

Re: presenting Hong Kong in Videogame Spaces

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INTRODUCTION

Hong Kong features as a location in over 150 videogames. It is second only to New York city in term of its depiction in ludic spaces. What accounts for the over-representation of this physical space in the virtual domain? How does its virtual representation correspond to the actual location? Drawing on research undertaken through an M+ and Design Trust Fellowship in Hong Kong, this paper examines why and how Hong Kong is so heavily represented in digital games revealing implications for the city as a cultural object. The city of Hong Kong as represented in videogames will be examined via the following overlapping areas of study:

The Walled City

Despite its demolition in 1994, Kowloon Walled City remains an enduring obsession for architects, urban planners and game designers. Its makeshift verticality and ungovernable reputation offers a historical reality to a game developers dream: a chaotically complex metropolis in which everyday rules do not apply. The Walled City's recurrence in videogames sees it continue to evolve almost thirty years after its destruction. How do these evolving digital fabrications – these zombie architectures - change understandings of the former historical structure? How does the algorithmically generated Kowloon Walled Cities in video games spaces reflect the actual architecture of the physical and psycho-geographical location?

Mapping the Virtual Streetscape

With processing capacity allowing for increasingly faithful digital representations of the real world, players are afforded the opportunity of in-game tourism. From the forensic intricacy of *Sleeping Dogs*, to the exciting exactitude of *Gran Turismo's* Tsim Sha Tsui, to what extent do these videogames offer pay homage to the living character of the Hong Kong streetscape? Are these representations simply a pastiche of clichés, or do they afford a more evocative psychogeography of a digital space with uncanny relationships to the actual terrain? And what impact do these representations have on the actual space of Hong Kong?

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SinoFuturism

Hong Kong looms large in the science fiction imagination. Renown for inspiring the cyber-noir futurescapes of *Blade Runner* and *Ghost in the Shell*, Hong Kong has inspired pioneering visions of the transnational city and endures as a template of Sinofuturist projections. Nowhere is this more accurate than in videogames. From the vacant warehouses of the original *Deus Ex* (2000) to the dense multicultural megalopolis of *Mankind Divided* (2016), the monumental architectures of *Project: Snowblind* to the intimate spaces of *HK Project*, the Hong Kong of the future flexes in shape and scale but endures as a model of things to come. How do these various urban predictions foreshadow the city's own future, especially given ambitions to link-up multiple centres of the Pearl River Delta region into a giant megapolis in the shadow of mainland China?

Connecting these three perspectives, and central to the study, is the manifestation of the character of Hong Kong; an intercultural and transnational hub that forms a template for imagining of all future global metropolises.

OPTIONAL BIO

Dr Hugh Davies is an artist and researcher exploring playful devices and the city as game-board. Through practice based-research, he examines how play becomes a movable line separating games and the everyday, reality and fiction. In 2014, Hugh received his PhD in Art, Design and Architecture from Monash University for a project examining transmedia games. In recent years, he has researched Asia-Pacific game cultures as a funded researcher at Tokyo Art and Space in Japan and at M+ and the Hong Kong Design Trust in Hong Kong. He is a postdoctoral research fellow at RMIT University.

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