

Introduction

The Ludiciné Research Team

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This special issue of *Loading...* features some of the papers presented at the international conference “Thinking After Dark: Welcome to the World of Horror Video Games” that was held in Montréal in April 2009, bringing together scholars from around the world to study this unique corpus. While some of the papers have already been published in *Horror Video Games: Essays on the Fusion of Fear and Play* (edited by Bernard Perron, McFarland, 2009), the quality and originality of the other presentations called for a complementary publication. Given the lack of genre studies that mars the video game’s rise in academia, these conference proceedings represent an important contribution. The papers published herein favor an intermedial approach to the manifestations of horror in other cultural practices (literary and filmic) in order to chart the realm of videoludic horror.

This study of videoludic, filmic and literary horror constitutes an essential starting point to better understand the specificity of each media, and opens up multiple areas of inquiry. Of concern are the ways in which the video game reuses the narrative strategies of novels and the staging of horror developed in film, the recurrent modalities of “ludification” in multiple videoludic adaptations of films or novels, and the expansion of filmic horror through the adaptation of horror video games. A more thorough examination of the different variations of horror in the video game also proves necessary. In order to identify some generic effects that are truly specific to the games labeled as “*survival horror*”, and in order to bring up national specificities of the genre beyond the universal reach of fear, a cultural analysis proves to be just as important.

This multidisciplinary dynamic reflects and highlights many complementary objectives. Given that the survival of an avatar constitutes the cardinal issue of a great majority of video games, the horror video game remains the videoludic genre *par excellence*. These proceedings thus provide an in-depth exploration of the issue from a historical and theoretical point of view. They allow us to improve our knowledge of, and they make more widely known, the original corpus that the horror video game is. Finally, they permit, on one hand, the positioning of new perspectives and novel analytical methods in video game studies, and, on the other hand, the fleshing out of the role of horror in videoludic expression.

Though not directly related to the video game, the historical overview of filmic horror offered by Barry K. Grant (keynote speaker at the conference and leading authority on the 7th art) that opens this issue remains a formidable introduction to the ins and outs of the genre, while laying out a general survey that acts as a springboard toward the other contributors’ papers. Exploring the large spectrum of emotions generated by horror films, Grant brings to the fore the modifications that the genre went through according to the

taboo fears and cultural anxieties particular to different historical and cultural contexts. Moreover, the paper explains how filmic horror can act as a release of our collective and individual fears.

Alexis Blanchet launches the transition towards the videoludic medium by focusing on the exchanges between film and the video game from an industrial and commercial point of view. The author approaches more precisely the adaptation of a horror film into video game form, questioning what makes up the specificity of each medium and measuring the impact of this transmedial relationship on the themes, myths and figures of filmic horror. Basing his study on a most rigorous statistical work and the analysis of fifty-some video games adapted from film, the author studies the way in which filmic horror is remediated while reflecting on the modifications that cinema undergoes through its borrowings from the video game.

As for him, Dominic Arsenault tackles the problems caused by the phenomenon of generic hybridity by laying the foundations of a new theoretical approach to the question of genre: a pragmatics of generic effects. According to this theory, the reception of a cultural object is modulated by a multitude of one-off generic effects that shape the reader/viewer/player's horizon of expectations and comprehension of the object. By way of a case study of the thematic and ludic genres of *survival horror*, Arsenault makes the point that a video game like *Diablo*, which at first seems far from *survival horror*, nevertheless uses many genre effects that cannot be disregarded when analyzing the game's different formal elements.

For her part, Clara Fernández-Vara is interested in the figure of the vampire in *Castlevania: Symphony of the Night* and on the modes of integration of the conventions established in the mediums of literature and cinema in the game's design. To do so, she examines how the different conventions of horror from these mediums are reused in the iconography and gameplay of the games. From the use of archetypal characters in films as level bosses to the reclaiming of Dracula's vampiric powers by the player-character, Fernández-Vara explains how this transmedial process constructs the player's experience and reflects the cultural evolution of the figure of the vampire, gone from a subject of fear to a subject of desire.

Adopting an intermedial tangent between literature and the video game, Jonathan Lessard emphasizes the connection between the Lovecraft Mythos and the adventure game. Crossing the fictional and aesthetic dimensions of his corpus, Lessard not only demonstrates the existence of similitudes at the structural level between adventure games and Lovecraft's novellas, but also questions the ability of this match-up to generate cosmic fear, the matter at the heart of the influential writer's works. Using the video games *Darkness Within* and *Shadow of the Comet*, Lessard shows that what may at first glance seem like an inevitable opposition between the journey of the character (whose mental state deteriorates from the truths he discovers) and the pleasure of the player (who sees those discoveries as the rewards for his actions) does not prevent the creation of cosmic fear from the games' aesthetics and *mise en scène*.

Chris Pruett reflects on what the horror video game can teach us about the national identity of Japanese culture. Having a passion for the history and myths of his foster land, the author highlights the extent to which the large pool of horror video games produced in Japan – whether the games favor the imitation of Western motifs or directly draw from the country’s horrific myths – can communicate information to the player on the folklore, traditions and recent worries of the Japanese.

Finally, by basing his study on the game *Fatal Frame II: Crimson Butterfly*, and thanks to techniques from the scientific analysis of images and video data, William Huber shows how, through multiple semiotic registers, players can learn to meet the challenges of a game and more easily use the different signifiers simultaneously present on-screen to navigate and interpret what they see in the context of gameplay. This experiment also allows the author to identify the patterns of repetition and suspense that contribute to the production of the aesthetic experience and of the uncanny in *Fatal Frame II: Crimson Butterfly*.

Inasmuch as the international conference “Thinking After Dark: Welcome to the World of Horror Video Games” has been all fun and games (quite literally), there is no doubt in our minds that this special issue of *Loading...* showcases the enthusiasm sparked by the reflections and discussions that were held there. At a time when the genre of *survival horror* itself is being called into question by its fans in the blogosphere and by the gaming press, these thoughts and this issue are timely indeed, and remind us that video games, far from existing in a void, participate in the same media and cultural ecology than the other homes of horror.