Gaming and the Virtual Sublime

Rhetoric, awe, fear, and death in contemporary video games

Matthew Spokes

About the Book

Can you have a transformative experience as a result of falling through a programming error in the latest triple-A title? Does looking out across a vast virtual vista of undulating mountains and tumultuous seas edge you closer to the sublime? In an effort to answer these sorts of questions, Gaming and the Virtual Sublime considers the 'virtual sublime' as a conceptual toolbox for understanding our affective engagement with contemporary interactive entertainment. Through a detailed examination of the history of the sublime, from pseudo-Longinus' jigsaw puzzle of the sublime in rhetoric, through the eighteenth-century obsession with beauty and terror, past the Kantian mathematical and dynamical sublime, all the way to Lyotard's 'unpresentable event' and Deleuze's work on chaos and rhythm, this book road-tests these differing components in a far-reaching exploration of how video games - as virtual spaces of affect - might reshape our opportunities for sublime experience. Using playthroughs, developer diaries, forums discussions and contemporaneous reviews, and games ranging from the heartbreak of That Dragon: Cancer through to the abject body-horror of Outlast (with a dash of Tetris in-between) are discussed in terms the experience(s) of play, their design and their co-creation with gamers with a specific focus on rhetoric and narrative; awe; fear and terror; death and boredom. Written in an engaging and accessible style, this book is a must-read for philosophers, scholars, and those interested in games and popular culture more broadly.