Contemporary Videogames and the Museum: What's Next?

Over the past decade, videogames have emerged as a recurrent fixture in the exhibitions and public programming of major museums including LABoral Centre for Art and Creative Industries, Gijon, Spain (2008), The Smithsonian Museum of American Art in Washington D.C. (2012), The Museum of Modern Art in New York (2012), and The Australian Centre for the Moving Image in Melbourne (2008, 2012), among many others.

Museum projects like these have highlighted some critical challenges surrounding contextualizing videogames within art contexts. Housing videogames within high-culture institutions has sparked deeper conversations around how to create appropriately critical curatorial, interpretive and pedagogical frames for contemporary playable media. Recent scholarship has explored this sometimes-messy intersection of cultures (Parker, 2013), and has thoroughly covered the ways in which game development can stand as a legitimate art practice (see Flanagan, 2009; Schrank, 2014; Sharp, 2015) that exists parallel to mainstream commercial videogames.

Though concerns regarding videogames and contemporary art are being discussed, logistical and conceptual issues persist (Brin, 2015). What happens once the inherent novelty of a blockbuster videogame exhibition has worn off? What are the institutional objectives motivating videogame-focused projects? Do games stand apart as their own curatorial discipline? How do they succeed or fail in helping museums reach new audiences? How might games facilitate educational programming? Is "videogames" even one coherent medium?

Keeping all these questions in mind, this DiGRA 2017 workshop aims to explore nuanced ways of thinking about videogames in museums, while proposing constructive methods for collaborating across those two professional worlds. Through talks and group discussion, the workshop will address problems faced by videogame designers, scholars, and museum professionals alike, including (but not limited to):

- What kinds of support do artists need to continue creating new, experimental videogames? What roles can the traditional art/design museum play?
- Which kinds of gameplay experiences are best suited for the gallery? How can current challenges be addressed and new opportunities explored?
- When and how is it appropriate to deploy new technologies like AR and VR in the museum?
- What are some best practices for designing games intended to deepen visitor engagement with exhibition content?
- Which types of interpretative strategies can engage audiences in dialogue extending beyond the art historical merit of a game's aesthetics, towards a discussion of experience, participation, and computation?
- How does the emerging prominence of videogame exhibitions reflect wider trends in contemporary cultures of display?

Objectives & Outcomes

The primary aim of the workshop is to provide a space for discussion between researchers, museum professionals, and practitioners working within and about videogames and the museum.

Workshop presentations will *not* be part of the official conference proceedings, but we will post talk abstracts on the conference website.

Format & Activities

This 4-hour workshop will be held at RMIT University on Monday, July 3, as part of the DiGRA 2017 conference in Melbourne, Australia (see the conference website: http://digra2017.com).

From the abstract submissions (see below) we will choose six papers. Presentations will be divided up into three blocks, each consisting of two 20-minute papers followed by a 20-minute discussion period. The proposed schedule is outlined in the table below:

Time	Activity
2:00pm	Welcome and workshop overview
2:10pm	Organizer and participant introductions
2:30pm	Paper session 1
3:30pm	Break
4:00pm	Paper session 2
5:00pm	Paper session 3
6:00pm	End of workshop

Submissions & Selection

We invite scholars, museum professionals, and game designers to submit a talk to the workshop. We welcome submissions of finished work as well as work in progress. Presentations can take the form of case studies, theory-based inquiry, or anything in between.

Talk submissions should take the form of an abstract up to 800 words, together with a brief bio. Send your abstract to douglas.wilson@rmit.edu.au as a .pdf file, by April 7. A submission template is not required, and papers should **not** be anonymized. The workshop organizers will review the submitted presentations and make selections based on relevance to the workshop's key themes and the overall critical rigor demonstrated by the author.

Alternatively, if you'd like to attend the workshop and join the discussion *without* presenting a talk, send us an email (also by April 7) with a paragraph about why you're interested in the workshop, along with a brief bio. The workshop room can accommodate up to 30 people, and so depending on interest we may or may not need to cap the number of accepted participants.

Do note that attendees must be registered for at least one day of the DiGRA 2017 conference to participate in the workshops. Contact us if you have any questions (douglas.wilson@rmit.edu.au).

Important Dates

Submission deadline: April 7, 2017
Notification: April 14, 2017
Workshop: July 3, 2017

Workshop Organizers

Sarah Brin, PhD Fellow, the GIFT Project, IT University Copenhagen

Sarah Brin is a curator and art historian working on the GIFT Project. As GIFT's Action Researcher, she collaborates with a consortium of European museums to develop and test playful museum experiences. She is a co-founder of and consultant for PlaySFMOMA, a program supporting art-made games initiatives at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. She has produced exhibitions and publications for arts institutions including the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, the MAK Center for Art and Architecture, the Hammer Museum, and elsewhere. She has spoken at the Game Developer's Conference, Different Games, the Nordic Game Conference, the National Videogame Arcade and at other venues worldwide.

Michael McMaster, PhD Candidate, RMIT University / Director, House House

Michael McMaster is a researcher and videogame developer. In 2017 he commenced a PhD at RMIT University's School of Media & Communication, building on a background in fine art practice and research, to examine the emerging prominence of videogames within art and design museums. He is a director and co-founder of the Melbourne-based game development studio House House, which released its debut title *Push Me Pull You* on PlayStation 4 and computers in 2016. He has also taught various theory and design studio courses as a sessional tutor in RMIT's Bachelor of Design (Games) program.

Helen Stuckey, Manager, Games Program School of Media and Communications, RMIT University

Helen Stuckey is a videogames researcher, historian and curator. She was the inaugural Games Curator at the Australian Centre for the Moving Image [ACMI] (2004-2009) where she initiated, produced and curated the Games Lab, an exhibition space dedicated to exploring videogame culture. As a curator she has contributed to such significant international exhibitions as *Game On* (2002-), *Gameworld* (2007) and *Game Masters* (2012-). She recently completed a PhD on how museums can work with online knowledge communities on the preservation and exhibition of videogames as part of the ARC Linkage Project - Play It Again: Creating a Playable History of Australasian Digital Games, for Industry, Community and Research Purposes.

Douglas Wilson, Assistant Professor ("Lecturer"), RMIT University / Co-Owner, Die Gute Fabrik

Douglas Wilson is an Assistant Professor ("Lecturer") at RMIT University's School of Media and Communication, where he teaches game design in the undergraduate Design (Games) program. He is

currently writing a scholarly book on game design and social-physical play. Douglas is also co-owner of Die Gute Fabrik, an independent games studio based in Copenhagen, Denmark. Douglas was the Lead Producer on Sportsfriends, a compendium of multiplayer games published on PlayStation Network and home computers in 2014. His games have been exhibited at festivals and museums around the world, including: the Independent Games Festival, IndieCade, Roskilde Festival, XOXO, MoMA, SFMOMA, the Hong Kong Arts Centre, and the Museum of the Moving Image.

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