Expansion, Excess and the Uncanny: *Deadly Premonition* and *Twin Peaks*.

Julian Novitz

Faculty of Health, Arts and Design, Swinburne University of Technology PO Box 218, Hawthorn, Victoria, Australia 3122. jnovitz@swin.edu.au

Abstract:

The influence of the cult television series *Twin Peaks* (1990-91) can be detected in a wide range of videogames, from adventure, to roleplaying to survival horror titles. While many games variously draw upon the narrative, setting and imagery of the series for inspiration, certain element of the distinctive uncanniness of *Twin Peaks* are difficult to translate into gameplay, particularly its ability consistently disrupt the expectations and emotional responses of its audience. This paper examines the ways in which the 2010 survival horror title *Deadly Premonition* attempts to replicate the uncanniness of Twin Peaks in both its narrative and gameplay, noting how it expands upon conceptualisations of the gamerly uncanny (Hoeger and Huber 2007). It contends that *Deadly Premonition'*s awkward and uncanny recombination of seemingly inconsistent and excessive gameplay features mirrors the ways in which David Lynch and Mark Frost draw upon and subvert audience expectations for police procedurals and soap operas in the original *Twin Peaks*, while also providing a similarly disorienting excess of "realistic" detail. Furthermore its exploration of the theme of possession – a central element of the television series – offers a diegetic exploration of the uncanny relationship between the player and their onscreen avatar.

Keywords: The Uncanny, Deadly Premonition, Twin Peaks, Survival Horror

1. Introduction: The Uncanny in Survival Horror Video Games

The contemporary idea of the uncanny as a first emerges in a 1906 essay by Ernst Jentsch, which he characterises as the psychological state that results from particularly unsettling experiences of uncertainty, particularly in relation to the status of inanimate objects.

> Among all the psychical uncertainties that can become a cause for the uncanny feeling to arise, there is one in particular that is able to develop a fairly regular, powerful and very general effect: namely, doubt as to whether an apparently living being really is animate and, conversely, doubt as to whether a lifeless object may not in fact be animate – and more precisely, when this doubt only makes itself felt obscurely in one's consciousness (Jentsch [1906] 1995, p.11).

Jentsch's definition of the uncanny famously cited and quoted by Sigmund Freud in his 1919 essay 'The Uncanny'. Freud rejects Jentsch's conceptualisation of the uncanny as intellectual uncertainty, suggesting rather that the inanimate objects that Jentsch identifies as distinctly uncanny – "wax-work figures, ingeniously constructed dolls and automata" (Freud [1919] 1955, p.226) are such because they

combine familiarity and strangeness. In working to transform the familiar into something strange, Freud argues that uncanny objects, narratives and phenomena challenge our sense of reality through the evocation of repressed memories, images and fears. For Freud, effects like mental illness are register as uncanny because, while strange, they evoke something familiar from our own mental state. Encounters with doppelgangers, reflections and corpses are also given as examples of potentially uncanny experiences.

The uncanny evokes a dual sense of fascination and repulsion, which made it a common feature of horror and suspense narratives long before the term was first defined. The popular Gothic literature of the nineteenth century, for example, often delivered uncanny reading experiences by encouraging their readers to speculate on whether their central mysteries had mundane or supernatural causes, leaving them uncertain as whether their narratives were real or fantastical for as long as possible (Botting 2008). Uncanny images, characters and aesthetics have long been a feature of horror cinema, with realistic living characters being frequently contrasted with blank-faced, lurching automata. Dread is powerfully evoked on screen by imbuing the familiar and recognisable human form with a fascinating strangeness (Royle 2003). In *the Powers of Horror* (1982) Kristeva locates the abject within the realm of the uncanny, suggesting that it is represented by border figures that are not quite right and must be cast out in order to survive. These uncanny aesthetics have been easily translated into video games, particularly those situated within the survival horror sub-category.

Horror videogames often draw upon the tradition of cinema in order provide uncanny experiences, confronting the player with human-like yet deformed monsters, and distortions of seemingly familiar environments, like the archetypical abandoned town or haunted house (Holmes 2010). However, uncanniness in a video game can also manifest itself simply through the designers' attempts at representation. As technology develops, videogames have, in general, moved from presenting abstract representations of people and locations and focused more on providing realistic and lifelike depictions, with two dimensional perspectives giving way to fully three dimensional figures with lighting and texturing. The increasingly realistic, yet still strange, representations found in videogames can have an uncanny effect on both players and observers, entering what robotics scientist Masahiro Mori famously defined as "the uncanny valley", where an artificial representation or duplicate becomes increasingly unsettling once it is sophisticated enough to cross a certain level of resemblance (Mori [1970] 2012). The uncanny can also manifest itself through glitches and bugs in the game's design, where distorted images and animations can result in uncanny experiences for the player (Holmes 2010).

Beyond its intentional and unintentional evocations through representational strategies in videogames, uncanniness can emerge as a feature of the gameplay itself, particularly in survival horror titles. Kirkland (2009) observes that the player's third-person control over an in-game avatar creates another uncanny space, which "unsettles the boundaries between dead object and living person". Hoeger and Huber (2007) argue that the relationship between the player and their onscreen avatar is central to what they define as the "gamerly uncanny" in survival horror titles, where seemingly familiar movements and actions (e.g. walking, talking, picking up an object, etc.) may be rendered strange. The sense of the uncanny that is created through player-directed movement and navigation has its basis in the particular mode of attention that videogames demand.

> The gamer is obligated to actively decode and navigate a genre-constructed space of threats and secrets. This navigation is performed by a surrogate-body in that fictive space: the avatar-character whose activities depend on the player's activities. The effort to overcome incoherence takes on a specific kind of urgency, one based on a possibility of death (Hoeger and Huber 2007, p.153).

While the uncanny hyper-awareness around movement is feature of all videogames, Hoeger and Huber argue that it is particularly important to the evocation of dread in the horror game, which "thematises and foregrounds the complicated relationship between these virtual bodies and the immersed situation of the player" (2007, p.153). Conventional video game design would usually attempt to avoid or mitigate evocations of a gamerly uncanny so as to avoid distancing or detaching the player from their onscreen avatar. In survival horror games, however, tension, dread and anxiety may be evoked through an avatar that appears incomplete and not wholly human (Tinwell and Grimshaw 2009). Hoeger and Huber argue that the gamerly uncanny is used as a means of evoking fear and uncertainty in the player of survival horror titles alongside the representational strategies and use of surprise that originate with horror films. In doing so, they examine the video game *Fatal Frame 2: Crimson Butterfly* (2003), which builds a great degree of tension from the clash between its uncanny aesthetic and its operational requirements as a videogame. In *Fatal Frame 2*, the player navigates an isolated, maze-like video game environment via a relatively slow and awkwardly controlled avatar, with their field of view restricted by the game's fixed camera angles, making it more difficult for them to anticipate and respond to threats. As Huber and Hoeger put it:

> This restriction of the free agency of the player, thought of as a liability in other genres, is a constitutive feature of horror games such as *Resident Evil*, *Clocktower*, *Siren* and *Fatal Frame* (155).

This common feature of survival horror titles creates a tension between the player's tendency to identify with the avatar and the limitations placed on their perception, agency and control. Thus the uncanny experience is generated through the gameplay itself rather than just the representational qualities of the setting and narrative.

2.   Twin Peaks and Video Games

David Lynch and Mark Frost's cult television series *Twin Peaks* (1990-91) is considered a distinctively and unusually uncanny television series (Weinstock 2010), which likely contributes to its continuing influence on a wide variety of media, including videogames, and in particular, survival horror titles. Many of the most memorable scenes and images from *Twin Peaks* stray into uncanny territory, particularly in the sequences that most closely align with horror or supernatural genres of storytelling. The backwards speech and jerky, distorted movements of the inhabitants of the Red Room serve as an example, as does the leering, malevolent image of Killer BOB, which appears in dreams and reflections. Furthermore *Twin Peaks* abounds with both overt and subtle doublings and duplications, which contributes to the uncanniness of its narrative, atmosphere and overall viewing experience. The series take duality as its central theme (present in the title itself), where the investigation into Laura Palmer's murder first uncovers her double life, then gradually the dark side of the town itself, and finally the duelling cosmic forces of the benevolent White Lodge and the

demonic Black Lodge. The characters themselves are frequently subjected to this doubling effect as the story progresses, with both literal and figurative doppelgängers and dark reflections appearing at key points in the series.

The host of video games that are either subtly or overtly inspired by *Twin Peaks* frequently draw upon the uncanny elements of the series to inform their narrative and representational content. Alongside their distorted, uncanny visual elements, horror games like *Silent Hill* (1999), *Persona 4* (2008) and *Alan Wake* (2010) replicate *Twin Peaks'* focus on doubling and duality through regular shifts between representations of mundane reality and nightmarish, otherworldly duplicates. *Twin Peaks*-inspired adventure games, like *Life is Strange* (2015) and *Kathy Rain* (2016), frequently involve uncovering the hidden natures, histories and identities of people, transforming the familiar into the unfamiliar through the revelation of these double lives. However, other aspects of the show's uncanny aesthetic are harder to replicate in a videogame format. As Jowett (2016) argues, *Twin Peaks* is unsettling not just because its uncanniness disturbs its viewers (in the manner of a classic horror or supernatural narrative) but because it frequently disrupts their expectations as to what they are about to see or experience in any given moment. Jowett (2016) contends that *Twin Peaks* develops its most distinctively uncanny affect through the combination of television genres/storytelling traditions that would have been highly familiar to audiences at the time of its first broadcast: the police procedural and the soap opera. The typically self-contained or episodic murder mystery or police procedural is expanded to an unwieldly and perplexing length through its integration into a soap opera, with the usually linear and logical accumulation of detail and evidence being diverted into a tapestry of side narratives, red herrings and dead ends. Similarly, the soap opera-like romances, schemes and conflicts of *Twin Peaks'* supporting cast take on sinister undertones when they are united by the narrative thread of Laura Palmer's murder. As the series progresses it draws in a range of other genres: supernatural horror, hardboiled noir, melodrama, teen rebel movies and more. The excess of influences and references in *Twin Peaks* can have a disorienting effect, making it challenging to predict the flow of the narrative or to understand and interpret key events. This is supported through the use of music is often used to complicate and confuse the viewer's emotional response to characters and narrative incidents. As Jowett (2016) notes, particular musical motifs and cues are used in association with particular characters and subplots to indicate the mood or tone. As the series continues, this music becomes detached from its original context – motifs associated with comedic scenes and characters are included in moments of serious drama, cues that were used to signify the eerie supernatural elements of the show are attached moments of mundane drama. The discordant musical ques and motifs call overt attention to the construction of the scene in question, making familiar genre tropes and conventions feel strange as a result of this audio mismatch.

It is this component of the uncanniness of *Twin Peaks* – where familiar genres and categories of storytelling are combined in ways that render them strange and subvert audience expectations and responses – which is difficult to replicate in gameplay. Regardless of the uncanniness of their narratives or their visuals, videogames typically require their audiences to engage with a limited set of mechanics which are generally determined by the broad category that the game falls into (e.g. role-playing, action, etc.). While the narrative or visual imagery found in the game may work to destabilise the player, the gameplay itself, once mastered, will typically remain familiar. Even the gamerly uncanny that Hoeger and Huber (2007) identify as operating in third person survival horror games is limited in this regard. While the way in which survival horror foregrounds and complicates

the relationship between the player and their avatar can certainly produce an unsettling uncanny effect, it is an effect that will probably be expected, anticipated and appreciated by the player, due to their familiarity with the survival horror category itself and/or their growing familiarity with the systems and mechanics of a specific survival horror title. By and large, while the videogames mentioned above draw upon the uncanny narrative, setting and imagery of *Twin Peaks* for inspiration, their gameplay remains cohesive and familiar, allowing the player to understand and achieve mastery of their systems in a predictable way, whether they fall within survival horror, action or adventure game categories. The consistency that is typically associated with good gameplay makes it difficult to translate the destabilising and disruptive elements of the uncanniness of *Twin Peaks* in a videogame.

The cult videogame title *Deadly Premonition* (2010) provides a rare example of how the subversive elements of the uncanniness of a show like *Twin Peaks* can be incorporated into the gamerly uncanny described by Hoeger and Huber (2007). Where Hoeger and Huber (2007) principally explore the ways in which the gamerly uncanny develops out of the player's relationship with their onscreen avatar, an examination of *Deadly Premonition* reveals that it can also be evoked through the destabilising combination of familiar modes of gameplay. Attempting to replicate the distinctive uncanniness of *Twin Peaks* in both its narrative and gameplay requires *Deadly Premonition* to expand upon some of the gameplay features traditionally associated with survival horror titles. It does so by incorporating elements from other categories of gameplay in ways that will probably render them strange and unfamiliar to experienced players, and by self-consciously foregrounding the uncanny relationship between the player and their onscreen avatar in its narrative.

3.   Expansion and excess: the gamerly uncanny in Deadly Premonition

Deadly Premonition is a third person survival horror game in which the player takes the role of an FBI agent, Francis "York" Morgan, who has been sent to investigate a murder in the small rural town of Greenvale. Upon arrival, York and the player discover that supernatural forces to be at work as their investigation takes them into a nightmarish otherworld inhabited by hostile ghosts and spirits. While the game's director, Hidetaka 'SWERY' Suehiro, has been cagey about acknowledging the direct influence of *Twin Peaks* on *Deadly Premonition* (Kumar 2011), most, if not all reviews, tend to the similarities with the television series. The parallels that can be identified in characters, locations, story beats and imagery are too numerous to list here, but what is truly notable is how it manages to translate the uncanniness of the atmosphere and themes of the series its style of play, which combines survival horror traditions with a free-roaming open world and life-simulation elements.

Upon its release, *Deadly Premonition* was generally received as a survival horror videogame title and this categorisation is understandable, given that it shares many of the gameplay features and representational elements commonly associated with this category. In terms of its visual aesthetics it bears a similarity to the seminal survival horror game *Silent Hill* (1999), with its washed-out colour palette, limited draw-distance, and movements between mundane settings and nightmarish, blood-streaked alternative realities. As Pruett (2011) notes, player characters in survival horror titles tend to be presented as relatively ordinary in their physical attributes and fighting abilities when compared to the protagonists of more action-oriented video games, and this is true of Francis York Morgan in

Deadly Premonition. Furthermore, Agent York is frequently presented as overwhelmed by the foes that he faces, being forced to run and hide at various points in game, providing the sense of vulnerability that Hand (2004) identifies as being essential to the success of survival horror. In the game's combat focused sections, the player is trapped in the maze-like environments common to survival horror titles (Kirkland 2005), and the awkward movement and aiming mechanics (reminiscent of *Resident Evil* ([1995]) work to both highlight the uncanny relationship between the player and their onscreen double (Hoeger and Huber 2007) and to restrict the player's control and field of view in the manner described by Krzywinska, who notes that survival horror games typically position the player as being "… unable to act as efficiently as would be expected…" (2015, p.296).

Despite the expected presence of these elements, however, few, if any, reviews suggest that *Deadly Premonition* is particularly scary to play. *Deadly Premonition*'s general inability to scare the player could be taken as a result of its outdated design and graphics, which were noted in a number of highly critical reviews, most notably IGN's withering appraisal at the time of its release (Brudvig 2010). However, the lack of the typical tension and fear expected from survival horror titles can also be understood as resulting from its excess and combination of gameplay features, all of which contribute to its unique uncanny aesthetic. Perhaps the most important of these is the open world nature of the game, which allows the player (between combat-focused missions) to explore the town of Greenville in a manner reminiscent of the *Grand Theft Auto 4* (2008) series. While backtracking between previously explored locations is a common feature of survival horror titles, relatively few games within this category provide a genuinely open world for players to freely explore at their leisure. The oppressive, terrifying atmosphere of survival horror games is often linked to the restrictive and claustrophobic environments that they force the player to traverse (Kirkland 2005), and is generally developed at the expense of player preference or choice, with horror games tending to favour a predetermined or 'on rails' structure (Kirkland 2009a). Girard (2011) goes as far as to argue that it would be impossible to develop the mounting terror that defines survival horror gameplay in a free roaming environment. The relatively few survival horror titles that do provide open worlds usually maintain their tension by surprising the players with aggressive enemies (for example *Silent Hill: Downpour* [2012] or *The Evil Within 2* [2017]), but this is not the case in *Deadly Premonition* where the player can explore the town and its surroundings in complete safety between story missions. The player can drive cars, talk to NPCs, and complete supplementary activities, like darts and fishing mini-games, in a manner reminiscent of adventure/role-playing titles like *Shenmue* (1997) and *Yakuza* (2005). The player is required to maintain the health and appearance of Agent York while they explore the town, ensuring that they sleep, eat and bathe at regular intervals, but these life-simulation elements are very easy to complete, and never become fraught or stressful in the manner of a survival horror title like *Pathologic* (2008), where the need to manage the player character's health, fatigue and hunger adds to the tension and the desperate atmosphere of the game. In fact, the often excessive rewards for these activities, where players will receive hundreds of dollars for something as simple as shaving work to undermine the more conventional survival horror sequences, by allowing players to purchase and stockpile a surplus of in-game resources. Survival horror titles tend to place strict limits on the in-game resources that that the player can accumulate to aid them in combat encounters (Perron 2009; Kirkland 2005). This typically forces players to inhabit a "survival space" within the game (Browning 2011), where the decisions they make in regard to exploration and combat are unusually fraught. The open world sections of *Deadly Premonition*, however, allow them to easily accumulate enough resources to act confidently in most instances, removing this expected tension.

While it does not deliver the tension and fear of typical survival horror titles, *Deadly Premonition*'s combination and excess of gameplay features nonetheless results in an uncanny experience for the player. The combination of different and seemingly incompatible gameplay styles (survival horror, open-world adventure, life-simulation and more) mirror the combinations and juxtapositions of different genres and modes of television storytelling found in *Twin Peaks*. *Deadly Premonition*'s movements between survival horror and open world exploration present not just a stark contrast in style, but also potentially undermine the rhythms and outcomes that players generally expect from these modes of gameplay. Not only do the resources accumulated in the open world sections rob the survival horror combat of much of its tension, but the populated and welcoming small town environment that the player explores offers a prolonged relief from the sense of isolation that is often vital to the development of discomfort and terror in survival horror titles (Hand 2004). Similarly, the awkward movement, perspective and navigation controls - common to survival horror titles - means that the open world exploration in *Deadly Premonition* does not feel as free and or as fluid as players might expect when compared to games like *Grand Theft Auto 4* and its various derivatives. *Deadly Premonition* also uses its soundtrack to confuse and complicate the emotional responses of its audience throughout these shifts in a manner that is very similar to *Twin Peaks*. The folk guitar main theme that the player hears every time they return to the main menu constantly disrupts the survival horror atmosphere, and the almost parodic jazz track that accompanies moments of investigation and supernatural strangeness in the survival horror sections is also applied to seemingly mundane activities in the open world sections, such as Agent York's lunch order in a local diner, or the consumption of a cup of coffee (Waring 2016). The combination of open world adventure and survival horror in *Deadly Premonition* works undermines the horror of the game's narrative and representational elements while still contributing to the game's uncanny character by transforming both the mechanics and the effect of familiar modes of gameplay into something unfamiliar, baffling or even alienating.

Further parallels between the destabilising uncanniness of *Twin Peaks* and *Deadly Premonition* can be seen through the ways in which both integrate seemingly realistic elements into their plot/narrative (in the case of the former) and gameplay (in the case of the latter) in ways that make them feel strange and unnatural. Todd McGowan argues that *Twin Peaks* "often seems unrealistic because of its excess of realism" (2016, p.145) – the show's tendency to focus on mundane exchanges and details that would normally be ignored in television narratives will seem strange to audiences familiar with the rhythms of police procedurals. This persists through the typical Lynchian visual fixation on objects and locations in the series – the lingering shots and close-ups of numbered doors, corridors and staircases, curtains, machinery etc. noted by Molodvan (2015) – where mundane features become strange through the unfamiliar focus and emphasis that is applied to them. A similar uncanniness is generated in *Deadly Premonition*. In survival horror games seemingly realistic objects and settings are traditionally important to deepening the player's immersion in the terrifying experience (Holmes 2010), but some of the excessively realistic elements of *Deadly Premonition* run counter to this, disrupting the player's immersion due to their lack of practical gameplay utility and their destabilising contrast with more overtly 'game-like' features as well as the underdeveloped visuals, animations and controls. Though the driving gameplay is torturously bad, the player has the option to view the interior of the car in first person, with a functioning gas gauge, speedometer, windscreen wipers and turn signals. All of the crudely animated non-player-characters (NPCs) in the town follow complex daily schedules, and the player even has the ability to peer through their bedroom windows

to watch them sleep at night. The player must ensure that Agent York sleeps, eats and bathes at regular intervals, but as noted earlier, there is no sense of tension or challenge attached to these activities. These excessively realistic features clash awkwardly with the game's frequent reminders of its own artificiality. These include the cash rewards which appear on screen like points or scores in arcade games; the flashing and rotating icons used to represent health supplies and ammunition; and the names that float above the heads of NPCs in a manner reminiscent of older Japanese role-playing games. In this sense, the excessive realism found in certain aspects of *Deadly Premonition*'s setting and gameplay works to create an uncanny effect in a manner similar to the focus on mundane objects and exchanges in *Twin Peaks*. In both cases they do not work to heighten the player's immersion in a realistic fictional world but rather deliver an alienating uncanniness due to the sense of strangeness that is created through their seemingly unnecessary presence.

The excess of both needlessly realistic detail and gameplay features found in *Deadly Premonition* connects it both to *Twin Peaks*, and the tradition of the Gothic that the series draws upon. In Gothic Literature (and its successor the 'Weird' tale) a wealth of detail, description and incident is used prolong rather than resolve the uncertainties of the reader (Krzywinska 2015a), and Gothic narratives are usually set against a background of excess (like castles and manors of rich elites), which provides a symbolic frame for the transgressive themes of their narratives (Chess 2015). This strategy of excess is what complicates and confounds attempts to read *Deadly Premonition* simply as a survival horror title, given that survival horror as a category of gameplay is defined by the restrictions and limitations it places on the player, in terms of movement, point-of-view, in-game options and resources, etc. (Krywinska 2015). While survival horror games often indulgence in Gothic sensibilities via some of their representational qualities (particularly their settings and the macabre histories that underpin their narrative) the expansive and destabilising excess of the genre is not typically reflected in their gameplay.

Deadly Premonition reproduces the subversive uncanniness of *Twin Peaks* via a similar strategy of contrast and excess, though one that is focused on familiar categories of gameplay rather than film and television genres and narratives. In doing so it demonstrates the potential of the gamerly uncanny to provide destabilising, self-reflective experiences beyond the simple evocation of terror, dread or tension. Hoeger and Huber (2007) argue that games within the survival horror category tend to present the most deliberate and sophisticated evocations of a gamerly uncanny, as occasionally accentuating the distance between the player and their on-screen avatar is an effective means of creating an atmosphere of tension and terror. The uncanniness of *Deadly Premonition*, however, works to disrupt its audience's familiarity with survival horror itself by failing or refusing to terrify at expected moments, and through its jarring movements into other gaming rhymes and styles.

Perhaps the most important parallel, however, between the televisual uncanniness of *Twin Peaks* and the gamerly uncanniness of *Deadly Premonition* relates to their shared focus on doubles and duality. The double is one of the principle areas of engagement with or experience of the uncanny (Royle 2003) and in both its narrative and visual imagery, *Twin Peaks* explores dual or contrasting worlds, characters and identities. *Deadly Premonition* addresses this fixation through the way in which it overtly narrativises the gameplay relationship between the player and their onscreen avatar, Agent York. In doing so it uses the principle mechanism of the gamerly uncanny as described to Hoeger and Huber (2007) to directly comment upon and explore one of the most powerful expressions of duality in *Twin Peaks*: the recurrent theme of possession.

4.   Possession in *Twin Peaks* and *Deadly Premonition*

Like Freud, Lacan emphasised the importance of the double or reflection in encounters with or experiences of the uncanny. Where Freud identifies the double as the "uncanny harbinger of death" (Freud p.235), in that the uneasiness it evokes is due to the idea of immortality it implies or creates – a duplicate or repetition that can survive the original – Lacan argues that uncanniness results from the way in which a double or duplicate blurs the boundaries of interiority and exteriority. Lacan defined the territory of the uncanny as *extimite*, a point where the most intimate interiority of a subject is somehow externalised and separated from them, becoming unfamiliar, threatening or horrifying (Dolar 1991). For Lacan the double or reflection is profoundly uncanny not only because it conveys an intimation of death, but because it transforms what should be the most familiar territory of all – the interior self – into something strange and disconnected.

As Weinstock (2016) notes, possession is the uncanny horror at the heart of *Twin Peaks* – where the interior self is revealed as an alien duplicate or consciousness. In the series the malevolent spirit Killer BOB is able to literally inhabit both the bodies and identities of others. Savoy (2016) argues that BOB operates as a literalisation of Lacan's model of the uncanny, observing that BOB is often depicted as appearing in mirrors, eerily mimicking the movements and expressions of those he has possessed, an exposure of the interior self that, in a Lacanian sense, transforms it into an alien and menacing countenance. BOB is arguably presented as the ultimate evil in *Twin Peaks*, the "dark passenger" (Savoy 2016, p.124) concealed within seemingly benign individuals and the traces of his hidden presence within the show work to transform the familiar tropes and rhythms of the soap opera and the police procedural into something unsettling and sinister.

The preoccupation with possession in *Twin Peaks* is interesting to consider alongside the ways in which third-person survival horror titles typically foreground and complicate the relationship between the player and their onscreen avatar as a means of producing tension and fear (Hoeger and Huber 2007, Kirkland 2009). The onscreen avatar serves, at one level, as the player's point of entry and orientation, the game's most familiar and accessible feature. At another level, the disconnection between the player and their avatar, where the player's inputs and commands have delayed, cumbersome or unexpected outcomes, is undeniably uncanny. Hoeger and Huber (2007) suggest that this can be akin to a battle between the player and an unknown intelligence for possession of the onscreen avatar. This uncanniness is occasionally accentuated by games with dialogue and narratives that emphasise the separation of the player and their avatar. In *Silent Hill 2* (2001) the player is initially unaware of the true history of the protagonist they are controlling and advancing through the game works to alienate the player from their onscreen avatar rather than deepening their identification. The protagonist of *Silent Hill 3* (2003), Heather, will occasionally address the player directly or refuse to perform an action in ways that make the player uncomfortably aware of the control they are exerting over her in a narrative that revolves around the themes of possession and exploitation (Kirkland 2007). In some other titles outside of the survival horror category (for example, *Metal Gear Solid* [1998] and *The Bureau: XCom Declassified* [2013]) moments in the narrative that call overt attention to the player's control and manipulation of their avatar can be likened to Brechtian alienation in that they suddenly expose the system that has been used to produce and prolong the player's immersion and potentially open it to critique (Dunne 2014). In all of these examples the sudden or gradual disruption of the player's

identification with their onscreen avatar is presented as an unsettling moment. Kyrnwinska argues that survival horror video games often assault or disrupt the player's control because "supernatural forces working to threaten sphere of human agency" (2002, p.206) is a consistent feature of the horror genre. The moments where the player themselves is constructed as one of these external forces therefore have the potential to be doubly disturbing.

Conway (2010) argues that these self-aware moments in videogame play do not "break the fourth wall" in the way that that they do in non-interactive media, where they momentarily or permanently disrupt the 'suspension of disbelief' that allows the audience to emotionally invest themselves in a fictional world or narrative. Rather they have the potential to extend the game's "magic circle" (Huizinga [1938] 1949) to encompass the player themselves, giving traditionally non-diegetic actions diegetic meaning. *Deadly Premonition* is novel in that it uses this extension to explore the idea of the player as a possessing consciousness in a sustained and consistent way through both narrative and gameplay. Rather than emphasising the duality of the player and their avatar in order to produce moments of discomfort or alienation, *Deadly Premonition* works to normalise it, which produces its own distinctively uncanny effect. This is teased out through yet another innovative parallel between *Deadly Premonition* and *Twin Peaks*. Both Cooper in the original series and York in the video game engage in lengthily monologues, which allow them to directly express their thoughts, feelings, memories and observations. In *Twin Peaks*, these take the form of Cooper's tape-recorded reflections, which are directed to his never-seen secretary Diane. In *Deadly Premonition*, they are delivered through York's one-sided conversations and asides to an apparently imaginary friend named Zach. In both cases these off-screen characters essentially function as audience surrogates, which is natural enough for the passive audience of a television show, but presents some interesting complications when the activeness of the videogame audience is taken into account. As *Deadly Premonition* develops, it becomes clear that when York is talking to Zach, he is actually talking directly to the player. Furthermore, throughout these asides, York seems aware that the player, as Zach, is directing the action. For example, when enemies are approaching in the opening level, York quips "Looks like we've got company, Zach. I'll let you handle the meet and greet", acknowledging that the player is taking control as the game moves from cut-scene to combat. Throughout the game, York regularly congratulates Zach for finding objects and items, and completing in-game tasks and activities. The moments of shock or disruption in the player/avatar relationship described in other games rely heavily on an assumption of direct identification between the player and their avatar in order to have their desired effect. *Deadly Premonition*, by contrast, emphasises that the player and the onscreen personality are separate and distinct from the outset, using York's monologues and comments to Zach (which in other narrative games might be presented as the protagonist talking to "themselves") to constantly remind the audience of this division.

 Throughout the game, Zach's control over York's body is presented as natural – when the player chooses to diverge from the critical path to pause or explore, York will typically make an encouraging or accepting comment (e.g. "Seen something Zach? It's okay, we have time."). The final movements of the game's plot reveal that York was an alternative personality created by Zach in response to an acute childhood trauma: the protagonist's true identity has been concealed behind the façade of York all along. While the overt acknowledgement that the player is "possessing" the protagonist is uncanny, due to its contrast with familiar video game player/avatar relationships, this uncanniness is not used to accentuate the terrifying or alienating atmosphere of typical survival horror titles. The dual identities are presented as working in tandem, with York providing observation and commentary and Zach

determining movement and direction. In this sense, *Deadly Premonition* presents an inversion of the approach to possession found in *Twin Peaks*. In the series, the "passenger" that resides within and asserts control over a number of the characters is something alien and other, in *Deadly Premonition* it is presented as a welcome presence – the player themselves. By the end of the game, once the true nature of the York/Zach duality has been revealed, York's commentary can be understood as encouragement – prompting Zach/the player to emerge and take direct control and agency. Tellingly, the final moments of the game see the player exploring Greenville as Zach, who has moved past the need for the alternative York personality. The NPCs remaining in the town identify and address the player as Zach, suggesting that the video game character that the players have inhabited or possessed throughout the game has always been a protective fiction and that they have been the true protagonist all along. In this sense, *Deadly Premonition* moves beyond its status as a simple homage or quasi-adaptation of *Twin Peaks* and presents an innovative alternative reading of the theme of possession by considering how it applies to gameplay. It reflects or inverts the preoccupation with duality and possession in *Twin Peaks* to explore the ways in which the player may possess or inhabit a video game protagonist – where the hidden passenger is revealed is revealed not as dangerous or unknowable other but as the true self all along. The uncanny effect that is created through the York/Zach meta-commentary is distinct from the gamerly uncanny that is typically present in survival horror titles. As Hoeger and Huber (2007) note, the gamerly uncanny in survival horror is usually created through the disruption or complication of the player's control over their avatar, but this is dependent on a strong sense of identification with the avatar, or at least the desire for it. The exploration of the player/avatar relationship in *Deadly Premonition* lacks the terrifying or alienating dimensions that might be expected from survival horror titles, but it is nonetheless distinctly and provocatively uncanny, as it works to dispute this need for the familiar illusion of a singular identification, rather engaging with (and exposing) the player/avatar relationship as a possessive duality.

5.   Conclusion: the uncanniness of Deadly Premonition

While it can be understood simply as a flawed or failed video game title, an appreciation of the sophisticated uncanniness of *Deadly Premonition* helps to explain its niche appeal and divided critical reception. Hoeger and Huber (2007) define the gamerly uncanny as an uncanniness that develops not just out of a game's representational elements, but also from the ways in which it renders familiar videogame actions and relationships as strange. They argue that the gamerly uncanny develops principally out of the ways in which games, and in particular survival horror titles, disrupt or complicate the player's relationship with their onscreen avatar. *Deadly Premonition* serves to demonstrate how this idea of the gamerly uncanny can be expanded upon and explored more deeply in order to deliver a novel gameplay experience. It develops its distinctly uncanny character through a number of interconnected strategies. In contrast to typical survival horror design, which is usually defined by the limitations it places on the player and a minimalist aesthetic, *Deadly Premonition* offers expansion and excess, combining a range of gameplay styles and experiences. This has the effect of rendering familiar gameplay features strange and uncanny to the player due to their apparent incompatibility and contradictory outcomes. *Deadly Premonition* disrupts not just the familiar player/avatar relationship, but the familiarity of the survival horror category of gameplay itself in order to deliver a distinctly uncanny effect. In this sense, it is very similar to the genre-bending elements of its source material *Twin Peaks*, which used the juxtaposition of different styles of familiar television

narratives to subvert the expectations of its audience. *Deadly Premonition*'s complex relationship with the television series that inspired it contributes to its uniquely uncanny aesthetic and atmosphere. A significant number of games demonstrate the clear influence of *Twin Peaks* in their narrative and visuals, but *Deadly Premonition* is arguably unique in its attempts to address the themes of the series through both its representational and gameplay elements. Its particular consideration of the themes of duality and possession leads to a provocative commentary on the player/avatar relationship. *Deadly Premonition* ultimately works to demonstrate the ways in which the development of a distinct gamerly uncanny can be used not just to create a sense of fear or alienation, but also a sophisticated self-awareness in relation to familiar and accepted relationships between videogame narrative and gameplay features.

References

2K Marin. 2013. The Bureau: XCOM Declassified. PC, PlayStation 3, Xbox 360. Novato CA: 2K Games.

Access Games. 2010. *Deadly Premonition*. PlayStation 3, Xbox 360. Tokyo: Marvellous Entertainment.

Atlus. 2008. *Persona 4*. PlayStation 2, PlayStation Vita. Tokyo: Atlus.

Botting, Fred. 2008. *Limits of Horror: Technology, Bodies, Gothic*. Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press.

Browning, John Edgar. 2011. Survival Horrors, Survival Spaces: Tracing the Modern Zombie (cine) Myth. *Horror Stories* 2:1: 41-59 <u>https://www.academia.edu/6697551/_Survival_Horrors_Survival_Spaces_Tracing_the_Modern_Zombie_Cine_Myth_HORROR_STUDIES_2011_uncorrected_proof_</u>

Brudvig, Erik. 2010. Deadly Premonition Review. *IGN*. February 22. Available online: <u>http://au.ign.com/articles/2010/02/23/deadly-premonition-review</u> (accessed on 22 June 2018).

Capcom. 1996. *Resident Evil*. Playstation. Osaka: Capcom.

Chess, Shira. 2015. Uncanny Gaming: The Ravenhearst Videogames and Gothic Appropriation. *Feminist Media Studies* 15 (3): 382-396, <u>https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2014.930062</u>

Clifftop Games. 2016. *Kathy Rain*. PC. Stockholm: Raw Fury.

Conway, Steven. 2010. A Circular Wall? Reformulating the Fourth Wall for Videogames. *Journal of Gaming and Virtual Worlds* 2(2): 145–155. <u>http://dx.doi.org/10.1386/jgvw.2.2.145_1</u>

Dolar, Mladen. 1991. "I Shall Be with You on Your Wedding-Night": Lacan and the Uncanny. *October* 58, 5-23. <u>https://www.jstor.org/stable/778795</u>

Dontnod Entertainment. 2015. Life is Strange. PC, PlayStation 3, PlayStation 4, Xbox 360, Xbox One. Tokyo: Square Enix.

Dunne, Daniel. 2014. Brechtian Alienation in Videogames. *Press Start* 1(1): 79-99. https://press-start.gla.ac.uk/index.php/press-start/article/view/8/7

Freud, Sigmund. 1955. The Uncanny in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XVII (1917-1919): An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works*. Translated by James Strachey. London: The Hogarth Press. First published 1919. 213-256.

Frost, Mark and Lynch, David. 1990-1991. *Twin Peaks*. Performed by Kyle MacLachlan, Michael Ontkean, Mädchen Amick, Dana Ashbrook, Richard Beymer, Lara Flynn Boyle, Sherilyn Fenn, Warren Frost, Peggy Lipton, James Marshall, Everett McGill and et. al. California: Lynch/Frost Productions and Spelling Television Inc.

Girard, Pavel. 2015. *"The Fear System" – Triggering Tension in Survival Horror Videogames.* Norderstedt: GRIN Verlag.

Hand, Richard, J. 2007. Proliferating Horrors: Survival Horror and the Resident Evil Franchise. In *Horror Film: Creating and Marketing Fear*. Edited by Steffan Hantke. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi. 117-134.

Hoeger, Lauren and Huber, William. 2007. Ghastly multiplication: Fatal Frame II and the Videogame Uncanny. *Proceedings of the 2007 DiGRA International Conference: Situated Play*. Edited by Akira Baba. DIGRA. 152-156. http://www.digra.org/wp-content/uploads/digital-library/07313.12302.pdf

Holmes, Eben. 2010. Strange Reality: Glitches and Uncanny Play. *Eludamos. Journal for Computer Game Culture*. 4 (2): 255-276. http://eludamos.org/index.php/eludamos/article/view/vol4no2-9/188

Huizinga, Johan. 1949. *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture.* London: Routledge. First published 1938.

Ice Pick Lodge. 2005. *Pathologic*. PC. Moscow: Ice Pick Lodge.

Jentsch, Ernst. 1995. On the Psychology of the Uncanny. Translated by Roy Sellars. *Angelaki* 2: 7-16. First published 1906.

Jowett, Lorna. 2016. Nightmare in red: Twin Peaks parody, homage and mashup. In *Return to Twin Peaks: New Approaches to Materiality, Theory, and Genre on Television*. Edited by Jeffery Andrew Weinstock and Catherine Spooner. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. 211-227.

Kirkland, Ewan. 2009. Horror Videogames and the Uncanny. *DiGRA '09 - Proceedings of the 2009 DiGRA International Conference: Breaking New Ground: Innovation in Games, Play, Practice and Theory*. http://www.digra.org/wp-content/uploads/digital-library/09287.25453.pdf

Kirkland, Ewan. 2009a. Storytelling and Survival Horror. In *Horror Video Games*. Edited by Bernard Perron. Jefferson, NA: McFarland & Company, Inc. 26-45.

Kirkland, Ewan. 2007. The Self-Reflexive Funhouse of Silent Hill.   Convergence 3(4): 403 – 415. https://doi.org/10.1177/1354856507081964

Kirkland, Ewan. 2005. Restless Dreams in Silent Hill: Approaches to Videogame analysis. *The Journal of Media Practice* 6: 183-195.

Konami. 1998. *Metal Gear Solid*. PC, PlayStation. Tokyo: Konami.

Konami. 1999. *Silent Hill*. PlayStation. Tokyo: Konami.

Konami. 2001. *Silent Hill 2*. PlayStation 2. Tokyo: Konami.

Konami. 2003. *Silent Hill 3*. PlayStation 2. Tokyo: Konami.

Kristeva, Julia. 1982. Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection. Translated by. Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press.

Krzywinska, Tanya. 2015. Conspiracy Hermeneutics: The Secret World as Weird Tale. *Well Played* 3(2): 119-138.

Krzywinska, Tanya. 2015a. Gaming Horror's Horror: Representation, Regulation, and Affect in Survival Horror Video Games. *Journal of Visual Culture*: 293-297. http://vcu.sagepub.com/content/14/3/293.abstract?rss=1

Krzywinska Tanya. 2002. Hands-On Horror. In Screenplay: Cinema/Videogames/Interfaces. Edited by Geoff King and Tanya Krzywinska. London: Wallflower Press. 206-223.

Kumar, Matthew. 2011. The 'Swery Game': Hidetaka Suehiro on Deadly Premonition. *Gamasutra*. June 3. Available online: https://www.gamasutra.com/view/feature/134764/the_swery_game_hidetaka_suehiro_.php

McGowan, Todd. 2016. Lodged in a Fantasy Space: Twin Peaks and Hidden Obscenities. In *Return to Twin Peaks: New Approaches to Materiality, Theory, and Genre on Television*. Edited by Jeffery Andrew Weinstock and Catherine Spooner. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. 143-157.

Molodvan, Raluca. 2015. That Show You Like Might Be Coming Back in Style": How Twin Peaks Changed the Face of Contemporary Television. American, British and Canadian Studies 24(1): 44-68.

Mori, Masahiro. 2012. The Uncanny Valley. IEEE Spectrum. June 12. Translated by Karl F. MacDorman and Norri Kageki. First published 1970. https://spectrum.ieee.org/automaton/robotics/humanoids/the-uncanny-valley

Perron, Bernard. 2009. Introduction: Gaming After Dark. In Horror Video Games. Edited by Bernard Perron. Jefferson, NA: McFarland & Company, Inc. 13-14.

Remedy Entertainment. 2010. *Alan Wake*. Xbox 360. Redmond WA: Microsoft Game Studios.

Rockstar North. 2008. Grand Theft Auto 4. PC, PlayStation 3, Xbox 360. New York: Rockstar Games.

Royle, Nicholas. 2003. The Uncanny. New York: Routledge.

Savoy Eric. 2016. Jacques Lacan, Walk with Me: On the Letter. In Return to Twin Peaks: New Approaches to Materiality, Theory, and Genre on Television. Edited by Jeffery Andrew Weinstock and Catherine Spooner. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. 123-141.

Sega. 1999. *Shenmue*. Nintendo Gamecube. Tokyo: Sega.

Sega. 2005. *Yakuza*. PlayStation 2. Tokyo: Sega.

Tango Gameworks. 2017. *The Evil Within 2*. PC, PlayStation 4, Xbox One. Rockville MD: Bethseda Softworks.

Tecmo. 2003. Fatal Frame 2: The Crimson Butterfly. PlayStation 2, Xbox. Tokyo: Tecmo.

Tinwell, Angela and Grimshaw, Mark. 2009. Survival Horror Games - An Uncanny Modality. Paper presented at the Thinking After Dark Conference, Montreal, Canada, April 23-25. http://www.academia.edu/1358775/Tinwell_A._and_Grimshaw_M._2009_Survival_horror_games_-_an_uncanny_modality_paper_presented_at_the_Thinking_After_Dark_Conference_Montreal_Canada_23-25_April

Vatra Games. 2012. Silent Hill: Downpour. PlayStation 3, Xbox 360. Tokyo: Konami.

Waring, Patrick. 2016. Deadly Premonition Retrospective Review. Gamecloud. February 10. Available online: https://gamecloud.net.au/featured/reviews/deadly-premonition-retrospective-review

Weinstock, Andrew. 2016. Wondrous and Strange: The Matter of Twin Peaks. In *Return to Twin Peaks: New Approaches to Materiality, Theory, and Genre on Television*. Edited by Jeffery Andrew Weinstock and Catherine Spooner. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. 29-46.