

Immortality and The Parasite

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INTRODUCTION

Sam Barlow, creator of the game *Immortality*, released in 2022, explains that his favourite horror films “feel a little bit alive, a little bit infections. I like horror movies that feel like they’ve snuck something into my brain.”¹ This feeling is ever-present in *Immortality*, a videogame that asks the player to discover “what happened to Marissa Marcel?” By piecing together old footage through match cuts—footage from the three movies in which she performed—the player is encouraged to learn not only the story of the main character’s supposed disappearance, but also reflect on the nature of film making in the twentieth-century Hollywood system. However, through particular haptic feedback and game mechanics, that little infectious element of horror creeps in to the player and encourages them to dig deeper.

This paper aims to read the “protean” characters of “The One” and “The Other One” in the game *Immortality* (Half Mermaid Studios, 2022) as representations of Serres’ concept of the parasite. Anthropomorphisation is characterised in fiction as the attribution of human traits and emotions to nonhuman objects. In fiction this functions like metaphor—the primary object is coloured with the qualities of another object in order to express that which cannot be expressed without representation. The “proteans” are essentially examples of the direct opposite, that is, they embody those which are coloured with the qualities of the human but are actually parasites, feeding on the essence of the main (human) characters of the game. “The proteans” are only revealed through the backwards scrubbing of footage, and are vaguely described throughout as immortal beings, existing in the bodies of humans, able to jump from one body to the other upon those humans’ deaths. Over the course of the videogame the player realises that these “proteans” are living within the main characters, controlling their behaviour, and impacting major periods of Hollywood film production.

A close reading of specific scenes will explore how this parasitic behaviour is represented through both film language and the main “scrubbing” mechanic of the game. Rather than the one-way method of interaction where the parasite drains the host of life, the “proteans” are Serres’ parasite—inextricable from the host but not necessarily dangerous. Instead, the parasite opens possibility, and provides opportunity for change: a flattened hierarchy of power. As Michele Serres notes from the outset of his work, *The Parasite* (2007), “the parasitic relation is intersubjective. It is the atomic form of our relations. Let us try to face it head-on, like death, like the sun. We are all attacked, together.”² “The One” explains to the player, “Artists create, transform, destroy. They find bodies and capture them, own them, tether themselves

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to immortality. Symbiotic parasites.”³ They stare at the dead artists beside them, and then directly at the player, inviting them to think about consumption and art in relation to this “symbiotic parasite” relationship. This paper will explore the consumptive practices of Serres’ concept of “the parasite” and focus on that “intersubjective” perspective on two levels. First, the diagetic, within the story of the videogame itself and the characters of “the proteans.” Second, the meta-narrative of the Hollywood system and celebrity as opportunities for parasites to thrive, as is explored in wider analogy of the videogame (including the form and mechanics).

BIO

Tania Marlowe is a PhD student with a research focus on eighteenth-century literature, alongside twenty-first-century posthuman and de-anthropocentric philosophies.

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¹ King, 2022.

² Serres, 2007, 8.

³ *Immortality*, “Minsky”, scene 44a/take 2, backwards (video clip 131), 2022.