Chapter 1: Survival Terror

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CHAPTER 1

Survival Terror

Terror is the widening of perspective and perception.
—David Drayton in Stephen King’s The Mist

A Perfect Genre

The survival horror (and let’s accept forthright the label even if it has been criticized)\(^1\) is maybe the video game genre \textit{par excellence}. There are many reasons—some more clear-cut than others—to make this claim. First and foremost, as the game designer of \textit{The Suffering} (Surreal Software / Midway 2004) and \textit{The Suffering: Ties That Bind} (Surreal Software / Midway 2005) Richard Rouse III states: “It isn’t by accident that so many games have found success in the horror setting. The goals of video games and the goals of horror fiction directly overlap, making them ideal bedfellows” (2009, 15). Moreover, video games rely on the same foundations that many suspense-driven horror films such as \textit{Night of the Living Dead} (George A. Romero, 1968), \textit{Alien} (Ridley Scott, 1979), and \textit{Ringu} (Hideo Nakata, 1998) rely upon.

Through its actions, this antagonistic force [of horror films] shows itself to be so thoroughly inhuman that no audience member would fault the hero for killing the evil as an act of self defense. This exactly maps on to the experience most action-oriented designers want to create, going all the way back to \textit{Space Invaders}; the player is thrown into a dangerous situation with a clear, undeniable “kill to survive” motivation. The evil forces are numerous and all deserve to die. Hence horror games are a natural fit. (Rouse 2009, 16)
To paraphrase Rouse’s essay title, the “match made in hell” is as inevitable as it is successful.

To be true to the genre, survival horror games should be played at night when you are “alone in the dark,” and even better, when everyone else is asleep. If this requirement puts the gamer in the same receptive state as the film spectator, it does not lead to an experience similar to cinema, an experience that is always a collective one through the relations of the hero with others (relations expressed among others through shots / reverse shots, i.e., switches between people interacting). Jean-Sébastien Chauvin explains:

The video game is organized according to an inverse schema: to the collective, it opposes an onanistic experience of the fiction, secret and solitary. It is a time where there is no more than oneself and a (the) world. To this measure, the Survival Horror genre (Silent Hill, Resident Evil) could well be the quintessence of this age of solitude, since when one is there, one is literally, the last of Men. The solitary experience of the character mirrors the player’s experience, where both mind and body are engaged by the manipulation of the controller, from which emerge vibrations linked to the context of the game (heart poundings, physical pain). Here, one properly experiences the self. (2002, 39; my translation)²

“Quintessence of this age of solitude,” survival horror well and truly puts forward the fact that the emotional experience of a video game is a personal one. In the dark, controlling your player character, you are the only one negotiating the menacing game space and facing the monsters.

We can easily imagine that to those who are afraid of video games and only see their evil influence on children, adolescents, and even adults,³ the survival horror is truly frightening. Indeed, you may remember the 1993–94 Senate hearings regarding the use of violence to promote video games. In a first judgment of 2002, it was upon viewing excerpts from two (out of four) survival horror games—Fear Effect (Kronos Digital Entertainment / Eidos Interactive 2000) and Resident Evil—that an American federal judge denied video games the protection of free speech, that is, the right guaranteed by the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.⁴ In addition, in the UK, as reported by Steven Poole, a member of Parliament tried in 1999 to limit the sales of SH1 because its “story centers on the disappearance and torture of a young girl” (2000, 219). Silent Hill: Homecoming has also been banned in Australia in its original gory state (Ramsay 2008). To argue against this hos-
ility, which is itself a by-product of fear, we could take a look at the games from the survival angle.

Play is as much an innate predisposition as an important activity for both our species and other nonhuman mammals, insofar as this activity only occurs because the participants are capable of some degree of meta-communication (exchanging signals that say, for instance, “This is play” and not a real fight). Bateson has observed that “the evolution of play may have been an important step in the evolution of communication” (1972, 181). As he pointed out, learning to recognize a threat leads to being able to foresee and prevent the denoted potential attack. Torben Grodal has summarized this evolutionary perspective by showing how “our ability to empathize with, identify with, and cognitively [and above all virtually in video games] simulate the situation of other members of our species is linked to the evident survival value of these prosocial activities” (Grodal 1997, 86; emphasis added). Without the fatal consequences of “ordinary” or real life, it is possible in the virtual space of video games to try out and observe the effects of different behaviors (for instance, being aggressive when it is not in your nature), test different strategies for problem solving (in a problematic and unsafe situation: charge in, run in zigzags to avoid being attacked, slowly bypass unnecessary confrontations, etc.), live in danger, and experience strong feelings. Opportunities to encounter disgusting and abnormal creatures like those of Silent Hill are limited in our daily life, but the techniques for dealing with a survival situation probably remain similar. As studies have shown, video games enhance visual processing and can even be effective for overcoming phobias.

It’s difficult to overcome fears. In the famous words of master of horror H. P. Lovecraft, which I have quoted elsewhere (Perron 2005b), fear is “the oldest and strongest emotion of mankind . . . and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown” (1973, 12). What’s more, “As may naturally be expected of a form so closely connected with primal emotion, the horror-tale is as old as human thought and speech themselves” (1973, 17). To the adversaries of supernatural horror tales, Lovecraft retorted with a response that is worth quoting again both to give a certain status to the genre and to respond to academic colleagues outside of video game studies who do not understand why you’re wasting your time playing video games, doubly so by playing horror games:

The appeal of the spectrally macabre is generally narrow because it demands from the reader [or the gamer] a certain degree of imagina-
tion and a capacity for detachment from everyday life. Relatively few are free enough from the spell of the daily routine to respond to rappings from outside, and tales of ordinary feelings and events, or common sentimental distortions of such feeling and event, will always take first place in the taste of the majority. (1973, 12)

It is not just anyone who can enjoy horror fiction. The objects of fascination of the genre are impure, disgusting, and scary monsters. The natural inclination is to move away, not to advance toward those beings who call for both a cognitive engagement, so as to try to discover this very fearful unknown, and an imaginative engagement, in which one is willing to “creatively specul[e] about what the monster might be like, what it might want and how it might be managed” (Vorobej 1997, 238). More specific to the video game, it forces a virtual physical engagement since the gamer, through his/her player character, will have to manage the monsters on his/her own. Those engagements make explicit the noteworthy observation of Janet Murray concerning fiction. For Murray, the expression commonly used to describe the pleasure of immersion in a imaginative world, Coleridge’s “willing suspension of disbelief,” constitutes too passive a formulation. The question is more about an “active creation of belief” since we use our intelligence to strengthen the reality of the experience (Murray 1997, 110). Without a doubt, the pleasure of playing, to reiterate, also depends on “being played.” You play a survival horror game because you want to be scared. As Jonathan Lake Crane underlines regarding horror films, if you don’t “manufacture particular kinds of belief” (1994, 47) and if you remain distant or turn your back on the imaginary dangerous world, the game is over even before it has started.

Drawing upon the concept made famous by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin (2002), the video game has remediated the film. This videoludic refashioning of cinematic forms could not have been more evident with regard to horror. It’s true that all genres are characterized by a set of pre-established conventions generating a certain number of more or less precise expectations. In this perspective, the notion of genre stimulates a certain reflexive game of guesswork and recognition. However, of all the genres, it may be argued that horror is the one most often compared to a game. In light of Bateson’s theory of play and fantasy, the depiction of horror has to be framed as a playful and fictional activity since it would be neither tolerated nor bearable otherwise (which is the case of snuff movies, where showing the actual murder of a human being renders them intoler-
able and unacceptable to the general viewer—the antithesis to playful). To find pleasure in horror film, it is necessary to play by its rules. This is why, while many scholars have sporadically made references to a game analogy in order to explain the contemporary horror film experience, others like Ruth Amossy and Vera Dika have made a lengthy and narrower link that is also worth presenting.

Ruth Amossy associates the horror tales to play and games in a chapter of *Les idées reçues: Sémiologie du stéréotype* (1991) dealing with the industrialization of fear. She states that the “art of frightening” is openly put forward as a ludic activity. She then lists three categories of objects of fear: (1) transgressions of normality and elementary laws of the physical known world like the “Old Ones” of Lovecraft or King Kong; (2) harmless objects in themselves that become scary only through an abnormal and strange aggressive behavior, such as birds, furniture, and cars; and (3) objects already scary that undergo a hyperbolic processing, such as wolves, spiders, and snakes. This closed repertory of fear and the fundamental use of stereotypes therefore serve as “direction signs of the ludic domain. They announce at the entry and at critical points of the fictional terror: ‘All those that enter here accept surrender to the dizziness of fear’” (1991, 142; my translation).

To clarify the activity at stake, Amossy refers to board games:

The progress of the game is not purely fortuitous, and the public expects that some “moves” mark out the itinerary of fear. . . . [The] threatening interruptions [by objects of fear] in the daily universe and adventures that ensue are also meticulously programmed according to known rules. One thinks of those games where the participants have, with throws of dice, to cross a perilous space sown with ambushes until they reach the square of final resolution.

If, therefore, the imitated reality is not defined by precise rules, the precise delineation of the terror will bring some to bear. It is the grid of the laws of terror applied on daily and banal scenery, or at least on what is claimed to be realistic, that produces the narrative of terror. (1991, 138; my translation)

On any given game board, the moves differ, but the grid remains the same. What happens next always maintains some kind of predictability. According to Amossy, the secret of the industry of fear lies less in the choice of the stereotyped object than in the choice of representation. Cinema thus occupies a preponderant place since it constantly invents and perfects its
realistic effects. The conclusions of Amossy put Steven Poole’s reasoning in perspective:

Why is it particularly the horror genre, and to a lesser extent science-fiction, that largely provides the aesthetic compost for supposedly “film-like” videogames? . . . The answer is that horror genre can easily do away with character and plot; it is the detail of the monster, the rhythm and tension and shocks that matter. Plot and characters are things videogames find very difficult to deal with. (2000, 79)

For the video game, a new media that is still audiovisual, the horror film provides a breeding ground for formal figures and techniques of mise-en-scène (anxiety-provoking music, expressive high/low angles, suspicious camera movements, startle effects, etc.). It also provides an ideal narrative framework: a small group of stereotypical characters barricade themselves in a place—or try to escape—in order to fight against and to survive an evil force embodied in monsters or ghosts. This perfectly suits the video game (the new media), which will inevitably, as did cinema (the old media), continuously invent and refine its realistic effects (in connection with computer manufacturers who constantly endeavor to sell new state-of-the-art technology).

Vera Dika has dedicated her book Games of Terror: Halloween, Friday the 13th, and the Films of the Stalker Cycle to demonstrating the way in which the stalker film formula of the 1980s put the spectator in a condition “less like watching a tennis match, for example, than like playing a video game. Here the spectator is implicated by a number of conventional formal strategies, ones that encourage a play with the film itself” (1990, 22; emphasis added). For Dika, the formal opacity of the repeated patterns and the surface variations (point-of-view shots, use of onscreen and offscreen spaces, frameline, screen time, etc.) facilitate a gaming attitude toward two central questions: “Where is the killer?” and “When will he strike?” Starting with Halloween (John Carpenter, 1978) and its two best copies Friday the 13th (Sean S. Cunningham, 1980) and Friday the 13th Part 2 (Steve Miner, 1981), the safe and controlled interaction between the spectator and the stalker-film games established a play of knowing or not knowing the answer to those two questions, and of how they were asked. Such play has become even more pervasive in the new cycle of stalker films initiated by the self-reflexive Scream (Wes Craven, 1996), a cycle created for a generation of teenagers who are as much film and television viewers as they are gamers.
As Amossy’s reference to game boards and Dika’s video game analogy show, the contemporary horror film was already playful and “interactive” before the advent of video games and explicit interactivity. It was a short leap to make “interactive horror movies” such as *Phantasmagoria* (Sierra / Sierra, 1995) or *Realms of the Haunting* (Gremlin Interactive / Interplay, 1996). Moreover, when asked how he would like *SH2* to be seen, the producer Akihiro Imamura answered: “As a horror movie, but with the fantastic feeling of being active within it” (Roundell 2001). With an action-oriented narrative framework and all the prominently displayed formal “direction signs” along the experiential route to fear, the spectator-gamer was more than ready to get into the labyrinth of horror and virtually display his competitive spirit.

The relation between survival horror games and horror films underlines a central element of play and games, which is repetitiveness. As we’ve seen, there is a horror formula, and anyone who is even marginally familiar with the genre is aware of this fact. However, Noël Carroll made a point of noting, in his transmedia study, that “predictability does not deter the horror audience’s interest (indeed, audiences would appear to desire that the same stories be told again and again)” (1990, 97–98). It’s precisely the noticeable variations within the framework, the efficacious scare tactics and the novelty of the techniques, that thrill horror enthusiasts and reaffirm their appreciation for the genre; it is a way simultaneously both to maintain and to lose control over the experience. This remark can be applied to many video games. To begin with Warren Robinett’s groundbreaking video (or graphic) game *Adventure* for the Atari 2600 (Atari, 1979)—not forgetting the text and text-and-graphic adventures that have preceded and followed Robinett’s game—adventures are designed on the same model: in a large mazelike game world, a player character/protagonist has to solve various problems and use various tools to get past obstacles and fight enemies in order to succeed in his quest to find something or to save someone. In this type of game environment, it’s stunningly realistic graphics and the expandable exploring environment that succeed for the gamer. With their own variations and chief characteristics, many action games (first- or third-person shooters) and role-playing games still follow this adventure formula. As for survival horror—sometimes called horror adventure—it shades the adventure with nerve-racking, morbid, and dark features. There is a last reason to see survival horror as an exemplary genre.
The adventure maze embodies a classic fairy-tale narrative of danger and salvation. Its lasting appeal as both a story and a game pattern derives from the melding of cognitive problem (finding the path) with emotionally symbolic pattern (facing what is frightening and unknown) . . . Like all fairy tales, the maze adventure is a story about survival. The maze is the road map for telling this story. (Murray 1997, 130; emphasis added)

Survival horror clearly exhibits the ins and outs of a broad range of video games.

**Slowly Getting into a World of Survival Horror**

Even if we establish 1992 as the date of the origin of the survival horror genre, we still have to go back to the horror games of the 1980s to construct an accurate genealogy of the genre.

Drawing from Robinett’s design, James Andreasen’s *Haunted House* (Atari, 1981) gave the adventure genre its first pitch-black representation. If it is difficult to see anything when progressing through the catacombs of *Adventure* (depicted as an orange-pathed network); it is also hard to explore each of the six rectangular rooms in the four-story-high *Haunted House’s* mysterious mansion. As a pair of square eyes (compared to the little square of *Adventure*), you have to discover the three pieces of a magic urn and bring it back to the house’s entrance. In your search, with nine lives and an unlimited supply of matches to see your way around (giving a reddish diamond-form view), you also need to find a master key to open locked doors, protect yourself with a magic scepter, or fight tarantulas, vampire bats, and ghosts. As the manual warns the gamer: “Every time one of these creatures touches you, you’ll be ‘scared to death,’ and consequently lose a life.”

To suggest this effect and to create a horror “atmosphere,” *Haunted House* uses flickering lights and thunderclaps when you are touched (your eyes will roll wildly). It also capitalizes on other specific sound effects, such as the sound of wind when creatures approach (which also blows out your matches), creaking doors, a knock every time you slam into walls and locked doors, and—says the manual again—“a spooky tune” (three notes in fact) when you use the stairs. Nine game variations challenge your scoring based on the number of matches you use and the number of lives you have left at the end of the game.
While the scrolling of Haunted House is mainly vertical in a very limited space (three rectangular double-rooms), other games had a horizontal layout so as to give a more “realistic” sense of the scene. Since stalker films were mentioned earlier, let’s refer to the Atari 2600 video game adaptation of Halloween (Wizard Video Games, 1983). In the game, the player character has three lives to navigate adjacent spaces representing the sixteen rooms of a two-story house (upper and lower levels accessible through connecting doors). She is a babysitter trying to save as many children as possible from the killer, who may appear anywhere, and bring them to safe rooms. Each child saved gives the gamer 675 points toward his total score. Occasionally, she finds a knife that enables her to defend herself. It is not mentioned (either on the box or in the manual) that the killer is Michael Myers, but his pale blue suit indicates that connection (sadly, it’s not possible to recognize Jamie Lee Curtis). In fact, the player character and the NPCs start to look like human figures. The “terrified children” (manual) wave their two-pixels arms and Michael brandishes his three-pixel knife and everybody moves their little feet. This initial level of anthropomorphism is giving birth to the first images of “gore” because at the moment Michael stabs the babysitter, he cuts her head off and leaves her running around with a few pixels of blood spurting out of her neck (same thing for children). To enhance the atmosphere of the game, Halloween uses the first notes of the movie musical theme every time Michael appears. The effect of his sudden apparitions is increased by an “electrical blackout” (manual), that is, a flickering effect that plunges you into darkness for a few seconds while the killer is pursuing you.

Many other horror video games of the 1980s could be introduced here to support the argument. One could obviously think about horror text adventures like Dave Lebling’s The Lurking Horror (Infocom / Infocom, 1987) or multiple windows text-and-graphic adventures such as Shadowgate (ICOM Simulation / Mindscape, 1987) and Uninvited (ICOM Simulation / Mindscape, 1987). Konami’s Castlevania (1987) is also part of the horror game genre evolution. To maintain a film perspective, the NES adaptation of Friday the 13th (LJN, 1989) could have been introduced similarly to Commodore 64’s Project Firestart (Dynamix / Electronic Arts, 1989), which is also referred to as an ancestor of survival horror.11 However, one game cannot be overlooked here: the Japanese RPG game Sweet Home (Capcom / Capcom, 1989)—released at the same time as its film counterpart realized by Kiyoshi Kurosawa.
One of the primary inspirations for *Resident Evil*, *Sweet Home* follows classical horror patterns. An investigation team travels to the painter Ichirō Mamiya’s haunted manor, situated beside a lake, in order to photograph his frescoes. But Mamiya’s evil spirit traps them inside the dangerous, corpse-filled, mazelike manor, which the team must search while struggling to survive and escape. Since it is an RPG game, each of three women and two men who you can control (interestingly enough in parties of two or three) has her/his own characteristics (levels of experience, attack power, health points, and pray points, which is another attack device) and her/his own tool that will be necessary to complete the adventure (Taro has a camera, Akiko a first-aid kit, Emi a key, Kazuo a lighter, and Asuka a vacuum cleaner). You can switch between the characters. The main screen of *Sweet Home* shows an overhead view of the manor. To the beat of a few efficacious synthesized musical themes, you scroll through the space with the team in order to find clues, various items, and weapons that are scattered around. A menu of popup commands enables you to look at things, talk to people, manage items, and save your state of play as many times as you wish. Clues are found in objects such as dolls and skeletons, in conversations with zombies or people and mainly in notes, blood messages, and frescoes that have to be cleaned beforehand (by Asuka, or someone else who has a broom) and photographs (by Taro or another camera owner). Various items are needed to overcome obstacles or monsters, such as tonic flasks that restore your life and pray points, pieces of wood or ropes to cross gaps, mallets to destroy rocks, statues, or mirrors, keys to open specific doors, two rings to bypass a guardian, and so on. Four items used in a certain order are necessary to beat the (final) boss, Mamiya. Weapons have different attack powers. However, a player character may possess only one weapon at a time. For that matter, with their initial tools, player characters can carry only four items at a time, and the inventory only has two open slots. Therefore you need to manage your items strategically, giving them to teammates, exchanging them, or drinking your tonic flask in order to leave room for a necessary tool. Following the examples of *Adventure* and *Haunted House*, certain sections of the manor are plunged into darkness, and a wax candle is required to light up a square around your party. Furthermore, similar to *Adventure*’s bat, which could remove objects or people, blue flying balls or ghosts can snatch one player character away and transport him to another room in the manor. Except for blue cats and mice, which don’t hurt you, enemies such as flying bats, suits of armor, and mirrors wander around launching attacks.
if you do not avoid them. However, there are many monsters (corpses, evil dolls, hounds, ghosts, ghouls, worms, zombies, etc.), which are invisible and can at any time take you by surprise. The music changes, the screen turns black, and then the image of the monster appears in an attack screen. You can attack, pray, run (but you will fall down), use a tool, or call upon your teammate during a fight. While the action is under way and damages are displayed, red sparkles on the screen. For example, if one player character is poisoned, red flickering will occur when he moves and Akiko’s first-aid kit will be required. Since you do not know which monster is going to show up or (depending on your experience level) how the battle will turn out, particularly with the tougher types, there is always a certain gameplay tension. Classical lighting effects enhance the atmosphere. *Sweet Home* even tries to create an interesting scare effect by making the “Man” enemy suddenly reveal a half-human half-skull face in a two-image switch (from the back of the enemy to the front of his face). It also keeps you on your toes by making things, such as a chair or a light, fall in a shaky image. When you decide to go left or right, to dive or pray, there is always a short lapse of time before you know if you made the right decision.

Although web reviewers have stated that “Haunted House still manages to instill a sense of fear and panic in the player” and that *Halloween* “captures the spirit of the movie quite well,” and although the first line of the manual of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Wizard Video Games, 1983) asserts that the game “recreate[s] the chilling climax of the most horrifying movie ever made!” these claims overlook the very limited scary effects of the abstract graphics of those games. Even if we keep a historical distance and regard them for what they are, the same conclusions have to be made about the NES 8-bit graphics or the excellent imagery of *Sweet Home*. All things considered, we have to agree with the assertion made by Win Sical and Remi Delekta in “Survival Horror: Un Nouveau Genre,” an article from the first and only issue of the French *Horror Games Magazine*: “Survival horror [can] not exist without a minimum of technical capacities: sounds, graphics, processing speed. Fear, to exist, needs to be staged, and this mise-en-scène requires capabilities” (Sical and Delekta 2003, 13; my translation). This mise-en-scène of fear was fulfilled in 1992 in a French PC game considered to be the first of its breed: *Alone in the Dark* (I-Motion Inc. & Infogrames / Interplay).

This “Virtual Adventure Game Inspired by the Works of H. P. Lovecraft” (box set) and also inspired by the zombie movies of George A. Romero (see
Provezza 2006, 54) takes place in the 1920s and follows the trail of private detective Edward Carnby (or of Hartwood’s niece, Emily Hartwood, but it is not possible to switch from one to the other as in *Sweet Home*) in a haunted mansion called Derceto where the former owner, Jeremy Hartwood, who was translating ancient occult manuscripts, hanged himself. Since devil worship makes Carnby smile, he looks for Derceto’s terrible secret, which results in his having to fight evil creatures. It is certainly not on those narrative premises that *Alone in the Dark* should be considered innovative. It is the means of the game that changed things. Indeed, *Alone in the Dark* is the first game to display 3-D polygonal characters and objects in 2-D pre-rendered 256-color backgrounds. This feature results in the game depicting a better immersive horror world and, above all, a remediated cinematic one since the action is always depicted from different fixed camera angles (as the expressionistic vertical angle—compared to a flat overhead view as in *Sweet Home*—which shows the character trapped in a corridor maze). For instance, it’s a high-angle view that shows Edward’s car arriving at Derceto’s gate. Then, while Edward is walking toward it, another high-angle long shot of the mansion reveals a light in one of the second-floor windows, followed by its countershoot from that window revealing only the hands of what we might guess is a strange creature looking down toward the player character. What’s more, this opening cut-scene is an exceptional preview of the way in which gameplay is enacted. All of the shots, mainly typical views from the ceiling, which are used to lead Edward from the main entrance to the attic, disclose spaces that you will pass through later on, not without sudden, unexpected events. Thus, although the graphics of the game look primitive in comparison to today’s standards and the music and sound effects do not have the same range, *Alone in the Dark* is still viewed as one of the “scariest games ever” because, as noted, it stages fear. The musical orchestration is compelling right from the beginning and varies during the game. You hear howls or strident sounds once in a while. The squeaking doors close heavily behind Edward. Floors creak. Footsteps produce quiet echoes in the tunnel. When you begin to explore the attic, you hear a sudden musical chord and see (or the game will cut to it) a long-fanged monster breaking through the window to attack you. Later on, a shot from outside a bedroom window brings yet another monster through it, a monster that will even jump on the bed to attack you.

In *Alone in the Dark*, the way a room is framed is sometimes employed as a technique to hide monsters from sight, as is the case when the long-
fanged monster appears\textsuperscript{16} and attacks you, just after you’ve taken Jeremy Hartwood’s notebook in his first room. In the kitchen cupboard, while a low-angle shot from the coal on the floor shows Edward, a zombie suddenly appears behind him. This kind of cinematographic mise-en-scène is based on a third-person perspective. In that sense, one has to agree with Daniel S. Yu that this perspective is more appropriate to survival horror games. As he says regarding \textit{Alone in the Dark} in “Exploring the Survival Horror Genre”:\textsuperscript{17}

Beyond the usual annoying aspects (like views changing during fights), the third person perspective added to the dramatic tension by allowing the player to see things that would otherwise be lost in a first person perspective, such as monsters chasing the player character and the player character running for his/her life at the same time. (Yu 2002)

In the third-person perspective, you have to think in relation to the player character, considering the actions he is capable of performing (Edward can run, fight barehanded, raise a rifle to his shoulder and shoot, open/search, shut doors, push large objects, jump, use items and throw/drop/place them) and of his relation to the camera: Is he close or far from the camera? Do his movements involve a change of angle? Does that limit the gamer’s vision? Is the player character in an open space where he can run or in a room where he can be caught? And so on. There is also the dimension of the body, its movements, its strength or vulnerability, and the violence to which the body is subjected. It is easy to be overcome by panic in first- and third-person perspectives while being attacked by a monster, but you’re more effectively overcome by horror when you actually see your player character out of your control being (b)eaten to death in a corner and dragged along the ground by a zombie to the stone altar (an end sequence that might have inspired one in \textit{SH3}). This way of visualizing is more “film-like” and is naturally associated with the horror genre.

The gameplay of \textit{Alone in the Dark} shows all the elements that will define the survival horror genre. To begin with, there is no map of the mansion available so you have to memorize the location of various rooms. You can switch to two screens. The first is the “save, load, quit and parameter screen” (manual). It is, notably, possible to save and reload anytime during the game (before a fight, an investigation, or after every jump onto pillars). The second is the “options screen,” which has three frames: one for the inventory, one for the possible actions, and one that shows your player character’s life
points and the selected items. The inventory is limited; therefore it’s impor-
tant to manage the items that you’ll choose to take with you. To save space
it’s possible to combine them. For example, you’ll need to use the oilcan to
fill the lamp and the matches to light it. This lamp is essential to investigate
a dark bedroom in order to find (1) a heavy statuette, (2) the library to get
to a secret room, and (3) a maze you have to pass through. Incidentally,
like *Adventure* and *Haunted House*, the screen of this maze is entirely black
except for a small lit circle around the player character.

As in a standard adventure game, you have to toil through scattered
clues that are discovered in books and parchments. The clues explain what
happened in Derceto and how to solve the various puzzles encountered. For
instance, references to Lovecraft’s Cthulhu, his call, and the danger of the
infamous Necronomicon are found in books. In order to discover the way
to pass by the “medusas” at the top of the stairs you must refer to the first
book found and then apply the section that states “shields that may shine
like mirrors.” J. Hartwood also writes in his notebook about the caverns
you need to discover under the house. You have to open various boxes or
search the furniture to find items and then collect the objects required to
fulfill a particular task, for instance: acquire a gramophone, search for a key
to obtain a record album, and finally fight a pirate for the key to get to the
ballroom in order to play a dance song. Daniel S. Yu and other reviewers
have noticed that there are not very many enemies (Lovecraft’s monsters
and creatures) to fight in Derceto, but neither are there many health drinks
(two and one box of cookies) or ammunition in the game (eight shells and
18 bullets). It is very evident that *Alone in the Dark* is more about survival
than horror. In fact, there are fewer pixels of splashing blood, and monsters
aren’t drenched in blood when they are defeated; they supernaturally van-
ish in smoke instead. You have to accomplish the final part of the game in
the caverns without any new supplies. Additionally, falling into the water
cuts down on the items that might be used because the matches and shells
get wet. You have to be very careful while making your way back up to the
mansion, saving as often as possible and repeating actions that have not
been performed perfectly.

The PlayStation game *Resident Evil* (Capcom / Capcom, 1996) popular-
ized the survival horror genre despite the fact that it was preceded by *Alone
in the Dark*. If the link between *Resident Evil* and *Alone in the Dark* is not
well established, it is the contrary in regards to *Sweet Home*. With its door-
opening loading screens, its in-game note saying, “You must escape this
Silent Hill house of residing evil!” (seen as an explicit reference), and the fact that the game was played during the development stage, the game released by Capcom in 1989 remains the acknowledged source for Resident Evil. Therefore, we can compare the gameplay experiences of these three games and notice significant connections.

Resident Evil opens with the Special Tactics and Rescue Service (S.T.A.R.S.) Alpha team trapped in Spencer Mansion. In order to escape, the team has to confront many zombies and biotech monstrosities (and traitors inside the team). Guided by a map this time, the team’s investigations uncover the secret machinations of the Umbrella Corporation. The tasks necessary to achieve their goal include finding clues in notes and documents, pushing things around (as in Alone in the Dark), looking for keys and various crests, and acquiring items for specific undertakings. Two player characters are on hand: Chris Redfield and Jill Valentine. As opposed to Edward Carnby or Emily Hartwood, the adventure is not similar for each character. Right from the start of the game, Chris ventures out alone, with only a survival knife to defend himself, while Jill has a gun and is followed by teammate Barry Burton. Without being a RPG, the story revolves around the S.T.A.R.S. team. Jill is helped by Barry at key moments throughout the game, and Chris is aided by Rebecca Chambers (from the Bravo Team). You also come across teammates, one of whom is poisoned by a huge snake and, similar to Sweet Home, you’ll have to get a serum to try to cure him. If you are the one bitten, you’ll have to get the serum in order to survive. Otherwise, you heal yourself with a variety of herbs (green, red, and blue) during the course of the game. You discover from a botany book that these herbs can be mixed to increase their healing power. In the course of action, mixing plants and combining items (weapon and clip, as in Alone in the Dark) also saves space in the inventory. The inventory of Resident Evil, like its two predecessors, is limited. Chris can carry six items and Jill eight. Therefore, inventory needs to be managed. As opposed to Alone in the Dark, it is not possible to drop or throw items anywhere or anytime. Instead, the herbs, weapons (you come across new and more powerful ones), and items have to be stored in boxes near save points. This way, you can retrieve things later in the game. This device complicates your mission and has been criticized on numerous occasions. If Steven Poole finds this inconsistent and laughable (2000, 66), Daniel S. Yu provides a more qualified opinion:

In truth, this was both good and bad. Good in that it created additional tension by (somewhat arbitrarily) limiting the player’s inventory. Bad in
that it tended to “break the illusion” of an interactive horror movie by 
 inadvertently reminding players that they were still playing a game—I 
 have to stash the ammo I can’t (for some reason) carry in this arbitrarily 
 placed storage box so I can come back for it later? Say what? (Yu 2002)

Another device became a standard of the survival horror form. Unlike 
*Sweet Home* and *Alone in the Dark*, it is not possible to save your PlaySta-

tion game anytime you choose. In order to save, you are required to find 
ink ribbons and use them in typewriters that are encountered during your 
progress. As everyone agrees, having to go from one save point to another, 
or having to return to a previous one for safety, creates a real and relevant 
dramatic tension since the whole point of the game is about being afraid 
to die.

If there is a link to be made between *Alone in the Dark* and *Resident 
Evil*, it is on the basis of its depiction. *Resident Evil* really did “welcome 
[you] to the world of survival horror” (read in the intro screen). Its live-
action video opening scene demonstrates its propensity to be viewed as an 
interactive movie. A few shots of a dog’s jaws and teeth along with a cam-
era quickly moving toward the panic-stricken teammates set the menac-
ing tone for what comes next. B-movie credits introduce each teammate 
through real actors who put a face on the polygonal characters. When Chris 
or Jill meets the first zombie, the prerendered cut-scene (not in the usual 
letterbox format so as to make it look as in-game) revealing the ugly face 
of this zombie also states that the game calls out the dark side of horror. 
*Resident Evil* maximizes the PlaySation graphics capacity and improves on 
the tricks and aesthetic of the 3-D characters in the 2-D prerendered back-
grounds of *Alone in the Dark*. The eerie music and the sound effects (like 
the different footsteps, gunshots, groans, roars, etc.) have everything it takes 
to set the mood. Its prerendered backgrounds are very detailed and use light 
sources and shadows in an expressionist manner (the characters cast only a 
dark circle on the ground). The cinematic camera angles—many of which 
are vertical angles—and the various cuts during gameplay also exploit well 
the architecture of the mansion and trick the gamer. In a scene reminiscent 
of *Alone in the Dark* and now considered a classic, Jill makes her way down 
a corridor, music playing in the background. When the camera cuts to the 
doors which Jill has just entered in order to reveal her in a long shot, a dog 
bursts through the right window in the immediate foreground, making you 
jump out of your seat. After Jill has killed the beast to the rhythm of fast-
paced music and turned the corner, another dog again bursts through a
window (a Flying Reptile bursts in a similar way through Cafe 5to2’s windows at the beginning of SH1). The gamer has to be continuously ready for action in Resident Evil because enemies are waiting behind doors or beyond the limits of the frame to surprise and attack her. To perfect its effects, the game draws from the closed repertory of fear, employing Zombies, Zombie Dogs, monsters (such as Chimeras, Hunters, and the T002-Tyrant), and beings that have undergone a hyperbolic processing by the T-Virus (such as the Plant 42, the large Bees, Sharks, Snake, and Spider). The encounters with this bestiary give rise to gory confrontations/episodes. The few pixels representing blood in Alone in the Dark are replaced with big spurts. Taking full advantage of the horror intrinsic with the third-person perspective, when Chris or Jill suffers an attack, blood spatters in streams. Despite the fact that the aiming controls are limited in Resident Evil, one of the main thrills of the game is to kill the biotech monstrosities, making their heads blow up (as opposed to seeing them blow up as in Romero’s movies). As Matthew Weise states in his “The Rules of Horror: Procedural Adaptation in Clock Tower, Resident Evil, and Dead Rising,” which deals with the modeling of horror texts into video games: “Although Resident Evil was an extremely limited exploration of the zombie simulation, it did manage to simulate certain aspects of the zombie film for the first time” (2009, 255).

Lurking Fear

There were several survival horror games released in North America between 1996 and 1999, such as Clock Tower (Human Entertainment / ASCII Entertainment Software, 1996—the Japanese Clock Tower 2), Overblood (River Hill Software / Electronic Arts, 1997), Parasite Eve (Square Soft / Square Soft, 1998), and, obviously, Resident Evil 2 (Capcom / Capcom, 1998). These games incorporated new characteristics such as hidden spots, different camera perspectives, outside urban scenes, RPG elements, and injuries that affect the movement of your player character; however, they did not have the same major impact on the genre as SH1 and its features.

With the exception of an unlimited inventory and a map that is automatically marked as the areas are searched, SH1 follows the usual cinematic adventure framework as described throughout this chapter using the examples of Alone in the Dark and Resident Evil. However, because SH1 takes place inside, outside, and in overlapping real and alternate worlds, it
builds a whole new frightening atmosphere. To render its fully real-time 3-D environments, Team Silent dealt with the finite processing resources of the PlayStation by limiting the field of vision. The fog and darkness are used to hide what is not depicted. As many reviewers have noted, this technical limitation has resulted in one of the most praised aesthetic effects of the game. The feeling of entrapment is very pronounced. You don’t see very far when wandering the streets of the resort town. The limits remain uncertain. You are always expecting to run into something awful. When you end up in the Otherworld and the streets change to grates, you are really made to feel as if you were walking over a bottomless abyss (fig. 1).

The dark ambience of Silent Hill is intensified. The flashlight Harry Mason finds at the beginning of the game, at the Cafe 5to2, gives a new signification to a visual trick that can be, as I wished to draw attention to with my quick look at the history of the genre, traced back to Adventure.
that you can only see what you light, you have to be very careful because monsters can be waiting, not only beyond the limits of the frame, but also just outside the real-time light halo. The light can be turned off so as not to alert enemies, plunging you into obscurity and intense fear. SH1 uses yet another device, audio this time, to heighten the fear. The pocket radio Harry receives before leaving Cafe 5to2 only transmits white noise when there are dangerous creatures nearby. While this prevents many surprise scares (which are still not completely eliminated), it elevates the level of tension. Fear rises every time the static grows louder. Not knowing which direction the monster is coming from, you remain continuously on your guard until you encounter the source of the emission.

Despite all of its peculiarities, SH1, and to an even greater extent SH2, remains the perfect game of a perfect genre. You truly are “alone in the dark” (and there is no switch to turn on the lights as in Alone in the Dark: The New Nightmare [Darkworks / Infogrames 2001]). Fear of the dark comes first in Stephen King’s list of ten key fears that underpin the creation of emotion in horror texts (in Wells 2002, 11). Silent Hill makes the most of it. You are dealing with yourself in an eerie space while desperately trying to survive through the night. Following the thread of exploration characteristic of the maze adventure, the quest for salvation in the labyrinth implies two movements, one that drives toward the center as in SH: Origins, SH1, SH: Shattered Memories, and SH2, and another that leads toward the exit as in SH3. The gripping city of Silent Hill prompts you to actively create or manufacture fear. The games of the Silent Hill series remain in the “Scariest Games Experience Ever”; and there remains even more to discover.

Assessed in comparison to Resident Evil, the horror of SH1 (and of the other games in the series) is best described as being psychological. The entire game is governed more by its atmosphere than by its action, by what is felt rather than by what is done. This design ensues from clear intentions. As Akihiro Imamura, the lead game system programmer of SH1 (also involved in concept planning, according to Beuglet 2001) and producer of Silent Hill 2, says in interviews:

I am aiming to create fear which gets deep into human instinct. Not making the fear by surprise, but by creating a feeling of anxiety, I would like to surge the fear little by little in the player. (Perry 2001a)

In Silent Hill 2, fear could be defined in terms of what you don’t see makes you feel afraid. If you know that there is something around that you can’t see, you’ll be scared, deep down. (Beuglet 2001)
Masashi Tsuboyama, who worked on SH1 and directed SH2, puts a term on the general atmosphere of the games:

The existence of fog and darkness and the real and alternate world is an important element in creating fear . . . just as in the previous title. However, for this title, I was conscious of a certain “strangeness” that was present in the game and in our daily lives. What I mean by “strangeness” is unexplained occurrences that can happen on and off without any real reason. Examples within the game would be the existence of [the] red square, the circumstances in which you get the handgun, traffic lights which are turned on in the deserted town, wandering monsters in the real world, buildings of unrealistic structure [though they seem realistic on the surface], etc. Moreover, we incorporated these ideas of “strangeness” throughout the game. . . . It adds a different quality to the oppressive fear already prevalent. (Beuglet 2001)

Team Silent has understood that, as Paul Wells formulates it, “the most persuasive horror is the one suggested in the mind of the viewer [and the gamer], rather than that which is explicitly expressed on the screen” (2002, 108–9). For instance, with the town of SH1 shrouded in mist and darkness I mistook a fire hydrant for a dangerous dog; I’ve also been frightened by white noise that finally ended without any sign of danger. I shuddered when I heard the child crying in the boys’ restroom of Midwich Elementary School. Without a map, I was thrown into panic when the first door locked itself behind me on the new fourth floor of the Alchemilla Hospital.18 I could continue with examples, but we’re going to come back to that later. Because, on the one hand, if the fairly obvious but hard to achieve requirement of survival horror games is to “be able to deliver dramatic scares to the player continuously throughout the game” (Yu 2002), Silent Hill delivers the goods. Indeed, it is not just at the sudden appearance of zombies that the gamer is frightened, as has been noted about Resident Evil. In Silent Hill, the gamer is in a continuous state of dread. On the other hand, if feeling fear—as intensely and as abundantly as possible (as Tan would say)—is the core of survival horror, the study of emotions created by Silent Hill goes beyond the simple question of being scared.

In The Philosophy of Horror or Paradoxes of the Heart, Noël Carroll calls “art-horror” the fear and disgust that horror narratives and images are designed to elicit from the audience (1990, 24).19 Cross-mediatic and fictitious by nature, and describing the response to impure monsters, art-horror is an occurrent emotional state (rather than a dispositional one such as
undying envy) that has both a physical and cognitive dimension (1990, 24). Insofar as the etymology of the word “emotion” refers to the idea of “moving out,” it involves the experience of a change of physical state, from a normal to an agitated one. For Carroll, art-horror implies a “feelings” mode. Its recurring feelings or automatic responses are, among other things, muscular contractions, tension, shuddering, recoiling, chilling, a reflexive apprehension, and perhaps involuntary screaming. There is no doubt that the confrontations with the monsters and the bosses of Silent Hill evoke a deeply felt physical agitation. You may abruptly jump out of your seat upon unexpectedly encountering Nurses when entering a room. Your respiration may increase as if you were the one moving quickly while fighting Dogs and Flying Reptiles. You may lean forward in your chair, press your R2 Button harder, and brandish your controller at arm’s length. You may swing the upper part of your body as if you were dodging and responding. Then, when the monster is killed or you manage to flee, you may calm down. Focusing on occurrent encounters with supernatural monsters, Carroll’s art-horror holds as true for Resident Evil as it does for its numerous clones; but it falls short of defining the overall emotional dimensions at play in Silent Hill. To explain this, we must revisit H. P. Lovecraft.

For the author of The Call of Cthulhu (1926) and The Shadow Over Innsmouth (1931), the supernatural literature that he refers to as “cosmic fear” is not to be confounded with mere physical fear and the mundanely gruesome.

The true weird tale has something more than a secret murder, bloody bones, or a sheeted form clanking chains according to rule. A certain atmosphere of breathless and unexplainable dread of outer, unknown forces must be present; and there must be a hint, expressed with a seriousness and portentousness becoming its subject, of that most terrible conception of the human brain—a malign and particular suspension or defeat of those fixed laws of Nature which are our only safeguard against the assaults of chaos and the daemons of unplumbed space. (1973, 15)

The horror of Lovecraft is undeniably more psychological or metaphysical than physical. The creation of a given sensation is the final criterion, namely “a profound sense of dread, and of contact with the unknown sphere and powers; a subtle attitude of awed listening, as if the beating of the black wings or the scratching of outside shapes and entities on the known universe’s utmost rim” (1973, 15). With its religious cult trying to bring about
the birth of an Old God to destroy the world so it may be born anew, the plot of SH: Origins, SH1, and SH3 expresses the belief that forbidden knowledge could destroy the human race and that there are unknown forces beyond the realm of our universe, forces as equally fascinating as dangerous. The aerial views of SH1 work on that impression. The views showing Harry in the first broken stairs on the right of the drawbridge seem to be god’s eye point-of-views. The main characters of SH: Origins, SH1, SH2, and SH3 are similar to the typical Lovecraftian protagonists. They are facing both a dark world that they are not certain they fully comprehend and horrors that take them to the far corners of their (our) imaginations, leaving them (us) in awe as we watch and listen.

Art-horror and cosmic fear can be seen as the two poles of creating fear. However, there is a more classical opposition that is relevant to recall. In “On the Supernatural in Poetry,” Ann Radcliffe clarifies: “Terror and horror are opposites, the first expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them” (1826, 149). Although I do not want to delve into the notion of sublime that this distinction of Gothic literature naturally leads to, I do feel inclined to speak, to a certain extent, about the sense of transcendence in terror. Will Rockett defines it in Devouring Whirlwind: “to transcend is to pass over or to go beyond the limits of oneself and to feel that one is in communion with that which is distinctly ‘other,’ or outside oneself” (1988, 6). I must admit that at moments I experienced a sense of transcendence in SH2. Obviously there is a certain status given to terror over horror, and authors of fiction aim at producing this overwhelming feeling of fear. To state his case, Rockett quotes Stephen King in Danse Macabre: “I recognized terror as the finest emotion . . . and so I will try to terrorize the reader. But if I find I cannot terrify him/her, I will try to horrify; and if I find I cannot horrify, I go for the gross out. I’m not proud” (qtd. in Rockett 1988, 45). What’s more, “King considers the provoking of terror a major means of ‘transcending’ the normal institutional limitations of the common horror tale” (Rockett 1988, 45). But even if we do not subscribe to this position—horror regarded implicitly as an inferior notion—the comments Rockett makes about the difference between horror and terror remain very informative. Horror is compared to an almost physical loathing, and its cause is always external, perceptible, comprehensible, measurable, and apparently material, while terror is identified with the more imaginative and subtle anticipatory dread. “In fact, terror is always of the indeterminate and incomprehensible, of the
unseen but sensed or suspected, or of the imperfectly seen” (Rockett 1988, 46). Terror engenders a wonder in the face of the inexplicable supernatural. “The most common time of terror . . . is night, a great absence of light and therefore a great time of uncertainty” (1988, 100). Without day’s light, certainty, and clear vision, there is no safe time; terror expands on a longer duration. But we should not place terror and horror in direct opposition, as the Gothic writers did. As Dani Cavallaro observes in The Gothic Vision: “Binary oppositions . . . are ultimately bound to prove reductive rationalizations. What is . . . proposed, in an attempt to avert the dangers implicit in binary thought, is that terror and horror are closely interconnected and that each is capable of metamorphosing into the other” (2002, 5). The truly scary stories actually go further.

The interaction of terror and horror is most explicitly conveyed by stories that articulate the experience of fear as an ongoing condition. Such narratives intimate that fear is not triggered by a single disturbing moment or occurrence but is actually a permanent, albeit multi-faceted, aspect of being-in-the-world. Concrete and intangible phenomena contribute equally to its dynamics. We oscillate constantly between terror and horror because we may only endure the pervasiveness of fear to the extent that we may be willing to acquaint ourselves with its more or less subtle modulations and transformations. (Cavallaro 2002, 6)

Much as in the interaction between the bottom-up (data-driven) and top-down (concept-driven) processes in our perceptual and cognitive activity, where one process can dominate in a context, terror or horror can come to dominate the emotional experience.

Admittedly, there are great moments of horror in Silent Hill, and the monsters encountered during the experiential route play an important role. But terror applies most entirely to the overall psychological approach and the emotional experience. Expanding on the elements of survival horror, we could employ Rockett’s argument that Silent Hill “transcends” the limitations of the genre. The series opens up a new territory. It creates its own subgenre (in which the Fatal Frame series is to be included). In the final analysis, to demonstrate how it stands out in comparison to the majority of survival horror games, it would be more appropriate to refer to Silent Hill as a paradigm of survival terror.