Restrictive controls of character movement in horror video games: How it amplifies Fear in players

Matthew Ganther
RMIT
25 murphy Street
Brighton, 3186
+61 488 036 069
mattrganther@gmail.com

Keywords
Restriction, controls, movement, video-games, fear, horror

Format of work
Video game prototype

DESCRIPTION OF WORK
The game I would like to present is called *Late Night Delivery*, created in Unreal Engine 5.4. The game is about a food delivery driver who is running deliveries late at night and has one last job at a creepy infamous hotel. You must safely deliver the goods on the top floor where the client lives. Sounds easy right? Well, don't be so sure about that. You will meet many strange characters along the way with many stories all unfolding all at once. While you should always prioritise your own safety, something tells you that if this last delivery doesn't go well, this might truly be your last. This first-person horror narrative game lets you interact with NPCs and become a part of their story. While you navigate the hotel, situations will change the way you control your character and limit character movements from standard WASD to move and the mouse to look around, to point and click actions to turn and move forward.

https://shheen.itch.io/late-night-delivery

RESEARCH STATEMENT
Horror games have been deleveoped as early as 1970 and since then, the median has been itteratiate and explored thoroughly by both academics and industry developers. Such Authors have explore how horror games cause psychological forms of discomfort (Gowler R. Iacovides. I, 2019; Lynch T. Martins N, 2015; Sarah I et al., 2016). Others like Yasmin Curren talk more closely about restrictive controls like fixed camera view and how builds player experience and fear. Curren states that horror isnt about 'the monster under the bed' but rather the 'journey… realising there is one under the bed' (2021). Horror games make use of this journey to show and hide certain things to build this tension, like how *Little Nightmares 2* (BANDAI NAMCO Entertainment American inc, 2021) uses it's unique 2 and a half dimension (2.5D)(refers to a perpestive style that mostly restricts players on a 2 dimension plane with litte access to the 3rd) style utilises shadows out of monsters outside of player view being the only way of knowing they are there. Through my game I will be exploring how change and lose of control enhances discomfort and ultimately scare the player. I have created situations where players experience a lose of control that changes the control scheme to limit movement of their character. Ultimately I want this work to inform other developers that horror games can benfit from exploring alternating use of controls which assists in hightening player tension.

As the creator of *Late Night Delivery* I believe this work contritubes to the ever growing discussion on discomfort in horror games. Gowler and Iacovides mention how 'there is still much to be understood about how discomfort is caused..' (2019) and I want to bring to everyones attention, a specific framework centered around restrictive and lose of control. While there are examples of restrictive control present in horror games, I explore in my work why restrictive controls that change throughout the game, either dynamically or based on narrative. This can benfit game developers looking to better manage the player experience

The significance of this work lies in the use of dynamic restrictive controls throughtout the game. I believe that this game will inspire others to explore this framework and the relationship between player and enemy movement. The horror genre is well established in the mainstream media with some arguing, like Sam Lake (as cited in Richardson T) that it is in it's 'golden age' (2023). My experiences growing up in australia has given me a unique perspective of horror experiences from australian movies, games and cultural stories. Using these experiences, I want to bring forth a young australian cultured inspired work, that can be showcased to a larger worldwide audience.

EXHIBITION
The work will run on a windows operated desktop computer with a monitor, mouse, keyboard and speakers/headphones. Attendees will be able to sit down and play the game.

BIO
Matthew Ganther (he/him) is a recent master's graduate from RMIT (Master of Animation, Games, And Interactivity) and has been creating games since he was 17 and has recently started to set his toe into the research of games specifically the horror genre. His first horror game 'Little Bit Of Gore' was a project focused on complex AI behaviour, but from feedback and playtesting, became interested in how restrictive controls of movement can affect how a player feels in a horror setting.

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