INTERACTIVITY

Presenting video games in an interactive state is often the desired and expected framing for many types of game exhibitions. However, this has to be balanced with the non-interactive elements of the exhibition, which may include artifacts and interpretive texts, as well as challenges with the physical limitations of the gallery space and the social expectations around interacting, especially in an arts context. This section presents strategies for dealing with the Set-Up, Duration and Accessibility of interactive games, as well as Game Literacy and encouraging visitors to interact with the work on display.

Set-Up

Limited space can force curators to make decisions over which games will be playable and which to present in deactivated form. Some games may require large custom interfaces or specialized equipment such as game cabins or VR igloos to name a few. In this case it is better to prioritize these displays over games that the visitor may be able to acquire and play at home since access to the former is much less likely.

This is not to imply an arcade solution is not possible, for example, the V&A's *Videogames: Design/Play/Disrupt* (2018-19) features one such section where visitors walk into an arcade-like space where they are free to play most of the games within. However, this only applies to a fraction of the exhibition in order to limit overstimulation.

And while sensory overstimulation may be used by a talented curator as a rhetorical or conceptual tool, in most cases it is best to avoid bombarding the audience with too many sounds or images as these may interfere with transmitting the themes and atmosphere desired by the game's creators.

Overcrowding, particularly in the case of very popular exhibits can also place a need to limit the amount of playable games in a space as it poses both logistic and health and safety concerns particularly in the case of VR games where the participants may have limited visibility/mobility and having a crowd too close may result in accidental injury.

Duration

While it may be considered a technical limitation, playtime length also puts limitations on the curator at a conceptual level. While many art games lean towards exhibition friendly formats such as short playtime or pick up and put down timeframes, some games (particularly commercial ones) may require playtimes of over 50hrs to fully experience. In this case decisions have to be made as to how to present gameplay. The simplest solution would be to allow players to start the game from the beginning, however this will result in tutorials being played over and over as well as not offering the full experience. In other cases, the game may be more suited to be played at home at leisure so the themes are fully communicated or the state of flow and control fluency is achieved.

As such, not all video games may be served by presenting them in their interactive form and other approaches such as screenshots or gameplay videos may be used. In the cases where interactivity is desired, thought must be put into how interaction will take place. The following questions will be helpful in determining the best solution.

1. Will the game be available on a first-come first-serve basis or will it be handled through some booking system?
2. Is the game short enough that the player can complete the experience within a reasonable amount of time? (0-5 minutes)
3. If not, will the player be able to play from the beginning or start at another determinate time of the game, and for how long?
4. Are the game controls simple enough that most users will be able to adequately engage with the game within the determined time frame or will there need to be some sort of training or assistance?

The exhibition theme will also help determine how many games should be playable. If an exhibition focuses on art and design at the production stage of game making, interactivity may not be a priority and perhaps a showcase of concept art and game play videos may be better suited to the exhibition. Again, the V&A exhibition is a perfect example of this, as at its core the exhibition is centered on the design process of the games rather than the games themselves – the focus is not on gameplay or the meanings and themes derived from play.

Accessibility

Motion sickness, color blindness and mobility limitations are a few accessibility interactive games can present. For an exhibition to be successful, it has to take steps to counter these issues.

Motion Sickness

This factor affects both VR and traditional video game with 67% of adults and 57% of children reporting a degree of motion sickness while playing video games[1)]. At the base level a warning regarding motion sickness may be recommended at the entrance. Further precautions include disinfectant wipes, motion sickness bags, and a trash can. In the case of VR, it is a good idea to keep players seated unless necessary to avoid potential injuries.

Color blindness

Colorblindness solutions vary on a game-to-game basis. Some commercial and indie games have an in-game option that applies filters for the different types of colorblindness. For games running under PC and Mac, the operating systems themselves have filters that can be enabled when needed go here for PC and here for Mac. Of course, these filters should only be enabled upon request and disabled immediately after.

Mobility Access

Most games depend on keyboard and mouse (PC), gamepads (consoles, VR and PCs) and motion controls (PC,VR and consoles). Unfortunately, this makes accessible controllers a complicated situation requiring a sizable budget and custom solutions. For PC and the Xbox console, the Xbox Adaptive Controller offers a flexible, solution that can fit most limited mobility situations. Unfortunately, this solution will not work for all devices nor provide a simple solution that can be deployed 24/7. Nevertheless, it should be easy to provide access to this device or even invite players

to bring their own and adapt it to most experiences.

Game Literacy

Game literacy can refer to the willingness and awareness of visitors to engage with interactive video games they see in an exhibition space, and also their familiarity with genre conventions and goals, and ability to use the subsequent controls effectively.

This barrier to entry is the most common in video game exhibitions as not every player has experience with the variety of game systems and mechanics and thus requires a degree of learning to develop both comfort with playing games in a public space, and being able to play them as intended. As a general rule, driving simulations, point-and-click games and text adventure games are the simpler games to control, with first-person shooters and flight simulators being the most complicated. Historical genre conventions, such as early text adventures where specific phrases have to be typed in to progress may also be more challenging to audiences than hypertext based games, for example. Additionally, if the space where the games are played is very publicly visible, or in an area typically associated with more traditional “hands-off” exhibitions, the ability to interact should be highlighted and encouraged for the visitor so they feel confident.

One way to combat this situation is through invigilators ready to teach the controls and mechanics to those who require it. Contextualizing and interpretive materials can also present instructions for the game, and illustrative diagrams of the controls. Vicarious participation is another important consideration for addressing this problem.

Vicarious participation is the process where the audience may get to experience a video game without having to actually control the action. This is achieved by placing large secondary screens that can be seen by others in the space which mirror the action the player sees, a smaller monitor for the player to engage with and space for the audience to sit back and enjoy the gameplay. In smaller setups a single large screen and allowing the vicarious participate to communicate with the player is enough to satisfy the needs of vicarious participation. This can both offer a bridge to better understanding the gameplay and a chance to observe a more confident and skilled player, which can potentially lead to hesitant visitors interacting on their own, or, even if they don't interact directly, coming away from the exhibition with a better understanding of the game.

Given that some video games are specific in nature, a solution may be to present audiovisual resources on screens or QR codes that present the video game, where they can tell us how the videogame was created, the developers, the creators, all the institutions involved, as well as the people who have played the video game by narrating the experience and playability of the game.

This narrates the video game in some way without losing its essence and can generate interest in the user by giving them valuable information.

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1)
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