

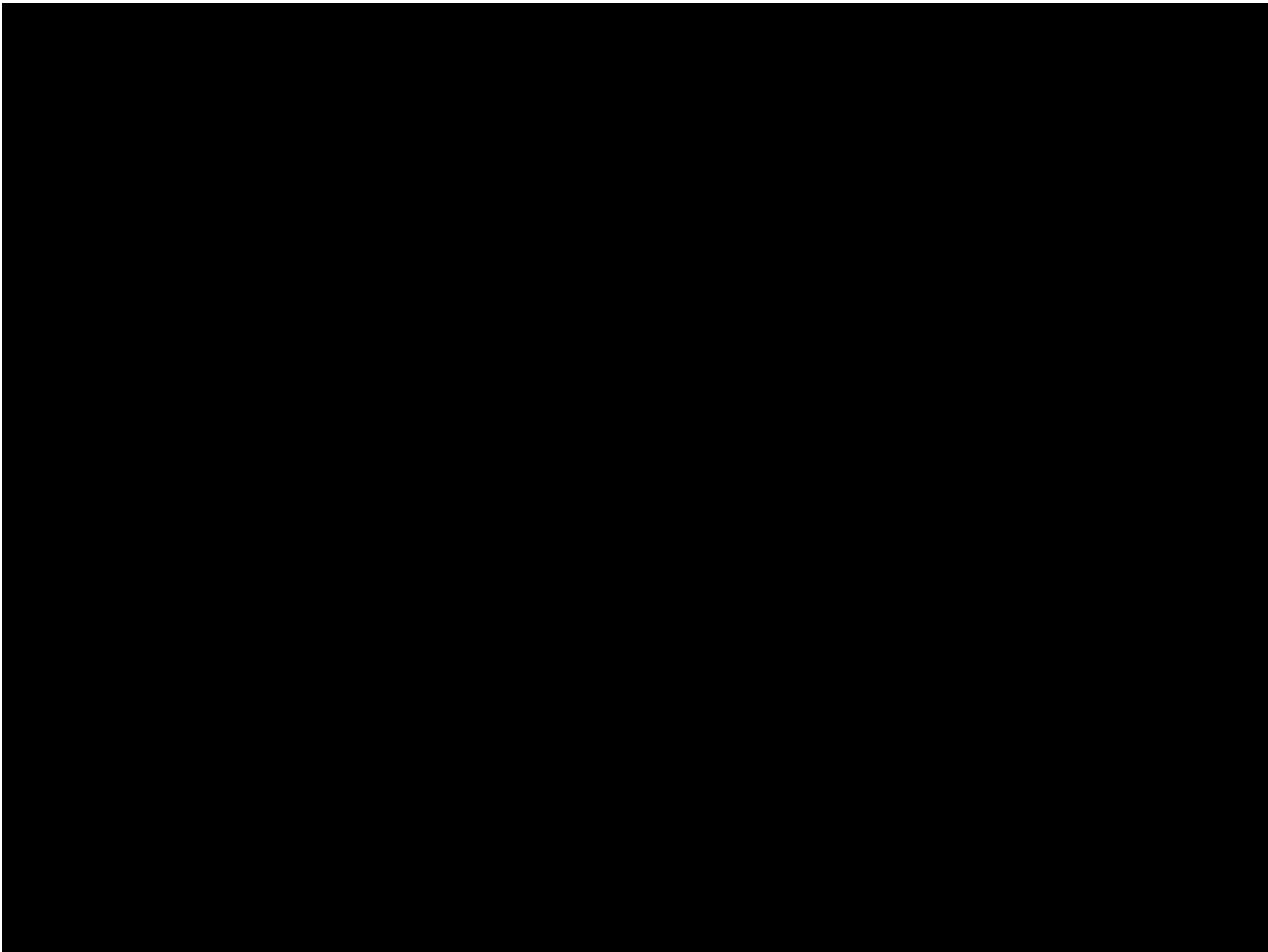
Know your monster

(How video games disenchant monstrosity through control)



Jaroslav Švelch, Charles University in Prague

jaroslav@svelch.com



Know your monster

How video games disenchant monstrosity through control

Your Mom Hates Dead Space 2

“It’s an atrocity!” – disgusted “moms” reacting to (among other things) *necromorphs*, monsters made out of recombined body parts of dead people

Know your monster

How video games disenchant monstrosity through control

Dead Space wiki – entry on necromorphs

“The act of strategically removing the limbs from the creatures is dubbed "Strategic Dismemberment" by the *Dead Space* game team. Each creature has its own strategies when it comes to dismemberment: some creatures will simply die after enough limbs have been removed, some creatures will die instantly if a specific limb is cut off, while some creatures will become even more of a threat if shot in the wrong place.”

Monsters in humanities

Monster is the abject, the unknowable and the liminal

They are “tokens of fracture within the human psyche”; they are “unnatural, transgressive, obscene, contradictory, heterogeneous, mad.” – *Kearney*

The *abject* is “what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite.” It is not “an ob-ject facing me, which I name or imagine.” - *Kristeva*

Richard Kearney, *Strangers, Gods, and Monsters: Interpreting Otherness* (London; New York: Routledge, 2002), 4–5; Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 1,4.

Monsters in humanities

Monster is the abject, the unknowable and the liminal

“The Thing cannot be described – there is no language for such abysses of shrieking and immemorial lunacy, such eldritch contradictions of all matter, force, and cosmic order.” – *Lovecraft*

...because ultimately *monsters* make us face ourselves, our fears or our lack of cognitive capacities; we remain baffled spectators, in awe of the monster

H. P. Lovecraft, *Tales of H.P. Lovecraft*, ed. Joyce Carol Oates (New York: HarperPerennial, 2007), 74.

The paradox of the monster

Monster is the abject, the unknowable and the liminal

“Monsters are in the world but not of the world. (...) They represent the outside that has gotten inside. (...) They are figures of chaos and disorientation within order and orientation.”

– *Beal*

Monsters in humanities

Monster is the abject, the unknowable and the liminal

“Humanist” monstrosity

Makes the subject passive

Is not an object

Chaotic

Unintelligible

Monsters in humanities

Monster is the abject, the unknowable and the liminal



Makes the subject passive

Monsters provide targets of the player's *agency*. The player is continuously facing the monsters.



Not an object

Monsters are an easy way of providing challenges, they are to be defeated. Using monsters as enemies alleviates the moral concerns about elimination of living things.

Not an object

Monsters are being turned into in-game capital and achievements (gaming capital).



The monster is chaos

Video game monsters follow rules laid out by the game designer. They have “stats” and programmed behaviors; they can be fit into databases and algorithms.

The monster is chaos

DRAGONS: There are six varieties of Dragons, each with separate characteristics in particular and other things in common. The varieties will be dealt with first:

<u>Dragon Type</u>	<u>Breath Weapon</u>	<u>Range & Shape</u>	<u>Hit Dice</u>	<u>Talking/Sleeping</u>
White	Cold	8" x 3" cone	5-7	25% / 60%
Black	Acid	6" x 1/2" line	6-8	40% / 50%
Green	Chlorine Gas	5" x 4" cloud	7-9	55% / 40%
Blue	Lightning	10" x 1/2" line	8-10	70% / 30%
Red	Fire	9" x 3" cone	9-11	85% / 20%
Golden	Fire or Gas	(as applicable)	10-12	100% / 10%

Breath Weapons: The Dragon is able to use its breath but three times per day, so sometimes it will bite instead. To determine this simply roll two six-sided dice; a score of six or less indicates the Dragon will bite, but a seven or better indicates it will breathe.

Gygax, Gary and Arneson, Dave, *Dungeon & Dragons Volume 2: Monsters & Treasure* (Lake Geneva, WI: Tactical Studies Rules, 1974).

The monster is unintelligible

Boss monsters tend to follow patterns of *special attacks* and *weak spots*. These are to be avoided and uncovered. Then the monster has been figured out and “demystified”.



Monsters in humanities vs. video games

Spot the differences

“Humanist” monstrosity	Mainstream video games
Makes the subject passive	Prompts agency
Is not an object	Is converted into loot and XP
Chaotic	Rule-based
Unintelligible	Can be figured out

Monster as mystery versus play

Can we play with monsters when play is “orderly”?

“Without doubt, secrecy, mystery, and even travesty can be transformed into play activity, but it must be immediately pointed out that this transformation is necessarily to the detriment of the secret and mysterious, which play exposes, publishes, and somehow expends. In a word, play tends to remove the very nature of the mysterious.” – *Caillois (1959)*

Roger Caillois, “The Definition of Play and The Classification of Games,” in *The Game Design Reader: a Rules of Play Anthology*, ed. Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 124..

Monstrosity versus informatic control

Deleuzian notion of control as continuous scrutiny

The society of control is strictly meritocratic, computerized and under surveillance. (*Deleuze*)

Games are “[...] training tools for life inside the protocological network, where flexibility, systemic problem solving, quick reflexes, and indeed play itself are [...] highly valued.” – *Galloway and Thacker*

Roger Caillois, “The Definition of Play and The Classification of Games,” in *The Game Design Reader: a Rules of Play Anthology*, ed. Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 124..

Has monstrosity been “gamified”?

Video game monsters are indicative of how societies of control deal with enmity and adversity.

Has monstrosity been gamified?



Amnesia: The Dark Descent (Frictional, 2010)

Has monstrosity been gamified?



Monster Party (Human Entertainment, 1989)

Has monstrosity been gamified?



Shadow of the Colossus (Team Ico, 2005)

Thank you!



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