

Panel Abstract Description

Monstrous Narratives: Adapting Ghosts, Death, Myths, and Animals in Game Storytelling

This panel seeks to introduce discourses on monsters and animals from the humanities to the field of game studies. Following its emergence in early modern critical theory, the development of monster studies gained momentum through the work of scholars like Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Donna Haraway, who conceptualize monsters as reflections of cultural values and advocate for an inclusive understanding of identity, coexistence, and interconnectedness. Key approaches to monster research comprise posthumanism, ethical inquiry, and cultural critique, which explore the relationships and representations of animals and monsters to highlight societal anxieties, power dynamics, and the construction of human identity within historical as well as contemporary frameworks.

Based on this foundation, the panel explores how video games adapt monsters as cultural artifacts that mediate identity, memory, and resistance. The common thread among the papers in this panel is their examination of how the representation of monsters serves as an entrance to diagnosing and destabilizing currently cultural and ideological conditions. In general, monsters in video games—such as ghosts, mythical creatures, and the dead, to name a few—are often stereotyped as enemies to be defeated, bosses to overcome, or NPCs sited in background, essentially, as the embodiment of evil and deviation. Nevertheless, these are instrumental characterizations of monsters, which may obscure the possible resistance and transformation possessed by monsters, along with their potentially genetical meaning and fertile entelechy. Therefore, a shared objective and motivation of each paper in this group is to reinstate the subject position of monsters, reveal the diversity of their narratives that differs from mainstream ones, and reflect on the specific cultural symptoms concealed behind their clichéd images. Meanwhile, the panel adopts multifaceted methodologies—including cultural studies, media theory, visual analysis, history, and mythology—to investigate the theoretical and empirical dimensions of the monsters involved.

To be more specific, the first two papers in this panel examine cultural symptoms through the lens of narratologies, uncovering the narrative dynamics embedded in the game, which defines human nature in relation to others. The first paper focuses on the symbolic role of female ghosts in Chinese indie horror puzzle games, analyzing their dual role as victims and agents of resistance. Drawing on feminist theory, cultural studies, and narratology, it examines how games transform these spectral figures into

metaphors for systemic injustice and gender oppression. The second paper articulates that the impossibility of death is an important philosophical proposition proposed by *The Walking Dead*. The characters in the game transform into zombies not because they were infected by a virus, but precisely because of their death. By appropriating narrative techniques from other media, such as comics and cinemas, the video game effectively conveys to players a deep reflection on death, ironically responding to nowadays living condition structured by globalization and digital economies that commodify lives into a mythical eternal state.

The last two papers focus on the emotional connections and symbiotic relationships between prehistoric creatures and humans. By exploring the "bestiaries" of pre-Qin China and the Western Middle Ages respectively, they reveal the historical paradigms of the coexistence of human and inhuman species, attempting to provide alternative solutions to contemporarily monotonous and toxic anthropocentrism. The third paper shifts the focus to the adaptation of Chinese mythology in modern games. Using the *Classic of Mountains and Seas* as a central reference, the paper explores how game developers reinterpret mythical creatures like dragons and serpents to craft immersive narratives that blend historical symbolism with philosophical inquiry. This study highlights how these mythical beings transcend cultural boundaries to engage global audiences, while simultaneously addressing questions of identity, spirituality, and ecological interconnectedness rooted in Chinese philosophy. The fourth paper explores the intersection of natural history and narrative, investigating how bestiaries and monster manuals in video games adapt and inherit traditions from natural history. Using the "animal turn" in historical studies, it argues that natural history writings, despite appearing disjointed, form cohesive narratives through taxonomy and organization. By comparing texts like Pliny's *Natural History* and the traditions of medieval bestiaries with *Dungeons & Dragons*, the paper highlights the preservation of these narrative traditions in modern video games. It suggests that these narratives can help players engage with post-human historical discourses.

In conclusion, the goal of the panel is to reveal how video games function not only as sources of entertainment but also as mediums for critical reflection on pressing social issues. By bridging the gap between traditional and contemporary contexts, the panel highlights the significance of preserving cultural heritage amidst modernization. Meanwhile, these studies also emphasize the potential for games to promote awareness and dialogue on themes of gender, biopolitics, anthropology, and ecology, suggesting that video games can enhance the understanding of cultural identity and collective memory.

Paper 1

Title:

The Terrible Victims: Female Ghosts as Cultural and Political Symbols in Chinese Indie Video Games

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the representation of female ghosts in Chinese indie horror puzzle games, focusing on their cultural, historical, and political significance. Despite challenges like limited funding and censorship, these games blend traditional Chinese aesthetics with modern storytelling, emerging as unique cultural artifacts.

Drawing from narratology, feminist theory, and cultural studies, this research analyzes key works such as *Detention*, *Laughing to Die*, *Firework*, and *Blind Village*. Female ghosts are depicted as allegories of systemic injustice, critiquing patriarchal oppression and socio-political marginalization. These narratives reflect anxieties rooted in folklore and classical literature, revealing gender disparities and silenced voices.

A comparative analysis highlights thematic differences between Taiwanese and mainland Chinese indie games. While Taiwanese titles like *Detention* emphasize redemption and liberation, mainland works such as *Firework* express anger and resentment, exposing unresolved gender issues and intellectual powerlessness. Ultimately, female ghosts embody subversive critique, navigating censorship to amplify marginalized voices.

This study contributes to discussions on gender representation and socio-political critique in games, showing how Chinese indie developers use horror to address historical and contemporary injustices.

Keywords

Female ghosts, Chinese indie games, horror puzzle games, feminist critique

Game references

Indie developer, 2022, *Blind Village*, Windows.

Gamera Game, 2021, *Firework*, Windows, Gamera Game.

Gamera Game, 2024, *Laughing to Die*, Windows, Gamera Game.

Red Candle Games, 2017, *Detention*, Windows, Gamera Game.

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Storytelling in the Game: Audience <http://nccur.lib.nccu.edu.tw/handle/140.119/133172>

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Paper 2

Title:

Beyond the Death: Ineffable Horror and the Evolution of Narrative in *The Walking Dead*

Abstract:

Under the multiple contexts of Anthropocene, Eschatology, and digital economy, this article takes the representation of death in *The Walking Dead (TWD)* as a focal point for analysis. It argues that the transmedia texts of *TWD* build a world where absolute death becomes an impossible event, responding to today's living condition shaped by globalization and digital economies that commodify lives into a mythical eternal state. Specifically, the paper delves into the transmedia narrative and representation of horror, unveiling the ways and implications of contemporary digital mediascape that construct our imagination of mortality, selfhood, and otherness. By examining the visual and textual elements in comics, cinematic techniques in television, and interactivity in gaming, the paper also elucidates the emotional engagements evoked to negotiate viewers or players' anxieties on existence. In doing so, this research provides significant insights to the discourse surrounding digital narratives and human condition, challenging existing paradigms of mortality and suggesting that our understandings must evolve alongside technological advancements. Through articulating death as a pivotal aspect of the human experience, the study underscores the profound implications of living in a digitally mediated age where the specter of the past continues to influence our present and future.

Keywords:

Death; transmedia; narrative techniques; otherness; The Walking Dead

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Paper 3

Title:

Dragons of "Classic of Mountains and Seas" in Chinese-style fantasy RPGs: An image connecting mythology and free imagination

Abstract:

Dragons represent significant symbolic importance in both East and West, though their biometrics and cultural connotations vary. In the West, dragons are commonly linked to fire-breathing, chaos, and malevolence, whereas the imperial power in the East. However, dragons were not initially associated with the symbol of emperors in ancient China but the mounts of deities and kings and were looked like serpents. It was described by the earliest ancient Chinese mythology collection "The Classic of Mountains and Seas". Within the collection, dragon have the identity and characteristics of animals and are vehicles for powerful shamans capable of traveling between the heavens and the earth. Further, some even could call the wind and rain, which related to water instead of fire. Nowadays, dragons are often reinterpreted in the Chinese-style fantasy RPGs to re-live meanings related to Chinese culture and philosophy. Developers retain the monstrous features of the dragon presented in the collection and create new immersive narratives, which had attracted players with non-Chinese culture from all over the world to understand the Chinese philosophy. This study highlights how these mythical creatures transcend cultural boundaries to engage global audiences, while addressing questions of identity, spirituality, and ecological interconnectedness rooted in Chinese philosophy.

Keywords:

Dragons; Classic of Mountains and Seas, Immersive Narrative, Traditional Chinese Philosophy, Nature Philosophy; Mythology

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Paper 4

Title:

Bestiaries as Living Narratives: Bridging Natural History and Monster Manual Traditions

Abstract:

Can natural history be narrative and tell a story? How do bestiaries and monster manuals in video games inherit and adapt the tradition of natural history, and what narratives do they form? Drawing on the "animal turn" in historical studies, this paper argues that natural history, despite its seemingly fragmented entries, forms a cohesive narrative through its selection, taxonomy, and cross-references. This narrative often reflects creation myths or the Great Chain of Being.

By comparing Pliny's *Natural History*, the *Physiologus*, and medieval bestiaries with the works of Linnaeus, Buffon, and the monster manual traditions in *Dungeons & Dragons*, this paper situates video game bestiaries within the broader history of Western European natural history narratives. It argues that video games, influenced by *Dungeons & Dragons*, preserve and adapt these traditions, even after the rise of modern biology. These games and their player communities continue to engage with the storytelling potential of natural history, positioning it as a resource for confronting posthuman historical narratives and reimagining humanity's relationship with the natural and mythical world.

Keywords:

Bestiaries; monster manuals; Dungeons & Dragons; natural history; the Great Chain of Being

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