reason. However, as expected, the logbooks mainly consist of verbatim transcription of player narration.

The logbooks also include information on the codes and coding. The codes used to analyse the data emerged from the data. Initially these concerned responses to Gothic elements more generally, whereas during later 'rounds' of coding, they focused on moral evaluations. Once a set of codes was established through repeated examination of the data, all the data were systematically coded.

As stated above, five events in the game that had Gothic elements were chosen for data collection in the LPs. Due to the openness of the initial research question, the data collection was first guided by a general interest in how players responded to Gothic elements or to Gothic-related game mechanics. The chosen game events took place at Moriarty's Saloon, Meresti Metro Station, Vault 87, Tenpenny Tower, and the Dunwich Building. The reasons for their selection will now be explained along with a description of each event and place.

Moriarty's Saloon (as depicted in Figure 4) is in Megaton, the settlement that is closest to the location where players first enter the open Wasteland and where they are directed first by the game's main quest. Thus, players will almost certainly visit it. It includes two potentially interesting Gothic events: first, the player meets a hideously transformed man, a Ghoul, who is being mistreated by the healthy humans in town, and, second, deals with a highly villainous NPC who offers the player a major karmic choice. Moriarty's Saloon is typically the first place where the player meets a Ghoul in this game; a man called Gob who has been enslaved by the saloon owner and, as it is implied, receives regular beatings from customers. Ghouls are Gothic characters resembling Frankenstein's Creature in the sense that because human NPCs find them repugnant in appearance, they are treated as monsters despite their human psychology. Consequently, players may comment on his appearance, 'ghoulism', and how he is receiving unjust treatment from humans. The other event of interest here is the dialogue with the wealthy Mister Burke who attempts to convince the PC to blow up Megaton with no warning to its citizens. Thus, players early on meet a truly depraved and tyrannical character and may provide commentary on his merciless suggestions. Mister Burke resembles the classic Gothic villains who have no redeeming qualities, such as the tyrannical uncle in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (Radcliffe 1794) or the cruel monks in *Melmoth the Wanderer* (Maturin 1820). Although the interest in my study is primarily on complex Gothic villains, it also seemed worthwhile to include player experiences of one extremely evil one. After collecting the data, Moriarty's Saloon turned out to be the least fruitful event selected for analysis. This is because few LPers stopped to give Gob proper attention and showed interest in his story. Moreover, although responses to dialogue with Mister Burke featured expressions of shock, anger, disgust and confusion, the most interesting aspect emerged from what happens next – an optional scene of confrontation witnessed between the sheriff of Megaton and Mister Burke. This is because some LPers were willing to witness the killing of the sheriff in the confrontation as his body could then be looted, while others replayed the segment if they failed to save the sheriff, determined to

leave him alive. To many players, this confrontation seemed more meaningful than Mister Burke's initial exhortations to destroy Megaton. Thus, it can be argued that something surprising emerged from an unexpected part of the research data.

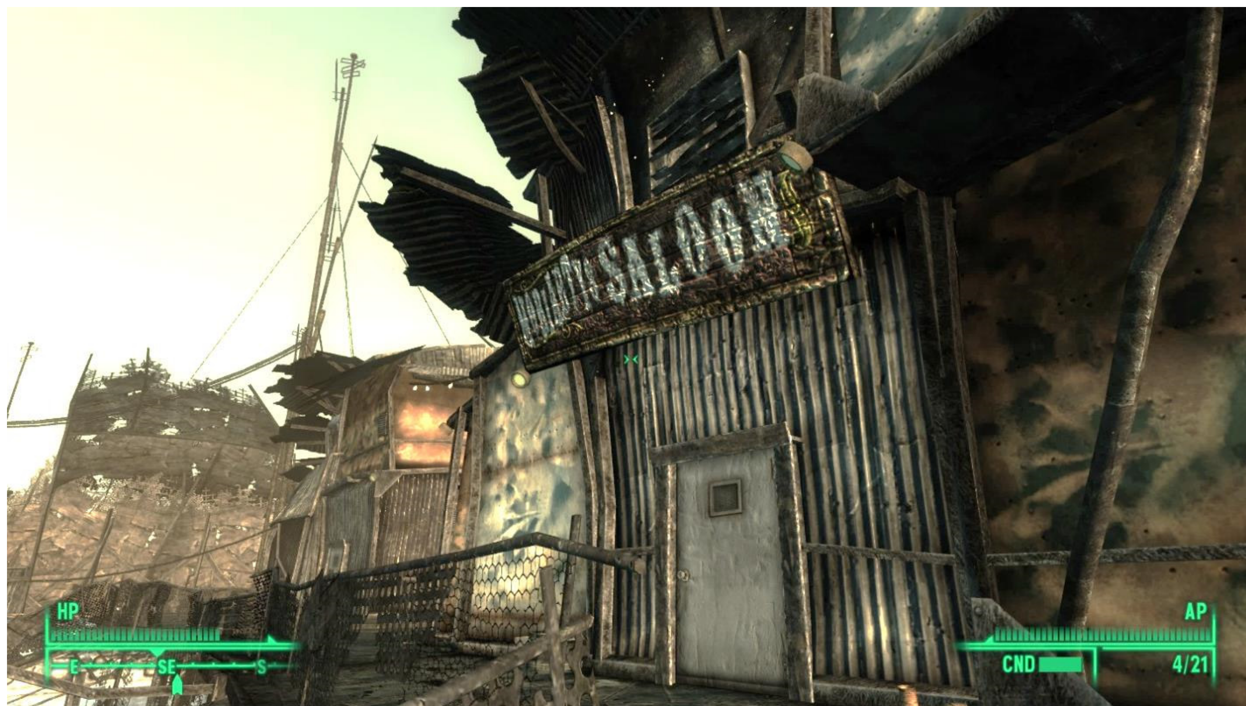

FIGURE 4. Moriarty's Saloon at the top of the shack city of Megaton.

The second event takes place in Meresti Metro Station, an underground settlement whose main communal area is depicted in Figure 5. It is home to the Family, a gang whose members are implied to have cannibalistic urges, but under the guidance of their leader Vance, are attempting to take on the role of vampires and only consume blood. Vance is a Gothic villain in the sense that he is misguided and has had secretive plans for nearby human settlements, but is also charismatic, has understandable reasons for his actions, and can also be reasoned with. Meresti is, thus, a fruitful location for observing how a player may respond to Vance as a charismatic Gothic villain, his strange ideals, and the Family's take on vampirism. The situation is complicated by the player attempting to 'rescue' Ian, a young man who is believed to have been kidnapped by the Family, but who, in truth, also suffers from bouts of violence and has recently killed his own parents during a mental blackout. Arguably, Vance is providing a home and help, if in questionable ways, to people who need mental health care, which is not available in the Wasteland. This at least blurs the concepts of blame and villainy in this situation. As with Moriarty's Saloon, players are likely to visit Meresti, since a quest starting from the former eventually leads there. The findings from Meresti were rich and their discussion would merit another research paper, since it was not possible to include them in the third case study article. For example, an interesting aspect of the cultural context was how the

players' interpretations of the Family were influenced by the *Twilight* movies that were popular around the same time, between 2008 and 2012, that many of the LPs were recorded, and that continued to influence the ones recorded later. Many players ridicule the vampires instead of finding them intimidating, commenting humorously, for example, that they are acceptable as long as they do not sparkle. The concept of vampires sparkling in the sun was introduced by the *Twilight* books and movies, and thus although the latter are not mentioned by name, the allusion to them can be recognized by culturally savvy viewers. Thus, an aspect of popular culture that is unrelated to the game appeared to have had a strong impact on player experiences of vampiristic NPCs in *Fallout 3*.

FIGURE 5. The main area of Meresti Metro Station, the Family's home.

The third location for collecting data was Vault 87. This is where Super Mutants, horribly mutated and aggressive people, originate from in *Fallout 3*. Super Mutants are a product of secretive, mad scientific experiments, which aimed to produce soldiers with supernatural strength, conducted by the tyrannical government of the United States in the game world's lore. Evidence of grotesque failed experiments can be found in the Vault, which is decorated with skeletons, blood stains and mutilated organs, some of which are depicted in Figure 6. Vault 87 is also where the player meets Fawkes, one of the only two friendly Super Mutants in the game. This was the main Gothic event focused on during the data collection, although LPer narration pertaining to spatial storytelling was also included. Vault 87 is a visually horrific environment which provokes questions of monstrosity and humanity, especially owing to Fawkes: despite his monstrous appearance, Fawkes is intelligent, polite, and willing to work with the PC. As a product of mad and obsessive experiment, Fawkes is like Franken-

stein's Creature, and has similarly had to educate himself independently, since his painful mutations resulted in memory loss, and thus also loss of identity. It was of interest to examine the LPer comments on the cruel history of the Vault and reactions to Fawkes who would typically be viewed as a monster in light of his Super Mutant status but can here become a valuable ally. As Vault 87 is a part of the main quest, most players are likely to arrive here. Data collected from this event proved very valuable for investigating moral evaluations of Gothic monsters in *Fallout 3*.

FIGURE 6. A corridor in Vault 87 with blood spatter and gore outside a laboratory.

The fourth event takes place in Tenpenny Tower, which mainly houses rich, snobby and bigoted people who do not allow Ghouls to live among them, even if the latter could afford to do so. In the form of a quest, the player is given the chance to side violently either with the Ghouls or the humans, or to find a seemingly peaceful solution. In making their decisions, players have the opportunity to comment on the tyranny, prejudice and injustice experienced by the Ghouls. As argued above, the Ghouls are, like Frankenstein's Creature, Gothic characters through their experience of life as an outcast. However, the Ghouls' plan to kill the bigoted humans is also monstrous and horrifying, and the player's narration may reflect this. Overall, the 'Ghoul situation' at Tenpenny Tower was a fruitful location for examining LPer reflections on the treatment of Others, the boundaries of humanity, and whether prejudice or murder is the greater evil. Tenpenny Tower is not a part of the game's main quest, but is a famous location in the game and as a tall tower stands out in the game world's landscape, as depicted in Figure 7, evoking curiosity. At least two quests that start

from outside the Tower also lead there; one in which the player is hired to assassinate Mister Tenpenny, the owner of the tower, and another which concerns Mister Burke's urge to destroy Megaton. If the player chooses to blow up Megaton, the explosion will be witnessed from the top of the Tenpenny Tower. Consequently, many players are likely to end up in this location and thus become participants in the aggressive situation concerning the Ghouls.

FIGURE 7. The Tenpenny Tower standing tall in the distance.

The events at the Dunwich Building were a something of a 'bonus' addition for the study, since the place is easy for players to miss: it is in a secluded area in the game map and is not connected to any major questlines in the game. However, it is a uniquely Gothic location in *Fallout 3* by breaking the general narrative rules of the game world when it comes to the supernatural. This makes it a scarier place than many others, since the rules of logic no longer apply. Elsewhere in *Fallout 3*, supernatural elements are eventually given a scientific or logical explanation, but in the Dunwich Building truly strange and inexplicable events take place. This is because the place is an allusion or pays homage to H.P. Lovecraft's horror fiction which features mysterious, supernatural elements and their worship. As the type of horror portrayed differs greatly from that elsewhere in the game world, the Dunwich Building was worth including in the study even if only eight of the twenty LPers included in the study ended up visiting it. The LPers responded to the eerie atmosphere in the building and expressed interest in finding out what had happened there: audio recordings scattered throughout the building by a man called Jaime reveal his descent into madness when he followed his similarly mad father's footsteps into this place. Players eventually find Jaime in a 'ghoulified' body worshipping a strange obe-

lisk in a cave under the building, as depicted in Figure 8. Jaime always immediately attacks players upon detecting them, which forces them to kill him. What is interesting is that the game grants the player with good karma points after killing Jaime, an outcome that many LPers in my data found mystifying. The game typically only grants karma points for killing clearly villainous people, but based on Jaime's recordings, it would be more accurate to describe him as a victim of brainwashing by a mysterious supernatural force rather than a calculating villain. Thus, the Dunwich Building provides a Gothic location where the LPers largely disagreed with the karma system. Notably, a LPer who was aiming to play the game as a villainous character became angered by this unwanted good karma, resulting in a rant filled with profanities. Although the Dunwich Building events were not analysed in detail in my research paper, they supported the observation of LPers as active and autonomous moral agents who would only rely morally on the karma system's judgement if it was agreeable to them.

FIGURE 8. Jaime worshipping a mysterious obelisk in the tunnels under the Dunwich Building.

As stated earlier, the initial interest of this study was in player responses to Gothic elements generally. However, during the analysis of these, moral evaluations emerged as a particularly relevant and interesting aspect of LPer narration. This is because moral judgements were expressed in diverse ways and LPers either explained their reasons for their judgements and actions or seemed to consider them self-explanatory. Because *Fallout 3* allows the making of meaningful choices, thereby granting LPers narrative agency, and makes evaluating the morality of actions salient via the karma system, the data showed rich LP narration that included moral evaluations. Even then, moral evaluations of

Gothic elements turned out to be too broad a topic for a single research paper. Consequently, the third case study focused on moral evaluations of Gothic monsters: Fawkes the Super Mutant in Vault87 and the Ghouls at Tenpenny Tower. The examples chosen to reflect typical features of the evaluations were then analysed in further discursive detail. The methods used for this are described next.

3.2.2 Insights and the methods used in the investigation of LP discourse

The analysis of moral evaluations of Gothic monsters in *Fallout 3* involved linguistic examination of transcribed LPer speech. Although in the early stages this was planned as content analysis, it soon became evident that this approach would not be suitable for examining the intricacies of moral evaluation. In Fine's (1986, 406) view, talk consists of content and evaluation. Analysing only the former would not produce useful knowledge about the latter. Moreover, LP discourse is rather different from the types of speech that are typically analysed in discourse studies, since it is naturally-occurring but performative, depends on the levels of play and narration, and involves conversational aspects. For these reasons, analysing the transcribed examples chosen for the third case study article in detail required combining different, although closely related approaches, of which morality in discourse and stance-taking theories were the most central. Insights on aspects of casual conversation, such as gossip and swearing, also proved useful. Appraisal theory, although not a central method for the analysis, was influential by, for example, providing terminology that served as food for thought, such as terminology on the forming of positive and negative judgements of such aspects as veracity. These methods and their influence on the study are discussed in more detail in the following subsections.

3.2.2.1 Morality in discourse

Some attention should be given to what type of LP narration is considered 'moral evaluation' in this study. Moral evaluation in discourse takes place whenever (dis)approval and (dis)respect are expressed (Bergmann 1998, 286). This is a more general understanding than the one in classical rhetoric and manuals on courtly behaviour in the 16th to 18th centuries that were normative in nature, advising readers how they should act and issuing warnings about 'immoral' behaviour (Bergmann 1998: 280). Here, morality in discourse is explored at the level at which speakers explicitly or implicitly take "moral (evaluative or normative)" attitudes to specific elements (Linell & Rommetveit 1998: 466), such as Gothic monsters. Psychologically, making moral judgements is an outcome of moral intuition, which Haidt and Bjorklund (2008: 188 as cited in Dwyer 2009: 276) define as:

> "…the sudden appearance in consciousness, or at the fringe of consciousness, of an evaluative feeling (like-dislike, good-bad) about the character or actions of a person, without any conscious awareness of having gone through steps of search, weighing evidence, or inferring a conclusion".

This definition enables a psychological understanding of why LPers' moral evaluations appear also reactive and often emotionally loaded, featuring, for example, verbal aggression; the LPers are also relying on their feelings of moral intuition rather than rational reasoning. Haidt and Bjorklund's definition is included in Dwyer's (2009) article on Moral Dumbfounding, which refers to the inability of people to provide reasons for their moral judgements, or their tendency to give reasons that are weakly associated with those judgements. This may also explain why many of the verbal moral evaluations given by LPers are curt ("that's just wrong" rather than "that's wrong because…") or become identifiable by the emotion expressed rather than carefully weighed verbal moral pondering. With these caveats in mind, it is possible to analyse moral evaluation in discourse; some of the concepts and tools for recognizing it are described below.

Drew (1998), for example, analysed complaints as a way of doing moral work. The moral work done through complaints can be implicit or explicit; in the former, the complainant attempts to portray him/herself as an unfortunate victim, and in the latter, formulates the normative standards that s/he perceives others to have transgressed (Turowetz & Maynard 2010: 513). One interesting aspect is the amount of detail speakers may go into both when they are taking a defensive stance and when they are complaining about the conduct of others (Drew 1998: 297 & 302–303). In the former case, the speaker attempts to convince the hearer of how troublesome some episode was while simultaneously maintaining that no transgression took place on their part. In the latter, complaints involve detailed accounts of how deliberately rude or offensive the person being complained about is and how they are to blame for their conduct. This discourse is, at the same time, influenced by the speaker's goal of gaining the listener's support (Drew 1998: 312). These elements of complaints are also observable in LPs generally, although situations in which LPers appear to perceive actions as so immoral that they require detailed justification and description are relatively rare compared to the other types of narration. However, because my focus was on Gothic elements that are transgressive and are likely to elicit such strong responses, the LPers were prone to producing such defensive detail or making complaints about NPC actions, game mechanics, or rules in relation to quests (such as the karma system). Thus, an understanding of complaints in discourse is also of value for examining moral evaluations made by LPers.

In addition to detailing, complaints often include extreme case formulations (Pomerantz 1986), that is, maximal descriptors such as 'completely', 'all', 'always' and 'never'. In addition to these, superlative forms like 'the worst' are likely to be made use of in LP narration. These formulations exemplify how negative moral judgements might be identified linguistically. However, in addition to complaints, they also appear when a LPer takes a strong morally approving stance towards, say, a NPC. Instead of describing such a NPC as 'good', the LPer might instead refer to him/her, for example, as 'the best'. In moral

evaluations, using extremes thus goes both ways, appearing in both morally positive and negative judgements.

Although words with a strongly evaluative tone can be perceived as the elementary building blocks for moral utterances, morality is also often communicated through prosody and symbols. For example, intonation may be used to convey "indignation, irony, or facetiousness" (Bergmann 1998: 288). In LP narration, irony, sarcasm, facetious comments and other types of verbal aggression are typical, and indeed communicate how the LPer morally perceives a NPC or a situation in the game. For this reason, in addition to word choices, meanings communicated through prosody were examined in the present research.

3.2.2.2 Stance

The LPers' moral evaluations of Gothic monsters were examined largely through stance-taking. As Johnstone (2009: 31) puts it, stance "is generally understood to have to do with the methods, linguistic and other, by which interactants create and signal relationships with the propositions they utter and with the people they interact with". For example, taking an expert stance would involve a speaker expressing propositions that s/he confidently presents as factual information, targeted to less knowledgeable, 'novice' listeners. In brief, stance is manifested by a linguistic and social act (Du Bois 2007: 141). Stances can be affective or epistemic and concern the speaker's emotional state or the degree of certainty about the proposition made (Jaffe 2009: 5). The former, especially, is often marked by prosody, such as high pitch or increased volume (Keisanen 2006: 39). Moral evaluations are typically affective stances, since as was noted above, these evaluations tend to be guided by moral intuition and feeling, although speakers may also express their evaluations with varying degrees of certainty. This shows, for example, in how indeterminacy can be maintained in stance-taking for "flexibility of self-presentation in potentially unpredictable or volatile social fields of reception and interpretation" (Jaffe 2009: 18). YouTube's gaming videos are fields of this kind, since the LPers cannot know who will be viewing their videos and commenting on them. Consequently, speakers can, for instance, mitigate or mediate the extent to which they are accountable for their stances if making their authorship clear appears socially risky.

Stance-taking involves laying claim to social and moral identities while always existing in comparison and contrast with other relevant people and categories (Jaffe 2009: 9). Thus, in exploring stances, the social and historical contexts are highly relevant. In this connection, Du Bois (2007: 151) argues that isolated, idealized sentences lack such contextualizing information. This explains why in my study it was important to consider both the immediate context of the LPer, i.e. gameplay events and the imagined audience, and the wider contexts of the gaming community and contemporary 'western' culture (which all the LPers represented) against which the LPer's moral evaluations would be constantly compared and contrasted.

Kärkkäinen (2006: 699) has argued that stance in discourse is intersubjective, that is, it is something that "emerges from dialogic interaction between interlocutors". My LP data evidenced no immediate dialogic interaction, and

thus no immediate exchange between interlocutors. Nevertheless, LPers are targeting their narrations to someone and at times expect feedback from an audience, although in the present videos they were unable to receive the responses in real-time. The linguistically and prosodically mediated stances that the LPers take are socially oriented, influenced by the expectation that the videos will be seen. Thus, I would argue that even in LP discourse, stance is intersubjective, involving more than one conscious mind.

The other subsections in this chapter to some extent overlap greatly with stance in the sense that they reveal ways in which stances can become evident. Because there are many ways of approaching the analysis of evaluative speech, these methods are not necessarily classified under stance-taking. However, these links and similarities are worth keeping in mind, especially since they justify the decision to draw on these resources instead of focusing on just one, and so avoid the risk of missing out on some interesting details in the analysis.

3.2.2.3 Casual conversation

Eggins and Slade (1997: 16) describe casual conversation as paradoxical, as it is simultaneously "the type of talk in which we feel most relaxed, most spontaneous and most ourselves", but is also "a critical site for the social construction of reality". That is; although on the surface casual talk appears free, speakers are engaged in reflecting and constructing their social worlds. Casual as the speech may be, it involves active socially meaningful work. As has been argued above, while LP is not strictly conversation, it features some conversational aspects as LPers are responding to NPCs and addressing their putative audiences, and is casual despite also being performative. The fundamental view of casual conversation as a field in which social worlds are constructed influenced my analysis of LP narrations because it underlines the fact that, through gaming videos in which they appear relaxed and spontaneous, players are nevertheless involved in doing 'serious' work. Thus, something casual that is done for fun can reflect what the LPers think about their overall experienced reality, not just the game world in isolation. In the context of Gothic game elements, this becomes evident in moral evaluations of, for instance, persecuted monsters; what the players perceive as unjust is unavoidably influenced by what is considered acceptable in their society, and in their evaluations players reflect these societal constructions.

Also of interest in the context of this study is the suggestion by Eggins and Slade (1997: 116) that humour, specifically, "allows the serious work of casual conversation in asserting and reaffirming values and attitudes to be rendered less visible and its participants held less accountable". Through humour, this serious work is disguised and, even if noticed, is not perceived as threatening. For LP videos, this is important, since not only do LP videos often strive to be humorous, but humour also offers the LPer a way of dealing with difficult situations in a self-preserving, non-threatening matter. For example, if a LPer realizes that s/he has been wrong about something, a humorous comment enables this to be dealt with in an honest, yet distanced manner that helps the LPer and the audience to move on and does not disrupt the enjoyability of the video. As

humour is also used to disguise the negotiation and contesting of power (Eggins & Slade 1997: 167), the LPer is arguably also reclaiming his/her power in this situation. In other situations, LPers can use humour to establish themselves as the wielders of power or to draw a distinction between themselves and NPCs by making them the targets of jokes.

The semantics of involvement refers to ways of constructing intimacy and affiliation, and divides into four subsystems: 'naming', technicality, swearing, and slang or anti-language (Eggins & Slade 1997: 143–144). These are of interest for the present study, since they can also be used to examine the relationships constructed between the LPers and NPCs, or LPers and their audience, both of which influence LPers' verbally expressed moral evaluations of Gothic monsters in the game. Naming refers to the use of names and vocatives. It can be used to "control, manipulate, divide or align the other interactants" (Eggins & Slade 1997: 144). The use of vocatives is especially interesting when it is seemingly redundant, suggesting that the speaker is attempting to establish a closer relationship with a specific addressee by excluding the other participants. Although naming does not initially appear relevant in the context of LP videos, given that the LPer is not a member of a group of interactants, an attempt either to stay in control or to construct closeness can be perceived when a LPer redundantly addresses NPCs by their name. For example, during dialogue events, anyone watching the LP video can see the name of the character that the LPer is speaking to, and it can be assumed that if the LPer begins interacting with a NPC, this character will be next to speak. Thus, by naming the NPC the LPer can position him/herself as the one who begins and continues the dialogue and is thus in control, or, if the LPer is fond of the NPC, portray this closeness to the audience. Thus, although no real-time interactants are present, naming can nevertheless be used by LPers to communicate their position of power to their audience or their intimacy with favourably perceived NPCs. How naming functions in LPs is different from its function in casual conversation, and examining it is important as one indicator of how LPers morally evaluate NPCs.

Technicality refers to the degree of specialization or commonsenseness; that is, those who are 'experts' on a topic can more easily dominate the conversation, while less experienced 'novices' "can be effectively excluded or their participation circumscribed" (Eggins & Slade 1997: 150). Again, because LPers are not in real-time conversation with others, technicality in LP discourse does not function in the same way as it does in conversation. However, if they are playing a game that they know well, LPers often position themselves as 'experts' and treat the audience as novices who must be educated on how the game works or should be played. This position, or expert stance, however, is much less likely to occur if a LPer is doing a 'blind' play of a game; that is, he or she is playing a game for the first time and has not researched it before recording the LP.

Swearing is one way of indicating how casual or formal talk is (Eggins & Slade 1997: 151). Typically considered emotive language, swearing includes interjections, emphasizers and expletive slot fillers (Ljung 2011). Even if some

LPers avoid using strong language to ensure that their videos remain acceptable to younger audiences, they may replace swear words with inoffensive, milder equivalents, that is, employ euphemistic replacement swearing (Ljung 2011: 11). In this way, by sharing in the use of relaxed and informal language, the narration can remain casual and hence suggest a degree of intimacy between the LPer and the audience. Eggins and Slade (1997: 153) found in their conversation data that swearing could also be used as a resource for claiming the position of a group leader, and that swear words were often "directed at, or attached to, subordinates or 'outsiders'". Similar use of swear words can be observed in LPs in which LPers may underline their power positions as the hero (or villain) or their positioning of disliked or disrespected NPCs as outsiders, i.e. as other. Some LPers make copious use of swear words, perhaps to display their power-related freedom to do so, as neither the game nor the audience can prevent this. In any case, swearing often plays a part in moral evaluations, representing the emotions of the speaker and a judgement of its target.

Anti-language is defined as "the creation of extensive vocabulary which gives new names to things, though not all words of the over-language will have equivalents". Rather than shared knowledge, the basis is a "shared rejection of certain values or modes of behaviour" (Eggins & Slade 1997: 154). Although mapping anti-language in LP discourse goes beyond the scope of this paper, the gaming community shares slang that is only comprehensible to those who belong to it, and this is also reflected in LP narrations. Some anti-language is specific to fans of a certain game or game series. The values this reflects are linked to the context of gaming and thus may signal rejection of those outside this context, especially in the context of violence or greed. Through anti-language or slang, LPers can construct intimacy with their audiences – especially if they formulate their own terminology during the LP specifically for sharing with their fans – while rejecting the 'outsider' values of those who are not a part of the gaming community and do not understand its contextual linguistic repertoire and needs.

Thus, although the semantics of involvement as described by Eggins and Slade function differently in LP discourse than in casual conversation, 'naming', technicality, swearing, and slang or anti-language are important in LP narrations. They also reflect the player's relationship to the NPCs and the imagined audience that the LPer is addressing when narrating a video.

A, possibly surprising, aspect of casual conversation that can be found in LP narrations is gossip. Although traditionally perceived as a way of talking between women that simultaneously perpetuates constraints on the female role and offers validating comfort (Jones 1980: 194), gossip is, viewed more generally, informal evaluative talk that is consequential, purposeful, and a significant tool of organization (Waddington 2012). By classifying what people should and should not be doing, it establishes and reinforces group membership (Eggins & Slade 1997: 283) as those who transgress expectations and social norms are treated as outsiders. In line with this, Fine (1986: 413) argues that successful

gossip relies on the assumptions and claims of the social actors inhabiting the same moral universe.

The idea that gossip might be present in fan culture is not a new one. Jenkins (1992: 82) argues that fans adopt all of the four functions of gossip, as presented by Jones (1980), in their discussions of television programs. These include exchanging information ("house-talk" in Jones's work), offering moral judgement ("scandal"), "bitching", for example, about the limited control of fans, and initiating more personal conversations ("chatting"). In fan culture, popular culture characters can function as catalysts for discussing shared experiences and feelings with people who were hitherto strangers (Jenkins 1992, 83). In LPs, a similar kind of shared fan experience and building of common ground also takes place. Most importantly for this study, the LPer morally evaluates game elements and characters, actions which the audience can participate in through the comment section or chat, depending on the streaming service.

In the same way as complaints, mentioned above, Fine (1986: 414–418) discusses personal blame in gossip and divides it into three types: moral defect, negligence and moral blindness. In the latter two, the person being blamed is perceived as ignorant, whereas moral defect suggests that a person is polluted at the core and, typically, cannot be changed. Negligence refers to social actors who 'should have known better' but are not perceived as immoral, whereas moral blindness is attributed to people who do not appear to know better, and do not realize that what they are doing is wrong. The ways in which blame is attributed to NPCs in digital games testifies to how LPers morally evaluate them, and hence exploring these is interesting for this reason. The following excerpt from the data demonstrates blame as a moral defect:

> You know what, although, then again that bitch talked to me like she was better than me. So you know what, good riddance to bad rubbish.

The NPC that the player is talking about was a wealthy, bigoted character who is killed because of this player's actions, although not personally by him. The player suggests that her death was deserved, even her own fault, because of her character, which did not seem to have redeemable qualities – and which could not be changed. The line sounds like something that could be overheard in a conversation between friends in a different context. As is typical of gossip, the player talks about the character in the third person, and word choices like "that bitch" and "good riddance to bad rubbish" denote moral judgement. Through gossip-like narration, the LPer can build common ground by using this (and other) characters as a discussion topic. For instance, LPers can use their judgements to create distance from and exclude NPCs whose morality they perceive as unacceptable, thereby reinforcing group membership between themselves and their audiences whose moral understanding they expect to resemble their own.

It should be noted that, according to Eggins and Slade (1997: 283), there are three obligatory elements of the generic structure of gossip: Third Person Focus ('we' versus 'they'), Substantiating Behaviour (involving the evidence or

information that enables negative evaluations) and Pejorative Evaluation (the events being evaluated and commented on). What is missing in LP discourse is part of Pejorative Evaluation, since only the LPer's evaluations are included in the videos themselves. The audience's agreements or disagreements would have to be observed in their posted comments, if these are shared. Thus, I argue that a scholar interested in focusing on manifestations of gossip in LP videos, or gaming videos generally, ought also to include the comments from viewers that on YouTube can be found under the video, or on other streaming services might be placed elsewhere. Here, gossip is only one of many explored aspects of casual communication.

3.2.2.4 Appraisal theory

Appraisal theory, although not central to the analysis, was nevertheless relevant for my study by providing some useful concepts and categories for the analysis of moral evaluations. Developed by researchers working within the Systemic Functional Linguistic paradigm, it examines the interpersonal in language and, for example, how speakers (dis)approve, enthuse and abhor, applaud and criticise in language and seek to position their readers or listeners to do the same (J. R. Martin & White 2005: 1). The three key aspects of appraisal are attitude, engagement, and graduation, reflecting feelings, speaker/writer positioning and the degree of evaluation, respectively. The framework proposed by Martin and White (2005) goes into great detail in examining these aspects in written texts, featuring lists of words as examples of each aspect of appraisal. Their suggestions, for example, on how to identify the force of an evaluation - e.g. intensification, comparative and superlative morphology, or repetition (J. R. Martin & White 2005: 37) - are useful for anyone interested in evaluative language. Additionally, insights on how speakers disclaim, proclaim, entertain or attribute propositions (J. R. Martin & White 2005: 97–98) were fruitful for understanding how players reject positions, or suppress or allow alternative positions. Arguably, these aspects are linked to stance-taking by showing how committed the speaker is to the proposition. Perhaps most importantly for my study, under the category of attitude, Martin and White (2005, 36) discuss judgement as encompassing the resources for assessing behaviour according to various normative principles, including evaluations of social esteem (normality, capacity and tenacity) and social sanction (veracity and propriety). These different types of judgements were evident in the LP narrations as players responded to NPCs and their behaviour.

However, the way in which the appraisal framework is typically applied in analysis is highly specific and does not allow the flexible application of tools from different approaches, as was found necessary for my study. Moreover, the tools presented by Martin and White focus on written language, whereas I was examining spoken language, which is, for example, more likely to employ prosody to convey meaning than careful lexical choices like those in newspaper reports. For these reasons, I did not make direct use of the appraisal framework in my analysis, although some of its more interesting concepts, as explained above, were influential as theoretical information on how to identify aspects of evalua-

tive language. Martin and White, in turn, suggest Eggins and Slade for insights on interpersonal meaning in spoken texts, and as described above, I made use of this resource.

3.2.3 Let's Play as data

Let's Plays as a medium of sharing gameplay and as discourse have already been discussed above, but in this subsection the advantages and disadvantages of using LP as research data will be discussed, since these have consequences for how the study has been planned and conducted. Some of the perhaps obvious main advantages are that LPs are easily found in great numbers and of many different kinds of games, thus comprising an accessible and ample resource for analysing several aspects of gaming. Possible further research topics might include the forms and multimodality of LPs, the interaction between LPers and their audiences with analyses that include comments from the latter, or further case studies like mine on how LPers respond to specific game elements. However, the abundance of the material constitutes a practical challenge even after it has been narrowed down in some way - for example, in my study, by only transcribing speech pertaining to the five pre-selected Gothic events as experienced by the players of *Fallout 3*. These specific events had then to be located within hours and hours of gameplay, and since there is no linear 'right' order of play in *Fallout 3*, the LPers could stumble upon one of the pre-selected events at any time (or revisit them). Moreover, not all of the LPers included in the study visited all of the locations of the pre-selected events, something that was to some extent expected, if not precisely known, by the researcher prior to the data collection. Collecting data from LPs of games with a more linear narrative would be much less challenging and time consuming, as the progression of the gameplay is more predictable.

The data collection also focused on commentary relating to Gothic elements in the game, although not on combat situations because of the differences between the levels of difficulty settings and between the players in the take-up of modified content. That is, because the combat difficulty level was notably different between the LPers, the targets of their responses also changed in quality – the same monster could be much more threatening to one player than another. Thus, combat situations were considered to include varying or altered content that would be make comparison difficult, whereas narrative content such as dialogue and spatial storytelling was considered 'stable' content that would produce comparable LPer responses. The consequence of this is that although, for example, Vault87 and the journey to Meresti involved a great deal of violent combat, narration on these sequences was not included in the study unless it was linked to the game narrative. A selection process of this kind is, however, challenging to conduct in practice and perhaps unnecessarily complicated the data collection. Instead, the combat narration could have been transcribed and simply accorded a less important role during the analysis.

The other disadvantages are likely similar to those encountered with naturally-occurring or human-based data in general: at times having a long wait

before data appear that are relevant to the research question, the repetitiveness of some aspects of the research material, or elements (for example, crude language) in the material that one might prefer personally to omit, but must instead record and analyse in detail. However, the advantages of employing LPs as research data outweigh the disadvantages. This is because LPs provide material for examining multiple aspects of gaming and, although performative, provide evidence of player experiences that cannot be obtained from interviews, questionnaires or pre-planned recordings of gameplay sessions.

3.2.4 Ethical considerations

As this study involved the examination of personally created and uploaded gameplay videos by individuals, it is important to discuss the ethics of the research methods used. To begin with, a question that needs to be addressed is whether the material from LP videos posted on YouTube is considered public or private. Arguably, a LPer's intention is to reach as many viewers as possible. This becomes evident from the number of subscribers to their channels: even the least popular LPers included in this study had thousands of subscribers, while two of the most popular ones had over a million. Therefore, it is reasonable to suggest that they not only expect but desire their videos to be viewed by a large number of strangers. The videos are also titled in such a way that they are easily found on YouTube by searching for video playlists using the game's name. Thus, the data analysed here are considered public and unlikely to feature sensitive material.

Another key ethical question regarding the collection of research material from LP videos on YouTube was whether permission for the analysis should be sought from the players in question. In the end, it was decided that requesting permission from the players was not necessary, since, first, the study was not likely to cause them harm and, second, with anonymous treatment, it would be extremely unlikely that the players would be identifiable from any published data excerpts. To elaborate on the first point, the study focused only on the ways in which players responded to Gothic elements in the context of the game, not on their personal qualities or personal information. The gender or nationality of players, for instance, did not influence their selection, and neither are marked anywhere in the data. While some players mentioned aspects of their personal lives during their LP videos, this was not transcribed, both to respect the privacy of the LPer and because it was not considered relevant for the study. The study, at no point, attempted to make general assumptions about the players as persons outside the context of the recorded game situations. Thus, it is unlikely that the study would produce analysis or results that the players would experience as invasive, hurtful, or damaging, or would impact their reputation even if they were identified in the material.

To explicate on the second point, since the data consists of transcribed audio from videos, the LPs in question cannot be located by simply entering quotes from the data in an online search engine. If one were determined to discover the identity of a specific LPer, one would have to look up different LPs on

YouTube, search for the correct video in a specific LP series - which often consists of more than 50 videos for open-ended games like *Fallout 3* - and even then, it would be difficult to find the specific point at which the quote occurs without access to time stamps. Theoretically, it is possible, but highly unlikely, that any reader of the study would be this motivated. Therefore, verbatim transcriptions of the LP narration could be published in their original wording without posing potential harm. Admittedly, some of the LPers might have preferred to appear in a study under their YouTube username in the hope of attracting new viewers. However, giving everyone equal anonymity seemed in practice a simple choice that also minimized the risk of harm, should any unanticipated issues emerge. Although I stored identifying information such as links to the YouTube videos (and thus had access to the LPers' YouTube profiles) in case there was reason to return to them, this information was locked behind a secure login and was only accessible to me. These files are to be deleted at the completion of this study.

There were also concerns that played a less important role in deciding on whether to ask for permission or not; that players would decline permission because of the cultural context of the international gaming community at the time of the data collection. The collection stage started in the aftermath of the GamerGate controversy. GamerGate was (and is) a movement online started by a vocal minority of gamers who claimed to promote ethics in game journalism, but in practice targeted women and other minorities involved in the game industry, whether in game design or otherwise, sending rape and death threats and participating in stalking behaviour (Lees 2016, Webber 2017). The movement was sparked in 2014 by a revenge 'manifesto' written and published online by the ex-boyfriend of a female game designer, containing false accusations of her sleeping with a video game journalist in exchange for positive media coverage (Valenti 2017). Criticism by the movement spread, also taking in game studies, resulting in arguments about game scholars - particularly the Digital Games Research Association (DiGRA) - driving a feminist agenda (Chess & Shaw 2015). Since the academy was being portrayed as untrustworthy, even threatening, and accused of feminist conspiracy among gamers, it seemed possible that some players would be influenced by this misinformation and decline permission to have their videos analysed, even if the topic of my study was unlikely to cause harm to anyone, did not criticise the gaming culture and was not feminist. In hindsight, these concerns were exactly what a movement such as GamerGate would be likely to celebrate, as it reveals a gap and a sense of mistrust between academia and the average player (although most academics studying games, myself included, are also players). Movements such as GamerGate aim to divide rather than unite people.

Although this cultural context was not the main reason why the decision was made not to seek permission from LPers, it was given considerable thought. Today, I would likely make a different kind of decision if only to help build a bridge between the two seemingly distant worlds of the scholarly study of games and the every-day gaming culture. However, this dilemma concerns cultural and societal issues rather than research ethics. In the end, it seemed ethi-

cally reasonable to argue that any findings arising from the study would override in importance player concerns about how the material from LPs would be used, since the focus was very narrow and, contrary to possible concerns about portraying games and gaming in an unfavourable way, the study underlines the potential of digital games to feature meaningful stories and players as active ethical agents. These are positive qualities: players are perceived as independent and autonomous and games as meaningful cultural objects alongside the more traditional storytelling media.

4 KEY FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH ARTICLES

In this section, the key findings of each article and what they suggest about the influence of Gothic elements on digital games and play experiences are presented. The articles are discussed in the order in which they were written rather than in the order of publication. The aim of this section is to provide a concise summary of the findings, while a more detailed discussion and the wider implications of the whole study are addressed in Chapter 5 below.

4.1 Case 1: Gothic monstrosities in dystopia

The aim of the first case study article was to analyse the representations of Gothic monstrosities in *Fallout 3* and their contribution to constructing its dystopian game world. Notably, the Gothic monstrosities did not merely participate in constructing the dystopia but were typically also its products and even victims. Thus, their role in the dystopia is ambiguous in the sense that they are both sources of horror and experience horror or go through horrific changes. Based on my findings, the Gothic monstrosities in *Fallout 3* could be divided into three main categories: ecodystopian, non-human monsters that exist in the game to be defeated, and complex quasi-human as well as Gothic villain-hero NPCs whose monstrosity the player is obliged to assess.

Of these categories, the first encompasses all the non-human monsters: in *Fallout 3*, this includes mutated insects and animals. They construct the dystopia by constituting threats to human societies and the PC, but in their biologically mutated forms are also consequences of the human actions – the nuclear war, or in some cases, scientific experiments – that resulted in the dystopia. While one can perceive them as victims of human actions, these creatures have adapted to their situation by taking on forms in which they can even thrive in the altered post-apocalyptic nature of the game world. The mutated insects and animals thus speak of nature's ability to withstand and adapt to even the worst destruction that humans are capable of and responsible for, while humans struggle to

gather the basic elements that they need to survive, such as shelter and clean water. Consequently, although when it comes to action these creatures are subjected to simple treatment – the players must kill them unless they have chosen specific perks that tame these creatures of nature – their existence in the game world is testimony to how humans, in the end, cannot fully control or defeat nature. For these monsters, the dystopia is not necessarily a dystopia at all, but simply a new kind of territory. Of the monstrosities addressed here, while they are the most far removed from the human or quasi-human monsters typically employed in the Gothic tradition, their uncanny appearance as mutated creatures and existence as a 'punishment' for humanity's actions render them Gothic in this context.

The second category includes the quasi-human monsters in *Fallout 3*, Ghouls and Super Mutants. These characters are ambivalent in that players are given reasons to sympathise with them, yet they are recognizable as threats to humanity. The similarity the Ghouls and Super Mutants share is that both are physically transformed human beings whose mutations are a result of injustice and who do not age. Ghouls have become mutated by radiation and excluded from human society despite being psychologically human. Super Mutants are the result of the government's secretive and unethical scientific experiments to produce super soldiers. These experiments were so physically severe that the mutants lost their human memories and became aggressive towards all other life forms. Both Ghouls and Super Mutants are thus mutated products of a dystopian world. This is in line with Cartwright's (2005: 207) argument that Gothic bodies are central to dystopian texts, as they become reformed into frightening shapes, othered and alienated.

However, Ghouls and Super Mutants also pose a threat to humanity. In the case of Ghouls, the threat is largely, but not only, a psychological one by reminding humans of their vulnerability in the face of radiation. Ghouls also blur the lines between humanity and monstrosity by continuing to live in corpse-like bodies that appear impossibly alive, yet simultaneously retaining their memories and psychological humanity, for better or for worse. Meanwhile, the threat posed by Super Mutants is violent, as they attack anyone on sight, and people who are not killed or eaten are kidnapped to undergo changes to become mutants themselves. Thus, by constituting psychological and physical threats, Ghouls and Super Mutants construct the dystopia for the humans inhabiting it. Ghouls, in turn, also experience the world as dystopian by being rejected by humans, whereas the Super Mutants, like the non-human monsters, thrive in it, although at the high cost of losing their sense of self and arguably their humanity. For players, it is easier to feel sympathy for the Ghouls, as they are represented as a powerless minority. Because, despite of their tragic origin, the Super Mutants are represented as strong enemies that the player cannot negotiate with (except for two unique NPCs who are more intelligent than the rest), players may come to perceive them as they do the non-human monstrosities, i.e. simply as enemies to defeat. From a dystopian viewpoint, Ghouls reflect a nightmare scenario in the sense that they may never be welcomed back

into human society, and Super Mutants in that their humanity is lost and their lives appear to now consist of only acts of violence.

The complex Gothic villain-heroes in *Fallout 3* constitute the third category. These are charismatic community leaders who pose a threat to other humans and act based on misguided, if in some way understandable motives. An example of this is Vance, the gang leader of the Family who has adopted vampiric traditions to survive. Although Vance could be considered a typical leader of a micro-dystopia, since he leads the gang based on his personal obsessions (Olkusz 2016: 96) and arguably brainwashes his followers, he is not tyrannical enough to punish gang members who are not enthusiastic about his teachings. Thus, one might argue that the Family is utopian to its members who feel hesitant about Vance's teachings, but have found a rare safe community in this post-apocalyptic game world, especially those who have been rejected by other human societies. One interpretation is that members of the Family have mental health issues that cause them to have violent, even cannibalistic tendencies; thus, the gang's existence is partly a result of a dystopian world that cannot provide people with the mental healthcare that they would urgently need. This means that although Vance and the Family might experience the gang as utopian, it has come into existence through dystopia and the inability of the disordered world to keep charismatic leaders like Vance from handpicking outcasts for his morally ambiguous community. Moreover, to continue their vampiric ways, the Family needs a source of blood, and hence the community poses a dystopian threat to human communities. Again, communities led by Gothic villain-heroes in the game are both a cause and consequence of the dystopia.

As can be summarised from the findings detailed above, the game world tends to offer social and biological explanations and contexts for the existence of its different types of monstrosities. The monstrosities have not appeared out of nowhere, but result from, at worst, hundreds of years of human mistakes and violation of nature. The post-apocalyptic dystopia of *Fallout 3* shows that these mistakes are being repeated at a time when people should know better; nature and people have been drastically altered and othered, yet individuals and communities continue to strive for power in morally dubious ways. Simultaneously, some Gothic dystopian monstrosities can become complex by not always being mere enemies to defeat, but also being potential allies or at least partners to negotiate with rather than destroy. Monstrosities in games, as in other storytelling media, take many forms and are an important narrative element in both Gothic and dystopian tales.

4.2 Case 2: Constructing Gothic ideology

The aim of the second case study was to examine the ideological aspects of the Gothic in *Fallout 3* through a close reading of the game discourse and by drawing on theories of the Gothic. The objects of analysis were NPCs, their actions and dialogue, and elements of the *mise-en-scéne* and storytelling style, all of

which participated in communicating ideological meanings. Indeed, it could be considered one of the findings that ideology is constructed by a combination of multimodal means in games, Gothic or otherwise.

With respect to Gothic ideology, it was found that the game world of *Fallout 3* was ideologically horrific – tyrannical and unjust – before and after the nuclear holocaust. While the latter could be seen in the simulated action and stories of the NPCs living in the game world inhabited by the PC, the former could be identified by means of spatial storytelling in the ruins and signs left behind. The continued injustice is arguably linked to the monstrosity of cyclical human horrors identified in the first study. As befits the dystopian and post-apocalyptic narrative of *Fallout 3*, the dominant ideology of the game world, present and past, is represented as horrific and ultimately destructive.

The study results also suggest that games duplicate traditional Gothic ideology. This is perhaps most evident in the phenomenon of othering: perceiving and treating a group or a person as different and inferior to oneself, as 'unlike us'. In classic Gothic fiction, Catholicism was often othered (Hoeveler 2014, 13) by portraying its power structures, in particular, as tyrannical. In *Fallout 3*, othering is not only a tool for distancing the player from NPCs or communities that are portrayed as evil, but also, in contrast, functions as a tool for evoking sympathy. That is, those who have been cast out by the majority are underdogs that elicit sympathy and support. This means that ideologically, othering means something different to the player than to the NPCs who represent the majority; something wrong and unjust. However, if the othered group in some way betrays its initial portrayal as sympathetic, the player may become morally and ideologically disoriented, as the revelation that the underdog is unworthy of support clashes with the player's expectations. The consequence is that the player cannot trust the ideological messages imparted by NPCs on who or what is right or wrong, but must remain critically vigilant – producing a new kind of Gothic ideological ambiguity through uncertainty.

This is in line with my other key finding that Gothic narratives in *Fallout 3* continue to feature ideological contradictions which also generate socio-political commentary. For instance, in this game world the striving for absolute control and social disorder are portrayed as dangerous and thus horrifying. This kind of ideological message reflects our experienced worlds in which we need some types of social structures and law enforcement but which should also respect our personal freedom and rights. *Fallout 3* gives glimpses of what might happen if we were at risk of losing either, becoming terrorised either by drug-addled Raiders, Slavers and Super Mutants in the prevailing chaotic anarchy or by the military might of the Enclave who eliminate anyone they consider unimportant and whose aim is to control the supply of clean water. Thus, Gothic ideology in games may be ambiguous and contradictory.

Such ideological conflicts and uncertainties can result in the player's responsibility as an active force in the game world becoming a source of experienced Gothicity. This is because the player is obliged to weigh up different options on how to solve problems based on in-game ideological messages that

might be misleading. This produces mistrust and paranoia, yet it is the players' responsibility to find the solution that is most acceptable or satisfying. Thus, although in discussions of Gothic games the powerlessness of the PC is typically underlined as a source of discomfort (see, for example, Krzywinska 2015a), a player placed in a powerful position may also experience Gothicity through the consequences of their actions which can be horrifying and harmful to innocent NPCs. This is directly a result of employing ideology in the game in an ambivalent, Gothic manner.

4.3 Case 3: Moral evaluations of Gothic monsters

The research question addressed in the third case study concerned what kinds of moral evaluations players form of sympathetic Gothic, quasi-human monsters in *Fallout 3*. These were explored through a linguistic analysis of transcribed player narrations obtained from 20 Let's Play (LP) series of the game on YouTube. Based on this study, it can be argued that complex Gothic monsters are an effective catalyst for the formation of moral evaluations. This is because LPers must deal with the monsters personally, a situation that demands critical evaluation. These evaluations are actively produced by players and they also have a significant impact on the play experience and how LPers share it with their viewers.

Although the design aspects of the monsters influenced how they were morally evaluated, these evaluations were also strongly impacted by the LPers' previous experiences of the game. If LPers already knew that a monster would turn out to be a useful ally, they made sure to tell their viewers about this. LPers seemed to acknowledge that their audience might misjudge NPCs as, for instance, suspicious characters, which suggests that they continued to detect an otherness that necessitated an explanation on choosing to show the monsters sympathy. Past play experiences were thus a key aspect in forming moral evaluations and how they were presented as information to the viewers. Thus, technicality, the degree of specialization, in casual conversation (Eggins & Slade 1997: 150) can also be observed when expert players direct their audience towards a moral interpretation that they believe to be correct. In these cases, the emotional stance overlaps to some extent with an epistemic one when the LPers both use their moral intuition to come to an evaluation and represent this as fact.

The performative and social aspects of moral evaluations in LP narrations showed in the (in)determinacy of the stances taken by the LPers. LPers may soften their evaluations by, for instance, using humour in situations where they suspect they might be wrong or where the audience's response cannot be anticipated. At the same time, LPers harbour assumptions about what their audiences will either morally agree with or wish to see from their performance as a good or evil character. This is manifested when LPers confidently express their evaluations and may strengthen them, for example, with swearing or extreme case formulations (Pomerantz 1986). LP narrations may also contain elements of

gossip when LPers complain about, or praise NPCs to the audience. Through this kind of narration, LPers construct intimacy with the audience while simultaneously distancing themselves from the object of evaluation.

As mentioned above, humour is used in moral evaluations to soften their representation to viewers. The role of humour in expressing moral views is important in other ways, too. Humour can protect the LPers from humiliation if they have misjudged a situation. It can also be used to distance the LPer from NPCs that they find morally reprehensible through ridicule of the latter. Simultaneously, laughing together at (typically) ridiculed objects helps to build a relationship between the LPer and the audience. Thus, humour has many important uses in LP narration.

While humour was used in the data when LPers admitted that they had mistakenly judged a 'good' NPC as a suspicious character, the situation was reversed when a NPC earlier evaluated as 'good' was revealed to be morally condemnable: instead of humour, they responded to having to renegotiate their moral stances in negative and aggressive ways. This suggests that the latter situation may be more frustrating or humiliating to the LPer; after all, it involves betrayal and severe consequences (such as the deaths of innocent NPCs) which do not occur if a 'bad' NPC is, against expectations, trustworthy or heroic. Thus, renegotiating the response to moral evaluation was quite different in the 'good to bad' than 'bad to good' situation, and was also expressed in very different ways.

When morality is communicated in LP narrations, it has the power to include or to exclude and alienate audiences. That is, if LPers express moral evaluations that are disagreeable to a viewer, the viewer will feel morally excluded. Typically, LPers may wish to avoid this so as not to repel potential viewers, but it is also a means for effectively shaping one's audience. If a LPer, for example, consistently uses derogatory language when referring to female NPCs, the LPer is unlikely to desire or expect the videos to have a feminist audience who would perceive such language as morally objectionable. Instead, the LPer will prefer viewers who use similar language or have a similar worldview. In the case of monsters, LPers convey assumptions about how a monster's otherness can be used as a source of humour and ridicule, or of how underdogs should be treated as victims of injustice that deserve their support. Both reflect how they perceive the monsters in question morally, and since the LPers assume that their audience will have similar views, these evaluations are not necessarily explicitly justified.

The study also showed that LPers are morally autonomous, willing to question or challenge the game's rating systems – in this case, the game's karma system – that assign an action as good or evil. That is, if LPers morally evaluated a monster as good or evil and this evaluation was supported by the karma points added or subtracted by the game, LPers were happy to refer to the karma system as an authorial voice to partially justify their own judgements. However, if the karma system gave an unexpected or disagreeable judgement in the LPers' view, they did not hesitate to voice their disagreement. Thus, although a

karma system might seek to guide a player's choices when the player is attempting to gain or lose karma points, their moral evaluations follow their individual moral intuitions.

One final finding that concerns Gothic, quasi-human monsters specifically is that if they are perceived as victims of injustice, they also easily receive sympathy from the LP and their innocence is almost taken for granted. Their perception as underdogs is so strong that it results in negative evaluations of their oppressors, and appears to make the LPer more tolerant of the monster's mistakes, unless, as discussed above, they finally commit an act that is deemed morally too repugnant. For example, a monstrous NPC may be rude to the PC in dialogue, but still be perceived as the more innocent party in a clash with an oppressive human NPC. Thus, considering their 'victim' status, smaller moral transgressions by these monsters may be overlooked in favour of the greater narrative of othering and ostracizing in the game world. This is another example of how Gothic monsters produce complex moral evaluations and LPer interpretations of what is acceptable behaviour by the NPCs.

4.4 Summary

The analyses of Gothic, dystopian monstrosities, Gothic ideology, and moral evaluations of Gothic monsters in *Fallout 3* showed that Gothic elements are a meaningful resource for game narratives and play experiences. The first two case studies concerned how Gothicity is (re)constructed in the game world through monstrosities and representations of its ideology by employing multimodal means of storytelling, including NPC dialogue, indexical storytelling and simulation. The pre-dystopian and current dystopian societies are closely intertwined in the prevalence of monstrosities and continued injustice, tyranny and violence. The third case study examined how players respond to such a world by actively forming moral evaluations of its monsters, taking stances, joking, gossiping, swearing, and attributing blame. This indicates that Gothic elements are meaningful for play experiences, especially those related to morality, and that this is because players are obligated to deal with moral dilemmas personally. The findings of the study are discussed in a wider contextual frame in the next chapter.

5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this dissertation research, my main aims were to examine Gothic elements in digital games and the meaning of Gothic elements for play experiences. I approached the first aim by conducting two close analyses of the action role-playing game *Fallout 3*: first, I analysed the Gothic monstrosities in the game and how they construct and are constructed by the dystopia represented in the game, and second, how Gothic ideology is (re)constructed in the game world. For these purposes I used data systematically collected from the game, such as screenshots and notes, combined with the method of close reading digital games. I addressed the second aim by examining the moral evaluations that players form of *Fallout 3*'s Gothic quasi-human monsters in their narrations included in their Let's Play (LP) videos. More specifically, I applied methods and tools from discourse analysis to analyse narrations transcribed from 20 LP series uploaded on YouTube.

Given the breadth of my initial research questions, it must be admitted that my case studies were only partially able to answer them. Instead of describing all the ways in which the game was Gothic, I ended up limiting my discussion to two main themes: monstrosity, and the central aspects of Gothic ideology in the game. Narrowing the foci of investigation in this way was necessary, since in my earlier attempts to map Gothicity in the game on a greater scale, I was unable to include sufficient analytical detail and thus the drafts of the articles were list-like in form. However, these drafts helped me to identify the Gothic elements in the game that would be the most fruitful for treatment in the case studies. I consequently chose monstrosity and ideology as the most suitable key themes for my two analyses of *Fallout 3*, since not only were they central to the game's narrative design, but these complex concepts also enabled me to examine multiple central aspects of the Gothic, such as othering, the cyclicality of human horrors and injustices, and ambiguity, without compromising the quality of the research.

5.1 The Gothic, monstrosities, and dystopia

I ended up conceptualising Gothic monstrosities in a way different from that used in previous games research (e.g. L. N. Taylor 2006, Švelch 2013), since I did not perceive them purely as enemies, but as multi-layered character types whose 'monstrosity' in the game world was very contextual. This is not to say that monsters or monstrosities in games should always be perceived in this way, but rather that, in the case of the Gothic, it is more fruitful to perceive them as ambivalent, conflicted, and hence at times sympathetic, or as acting in ways that are at least understandable. This facilitates the exploration of games producing NPCs that appear to have such characteristics as this motivates players to hear or think about their side of the story – and not only about those who are perceived as their victims. In *Fallout 3*, perhaps the most concrete example of this is how the friendly Super Mutant Fawkes is placed behind protective glass when the PC first meets him, forcing the former to note his surprising humanity before being given an opportunity to harm him. It may be worth investigating in the future what makes these attempts to induce the player to give monstrous NPCs a chance to explain their viewpoint successful or unsuccessful.

I was also able to examine the close connection between the Gothic and dystopia in games - or rather the mutually beneficial relationship that, using monstrosities and Gothic bodies specifically, the game designers bring to bear in constructing unnerving, discomforting narratives. This was not a goal initially planned for the study but one inspired by the opportunity to present a dystopia-themed paper at the conference *Fantastic visions from faerie to dystopia - Finncon academic track 2016* in Tampere, Finland. The work on this paper ended up being very influential for the study, since the concept of dystopia proved valuable for understanding how the post-apocalyptic game world, its NPCs and micro-narratives are linked together. In addition to examining Gothicity in games, I believe much remains to be learned about how dystopian storytelling emerges in different types of games - what similarities and differences exist between them, what really makes a game dystopian, and whether (and how) the game is also a dystopian experience for the player/PC, or whether it would be more accurate to describe it as a representational or narrative feature. Many of these questions or challenges are also discussed by Krzywinska (2015a) in her article on the Gothic coordinates in games.

My investigation into Gothic ideology addressed the communication of such meanings by multimodal means in the medium of games. In games, they are conveyed through the overall design of the game world, including information gained from dialogue with NPCs and from items and messages left for the player to read and interpret. This underlines the fact that even when Gothicity is primarily to be found in the representative elements and narrative of the game (rather than the gameplay mechanics), it is as a combination of verbal and visual messages and concerns multiple aspects of game design. This study could also have addressed other typical elements of Gothic ideology in more

detail. Tyranny and othering, for example, are typically present in Gothic stories in representations of power imbalance in society and where groups or individuals are mistreated, excluded and othered. This can be observed in the Gothic tradition from Frankenstein's Creature to recent films like the romantic dark fantasy *The Shape of Water* (del Toro 2017) in which a humanoid water creature is cruelly experimented on by government officials and saved by people who are also social outcasts (by their skin colour, disability, or sexuality). However, for the audience of the story, it is the tyrant in these stories who becomes othered through a negative portrayal: thus, othering has the double purpose of producing sympathy towards the oppressed and outrage towards the oppressor. In games, moral dilemmas may emerge when the player is forced to identify which is which, and decide their next action accordingly.

To those interested in play as an aesthetic phenomenon, Huizinga's (1998/1940) theory of play has been of especial importance. He famously argues that play is older than culture, as it does not require a human society (and in human societies, it appears to permeate nearly all aspects of culture), and for instance, underlines the fluidity of the contrast between play and seriousness. What makes his conceptualization interesting here are his concerns about play engaged in for the wrong reasons and in the wrong ways. His theory appears to suggest that, for example, using play to mask other types of agenda is a potential source of Gothic anxiety. According to Huizinga, real civilization requires fair and pure play that follows specific rules and is not based on reason, faith or humanity. He cautions against false play in politics, naming propaganda as one example of play masking political purposes. Interestingly, Huizinga's theory is influenced by Kant and Hegel – philosophers of the Romantic period – and shares their fears about the potential instrumentalization of Enlightened reason (Murray 2016: 10). He describes a cultural period of decline as one in which play is removed from both reason and ethical life, causing rituals to lose meaning and purpose and to become empty conventions (Murray 2016: 9). That is, the failure of a playful transition between reason and morality results in a despairing culture with increasingly formulaic laws and philosophies. This continued anxiety caused by the Enlightenment's confidence in human reason is not only reflected in Huizinga's theory, but also in the United States of *Fallout 3*. The observation that the game world of *Fallout 3* is a dark tale about what happens when people blindly and too obsessively believe in reason, progress, and technology is another contribution of this study. Drawing on the Golden Age of the United States in the 1950s, *Fallout 3*'s alternate timeline shows what potential disasters and monsters hide behind an overly optimistic ideology and a seemingly utopian society (which, as always, is utopian only for some). By examining the Gothic elements employed, it becomes possible to observe the transformation from utopia to dystopia: from a society enjoying technological advancements to global resource wars, then to global apocalyptic destruction, and finally post-apocalyptic horrors. The society that trusted reason seemed to be showered with propaganda and fascinated with artificially induced progress, allowing, for instance, the creation of the Vaults that later turned out to be an

extensive research project by the government to experiment on its people. The Vaults appeared a means for people to 'play house' during a nuclear Fallout – but the play was ultimately detached from both morality and reason. This, like many other actions resulting from the continued Golden Age rationale as depicted in the game, was self-destructive. People, including government agents themselves, were killed and terribly mutated in a way that benefitted no-one. Therefore, in many ways, *Fallout 3* shows an extreme example of misguided faith like that of the era of the Enlightenment, and hence false and impure play. Whereas Romanticism rose to challenge the Enlightenment, here Gothic elements give rise to our perception of the dangers of such an ideology as featured in the alternative United States of *Fallout 3*.

As can be argued from the findings, many of the Gothic elements identified and discussed in the present studies are closely interlinked, connecting monsters, uncanny bodies, tyranny, othering, ambivalence, and morality. For example, in case study 1, the different types of monstrosities were clearly caused by the injustice that they had experienced. In case 2, in turn, injustice was found to be a central means of communicating Gothic ideology through multimodal storytelling means in the game. In the third case study, whether the players perceived the monsters they encountered as victims of injustice (or as perpetrators of injustice) had a significant impact on their moral evaluations of them. Through this example, we can identify injustice and the tyrants implementing it as a persistent element that, in diverse ways, produces ambivalent Gothicity in games. However, a similar case could be made for the other elements mentioned above. This underlines the complexity of Gothic elements: because they are so often linked to core questions of humanity and ethics through portrayals of horrific and discomforting events and characters, they can also impact gameplay experiences in multi-layered, interlinked, and ambiguous ways. As is evident in the moral evaluations by the present LPers, this impact is not insignificant. This is especially interesting because *Fallout 3*, like other violent action RPGs, does not typically strike players as a game that is attempting to be culturally critical or make them negotiate morality. Arguably, Gothic elements facilitate the inclusion of such complex and ambivalent aspects in games in a disguised manner, combined with dark humour and other genres of storytelling, such as science-fiction. Thus, serious social discourse is made pleasurable and moral dilemmas are concealed within power fantasies.

The benefit of a Gothic-dystopian framework was that it brought into view aspects of monstrosities that might otherwise have been overlooked, such as their role is in the dystopia/utopia that they experience. Based on the LPers' moral evaluations of such monstrosities, it can also be argued that featuring them in games gives rise to ambivalent situations in which LPers are faced with the dilemma of deciding whether they can be trusted and therefore supported. For game design, this has the implication that if a game seeks to include a nuanced narrative in which the boundaries between heroes and villains are blurred, it is important that there are logical reasons for the introduction of monsters into the game space, so that the player can interact with them in more

ways than simply challenging and attempting to defeat them, or that at the very least have an opportunity to learn about their origins which may make them more sympathetic. Information about the origin of monsters when they cannot speak for themselves is often conveyed by indexical storytelling, as, in line with Krzywinska's (2013: 305) suggestion, the players become Gothic, conspiracy-style readers interpreting signs scattered around the game world. The risk is that when reading this information is completely optional for the player - as in *Fallout 3* - it may be considered unnecessary or even boring by some players. My LP data included many players who either skimmed readable texts or explicitly announced that they were not worth reading. Thus, a designer must balance between allowing the player some freedom in deciding whether learning the back stories of the game world and NPCs is of interest to them and providing the necessary information for the players to understand the world that they are participating in, how the monsters came to exist in it and what their true identity is.

The discussion of the Gothic and dystopian game world can be complemented by Fisher's (2017) conceptualizations of the weird and the eerie. While Fisher underlines that these two modes of storytelling exist separately from genres such as horror and the Gothic, some of their aspects also draw on the Gothic tradition. Here, the concept of eerie is of especial interest, as it is produced by the uncertainty of agency (who or what is behind an action or phenomenon?) and the uneasy tension produced by a sense of *nothing being there when something should be there* or *something being there when nothing should be there*. These aspects of the eerie might be linked to terror, the intangible and inexplicable sources of fear. Because of this connection, the eerie is examined here as part of Gothic storytelling, although it does not aim to challenge Fisher's arguments about the eerie as a mode with specific, identifying features. For instance, the post-apocalyptic landscape of *Fallout 3* is eerie in its solitary and desolate atmosphere, largely lacking human, animal, and plant life. This isolation also alters unexpectedly: upon traversing the open space, the player may suddenly hear sounds of combat, as NPCs have randomly spawned (appeared) in a nearby location and started fighting each other. While previously the eeriness was produced by absence, it is now produced by there being an alarming sound whose source is a mystery. The sense of eeriness is likely to be dissipated once the player can see the agents behind the sounds: agency is no longer a mystery, and the alteration between silence and sounds of combat becomes familiar. The fact that games allow players to know their surroundings and enemies intimately make it challenging to uphold a sense of the eerie. A similar argument is made by Martin (2011), who argues that the sublime sense produced by a game's landscape cannot be sustained once it becomes domesticated through exploration and interaction. The sense of the eerie is also inhibited by the fact that, as is often the case with post-apocalyptic narratives (Fisher 2017), *Fallout 3* explains why the area has been depopulated. At the same time, the Capital Wasteland is an agent in its own right. The ability of landscape to have agency is considered a source of eeriness by Fisher. Everything that happens in the

game, happens as part of its landscape, which is possibly the key character in the game, as discussed earlier in section 2.2.3 *Game spaces tell stories*. Not only that, but by giving a scientific explanation for most of the strange beings and events in the game, the Capital Wasteland suggests that our own material world can become alien to us in a way that does not require supernatural influences.

Notwithstanding, *Fallout 3* does not fully take advantage of the eerie even in the rare situations when a scientific explanation is not given and agency is unclear. As discussed above, the Dunwich Building pays homage to H.P. Lovecraft by featuring inexplicable events (and it is worth acknowledging that Fisher uses Lovecraft's writings to exemplify his conceptualization of the weird). However, exploration of the eerie space in which notes about strange events have been scattered around, along with unnerving moments that raise questions of agency, is disrupted by the presence of hostile Feral Ghouls, forcing the player to take action. Instead of being able to immerse oneself in the eeriness of absence and isolation, action-wise the space is no different from other unsafe locations that the player visits in the game: teeming with hostiles that must be killed. Considering that *Fallout 3* is an action game rather than a horror game, this kind of design choice makes sense. However, since the Dunwich Building is already fundamentally different from other locations in the game with its references to a supernatural cult and a mysterious obelisk, its impact on the play experience would have been stronger if, at least, the presence of Feral Ghouls had been limited to a few that served a specific narrative purpose (such as worshipping the obelisk in a cave underground). The sense of the eerie is muddled here by the inclusion of a material and familiar source of horror, as players will most likely have encountered Feral Ghouls before discovering this location. The inability to fully embrace the eerie in the game also functions as an example of not fully embracing the Gothic in the action and game mechanics – a phenomenon that is forgivable in the context of *Fallout 3*, considering its genre, but nevertheless worth discussing. After all, it is not only the successful employment of Gothicity in games that can help us understand its reconstruction in games.

5.2 Play narrations of the Gothic

With the analysis of moral evaluations of Gothic monsters that LPers formed during the narration and recording of *Fallout 3* gameplay, it was possible to identify discursive means through which LPers actively and critically interpret game elements. The study showed that LPs are a rich resource for examining the gaming culture and that moral evaluations are a central part of play experiences in games that feature narratives. My investigation of 'Gothic play experiences' was necessarily limited to those triggered by complex Gothic monsters, in particular, as sources of moral dilemmas, which players were then responsible for solving. I discussed the impact of Gothic monsters on play experiences according to whether they were evaluated as suspicious or sympathetic, or to be

condemned or praised, or to be ridiculed or defended as victims by the LPer. However, a significant gap remains in the research on player experiences of Gothic elements in digital games. The reason for this is that my study focused on experiences of narrative elements rather than the Gothic horror that players might experience, for example, from the loss of power (the inability to fight enemies and being forced to flee), becoming disorientated, or having a limited view of their surroundings. Consequently, my wider initial research question on what Gothicity means for play experiences could be explored further.

What is found in the moral evaluations of Gothic monsters in *Fallout 3* can be understood within the larger framework of disposition theory, which argues that characters who are perceived as morally correct are liked, whereas characters whose actions and motivations are perceived morally incorrect lead us to dislike them (Raney 2004: 350–351). For example, viewers tend to assume the worst of disliked characters, whereas the actions of characters they have identified as good are presumed to be on a morally higher plane (Raney 2004: 356–357). The latter became evident in how players assumed that the Ghouls, the outcast and victimized minority group in the game, were worth defending over the snobby and bigoted human NPCs, even when the leader of the Ghouls expressed violent intentions and used harsh language, and thus gave no reason for the player to believe that the Ghouls were morally superior to the bigots. Because the leader of the Ghouls represented a marginalized group, it seemed that the players were willing to overlook the aggression in the leader's dialogue, as well as the warnings from the human NPCs that the Ghouls were likely to become a violent threat. Thus, although games are interactive in somewhat more demanding ways than other storytelling media, morality can be similarly used in them to influence how players will perceive and experience certain characters and situations. The caveat to keep in mind is that the unique moral make-up of individuals can change the way in which they experience characters (Raney 2004: 351).

It has also been suggested that affective dispositions towards characters are often set as soon as they are seen on screen; they are instantaneously identified as 'good' or 'bad' (Raney 2004: 361). In the context of games, it is important to remember that such judgments are typically based on the player's earlier experiences, a phenomenon briefly discussed in the third case study. Sicart (2009: 65) argues that knowledge acquired from games, digital and non-digital, helps players build and recognize patterns that make it easier to learn a new game, and this repertoire extends to the ethical level in games. If moral evaluations of characters in other media resemble those made in games - as I have suggested above - it follows that interpretation of NPCs is a very complex process that draws on multiple sources of knowledge. This deeper level of the impact of previous experiences on moral evaluations could not, however, be examined in my study on LP videos, as the only definite information available was whether the LPers had played *Fallout 3* before. This was typically stated by them at the beginning of each LP series. Consequently, although it was possible to form arguments based on the LPers' narrations about moral evaluations and what

might have influenced these, it was not possible to account for external influences. For example, some of the LPers might have played other *Fallout* games before and been familiar with character types such as Ghouls and Super Mutants, and NPCs with ambiguous motives. This would have given them tools for anticipating twists in the narrative and reduce the discomfort caused by the monstrous NPCs, as they would already be familiar to the player. Similar NPCs and storytelling methods are also employed in other RPGs, which also serves to 'educate' the player. These gaps in knowledge of the players' gameplay history and other narrative experiences pose a limit to what LPs can reveal about player experience as an accumulative process. This does not diminish the value of what the study of LPs can contribute to the understanding of gameplay experiences, but it means that the context and limitations on what can be studied must be acknowledged.

Švelch (2010: 57), for example, suggests that players may behave differently when their play is being observed, which may in turn influence how they solve moral dilemmas. In my data, it was clear that, in their play narration, LPers took their potential viewers into account by, for example, articulating justifications for their actions. However, based on my research data, being observed does not necessarily result in LPers attempting to play the game in a more morally virtuous way. Players who had decided on a villainous playthrough at the start did not hesitate to make 'evil' choices that reflected this playstyle, even when they expected others to watch these videos. Before destroying the city of Megaton, one player recorded a long segment of hesitation in which he morally condemned the action as too horrible, declaring that he had decided to change his ways and become 'good' – yet instantly replaying the segment and laughing as he watched the bomb destroy the city in the distance. In his case, putting on a show of excessive villainy in which he only pretends to be the noble hero for just a moment was a fitting and powerful performance in his villainous role. Therefore, the public moral behaviour of LPers is strongly impacted by what their personal goal is: if it is to be a villain, the morally heinous action becomes the 'right' thing to choose to simultaneously entertain and disturb one's audience. This, perhaps, is also an ambivalent, Gothic way of sharing play through LPs: to attract the viewer with shamelessly chosen, morally questionable actions. It is not possible to address the potential of LPs for Gothic storytelling in detail here, but it is worth acknowledging.

When investigating the moral evaluations of Gothic monsters in *Fallout 3*, it was not possible, owing to limitations on space, to discuss in detail aspects of gossip that emerged in the narrations. If we return to Fine's (1986: 414–418) conceptualizations of personal blame attributed via gossip, it is interesting that although logically it would make sense for LPers to perceive Gothic monster NPCs as morally blind, as they are simulated characters that are coded to act in certain ways, and thus are not in control of what they can 'know' or do, they were in fact treated as morally responsible social actors. When the NPCs did something that LPers found morally reprehensible, the LPers typically gossiped about them to their viewers as morally defective or negligent, thus attributing

human qualities and moral responsibility to them. This is perhaps not surprising in the sense that characters in other storytelling media are also morally evaluated; however, as has been discussed above, in games, players must deal with moral issues personally. This underlines an interesting contrast between how LPers experience quasi-human monsters in the game and, for example, how readers interpret Frankenstein's Creature in Mary Shelley's novel; because the victimized Creature speaks of his hardships so eloquently and readers do not face his monstrosity personally, readers come to forget the fact that he is a vengeful child murderer, and do not hold him accountable for his actions (D. M. Higgins 2008: 87). This is not the case in games beyond initial moral evaluations, e.g. the assumptions of moral righteousness, that may overlook some contrary aspects. A NPC who betrays the player's moral expectations is harshly condemned, as the betrayal is experienced as a personal one. In addition to personally dealing with monsters, typical via gossip, justifications for the blamed social actor are rejected (Fine 1986: 419). In the case of digital games, NPCs cannot justify their actions beyond the game script, and so it becomes easy for NPCs to fall 'victim' to gossip and to be held morally responsible. Thus, when applied to games, aspects of blame in gossip become important in recorded and narrated play experiences such as LPs. This finding, revealing a similarity between communication in gaming culture and other spaces of casual conversation, links the present study to the wider investigation on the uses of blame and the functions of gossip.

Another yet unexplored aspect remains the influence of mechanical considerations (such as rewards, loot, and karma in the case of *Fallout 3*) on the moral decision-making of players in their immediate responses in LP videos. Sicart (2013) argues that when players are attracted by rewards that benefit them instead of deciding their actions based on narrative consequences, these considerations are instrumental as they promote strategical rather than moral thinking. However, actions that are driven by self-interest in the gameplay context can be a part of virtuous achievement when the play is fair (Sicart 2009). In terms of gameplay mechanics and narrative, it becomes morally acceptable or sound to look to one's own interests. For example, when it comes to looting and deciding how to complete a quest in hopes of a specific reward, the player-character is the only one who can truly change the game world, and thus the 'right' thing to do is to obtain as many useful items and as much valuable currency as possible. Stealing, however, is an interesting phenomenon in LPs, since LPers often soften the situation by joking about it or give it a narrative justification by blaming the victim or by underlining their own needs. Unlike outside the gameplay context, nobody concretely suffers from theft in a single-player game, since the player is the only one who can use stolen items in a meaningful way – but this rationalization does not seem to be enough for LPers, who often explain their decisions to the audience. Thus, players may still steal an item, suggesting that the instrumental benefit trumps the game's marking of an action as wrong, but it nevertheless influences the way in which LPers narratively frame the situation. This is in contrast with Sicart's (2013: 31) conceptualization

of ethical play as a pause: “a moment of hesitation in which the player is not applying social or strategic thinking to engage with the game”. Although LPers pause to explain their actions, by acknowledging their audience and articulating their consideration of the rewards, they appear to be applying both social and strategic thinking. Švelch argues that “without fictional context, the player actions cannot be interpreted morally” (2010: 56) which raises further questions about how and whether mechanical considerations are narratively framed in the game or by players and whether player decisions can be examined as moral when such considerations are at stake. In any case, LPer articulations of moral decisions are a complex topic that differs from examining moral evaluations more generally and thus warrants further investigation.

5.3 Methodology

Methodologically, I struggled initially to find tools for analysing a digital game. Many of the existing research articles on games - likely due to space limitations - did not go into detail about how their data were collected and what methods of analysis they used. Even now, the close reading of a game appears to be more of an orientation, a general approach to playing a game analytically, than a detailed guide on how to systematically collect data and what data to collect. Such work is, of course, guided by the research question, and during my research project, Fernández-Vara (2015), for example, has provided detailed suggestions for analysing games. Notwithstanding, it would be a fruitful future venture to write a meta-reflection of the methodology employed in my dissertation to address the challenges in researching, and specifically close reading, a game like *Fallout 3*. Rather than depicting a single consistent and coherent narrative, this game depicts a place that features various micronarratives, some of which are connected while others exist in isolation, that are nevertheless made possible by the contextual place in which they are situated. Although the game has a main storyline that a player must finish to mechanically complete the game, its role and significance is small in comparison to everything else that the player can do in this place, the Capital Wasteland. The close analysis and linking of the micro level narratives to the macro level of the world was made possible by the data collection and methods of analysis used in this research, and hence might be of use to others examining similar enormous game worlds and narratives that at first glance may appear impossible objects to read closely.

My own data collection would have benefitted from seeking existing transcripts of the game dialogue and messages online and more careful consideration about how to take screenshots of the game (i.e. the lighting and framing). As it is, my notes focused on detailed descriptions of events, and the screenshots were often too dark or did not depict the intended subject (for example, a character's appearance) clearly. Although early interpretative work is valuable in qualitative analysis and was grounded on what was present in the game, it made it challenging at times to find solid evidence in the game - quotes or well-

angled screenshots - to include as examples when preparing my articles. I needed to return to the game itself more than once for this purpose and would advise anyone attempting game analysis of this kind in the future to consider carefully what kind of data are strictly needed, not only for the analysis itself but also for presentation purposes. I did, however, learn from these struggles before embarking on the LP video analysis, as I transcribed not only what the LPers were narrating, but also the NPC dialogue that they were responding to, thereby fully contextualising the narration. This improved the fluency of the progression from analysing the data to reporting the findings.

5.4 Game studies

Perhaps one of the more obvious questions at the end of the study is what conducting such a detailed analysis in the context of a specific digital game means for Gothic studies and/or game studies. I have, for example, examined Ghouls, Super Mutants and player experiences of both - but Ghouls and Super Mutants only exist in the *Fallout* universe. Does the study have implications beyond studies of this specific game series?

I argue that it does for one key reason: the Gothic elements represented by the examples in my data appear in adapted forms in numerous other games. This concerns not only the representational elements, but also the gameplay mechanics. Thus, despite differences in design details across games, the findings are applicable to games of similar kind. In the discussion on the choice of *Fallout 3*, I mentioned several aspects of the game that apply equally to others, such as the RPG mechanics and its consequences for character advancement, emphasis on action over suspense, and the use of a dialogue tree. Even a system that evaluates a player's actions as 'good' or 'evil', like the karma system in *Fallout 3*, is a feature that has been employed in other games. Therefore, how Gothic elements function when combined with such gameplay aspects is likely to bear similarities across different games: for example, powerful mastery increases a sense both of responsibility and of consequent discomfort when horrific, unexpected consequences take place. With respect to the game's narrative aspects, dystopian and/or post-apocalyptic settings are popular in games of many genres, as are different kinds of monstrosities. Examples are the first-person survival horror game *Metro 2033* (4A Games 2010) and the action-adventure survival horror game *The Last of Us* (Naughty Dog 2013); in addition to featuring horribly mutated and dangerous animals or people, these game worlds also represent the monstrosity of humans in dire post-apocalyptic circumstances. Narrative details concerning the origins of monsters, for example, may vary between games, but the Gothic ambivalence experienced by encountering sympathetic monsters is by no means a feature unique to the *Fallout* universe. For instance, Japanese RPGs like *Tales of Phantasia* (Wolf Team 1995) and *Treasure of the Rudras* (Square 1996), although not Gothic games, feature villains whose cruel actions are eventually revealed as understandable: in these games,

attacking one world to save another and threatening humanity with extinction to test their strength against a greater upcoming threat, respectively. Since the use of Gothic elements in games is flexible, we should also look beyond the context of *Fallout 3* and discuss the applicability of the findings to a large number of games whose goal is simultaneously to disturb and attract players or to feature complex characters and narratives, while providing socio-political and cultural commentary through portrayals of tyranny and othering.

As mentioned above, *Fallout 3* was chosen for analysis partly because it is not typically considered Gothic, yet employs many Gothic elements particularly in representational and narrative elements (although it was also found that what the player can *do* with regard to them through the game mechanics is an important factor in how they are interpreted). This decision may readily be questioned by those who are aware of the many horror games that employ the Gothic in more immediately evident ways, including the game mechanics. However, after the present analyses, we can conclude that Gothic elements can also play a notable role in the stories and play experiences of games in which the player eventually becomes an unstoppably powerful force. Thus, it would be limiting to restrict the analysis solely to games that most obviously represent a certain 'genre' or the employment of certain narrative strategies, since these kinds of influences are potentially much more pervasive than might initially have been expected. It must be, however, admitted that this study did not produce much new understanding of the ways in which the Gothic is adapted and used in the 'action' of the game as this is traditionally understood – for example, through inducing a sense of powerlessness. Instead, I argue that the sense of responsibility for one's actions that is gained through power and the ability to make choices can also act a source of Gothicity when the consequences are or could be horrific. However, this interpretation does not take account of the experiences of 'false' heroes in traditional Gothic tales and might be limited to games and other ergodic texts in which the 'audience' also has a central participatory role and thus can experience responsibility. This viewpoint, which fundamentally challenges the way a Gothic hero is perceived, warrants further investigation.

From a narrative perspective, my study produced new information on what types of characters in games draw on the Gothic mode, how the game world and some of the bodies represented in it are Gothic-dystopian, how Gothic ideology can be (re)constructed in games through multimodal means, and how these elements motivate the formation of moral evaluations. Thus, by providing detailed and solid evidence of the Gothic in these ways in the target game, my study complements studies like those by Krzywinska's (2013, 2015a) which attempt to provide a more all-encompassing theorization of the Gothic in games.

5.5 Further implications

The thorough engagement with Gothic and dystopia in this dissertation offers tools for analysing, first, the emerging interest in the Gothic in all aspects and areas of popular culture and, second, how contemporary media productions aesthetically and economically relate to videogames. The cultural processes at work in digital games are not limited to the context of gaming, which shows, for example, in the current popularity of dystopian storytelling in film and television alongside games. Therefore, the arguments adduced here in the context of games may prove useful in a wider exploration of narrative elements and Gothicity in cultural products, especially since not only do digital games draw on the aesthetics of more traditional storytelling media but film and television, for example, may also be inspired by digital game aesthetics. Moreover, LPs represent a longer and wider tradition of productive and participatory fan activity. Thus, what we learn about LP discourse as a means of constructing a shared morality is not necessarily limited to this medium but is a phenomenon that can be observed more widely in gaming and other fan communities on- and offline, through discussions, memes (humorous images, videos or phrases that become popularly spread online), art and other creations of fans.

Besides a Gothic framework, or a dystopian one as employed in the first case study, this study is also linked to a wide array of research domains and studies concerning, for example, morality in gaming, how characters are evaluated and experienced, what LPs can tell about play experience, and the use of humour, swearing, and gossip in LP discourse. In sum, my study is located at an intersection connecting Gothic studies, game studies, dystopian studies, cultural studies, and even discourse analysis. Although not the only intersectional study of this kind, my research shows that there is much to be gained from marrying distinct disciplines for focused case studies of games and gaming, whether game studies are combined with the studies of a narrative tradition such as the Gothic, or analytical methods such as discourse analysis. As digital games are complex cultural products that reflect the context in which they were created, their analysis by necessity links to a wider cultural framework and reveals something about their designers and audiences. This study also helps to formulate new questions for game studies, media studies, or even literary theory: what elements do the emergent Gothic and dystopian narratives in games and other storytelling media share (and are there elements that are only prominent in one media type)? What specific cultural contexts and ideological processes invite the current surfeit of games (and films, television) drawing on and reconstructing these narrative influences? What kinds of similarities and differences can be found between the sources of anxiety and fear that are reflected in games and those reflected in other contemporary Gothic and dystopian narratives? Are there differences between Gothic games published in different parts of the world, or have our fears become as global as games are as a medium?

Potential topics for future research applying the concepts developed in this thesis include conducting a comparative analysis of another game. Examining the differences and similarities between games would produce new information, for instance, about the variety of forms that Gothicity may take in games, or about its more persistent features. Overall, I argue that adopting a Gothic viewpoint can reveal fresh aspects about typical game elements that many players have come to take for granted, like monsters and game spaces with stories of past horrors. Here, I have also assessed which of the game elements are *not* specifically Gothic – the player character in *Fallout 3*, especially, does not represent the helpless hero of the Gothic tradition. There is much to be gained from drawing on Gothic in both the interpretation of games that feature disturbing, yet attractive, and socially reflective elements, and in the design of games that aim to be psychologically and emotionally impactful in specifically discomforting ways. This is the case even when the Gothic is only one of many possible sources that the game design seeks to employ. Here, we have witnessed the continued impact of Gothic storytelling in digital games and what, in the context of quasi-human monsters, this means for play experiences.

TIIVISTELMÄ (FINNISH SUMMARY)

Gotiikan jälleenrakentamista peleissä ja pelaamisessa: Goottilaiset hirviöt ja ideologiat Fallout 3 -toimintaroolipelin tarinoissa ja maailmoissa sekä pelikokemuksissa

Synkkiä linnoja, kummituksia ja tummanpuhuvia mekkoja – gotiikka voidaan ymmärtää monella tavalla. Tässä tutkimuksessa se kuitenkin ymmärretään monirakenteisena tarinankerronnan muotona, joka on samanaikaisesti houkutteleva ja luotaantyöntävä, heijastaen aikansa huolen- ja pelonaiheita. Goottilaisia aineksia hyödynnetään usein niissä digitaalisissa peleissä, jotka pyrkivät viihdyttämään pelaajaa samalla pakottaen hänet kohtaamaan epämiellyttäviä, ristiriitaisia tai monitulkintaisia tilanteita. Tutkimuksessani tarkastelen, miten goottilaisia aineksia hyödynnetään *Fallout 3* -toimintaroolipelin (Bethesda Game Studios 2008) tarinoissa, hahmoissa ja maailmassa, sekä miten pelaajat tulkitsevat pelimaailman goottilaisia hirviöitä. Väitöskirjani koostuu kolmesta tutkimusartikkelista, joista kahdessa ensimmäisessä analysoin itse peliä siitä järjestelmällisesti kerättyjen muistiinpanojen ja ruudunkaappauksien kautta, ja viimeisessä pelikokemuksia YouTuben pelivideoista litteroidun, pelaajien tuottaman kerronnan perusteella. Tarkemmin sanottuna, tutkin goottilaisten hirviöiden kaksisuuntaista roolia pelimaailman dystopian tuottajina ja uhreina, goottilaisen ideologian jälleenrakentamista pelissä multimodaalisin keinoin, sekä pelaajien muodostamia moraalisia arvioita pelimaailman hirviöistä internetissä jakamissaan Let's Play -pelivideoissa (tästedes LP).

Tutkimus on luonteeltaan laadullinen, teoreettiselta ja menetelmälliseltä viitekehykseltään sijoittuen sekä gotiikan tutkimuksen, että pelitutkimuksen kentälle, mutta käsitellen myös dystopian tutkimusta ja yhdistäen diskurssinanalyysin ja pelitutkimuksen pelivideoiden analyysissa. Goottilaisten ainesten tunnistaminen pelissä perustuu gotiikan tutkimuksen lähdekirjallisuuteen koskien eri kerronnan menetelmiä, kuten kirjallisuutta, elokuvia ja televisiota läpi historian (esimerkiksi Bloom 2010; Cavallaro 2002; Crow 2009; Punter 1996 ja 2014; Spooner 2006), sekä pelejä (Krzywinska 2013; Niedenthal 2009; Taylor 2009; Teofilo 2010). Pelin analyysissa on hyödytetty lähiluvun menetelmää (Bizzocchi & Tanenbaum 2011; Fernández-Vara 2015: 209), eli tulkitsevaa analyysia, joka keskittyy parhaiten tutkimuskysymykseen vastaaviin pelin piirteisiin – tässä tapauksessa goottilaisiin aineksiin. Pelin lähiluvun aikana aineistoa kerätään pyrkien samalla uppoutumaan pelikokemukseen, että objektiivisesti tarkastelemaan niitä pelin ominaisuuksia, jotka tuottavat tietynlaisia tulkintoja. Lähilukevan pelaamisen aikana asennoiduin myös niin sanotuksi naiiviksi pelaajaksi, joka kokee pelin ensimmäistä kertaa, jotta en lähestyisi pelin tuttuja ominaisuuksia itsestään selvinä. Aineistonkeruu koostui kahdesta pelin läpipeluusta, joiden aikoina omaksuin erilaiset roolit: ensin sankarillisena, 'hyvänä' hahmona, sitten 'pahana' itsekkäänä roistona. Tämä johtuu paitsi siitä, että peli mahdollistaa erilaiset pelityylit, myös siitä, että erilaisten valintojen seurauksena pelaajalle paljastuu uusia puolia pelin hahmoista ja maailmasta. Tutkimuk-

sen kannalta tällainen tieto oli tärkeää, etenkin goottilaisesti kauhistuttavien tai monitulkintaisten seurausten tapahtuessa.

Pelivideoiden kerronnan analysoimiseen hyödynnän menetelmiä ja kirjallisuutta liittyen moraaliin diskurssissa (Bergmann 1998), asenteeseen (*stance*) sekä asennoitumiseen (*stance-taking*) sosiolingvistiikan näkökulmasta (Du Bois 2007; Jaffe 2009; Keisanen 2006; Kärkkäinen 2006), ja epämuodollisen keskustelun analyysiin (Eggins & Slade 1997). Näiden lähteiden ja menetelmien joustava hyödyntäminen oli välttämätöntä, sillä LP-videoiden kerronta on luonteeltaan hyvin erilaista diskurssinanalyysissa tyypillisesti tarkastellusta kielellisestä aineistosta. LP-kerronta on luonnollista (eli ei tutkijan motivoimaa) tutkimusaineistoa, mutta on myös luonteeltaan esittävää ja siten 'epäluonnollista': LP-pelaajilla ei tässä aineistossa ole reaaliaikaista keskustelutoveria, mutta kerronta on silti oletetulle yleisölle sosiaalisesti orientoitua; ja välillä pelaaja suunta puheensa pelin hahmoille, joiden mahdollisuudet vastata rajoittuvat pelikoodiin. LP-diskurssi on myös kaksitasoista sisältäen samanaikaisesti pelaamista ja kerrontaa, jolloin toimijasta tulee pelaaja-kertoja (*player-narrator*, Kerttula 2016).

Fallout 3 on hedelmällinen valinta analysoitavaksi, koska sen maailmanlopunjälkeinen, dystooppinen pelimaailma sisältää monia mahdollisuuksia goottilaiselle kerronnalle. Tapahtumat sijoittuvat ydinsodan tuhoamalle Yhdysvallan itärannikolle, Washington DC:n ympäristöön vuonna 2277. Pelimaailmaa asuttavat säteilyn epämuodostavat eläimet, hyönteiset ja osittain myös ihmiset, väkivaltaiset heikompiaan riistävät orjakauppiaat ja rosvot, vastuuntunnottomat tiedemiehet ja eettisesti kyseenalaisia asioita tekevät hahmot, joiden toiminnan syyt ovat kuitenkin ymmärrettäviä. Pelaaja joutuu tekemään päätöksiä siitä, kenen puolelle asettuu; ketkä ovat pelimaailman todellisia hirviöitä. *Fallout*-sarjan pelit, joista pääsarjaan kuuluvia pelejä on nyt neljä, sijoittuvat tarinallisesti samaan vaihtoehtoishistorialliseen aikajanaan, mutta *Fallout 3* oli sarjassa ensimmäinen, jossa pelataan *first person* -näkökulmasta, eli pelaaja näkee maailman pelihahmon silmin. Moraalisten arviointien tarkastelun näkökulmasta peli on kiinnostava paitsi tarinallisten ominaisuuksiensa vuoksi, myös sen käyttämän karmajärjestelmän takia. Karmajärjestelmä seuraa ja arvioi pelaajan tekojen hyvyyden tai pahuuden, lisäten tai vähentäen hänen karmapisteitään. Tämän seurauksena valintojen moraalisuus tulee näkyväksi, ja myös pelivideoiden kerronnassa kommentoidaan karmasysteemin arviointeja, jotka eivät aina ole linjassa pelaajan omien moraalisten arviointien kanssa.

On kuitenkin huomioitava, ettei *Fallout 3* ole tyypillisesti goottilaiseksi luokiteltu peli. Tämä johtuu erityisesti siitä, että goottilaisiksi peleiksi yleensä mielletään sellaiset, joissa pelattava hahmo on voimattomassa asemassa, eikä välttämättä pysty puolustamaan itseään taistellen lainkaan (Krzywinska 2015a: 66). Perinteinen goottilainen sankarihahmo on sankari vain lainausmerkeissä myös kirjallisuudessa ja elokuvissa, sillä tyypillisesti hän on olosuhteidensa vanki. Sen sijaan *Fallout 3* antaa pelaajalle runsaasti mahdollisuuksia ja keinoja kehittää taitojaan ja puolustaa itseään voimallisesti. Pelaaja pystyy myös valinnoillaan selkeästi vaikuttamaan maailmaan, karsien sieltä vaaratilanteita tai 'pahoja' tai 'hyviä' hahmoja. Tälle tutkimukselle onkin lähtökohtaisesti ollut

kiinnostavaa, miten merkittäviä goottilaiset vaikutteet ovat myös sellaisille peleille, jotka eivät ensisijaisesti pyri olemaan goottilaisia, ja joita pelaajat eivät kuvaile tai tunnista sellaisiksi.

Tutkimuksen alustavat tutkimuskysymykset olivat: miten goottilaisia aineksia hyödynnetään *Fallout 3* -pelin tarinoissa ja maailmassa, ja miten pelaajat kokevat ne? Sekä pelin tarinoiden, että maailman tarkastelu oli tärkeää, koska molempien avulla voidaan rakentaa goottilaista kerrontaa: tarinat sijoittuvat synkkään maailmaan, joka mahdollistaa niiden kertomisen. Koska yksi gotiikan merkittävimmistä piirteistä on sen aiheuttamat vahvat tunnereaktiot yleisössä, oli myös tärkeää tarkastella, millaisia kokemuksia pelaajilla on goottilaisista piirteistä.

Voidakseni tutkia pelin goottilaisia aineksia ja kokemuksia niistä yksityiskohtaisesti enkä vain yleisesti kartoittavalla tavalla, tarkensin tutkimuskysymyksiä kutakin artikkelia varten. Tarkennukset seurasivat analyysin alkuvaiheita, jolloin pelistä kerätystä aineistosta sekä pelivideoiden kerronnasta nousivat esille tyypillisimmät ja näkyvimmät tavat, joilla gotiikka ilmeni tai pelaajat kommentoivat sitä. Näiden havaintojen pohjalta tutkimuskysymyksiksi muodostuivat: (1) *Millaisia hirviöitä on* Fallout 3 *-pelin maailmassa ja miten ne rakentavat dystopiaa?* (2) *Millaista goottilaista ideologiaa pelissä rakennetaan ja miten?* (3) *Miten pelaajat arvioivat moraalisesti pelin goottilaisia, ihmismäisiä hirviöitä?*

Ensimmäisessä artikkelissa tutkin gotiikkaa lähilukien peliä hirviömäisyyden ja dystopian käsitteiden kautta. Molemmat ovat *Fallout 3*:n maailmalle olennaisia, sillä pelaaja kohtaa monia erilaisia hirviöitä maailmantuhonjälkeisissä olosuhteissa. Yllä mainitun gotiikan teorian lisäksi hyödynsin dystopiatutkimuksen kirjallisuutta (Claeys 2013; Gottlieb 2001; Prakash, Tilley & Gordin 2010; Sargent 2013; Sargisson 2013) ja pelitutkimuksen puolelta tutkimusta koskien hirviömäisyyttä peleissä (erityisesti Švelch 2013), jotta voisin ymmärtää hirviöiden roolia peleissä ja osallisuutta dystooppisessa maailmassa. Erityisen merkittävä lähde oli Cartwrightin (2005) tutkimus, joka yhdistää dystopian ja gotiikan teoreettisesti, korostaen goottilaisen, toiseutetun ruumiillisuuden merkitystä dystopiassa.

Tutkimuksessani löysin, että goottilaiset hirviömäisyydet voitiin jakaa kolmeen pääluokkaan: ei-ihmismäisiin, oudoiksi muuntuneisiin eläimiin ja hyönteisiin; ihmismäisiin, ruumiillisesti hirviömäisiksi muuntuneisiin Ghouleihin ja Super Mutanteihin; sekä goottilaisiin kompleksisiin sankari-roistoihin. Näistä kaikki sekä tuottavat dystopiaa, että ovat sen tuottamia. Radioaktiivisen säteilyn tai tieteellisten kokeilujen tuloksena muuntuneet eläimet ja hyönteiset ovat kauimpana goottilaisen perinteen tyypillisistä hirviöistä, sillä gotiikka yleensä keskittyy ihmisten hirviömäisyyteen. Pelimaailman konteksti kuitenkin tekee niistä goottisia, sillä niiden uusi outo ja kauhistuttava ulkomuoto on ihmisten virheiden tulosta. Toisaalta ne kertovat luonnon kyvystä muokkautua ja selviytyä myös maailmantuhon olosuhteissa, ollen täten esimerkkejä ekodystopiasta. Väkivaltaisina olentoina ne rakentavat dystopiaa pelin ihmishahmoille ja myös pelaajan näkökulmasta ovat yksinkertaisesti päihitettäviä vihollisia. Toisen luokan muodostavat ihmismäiset hirviöt (pelissä Ghoul ja Super Mutant -

hahmot) ovat säteilyn tai tiedekokeilujen ruumiillisesti muuntamia ihmisiä, joiden ulkomuoto on samanaikaisesti tuttu ja vieras ja siksi oudoksi koettava. Ulkomuotonsa lisäksi heitä voi luonnehtia Frankensteinin hirviön perinteen kantajiksi, koska pelin ihmisyhteisöt hylkivät heitä, oli siihen ymmärrettävää syytä tai ei. Pelaaja joutuu arvioimaan heidän hirviömäisyyttään, sillä kaikki heistä eivät ole yksinomaan vihollisia. Osittaisen väkivaltaisuuden uhan rinnalla nämä hahmot tuottavat dystopiaa muodostaen psykologisen uhan, sillä he muistuttavat ihmisyyden heikkoudesta. Viimeinen luokka sisältää pelin karismaattiset johtajahahmot, jotka muistuttavat gotiikan perinteisistä monimutkaisista sankari-roistoista: he osallistuvat moraalittomaan toimintaan, mutta esittävät sille ymmärrettäviä syitä. Myös heidän kohdallaan pelaaja joutuu itse arvioimaan, voiko heihin luottaa ja kannattaako heidän toimintaansa tukea. Kannattajilleen nämä johtajat voivat tarjota pienen utopian keskellä raunioitunutta maailmaa, mutta toiminnallaan aiheuttavat uhan ryhmän ulkopuolisille, ja siten osallistuvat dystopian rakentamiseen. Yleisesti sanottuna, hirviöiden olemassaolon pelimaailmassa tulee olla yhteiskunnallisesti ja biologisesti selitettävissä, jotta heidän roolinsa siinä on ymmärrettävissä, ja erityisesti, jotta pelaajat voivat ymmärtää monitulkintaisten hirviöiden motiiveja ja siten tuntea sympatiaa heitä kohtaan. Hirviömäisyydet kertovat myös epäoikeudenmukaisuuksien jatkuvuudesta maailmantuhon jälkeisessä maailmassa, toisintaen gotiikan perinnettä korostaa ihmisten virheiden toistuvuutta.

Toisessa artikkelissa tutkin jälleen lähiluvun keinoin goottilaisen ideologian (jälleen)rakentamista *Fallout 3*:ssa hyödyntäen gotiikan teoriaa, joka käsittelee ideologian eri osa-alueita, kuten uskontoa (Hoeveler 2008), sukupuolta (Ellis 1989; Michasiw 1998) tai etnisyyttä (Edwards 2005). Löydökset kertovat, että kun huomioidaan sekä pelimaailman raunioista löytyvät viestit, että sen tämänhetkisten asuttajien kertomat tarinat, ideologia oli goottisella tavalla kammottava ennen maailmantuhoa ja on sitä nykyisessä tilassaan. Tuhoa edeltävä maailma nojasi vahvasti sukupuolirooleihin, oli rasistinen, ja polki työntekijöiden oikeuksia. Tuhon jälkeisissä olosuhteissa ruumiillisesti muuntuneista ihmisistä on tullut uusia rasismin uhreja, mikä kertoo paitsi toiseuttamisen jatkuvuudesta yhteiskunnassa, myös tämän gotiikan ideologisen piirteen uudelleentuottamisesta pelimaailmassa. Toiseuttaminen tekee sen uhreista sympaattisia pelaajalle, mutta jos nämä hahmot kuitenkin osoittautuvat petollisiksi, pelaajan ideologiset tulkinnat voivat hämmentyä, sillä hän ei voi enää luottaa siihen, mitä hahmot kertovat omasta asemastaan; pelihahmot voivat tarkoituksellisesti johtaa pelaajaa harhaan. Toinen toistettu gotiikan piirre on ideologisten ajattelumallien kamppailu tai näennäinen vastakkainasettelu. Vaikka tietyt ideologiset kategoriaparit, kuten anarkismi ja järjestäytynyt yhteiskunta, asetetaan usein vastakohdiksi, kumpikin on tässä pelimaailmassa epätoivottava vaihtoehto. Sekä järjestäytyneisyyden puute, että sen toinen ääripää esitetään hirviömäisinä. Tämä toistaa goottilaisen kerronnan mahdollisuutta sekä tukea, että vastustaa vallitsevaa ideologiaa (Ellis 1989: xii) esittämällä tietyt hahmot ja yhteisöt vallan väärinkäyttäjinä.

Kolmannessa artikkelissa analysoin 20:sta YouTuben LP-pelivideosta litteroitua pelaajien kerrontaa keskittyen moraalisiin arvioihin pelin goottilaisista, ihmismäisistä hirviöistä. LP-videot ovat suosittuja pelaajien internetissä jakamia tallenteita, jotka sisältävät pelaamista ja tyypillisesti pelaajan samanaikaista kerrontaa. Kiinnostus LP:tä kohtaan on nousussa tutkimuksissa, jotka tarkastelevat sen kertovaa tai esittävää luonnetta (Kerttula 2016; Ngyuen 2016), tai sen mahdollisuuksia tutkimuskenttänä (Hale 2013; Radde-Antweiler, Waltmathe & Zeiler 2014), pelien ja pelaamisen säilöntämuotona (Nylund 2015) tai oppimismenetelmänä (Smith & Sanchez 2015). Tutkimukseni on kuitenkin ensimmäinen, jossa kerrontaa tarkastellaan diskurssinanalyysin menetelmin. Yllä mainittujen menetelmien lisäksi hyödynsin kiroilua (Ljung 2011) ja juoruilua (Fine 1986; Jones 1980) käsittelevää diskurssintutkimusta, sekä aiempaa pelitutkimusta keskittyen eettisyyteen ja moraalisuuteen (Schrier & Gibson 2010; Sicart 2009; Weaver & Lewis 2012; Hartmann 2017). Moraalisiksi arvioiksi luokiteltiin ilmaisut, joissa kuvailtiin hahmoja ja/tai tapahtumia hyväksyttäviksi tai tuomittaviksi; esimerkiksi loukkaukset, kehut, syytökset ja valitukset kertoivat pelaajan asennoitumisesta.

Tutkimuksen perusteella goottilaisia hirviöitä voi pitää tehokkaina katalyytteinä moraalisille arvioille, joilla taas on merkittävä vaikutus pelikokemukselle. Tämä johtuu siitä, että pelaajien tulee kohdata monitahoiset hirviöt henkilökohtaisesti ja siten myös valintojen seuraukset ovat heidän vastuullaan. Peliä aiemmin pelanneiden asennoitumiseen vaikutti kokemuksen tuottama tieto: pelaajien moraaliset arviot eivät olleet vain tunneperäisen moraalisen intuition seurausta, vaan he asennoituivat asiantuntijoiksi, jotka pystyivät kertomaanyleisölle, onko hirviö esimerkiksi luottamuksen arvoinen, ja siten estämään 'väärinymmärrykset'. Pelaajat yhtäältä asennoituivat vahvasti tiettyjen arvioiden taakse niitä perustelematta, mikä kertoo oletuksesta yleisön samanmielisyydestä. Toisaalta osa moraalisista arvioista ilmaistiin vain yhtenä mahdollisena tulkintana, mikä kertoo varovaisuudesta niiden ilmaisussa tilanteessa, jossa kuka tahansa saattaa nähdä videon, tai jossa pelaajan arvio saattaa osoittautua vääräksi. Pelaajat käyttivät arvioissaan hyödykseen huumoria, kiroilua ja juoruilun piirteitä. Huumorin kautta arvioita voitiin tehdä vakavistakin aiheista niin, että video säilyi viihteellisenä ja loukkaamattomana, ja jos pelaaja oli erheellisesti tulkinnut hahmon 'pahaksi', tilanne oli mahdollista käsitellä nopeasti pelaajaa häpäisemättä huumorin kautta. Sen sijaan, jos pelaajan 'hyväksi' olettama hahmo osoittautui petturiksi, pelaajan kieli muuttui vihamieliseksi ja hahmon toiminta tuomittiin perusteellisesti, mahdollisesti koska petturuus kohdataan peleissä henkilökohtaisesti. Juoruilun piirteitä esiintyi, kun pelaajat puhuivat hahmoista tuomitsevasti tai kehuen oletetulle yleisölle; tällä tavoin pelaajat pystyivät rakentamaan suhdetta yleisön kanssa yhteisen kommentoinnin kohteen kautta. Viimeisin tärkeä löydös tukee aiempia tutkimuksia (esimerkiksi Sicart 2009), joissa pelaaja käsitetään aktiiviseksi moraaliseksi toimijaksi. Pelaajat olivat toisinaan eri mieltä pelin karmajärjestelmän arvioiden kanssa, ilmaisivat eriävät mielipiteensä ja myös toimivat karmajärjestelmän vas-

taisesti kokiessaan sen tarpeelliseksi. Pelaajat siis eivät olleet vain aktiivisia, vaan myös itsenäisiä moraalisia toimijoita.

Artikkelien löydöksiä yhdessä tarkastellessa voi nähdä, miten tyypilliset gotiikan ainekset, kuten hirviömäisyys, epäoikeudenmukaisuus ja toiseuttaminen linkittyvät toisiinsa monisyisesti, ja miten ne mukautuvat pelien tarinankerrontaan rakentumalla multimodaalisesti hahmojen dialogin, tilallisen tarinankerronnan kuten raunioihin jääneiden viestien, ja pelaajan vaikutusmahdollisuuksien kautta. Ne ovat myös merkittäviä pelikokemukselle, pakottaen pelaajan tulkitsemaan ja moraalisesti arvioimaan maailmaa, jossa hän toimii. Vaikka *Fallout 3* on vain yksi peli, jota ei toimintakeskeisyytensä vuoksi voi luokitella goottilaiseksi, samanlaisia aineksia käytetään monissa muissa peleissä, ja siten löydökset ovat verrattavissa muihin. Ne myös osoittavat, että narratiivisia vaikutteita on arvokasta tutkia myös peleissä, jotka eivät kaikkein selkeimmin edusta tiettyä kerronnan genreä tai joissa haastavien kysymysten esittäminen kätkeytyy pelaajan valtafantasian alle.

Tulokset kertovat, että goottilaiset ainekset muodostavat rikkaan lähteen pelin tarinankerronnalle, kun tavoitteena on tuottaa monimerkityksisiä, ristiriitaisia tilanteita, joihin pelaaja osallistuu henkilökohtaisesti. Niitä voi myös luontevasti yhdistellä muiden genrejen ainesten kanssa, kuten dystopia, tai tässä tutkimuksessa pitkälti sivuun jääneet tieteiskirjallisuus tai vaihtoehtohistoria. Voi myös sanoa, että dystopian roolin arvioiminen pelissä on haasteellista monin samoin tavoin kuin gotiikan, ja siten Krzywinskan (2015a) laatimat gotiikan koordinaatit peleissä voivat olla ohjeellisia myös pelin dystooppisuuden arvioinnille, etenkin kun otetaan huomioon, ettei kerronnallisesti dystooppinen pelimaailma ole välttämättä sellainen pelikokemuksena. Pelaajalle dystopia voikin olla utopia silloin kun hänet asetetaan erityiskohdeltuun asemaan: pelin esineet, paikat ja ongelmienratkaisu ovat hänen omaisuuttaan, ja *Fallout 3*:n kaltaisissa toimintaroolipeleissä hän voi edistää taitojaan siihen asti, että on käytännössä voittamaton. Cartwrightin (2005) tutkimuksen kanssa samoilla linjoilla erityisesti goottilaisen ruumiillisuuden osallisuus dystopiassa myös osoittautuu merkittäväksi, esittäen kysymyksiä ihmisyyden rajoista. Näiden tulosten avulla voidaan ymmärtää goottilaisten ja dystooppisten ainesten merkitystä ja potentiaalia pelikokemukselle, miten näiden viitekehysten kautta paljastuu piirteitä peleistä, jotka muuten voisivat jäädä huomiotta, ja miten goottilainen kerronta ja toiminta kytkeytyvät toisiinsa pelaajan vastuuntunnon kautta. Tutkimukseni pystyi vastaamaan alkuperäisiin tutkimuskysymyksiin koskien gotiikkaa peleissä ja pelikokemuksessa kuitenkin vain osittain niiden laveuden vuoksi. Tarvetta on erityisesti lisätutkimuksille pelikokemuksista tilanteissa, joissa pelaaja kokee itsensä voimattomaksi, mukaillen goottilaisen perinteen sankarihahmoa. Myös LP-videoiden käyttö tutkimusaineistona ja niiden roolin tarkastelu pelikulttuurissa ovat kiinnostavia esille nousevia aiheita.

Tutkimus antaa uutta tietoa hirviömäisyyden käsitteestä peleissä alleviivaten niiden synnyn ja olemassaolon kontekstin tärkeyttä sekä niiden mahdollisuutta olla myös sympaattisia, jopa pelaajan apureita. Tällöin vaikka muu pelimaailma näkisi hahmon hirviönä, pelaajalla on mahdollisuus tulkita ja kohdella

häntä toisin. Samalla hirviöitä kuitenkin pidetään vastuullisina toimistaan; tämä poikkeaa muista tarinankerronnan menetelmistä, sillä esimerkiksi Shelleyn *Frankenstein*-novellia lukevat tyypillisesti antavat anteeksi hirviön murhateot, koska eivät joudu itse kohtaamaan häntä tai tekojen kauheutta (D. M. Higgins 2008: 87). Pelaajan toimijuus ja osallisuus maailmassa siis rajaavat olennaisesti hänen sympatiaansa hirviöiden kyseenalaisia tai julmia toimia kohtaan, vaikka hirviö itsekin olisi esimerkiksi yhteiskunnan syrjinnän uhri. Lisäksi tutkimus kertoo, miten pelivideot omalta osaltaan rakentavat pelikulttuuria tarjoten pelaajille tavan jakaa kokemuksensa muiden kanssa myös yksinpeleistä, jakaen samalla myös pelikohtaista moraalisuuttaan. Jenkins (1992) käyttää juoruilun käsitettä fanitutkimuksen kontekstissa, korostaen sitä, miten yhteinen 'fanituksen' kohde tarjoaa ventovieraille yhteisen puheaiheen ja yhteisön luomisen perusteen; pelivideot tekevät samaa jaetun pelaamisen kautta jatkaen fanikulttuurin perinteitä. Pelaamiseen liittyvässä vuorovaikutuksessa myös hyödynnetään luontevasti muun epämuodollisen keskustelun piirteitä, kuten huumoria, kiroilua ja juoruilua, vaikka niiden luonne pelivideoissa on hieman erilainen niiden esittävän luonteen ja pelaajan yksinpuhelun kautta. Tutkimus siis myös tuottaa uuttaa tietoa siitä, miten keskustelunanalyysin menetelmiä voi käyttää esittävien pelivideoiden kerronnan tutkimukseen ja mitkä nousevat sen keskeisiksi piirteiksi. Siten tutkimukseni sijaitsee monen alan liitoskohdassa, antaen uutta tietoa gotiikasta (erityisesti hirviömäisyydestä) peleissä, dystopian ja gotiikan suhteesta pelien kerronnassa, moraalisesta arvioinnista osana pelaamista, diskurssianalyysista pelivideoiden kerronnan analysoimisen työkaluna, pelivideoista osana pelikulttuuria, ja pelikulttuurista osana fanikulttuuria.

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ORIGINAL PAPERS

I

CONSTRUCTING A DYSTOPIAN GAME WORLD: GOTHIC MONSTROSITIES IN THE DIGITAL ROLE-PLAYING GAME FALLOUT 3

by

Piittinen, S. 2018

Submitted for publication

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II

INJUSTICE IN THE RUINS AND A DISORDERED POST-APOCALYPSE: GOTHIC IDEOLOGY IN THE DIGITAL GAME WORLD OF FALLOUT 3

by

Piittinen, S. 2018

Accepted for publication

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III

MORALITY IN LET'S PLAY NARRATIONS: MORAL EVALUATIONS OF GOTHIC MONSTERS IN GAMEPLAYVIDEOS OF FALLOUT 3

by

Piittinen, S. 2018

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Morality in Let's Play narrations: Moral evaluations of Gothic monsters in gameplay videos of *Fallout 3*

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Abstract

Performative Let's Play gaming videos are a part of contemporary Internet culture through which morality becomes shared. Many digital games draw on Gothic traditions to feature human-like monsters who demand morally complex interpretations from players. This study examines what kinds of moral evaluations players form of ambiguous Gothic monsters in Let's Play videos of the action role-playing game Fallout 3. With a discourse analysis of transcribed speech obtained from 20 Let's Play series on YouTube, it argues that the moral evaluations that players actively produce impact significantly on the play experience, that players take diverse moral stances whose (in)determinacy varies based on what players assume of their audience, and that players are morally autonomous by not hesitating to disagree with the game designers' moral ruling. Complex Gothic monsters function effectively as catalysts for the moral evaluations that can involve expressions of suspicion, sympathy for the underdog, begrudging acceptance, and betrayal.

Keywords

Digital games, gameplay, gaming culture, Gothic, Let's Play, monsters, morality, video games

Introduction

Let's Plays (LP) on YouTube are recorded, performative (Nguyen, 2016) gameplay videos that typically feature real-time narration from players on action and game elements

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through which Let's Players (LPers) can connect with their audiences. In this article, I argue that LP narrations significantly feature complex moral evaluations, and explore the discursive means through which these are produced. The analysis is based on LP data in which ambivalent Gothic monsters function as a moral catalyst that players are obliged to concretely address during gameplay. LP videos thus provide empirical evidence on how people deal with disturbing digital game elements that have caused moral panic in the past (Kocurek, 2012). The data for the study were obtained from the LP series of the single player, action role-playing game *Fallout 3* [1](Bethesda Game Studios, 2008) [1], which features quasi-human monsters in a post-apocalyptic setting. Morality is made salient by the game's karma system, which tracks and evaluates the player's actions as 'good' or 'bad' but does not prevent the player from making either choice. This article seeks to answer the question: What kinds of moral evaluations do LPers produce about ambivalent Gothic monsters in *Fallout 3* and how do LPers justify their own actions based on these?

Gothic monsters as catalysts refer here to non-player characters (NPCs) in the game-world who have transformed human bodies and human psychological capacities. Although not described as such in the game, what makes these monsters Gothic is their simultaneously fascinating and disturbing transgressive physicality and treatment as outcasts. Like in Gothic fiction, their experience of injustice in the game world reflects contemporary concerns and raises questions of who the 'real' monsters of a society are. Such a Gothic framework contributes to the understanding of how ambivalent, complex monstrosities are experienced in games. The reason why they are effective as moral catalysts, and can even present the player with a dilemma, is that their humanity demands more complex evaluations from LPers than monstrous animals or beasts. For instance, Švelch (2013) argues that using non-human monsters as foes in games 'alleviates concerns about morality of in-game action' (p. 198). It is not as morally questionable to kill non-humans as it is to kill people or characters who are perceived to have a mind (Hartmann, 2017). The perceived humanity or sub-humanity of monsters thus influences the moral evaluations made about them.

LPs and morality in gaming are currently emerging areas of academic research. This study seeks to contribute specifically to the debate on LP narration. Kerttula (2016) argues that LPs 'reveal a hidden layer of the game narrative: the story of the player and the experience' (p. 17). From this perspective, the story elements in the game are not simply something that LPers respond to, but also something that they use as tools for creating their own narrative within the play experience. In this study, it is argued that morality can be used in a similar way, that is, players formulate and present their play-specific morality, and hence, the moral of their story, to their audience. As Bergmann (1998) argues, morality is what makes us 'observe, remember and narrate an event', and thus the connection between stories, narration and morality is of importance in the context of LPs (p. 281). Although interest has been shown in ethics and values in games (Flanagan and Nissenbaum, 2014; Sicart, 2009), in game elements that influence the ethical reasoning of players (Simkins and Steinkuehler, 2008), in moral disengagement (Hartmann, 2017) and in moral choices and decisions (Schulzke, 2009; Tamborini et al., 2016; Weaver and Lewis, 2012) during play, none have examined naturally occurring,

empirical evidence from sources such as LPs to specifically examine how players negotiate morality in games–a gap that this study addresses.

LPs as discourse and moral speech are central concepts in attempting to answer the research question. LP discourse is rather unique: it can be conversational, yet it is not conversation; it is performative, but it is also naturally occurring speech, and it includes levels of play and narration. For this reason, the present analysis draws on various approaches that have addressed evaluation and morality in discourse (Bergmann, 1998), such as stance-taking (Du Bois, 2007; Jaffe, 2009) and relevant aspects of casual conversation (Eggins and Slade, 1997). With the help of these tools, the linguistic means by which LPers express their moral evaluations are identified and analysed.

The data analysed here consist of transcribed extracts from 20 LP series on YouTube, amounting to over 72 hours of gameplay. These extracts from gameplay videos contain linguistic data that include instances of moral evaluation. The LP series were found by searching for *Fallout 3* playlists on YouTube and selected based on the LPers use of the English language, clear audio commentary from the LPer, scantiness of editing and the level of extensiveness of the series, since a short series would be unlikely to feature some of the elements of interest in the study. The data for this study were collected from gameplay in two pre-selected situations featuring quasi-human Gothic monsters. This was done to narrow the focus, since the gameworld is large and open. The data were initially transcribed in a simple, verbatim form and coded based on type of moral evaluation in a data-driven manner, including morally positive, negative, and fuzzy evaluations. This means that codes were created based on what was present in the research material rather than on pre-existing codes of moral evaluation. For the purposes of a closer analysis, the chosen extracts are transcribed here in more detail using the conventions recommended in conversation analysis (Jefferson, 2004) which are listed in Appendix 1. These extracts were chosen to showcase features that had been identified as typical of the moral evaluations formed by LPers.

This article begins with a brief discussion on academic interest in LPs thus far. Morality is then examined in the context of games and discourse, since both are relevant to the present study and form the theoretical and methodological framework for the analysis. The analysis presents the kinds of moral evaluations that are typically communicated in LP narration. These include suspicion towards unfamiliar monsters; attempts to convince the audience of the ‘goodness’ of a monster when the LPer suspects that they might be judging the monster negatively, and the use of the game’s karma system to support one’s moral evaluations as well as the ability to break free when the LPer disagrees with it.

Theorizing LP

Although this study focuses on LP videos with real-time commentary on YouTube, no real rules govern the production of LPs (Kerttula, 2016: 1). The earliest LPs appeared in written form featuring screenshots of the game (Ligman, 2011: 3–4), whereas today videos are the most popular medium. The goals of LPers also vary greatly, from being informative to being entertaining. This diversity in LPer goals has been examined by Kerttula (2016), who identified and described seven key aspects of LP narration.

As already mentioned, Kerttula also analyses how the narrative of a game can be altered and given new meanings by the LPer. In a similar vein, Nguyen (2016) discusses how, through riffing (live commentary), LPers engage in performative meaning-making with video games while they play. In line with Kerttula and Nguyen, LPers are treated here not only as recipients of stories, but also as actively involved in producing narrative meanings through their actions and commentaries. However, despite their immediacy, moral evaluations as performances by LPers may also to some extent be pre-planned or exaggerated. This potential performative intentionality does not diminish the importance of morality in LP commentaries–it may even underline it, if players consider it a feature that can enrich their narratives and provide a way to connect with their audience.

Understanding LP as discourse is not a simple matter. For instance, although LPs on YouTube can involve elements of conversation, they are not conversations per se, since they do not include a present real-time conversation partner. LPers may respond to characters in the game or address their audience, but these cannot reply in real-time or outside the game script. In other words, LP narration is naturally occurring speech and socially oriented, but it is also performative action and involves communication with scripted characters that is profoundly different from communicating with another person.

Because of these characteristics of LP, and along the lines suggested by the ethnomethodological and conversation analytic informed (EMCA) approach to investigating talk, LP talk is also regarded as action. A LPer is constantly involved in a context of action: for example, with respect to *Fallout 3*, the LPers are not only forming evaluations of the monsters that appear during the game, but also of their own actions and their ability to influence events in the game. Thus, LP discourse can be characterized as performative discourse that has at least two closely linked levels: the level of narration/commentary, and the level of play, involving a LPer who is a player-narrator (Kerttula, 2016: 7).

Morality in games

There are at least three dimensions of morality that can be associated with gaming: first, the moral impact of games; second, morality as it is represented in games; and third, moral activity by players in games. This article focuses on the third dimension, with specific reference to players' linguistic activity: in other words, the ways in which moral negotiations and evaluations take place in LP activity as reported in the gameplay videos.

Ethics and values in games have been of interest to researchers before. For instance, Sicart (2009) studied the ethics of computer games, arguing that 'computer games are ethical objects, that computer game players are ethical agents, and that the ethics of computer games should be seen as a complex network of responsibilities and moral duties' (p. 4). Such a view effectively highlights why analysing ethics, morality and values in the context of games and gaming is of importance, and above all that players are non-passive ethical agents.

Simkins and Steinkuehler's (2008) ethnographic interview study focused on player recounts of ethical situations in role-playing games (RPGs). Their analysis represents players as ethical agents who can reflect on the ethical decisions they make in the game and their effects. Like Sicart, Simkins and Stenkuehler view players as ethically non-passive. However, unlike Simkins and Steinkuehler (2008), who examine game characteristics that

'foster critical ethical reasoning' (p. 348), the present study examines the moral evaluations that players make, with special attention to player reflections on ethics.

Violence is often a crucial aspect of digital games. When considering morality and violent games, it is important to ask who the victim or target of the violence is, and whether there are any alternatives to violence when, for example, characters show up who are initially perceived as the enemy. For instance, physically monstrous human NPCs may at times turn out to be the player's allies. Their mere presence in the game-world could be interpreted as a catalyst for questioning dominant ideas of humanity and its boundaries that demand flexible moral evaluations during play. In line with this, Taylor (2006) has argued that showing the human side of monsters upsets the fundamental structure of player character (henceforth PC), NPC and opponent, and that the narrative function of the monster and the changing gameplay function of the opponent are 'inextricably linked' (p. 29). Such a position is also supported by Hartmann (2017), whose study on moral disengagement in video games suggests that certain factors–such as cognitive strategies for justifying violence–diminish guilt, whereas perceiving NPCs as innocent increases it. Arguably, narrative and gameplay aspects of games can induce perceptions of the innocence or sub-humanity of monsters which can, in turn, influence a player's moral evaluations, specifically those concerning whether the monsters do or do not deserve to be objects of violence.

Morality and evaluations in discourse

As Bergmann (1998) argues, morality is 'such a common and intrinsic quality of everyday social interaction that it is usually invisible to us' (p. 280). This is what makes morality an interesting, but challenging subject of study. Here, morality is explored at the level of discourse at which speakers explicitly or implicitly take moral evaluative or normative attitudes to topics (Linell and Rommetveit, 1998: 466). These attitudes may become visible, for instance, in moral prescriptions and warnings and blame attributions. In general, 'whenever respect and approval (or disrespect and disapproval) for an individual are communicated, a moral discourse takes place' (Bergmann, 1998: 286). Hence, by analysing expressions of (dis)respect and (dis)approval, it becomes possible to identify the ways in which players express moral evaluations of Gothic monsters in LPs. Moral evaluations refer to interpretations of something as right or wrong, acceptable or condemnable.

Evaluative language is a topic addressed by multiple theories. My analysis is most importantly informed by work on stance-taking (Du Bois, 2007; Jaffe, 2009; Kärkkäinen, 2003; Keisanen, 2006). Biber and Finegan (1989) define stance as 'the lexical and grammatical expression of attitudes, feelings, judgements or commitment concerning the propositional content of a message' (p. 93). Stance involves social categorization and evaluation and laying claim to social and moral identities (Jaffe, 2009: 9). At times, stance also involves indeterminacy as means for maintaining flexibility of self-presentation in 'potentially unpredictable or volatile social fields of reception and interpretation' (Jaffe, 2009: 18). One such 'field' may be YouTube, where content creators cannot determine who is watching their videos. In the context of play, stance can serve as a tool to investigate the formation of a moral identity in LP narration that is important not only to the players themselves, but also to their social context, that is, the viewers of their LP

videos. In line with this, Jaffe (2009) argues that a personal stance is ‘always achieved through comparison and contrast with other relevant persons and categories’ (p. 9).

In sum, the analysis of moral evaluation in this study comprises three phases. The first is the systematic transcription of narrative sequences pertaining to specific Gothic events, that is, events in which players encounter monsters, villains and injustice, in 20 LP series. In the second phase, the transcribed data are coded using a data-driven approach based on different types of moral evaluation. Here, morally positive evaluations are expressions, such as expressions of sympathy, respect and politeness, protectiveness, diplomacy, pacifism, appreciation and alliance, suggesting that the LPer perceives NPCs as morally akin to themselves or as morally acceptable. Morally negative evaluations are conveyed by expressions indicating a moral mismatch between the LPer and NPCs, such as accusations, threats, commands, complaints, insults, ridicule, suspicion, and expressions of indifference, shock or disgust. In addition, the analysis focuses on LPers’ comments on the game’s karma system and the reasons given for actions, such as the possibility of attractive rewards, avoidance of consequences, and whether or not actions match the player’s or PC’s morality. Based on this stage, informed by the notion of stance-taking, the third and final phase of the analysis examines what is typical of moral evaluations and player actions in relation to these in LPs of *Fallout 3* and analyses specific extracts in closer detail, chosen as examples of what was typical in LP narrations. Since my data consist of spoken language, prosody is of necessity one level on which LP discourse is constructed, and this level is also included in the analysis. This means that features such as volume, emphasis and intonation are denoted in the examples, as they are important for interpreting their meaning.

Moral evaluations in *Fallout 3*

The analysis is presented under two main headings according to the moral evaluations of the two different types of quasi-human, Gothic monsters in the game: a unique Super Mutant, and Ghouls. They are made Gothic by their uncanny, transformed human bodies that are discomforting because they remind us of human vulnerability and death, and by the injustice that they experience. Although both can elicit the LPer’s sympathy and empathy, the gameplay contexts in which these monsters are encountered differ in such major ways that they are likely to elicit different types of moral evaluations. For example, in both the gameplay events analysed here the player can choose to work with the monster, but in the first the monster is ultimately revealed as unexpectedly good, and in the second, as unexpectedly cruel.

Evaluating the friendly Super Mutant

One of the NPCs in *Fallout 3*, whose design as the victim of unjust mad science arguably draws on the Gothic, is the physically horribly mutated Super Mutant named Fawkes. He is inhumanly large, his skin is a greenish shade, his expression is fixed in a permanent grimace and he speaks slowly in a growling voice. Unlike the other Super Mutants, Fawkes is intelligent and non-aggressive–as victims of scientific experiments, the others of his kind have also undergone psychological changes, mainly becoming simple-minded

and hostile towards other life forms. To new players, Fawkes's human qualities may be a surprise. Players discover Fawkes in a test chamber in which he has been locked by the other Super Mutants for being different, and they are given the choice to free him. In return, Fawkes will help the players secure a special item, G.E.C.K., which is required to continue the main storyline of the game. This item is locked away in a lethally radiated area, but Fawkes is immune to radiation, rendering him a useful ally for retrieving it. It is also possible kill Fawkes in his test chamber by activating a subject termination process, but this option often remains undiscovered by players.

As Sicart (2009: 65–66) argues, the ethical subjectivity of players is developed by the knowledge accumulated over time by playing games. For example, a player who is familiar with open world RPGs might quickly conclude that since Fawkes can be spoken to, unlike other Super Mutants, there must be something special about him. These games typically allow dialogue with unique NPCs for specific reasons, developing the expectation that unordinary NPCs exist in games for meaningful purposes. Moral evaluations are also influenced by such acquired knowledge. However, since knowledge of the players' repertoire of this kind is not accessible here, in the analysis experience is discussed at the level of previous plays of *Fallout 3*.

Many players, especially those who have played *Fallout 3* before, respond to Fawkes in an overwhelmingly positive way, while less experienced players may remain suspicious of his intentions. Thus, (un)familiarity with a monster greatly impacts a player's interpretation of its morality. This underlines, first, the fear of the unknown in the Gothic tradition. As a Super Mutant, Fawkes is strange and unexpectedly friendly. Second, monsters in games may initially be judged based on their appearance rather than their actions and words. Immorality, then, becomes linked to unfamiliar, 'othered', monstrous bodies. Here Player05, playing this game for the first time evaluates Fawkes as morally untrustworthy:

Example (1):

1. Wait a minute.
2. A g↑ood (..) Super Mutant?
3. MY ASS, I ain't falling for that shit?

In line 1, the LPer expresses surprise and disbelief with the formulaic expression 'wait a minute' which denotes that something unusual has taken place. He then uses prosody to manifest a suspicious stance, that is, he expresses incredulity with a rising intonation and highlights the character aspects 'good' and 'Super Mutant' as an unlikely and unexpected combination. While the loud self-response to the rhetorical question, 'my ass', further suggests that the LPer's evaluates the goodness of a monstrous Super Mutant as deceptive, this derogatory language, which can be understood as an instance of emphatic incredulity (Ljung, 2011: 29), also gives the response a humorous quality. Thus, the LPer is questioning the truthfulness of Fawkes, but uses humour to soften this evaluation. The LPer moves on to implicitly accuse Fawkes of deception by saying he will not fall for 'that shit'. This suspicion lingers until the LPer has completed the mission with Fawkes on his side:

Example (2):

1. At least he didn't turn and (..) kill me.
2. See I- THAT'S WHAT I was expecting, was he was gonna (. . .),
3. [. . .]
4. I thought he was j- just gonna like turn on me (..) when he gave me the geck?
5. He was gonna be like, @HAR HAR HAR HAR HAR, N↑OPE @ (splatting sound).

These lines show a shift from the LPer's earlier to his current perception of his position. In line 1, the LPer appears glad that Fawkes did not betray him, thereby positively judging his reliability. However, this positive evaluation is weakened with 'at least', which leaves room for assuming some wrongdoing on Fawkes's part. The LPer's evaluation takes a negative turn in line 2. The loud, enthusiastic start with 'that's what' emphasizes that Fawkes's murderous betrayal was specifically what he expected. In lines 4–5, he ends up focusing on the monstrous aspects of Fawkes, as he imitates the way in which the Super Mutants talk in the game–in a loud, growling voice–and relates what he thought would happen, that is, that Fawkes would refuse to hand in the G.E.C.K., accompanied by mad laughter and a 'nope', and proceed to attack or kill the PC, as indicated by the splatting sound. In example (2), Fawkes is still negatively judged by the LPer, although the humorous way in which he represents Fawkes arguably both weakens the intensity of that judgement and marks the change in his perception. As argued by Eggins and Slade (1997: 166), humour typically allows speakers to do serious work in disguise, simultaneously distancing them from it. In example (2), this is exactly what happens: Player05 under the disguise of humour communicates both his suspicion of Fawkes, and his admission of having been wrong. Although not explicitly stated, Fawkes's physical monstrosity is arguably why a first-time player like Player05 may perceive this unfamiliar monster as morally dubious.

A much more positive moral evaluation of Fawkes occurs when Player02, an experienced player, introduces him:

Example (3):

1. Okay, so THAT is FAWkes
2. and he's the best follower companion in all of Fallout history (. .)
3. and he's generally really cool and badass.

Because this LPer is already familiar with Fawkes from his previous playthroughs, and knows about his good qualities, he introduces him as known, identifying him by name, and immediately evaluates him positively despite his physical monstrosity. In line 2, the force of his evaluation is augmented by the stressed, superlative description of Fawkes as the best follower in any *Fallout* game. A 'follower' is a NPC that can become a permanent companion for the PC. The extreme case formulation (Pomerantz, 1986) 'best' displays the LPer's strong investment in his stance towards Fawkes's positive qualities. In line 3, the LPer's positive evaluation continues as he recognizes Fawkes's qualities as 'generally really cool and badass', highlighting him as a capable companion. Instead of

directing these compliments to Fawkes, the LPer positions himself as an expert whose evaluation is credible information to the audience. When the LPer is heading to fetch the G.E.C.K. with Fawkes, he continues the positive moral evaluation, but appears to be aware that his imagined audience might have suspected Fawkes–an interpretation which he challenges:

Example (4):

1. ALRIGHT, and we've gained karma
2. and if you were expecting that he was gonna betray us and try to kill us, ↑NOPE.
3. He's actually a: totally friendly (..) uh, cool d↑ude↓.
4. A::nd I think you can only have him as a follower if you have positive karma actually
5. so that tells you that of course, he's a good guy.

In line 1, the LPer notes that he has gained karma by completing the quest. Thus, the LPer is referencing the karma system as endorsing his implicit suggestion that working with Fawkes was the 'right' thing to do. The LPer then acknowledges in line 2 that his audience might have been suspicious of Fawkes. However, asserting his expertise, the LPer quickly disclaims potential interpretations of Fawkes as treacherous: 'if you were expecting that he was gonna betray us and try to kill us, nope'. Thus, it is suggested that an interpretation of Fawkes as untrustworthy is a misunderstanding that needs to be corrected. However, the simplicity, sudden loudness and rising tone of 'nope' gives it a humorous flavour, and thus the LPer's denial and commitment to his stance do not sound confrontational. 'Actually' in line 3 indicates counter-expectancy and denotes that the LPer is about to provide further corrective information on Fawkes as 'totally friendly', and a 'cool dude'. The LPer suggests that Fawkes can only become a permanent ally of the PC if the PC is also 'good' with positive karma. This is information that becomes available later in the game, so the LPer is using his foreknowledge to not only form his moral evaluation of Fawkes, but also to persuade his audience to come to a similar conclusion. The reference to the karma system is continued in line 5 in which, again, it is used to endorse the positive judgement of Fawkes's propriety. The concurring 'of course' implies that this information is now something to be taken for granted.

Because of Player02's previous knowledge of Fawkes as a good character, his monstrosity as a Super Mutant does not raise concern, although the LPer is implicitly aware that his audience might perceive Fawkes as a dangerous 'other' based on his mutated body. The LPer considers the perception of Fawkes as an object of suspicion to be a false one that must be corrected, as evidenced by his denial and elaboration of his viewpoint. Thus, instead of his monstrosity, the LPer highlights the positive aspects of Fawkes in a non-confrontational way. Even Player16, who is doing an 'evil karma run' of the game and terminates Fawkes in his test chamber (the only player to do so in my data), describes him as 'good', underlines the difficulty in retrieving the G.E.C.K. without his help, and describes him as a strong companion based on his earlier experiences of the game. Thus,

taking on the villain role does not prevent players from recognizing the goodness of NPCs and sharing their moral evaluations as advice.

As Example (4) exemplifies, the player is indicating that he treats Fawkes as an ally. Becoming allies with game characters has been conceptualized as 'allegiance' by Lankoski and Björk (2008), requiring a positive evaluation of the PC/NPC's qualities and goals. This is typically achieved via desirable or positive qualities concerning, for example, looks, skills, and moral or ethical values. In Example (3), when the LPer perceives Fawkes as morally good and capable (largely based on his knowledge of the game), he has no doubts or concerns about being allies with him. In contrast, LPers who question Fawkes's morality based on his Super Mutant physicality only become convinced about his goodness at the very end of the quest, a shift that produces only a shaky, temporary alliance, as illustrated in Example (2). Thus, moral evaluations of monstrous NPCs have a concrete impact on how players bond with them.

Dealing with bigoted tyranny and its 'victims'

At Tenpenny Tower in *Fallout 3*, bigoted human NPCs are refusing to allow a group of persistent, hideously mutated people, the Ghouls, to move in. It is a threatening situation which the player is invited to solve. Transformed by high levels of radiation, the Ghouls are corpse-like in appearance, but psychologically human. Despite this fact, they are treated as monsters by non-altered human NPCs. The player can solve the situation at Tenpenny Tower in three ways: by killing the Ghouls to help Tenpenny residents, by allowing the Ghouls to sneak in to massacre the residents, or by negotiating a peaceful solution that results in the Ghouls moving in–although a few in-game days later, it turns out that the Ghouls have killed all the human residents after all. The last option is typically considered the morally good one by players and the game's karma system, since the player cannot anticipate the murders. Interestingly, helping or not helping the Ghouls to peacefully move in is often linked to whether the LPer perceives his or her playstyle as villainous or heroic. The decision is also often based on the evaluative assumption that the Ghouls are morally good and, thus, helping the Ghouls is a morally good option. Arguably, the injustice that the Ghouls experience is so extreme that their victim status becomes taken for granted.

This shows when Player16, who is playing a villainous character, decides what to do:

Example (5):
1. <u>Ghouls</u> are pretty much the:: u:: h [pause] the <u>persec</u>uted in this game. (. .)
2. U:m, (. .) people <u>hate</u> them, and they wish they go b↑ye-bye↓.
3. You can do a quest, we can get them inside here,
4. but obviously I'm not gonna do that, 'cause I'm the <u>bad</u> guy?
5. That would be <u>hel</u>ping them?

Player16 first begins with a description of the status of the Ghouls in the gameworld as persecuted, a proposition that the expression 'pretty much' indicates he is entertaining rather than proposing as the only dialogic alternative. Persecution is arguably an attitudinal lexis that simultaneously construes affect and judgement: it evokes sympathy towards

the persecuted and condemnation of their persecutors. In line 2, the LPer humorously suggests that human NPCs hate the Ghouls so much that they wish to see them killed: 'they wish they go bye-bye'. The LPer attributes this proposition to others instead of explicitly agreeing with it. The LPer then presents the option of getting the Ghouls inside the Tower, but then with 'obviously', strongly proclaims that he will not be doing it because he is 'the bad guy'. He thus introduces the alternative position of helping Ghouls only to reject it. The rising tone at the end of both lines 4 and 5 participates in the rejection by implicitly suggesting that doing the opposite would be absurd. The LPer portrays the Ghouls as victims of persecution that he cannot help, since he is 'bad'. Thus, even though he is playing the villain, by asserting that helping Ghouls is the 'good' thing to do he is engaging in moral reflection and decision making from the viewpoint of ordinary 'good' characters as well as his own morally 'bad' position.

The peaceful outcome at Tenpenny Tower involves 'convincing' bigoted Tenpenny residents to allow the Ghouls to move in. However, in practice, the goal is achieved by threats and manipulation, some of which indirectly result in the deaths of human NPCs. Despite this, LPers typically never question the morality of essentially forcing the residents out. Instead, snootiness, bigotry and prejudice towards the Ghouls are considered good enough reasons to blame the residents for the outcome, even if that outcome is death. The Tenpenny residents are thus perceived as tyrannical Gothic villains who misuse power in unjust ways and must be punished. This becomes apparent in the indifferent responses towards the plight of the NPCs who decide to leave. This extract from Player18 shows a very typical response:

Example (6):

1. ((Anthony Ling: I won't stand for this! Where the hell am I supposed to go?))
2. I don't give a shit where you go? [pause]
3. [((Anthony Ling: The only suitable place is …))
4. [I g↑ained g↑ood ↑karma.

The LPer's indifference in line 2 is intensified by swearing, which is emotive language and reflects the speaker's feelings and attitudes (Ljung, 2011: 4), which in this case are negative. Swearing can also be a resource for claiming the position of a group leader and is often directed at outsiders, as Eggins and Slade (1997: 153) found in their analysis of casual conversation. This suggests that by swearing, the LPer can demonstrate his powerful position inside the game world and create a distance between himself and the NPC the swearing is directed at. The LPer thus takes a stance that denies any sympathy with or interest in the NPC Anthony Ling's fate. Notably, the LPer is also directly addressing Anthony, which makes the response sound more aggressive tone than expressing it in the third person would. At the same time, the LPer is in the comfortable position of knowing that Anthony cannot really hear him; there is no fear of repercussions. The LPer then speaks on top of Anthony and his use of rising intonation suggests that he is happy to notice that the game's karma system has granted him points. Again, the karma system has an authorial role here, implicitly endorsing the LPer's moral evaluation of Anthony as so despicable that his fate is inconsequential. The fact that the mere mention of gaining karma appears enough for the LPer to justify his coldness towards Anthony suggests that

the righteousness of indifference is taken for granted. Thus, a typical evaluation of Anthony is that he is morally evil and deserving of punishment, since the game system rewards the LPer for 'convincing' Anthony to leave. The same applies to the four other NPCs that players must expel to allow the Ghouls to move in.

As we have seen above, the Ghouls are typically assumed to be the innocent party in the disagreement with the Tenpenny residents. However, a new Gothic layer is revealed when sympathetic monstrosity is shown to be deceptive. When it turns out that these Ghouls are morally reprehensible–that despite the LPer's best efforts to solve things peacefully, the human residents have been killed–they are typically severely judged by LPers. An example like this comes from Player12:

Example (7)

1. ((Roy Phillips: They had it coming. But I don't have to justify myself to you, or any other smoothskin. In fact, you'd best piss off if you don't want to join them.))
2. Oh, you did not (. .) just do that. (. .)
3. YO:U DID NOT just do that, after I got you in here.
4. If you are seriously telling me that you just killed all the inhabitants, (. . .)
5. oh, that's it.

Here, Roy Phillips first admits to killing the human NPCs and threatens to do the same to the PC if he does not leave him alone. The dialogue ends and the LPer is left to make sense of what Roy has said. In line 2, the LPer addresses Roy directly to negatively evaluate and condemn his actions. At first, it is not explicitly clear what the LPer is referring to with 'you did not just do that': it could be Roy's threat, his indifference, or his implied murderous actions. The repetition and loudness of the phrase in line 3 acts as intensification, strengthening the LPer's stance in evaluating Roy's actions as wrong. 'After I got you in here' suggests that the LPer feels personally betrayed. It is implied that Roy unfairly took advantage of the LPer's kindness. Finally, the player mentions the source of his feeling of betrayal in line 4: that all the human residents have been killed. 'Seriously' functions as a manner adverb that intensifies the LPer's condemnation of Roy's actions. 'Oh, that's it' in line 5 is an evaluative outburst that arguably functions both as an expression of resignation and a call to action: the LPer's patience has reached its limit. He is done evaluating the situation and is ready to take action. He proceeds to kill Roy Phillips and justifies his actions:

Example (8)

1. I don't care for lost karma. He deserved to die for what he did. [long pause]
2. So basically what we're being told folks is that now Tenpenny Tower is useless to us. [long pause]
3. Because the idiotic Ghouls have killed everyone. [pause]
4. Well, tell you something, I'm not taking it lying down. [long pause]
5. Time me for a bit of Wasteland justice, I think. [pause]
6. Although, [pause] it might not have been the other Ghouls who killed them. [pause]
7. But still, they didn't do anything to save them.

Despite the fact that Roy Phillips is a murderer, killing him results in players losing karma points. In line 1, the LPer expresses indifference about losing karma. He justifies killing Roy as revenge; 'what he did' refers to the murders and receives a negative moral evaluation. The idea that Roy deserves his fate is arguably ethically subjective and emotionally loaded, meaning that the LPer's judgement is also affectively impacted. The disagreement that the player has with the game's karma system suggests that he has explicitly become an independent moral agent who does not require the karma system's authorial support. In line 2, he moves on to complain to his audience about another condemnable consequence of Roy's actions: the Tower has lost value and become 'useless'. The focus of his complaints thus shifts to gameplay instead of the moral aspects of the narrative. With the human residents dead, the LPer believes that he has, for instance, lost the ability to trade items at Tenpenny Tower, which means that there is little to no reason to revisit it. Such a conclusion is in line with Lankoski and Björk's (2008), who argue that moral dilemmas can only be effective in games if they have consequences for the player.

The player places the blame on the Ghouls in line 3 for having killed everyone and insults them by calling them 'idiotic'. This is a strong negative judgement of their collective intellectual capacity. The LPer is addressing the NPCs, but the real recipient is the audience watching the video. His speech, thus, has elements of gossip (Besnier, 2009) in that, seeking to re-establish group membership with the audience while signifying detachment from the Ghouls, his complaint is shared in an environment where he can expect to be understood. In line 4, by placing stress on himself as an active agent who will not allow the Ghouls to get away with the murders, he implies that 'not taking it lying down' is a brave position to take. He also positions himself as a righteous moral agent in line 5 when he suggests that it is time for 'Wasteland justice', that is, the time to right wrongs. Although 'I think' is an epistemic stance marker that is typically placed at the beginning of intonation units (Kärkkäinen, 2003: 16), arguably it implies here that the LPer is entertaining other alternatives, since it is tagged on at the end of the proposition. This slight indecisiveness is explained in line 6, where the LPer considers that the other Ghouls may not have participated in killing the humans; it was all Roy's work. This is a moment of moral reflection during which the LPer justifies his assessment based on the information that he has. However, the LPer moves on to counter this proposition by pointing out that the other Ghouls did nothing to stop it. This forms a new blame-based justification for 'Wasteland justice'. Whether Roy acted alone or not, the LPer comes to evaluate this group of Ghouls, previously perceived as victims, as morally depraved. In his view, they deserve to be killed and have only themselves to blame for the punishment that the LPer plans for them as an independent moral agent who is not merely basing his evaluations on what the game's karma system decides.

The Ghouls in Tenpenny Tower arguably upset the typical Gothic relationship of tyrannical villains and their blameless victims of injustice, like Emily and her uncle in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (Radcliffe, [1794] 2009) or Antonia and monk Ambrose in *The Monk: A Romance* (Lewis, [1796] 2009). This may be why LPers often feel betrayed by and strongly morally reject the Ghouls after finding out that they killed the human residents. As initially sympathetic Gothic monsters, Ghouls gain the support of the player, but later may lose it.

Discussion

The aim of this article was to explore the different moral evaluations that players form of ambiguous Gothic monsters in LP videos of *Fallout 3* and how they justify their actions in relation to them. With insights provided by the stance theory and discourse studies on moral evaluation, I analysed in detail the moral propositions formed and stances taken by LPers during their narrative process.

The findings were, first, that how monstrous NPCs are morally evaluated impacts significantly on play experiences. LPers consistently and non-passively produced such evaluations. For example, if the NPC is considered suspicious, this may hinder the forming of a sense of alliance; or in contrast, if the NPC is perceived as an innocent victim of injustice, such an alliance may be hastily formed and taken for granted. In line with Sicart (2009: 65–66), it is worth noting that these evaluations are both influenced by earlier experiences and develop a play morality that influences future play experiences and expectations towards monstrous NPCs, especially in games belonging to the same genre. Second, these evaluations reveal a variety of moral stances concerning, for instance, (in)determinacy: LPers either soften their evaluations, remembering the presence of an audience that might disagree and make aggressive comments about their actions, or present their evaluations as unnegotiable. This shows that there are times when LPers commit to their stance and evaluation so strongly that negotiating with their audience is considered unnecessary, or that the risk of receiving negative comments on the video is worth it. Third, LPers refer to the karma system of the game as an authorial voice only when it is convenient for supporting their own moral evaluation or actions, and discarding its judgements at times of disagreement. This suggests moral autonomy and independence during gameplay, strengthening the view that players are non-passive ethical agents. Indeed, players of violent games such as *Fallout 3* make moral evaluations, reflecting on their options and the effects of their actions. This challenges the moral panic thesis that digital games are morally corrupting.

The analysis revealed that humour, swearing, and gossip are typical aspects of LP narration that participate in the formation of moral evaluations, and hence potential topics for future research. Humour enables morality to be negotiated in an unaggressive, disguised manner, and can be used by the LP to connect with and entertain the audience. This also takes place when players ridicule NPCs that are perceived as unacceptable in some way and become othered through the player's jokes. The role of humour in expressing especially negative moral evaluations is thus important for making morality–which is typically perceived as a serious topic–shareable in an enjoyable and self-preserving way. Swearing informalises the situation and is often attached to a perceived outsider (Eggins and Slade, 1997: 151–153), constructing a level of trust between the LPer and the audience against a morally reprehensible NPC. Gossip, in turn, is informal evaluative talk that expresses and reflects power relations and underlying ideologies and is powerful as a means of inclusion and exclusion (Waddington, 2012). It thus makes sense that LPers would at times refer to NPCs in a gossip-like manner during narration when NPCs appear deserving of praise or morally reprehensible, and when LPers wish to consider a NPC an ally or to detach themselves from a NPC's actions.

As two-dimensional discourse, in which LPers justify their moment-by-moment evaluations and gameplay decisions to their imagined audience in real time LP narration

represents the social and sequential organization of play (Reeves et al., 2016). It is also of note that LPers often harbour underlying assumptions about how the audience will interpret, for instance, monstrous NPCs, as suggested by their lack of justifications or explanations for certain actions. For example, if the LPers ridicule a monster, they expect that the audience will understand without further explication that because the monster is different–in looks, voice or behaviour–it is acceptable and therefore unsurprising to use that difference as a resource for humour. Thus, LP narration features implicit meanings and interpretations that the imagined audience is expected to pick up on. Those who cannot are discursively, and even morally, excluded from this gaming experience. Thus, morality becomes a tool of inclusion and exclusion not only inside the game, but also for the LPers and their audience.

Based on the analysis, it can also be argued that monsters who are portrayed as victims of injustice receive sympathy from LPers to the extent that they are assumed to be innocent and deserving of help in any situation, even if that help requires morally dubious actions from the player. Helping them as the morally good thing to do is taken for granted, and this guides the decision-making of LPers. Thus, the social status and treatment of monsters, or any group of NPCs, in a specific game universe impacts significantly on how the LPer morally evaluates them, regardless of individual actions and behaviour of members of the NPC group. Those in power are easy targets of criticism that the LP considers justified, as in the case of the Tenpenny Tower residents, whereas underdogs–here, the Ghouls–receive a more sympathetic 'reading' from the LPer. One might argue that the snobbery and rudeness of Tenpenny Tower residents also impacts on this, although the leader of the Ghouls, Roy Phillips, is similarly dislikeable and offensive. If the victims turn out to be perpetrators of injustice themselves, LPers express a diversity of negative evaluations. This shows the power of ambivalent monsters as catalysts for producing morally complex or even controversial game narratives. Arguably, these negative responses also reflect the frustration or humiliation of the player in having to renegotiate one's moral stance after seemingly misjudging a situation. Another way to deal with this, as Example (2) shows, is to employ humour, but the key difference is that humour was used when the moral stance changed from suspicion to mild appreciation, whereas negativity was expressed when the moral stance changed from supportive to condemning. This suggests that the renegotiation of one's moral stance is influenced by whether the stance is being challenged by something revealed as unexpectedly 'good' or 'evil', and potentially how humiliating the situation is.

The moral dilemmas that players face resemble those faced by the audiences of Gothic fiction, drama and film when they encounter representations of complex monsters. Thus, through a Gothic lens, it is possible to recognize some key aspects of monsters that produce ambivalent play experiences. The examination of naturally occurring, empirical data on gameplay has much to offer in seeking to understand both the meaning of narrative elements and game mechanics and their influence on the play experience–and how gaming videos, in part, construct a gaming community with a shared morality.

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Author biography

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Appendix 1

Transcription conventions

Adapted from Jefferson (2004); Recktenwald (2017)

Sounds, quality of sounds

Vocal responses: mm, hmm, oh
Hesitations, vocalisations: um, er, uh
Sound stretch: ye::::s; no:::
Stress and emphasis: oh not to<u>day</u>
Loudness: WHAT
Cut-off sound: I did the wa- I mean the shopping
Voice quality: @animated voice@
Speech that is quieter than surrounding speech: °yes°

Things that happen simultaneously

Overlap:
A: Isn't this [nice
B: [beautiful

Prosody

Level intonation:, (to mark that the speaker is going to continue)
Falling intonation: . (to mark the end of a unit)
Questioning intonation: ? (rising intonation at the end of a unit)
Marked fall: ↓ (often within a word or phrase; that's un↓fair)
Marked rise: ↑ (you did ↑what)

Silences

Because online live streaming of video games is an open state of talk (Recktenwald, 2017: 74), silences can be a consequence of play rather than have conversational or narrative implications. For this reason, silences are not transcribed in the detail of tenths of seconds, but rather:
Under a second: (..)
A second: (…)
2-3 seconds: [pause]
4+seconds: [long pause]

Things that happen in the game

Verbal descriptions, or NPC dialogue as it is subtitled in the game, in brackets: (())N↑OPE