DIGRA 2025 Workshop - Call for Participants

Microhorror: Through the Magnifying Glass

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While survival horror classics like Alone in the Dark, Resident Evil and Silent Hill return to consoles, updated with photo-realistic graphics, independent microhorror games (Brycer, 2022; Marak, 2021) lasting no more than 2-3 hours offer an opposite resurgence, proposing new universes that take up the look or formulas of past generations. We're seeing the resurgence of point'n clicks (the Midnight Scenes series by Octavi Navarro; *Now You see*, Screaming Void, 2019; *Teleforum,* Monumental Collab, 2023; *The Whisperer*, Chien d'or, 2021), fixed survival horror cameras (*Cannibal Abduction*, Tomás Esconjaureguy, 2023; *The Night of the Scissors,* Tomás Esconjaureguy, 2022), and the low-fidelity graphics of analog VHS or of PlayStation One (*Rewind or Die*, Comp 3 Interactive, 2023; *Bughouse*, Disrate Studio, 2022; *Bloodwash,* Black Eyed Priest & Henry Hoare, 2021), microcomputers (*The Thing of the Lake,* Panstasz, 2020) and Atari 2600 (the Faith Trilogy, Airdorf, 2022). This preference for the medium's visibility or hypermediacy (in Bolter and Grusin's terms, 1999), versus its transparency or immediacy, for a return to the past that reveals its strangeness, is accompanied by regularly nostalgic, intimate or meta themes. The living-room TV (*Duck Season,* Stress Level Zero, 2017), the portable console (*Summer Night,* Airdorf, 2020) or the computer (*Dreader,* Donitz, 2020; *World of Horror,* Pawel Koźmiński, 2023) become open doors to horror for unsuspecting children.

The main objectives of this workshop are: 1) to shade light on this very rich independent horror production, 2) to better map its family trees in the horror genre, and 3) to see how the past contaminates the present.

We'll be achieving these through three branches of presentation.

Branch 1: A Frightening Memory

We are all haunted by video game ghosts that reappear in current productions. This branch invites participants to immerse themselves in the haunting of the genre and to associate a recent microhorror game with one they used to enjoy or dread. Just as Laurie N. Taylor (2009) was able to look back on her memories of *Resident Evil 2* (Capcom, 1998) to highlight some of the specific aspects of survival horror and its evolution, we wish to learn about an experience of microgaming which has triggered back a reminiscence of one's gaming life. From nostalgia to new amazement, how this has shaded light on the short experience, whether it's Link's screams in *Majora's Mask* (Nintendo, 2000), the first confrontation with a zombie in *Resident Evil* (Capcom, 1996) or the bloody nightmare of *Max Payne* (Remedy, 2008).

Branch 2: To Scare by Design

Inasmuch as the tools and technology used to create microgames have been democratized and are more accessible, people can now design horror games. Consequently, this branch invites participants to introduce their own games, their inspiration and their thought process, from the frightful experiences they wanted to emulate to their research of new ways to make the genre mutate and evolve. It is also possible to present interviews with game designers regarding their creative process as it is always intriguing to know more about the evil minds behind the dreadful contraptions one loves to play.

Branch 3: From Analog to Digital Horror

Like a virus, horror spreads by contaminating and phagocytizing other media productions. From the visual artifacts of VHS to the grain of cathode-ray television tubes, microhorror games such as *The Tape* (Oleg Kazakov, 2015), *The Building 71 Incident* (Scary Cube, 2021) or *September 1999* (98demake, 2018) vampirize analog technologies. In this branch, we wish participants to present a game remediating conventions and aesthetics of analog media such as television, radio, cinema or board games.

The workshop is scheduled to last for 3 hours on Monday, June 30th, 2025. It is mainly structured around :

1) a short introduction of the research corpus by workshop leaders,
2) 5-minute presentations of the microgame by each of the participant, and
3) a plenary discussion during which will draw all together some of the branches of the family tree of microhorror.

We ought to organize a workshop to be able to meet with and to gather other researchers willing to share their interest in horror video games, but who may not wish to give a full presentation on this topic. This is echoing all those Q&A after a normal session during which people are pointing out other works and suggesting ways of looking at the subject. The main outcome of the workshop is then to promote the creation of a better network of colleagues interested in videoludic horror.

By June 1st, we ask the participants to:

1) **indicate which branch their short presentation will take place, to**
2) **clearly identify the microgame they'll introduce; and**
3) **send 2-3 screen captures so to help us set our focus for the plenary discussion.**

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Come and share your enthusiasm for scary video games!!

Bibliography

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Organizers

Bernard Perron is a Full Professor of film and game studies in the Department of Art History, Cinema, and Audiovisual Media at the Université de Montréal. He has (co)directed several books on video games and cinema, including *The Video Game Theory Reader 1* and *2* (2003 and 2009), *Horror Video Games: Essays on the Fusion of Fear and Play* (2009), *Z for Zombies* (2015), and *The Routledge Companion to Video Game Studies* (2nd edition, 2023). He is also the author of *Silent Hill: The Terror Engine* (2012) and *The World of Scary Video Games: A Study in Videoludic Horror* (2018). His research focuses primarily on video games and horror. He is the head of LUDOV (Video Games Observation and Documentation University Lab – ludov.ca). [bernard.perron@umontreal.ca]

Jean-Charles Ray holds a PhD in Film Studies (UdeM), a PhD in Comparative Literature (Paris III), and is a lecturer at Université de Montréal and Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue. He is the author of *The Grimoire and the Monster: Thinking About Video Games Through Uncanny Literature* (2024, in French) and the co-founder of the Role-Playing game Researh and Observation Group (GORR). His main research interests are horror, ludic scriptwriting, and tabletop role-playing games. He is also a screenwriter and role-playing game creator. [jean-charles.ray@umontreal.ca]