

The Infusion of Virtuality and Reality: Video Games in Exhibition Space and the Flow of Power

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Keywords

Video games in exhibitions; player agency; first-person experience; curatorial practice; power dynamics

INTRODUCTION

Video games have increasingly entered museums and galleries, not only as cultural artifacts but as systems that reshape spatial experience and audience participation. As a result, their exhibition involves complex negotiations between artistic intention, institutional frameworks, technological systems, and audiences. This research examines game-based exhibitions as ecosystems composed of both human and non-human actors, focusing on how agency and power circulate within these networks. Through three case studies, the Berlin Computerspielemuseum, a collaborative game-based project Munch Arcade (Erlend Kirkebø, 2024) at the Munch Museum in Oslo, and Third World: The Bottom Dimension (2023) by Gabriel Massan at the Serpentine Galleries, this study analyzes different curatorial approaches and modes of collaboration. The research argues that video games destabilize traditional exhibition hierarchies by redistributing agency among institutions, artists, audiences, and machines, revealing both tensions and new possibilities for exhibition practices in technologically mediated contexts.

This research dives into the intersection of physical exhibition space and virtual video game world and tracks the power flow and dynamic relationships within. Within the ecosystem, human and non-human actors would be identified in the network, their roles would be clarified, then the circulation of agency from different actors and the power dynamic would be traced. The whole ecosystem, from backstage, production, curation, to exhibition of game-based exhibition would be built up.

As the agency is an important aspect of the whole research, the researcher's first-person experience and their understanding of video games and exhibitions are placed in a leading position in the whole research. The researcher takes it as a test of their own agency within the ecosystem and a reflection of other actors' intentions. Non-human actors are also emphasized in this research for they are often considered tools in the process instead of actors with important influences on others (Galloway, 2006). In the case of video game-based exhibitions, they have a determined function and take part

Proceedings of CDiGRA 2025

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in the whole process of production and exhibition, claiming their place in the ecosystem(Future Art Ecosystem, 2025). The process of making games guarantees the artist full control over the creativity and how they want to deliver messages to the players. Meanwhile, video games also bring in technological labour, machine maintenance and other new actors to the system(Nolasco-Rozsas and Hofmann, 2021). The research looks into three cases, featuring different types of games and different methods of curating the games. The first case study is about Berlin Computerspielemuseum, a museum that is dedicated to displaying the culture and history of video games, in order to identify how to place video games in exhibition space. The second case study discusses a collaborative game *Munch Arcade* created in reference to an original artwork and designed for an inclusive space at the Munch Museum in Oslo, aiming to explore the dynamic changes throughout the entire museum. *Third World: The Bottom Dimension* by Brazilian digital artist Gabriel Massan is the third case study. It's a collaborative game exhibited in Serpentine Galleries, London, and it shows the artist's discussion on decolonial narration(Serpentine Galleries, 2023). This case uncovers the collaboration challenge of traditional art institutions and game artists.

With the involvement of machines and video games, the power dynamic becomes more complicated and unstable within the exhibition space and the ecosystem, as more types of visitors are attracted, audiences are given more agency, and machines are proving their importance. But this "chaotic" situation also encourages both the institutions, artists and audiences to accommodate and evolve to the era of advanced technology.

BIO

Sun Xue is a freelance game designer and cultural practioner working across games, exhibitions and participatory art. Their work explores how playful systems can create new forms of social interaction, collective storytelling and embodied experience. Currently, Sun focuses on creating embodied experience through game narratives while experimenting with different forms of participatory practice.

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