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PRESS PLAY TO START:

THE CHALLENGES OF EXHIBITING VIDEO GAMES AT THE MUSEUM

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Abstract

Curating video games in art museums presents complex theoretical and practical challenges that demand a critical reassessment of established museological norms and practices. As both cultural artifacts and interactive experiences, video games are inherently participatory, technologically dependent, and susceptible to rapid obsolescence, which complicates the processes associated with their collection, preservation, and exhibition in ways that exceed the demands associated with traditional art objects.

Drawing a parallel between New Media Art and video games, this article focuses on the challenges of exhibiting digital and electronic works within the context of art museums. By examining the process of translating video games into artistic objects and the implications of their inclusion in museum settings, it invites a reflection on more specific issues, including the mediation of interactivity within institutional space, the construction of narratives that confer cultural value and stimulate critical engagement, the tension between material and immaterial components, the intersection of gaming culture and the white-cube gallery, and technological obsolescence, which threatens to render games unplayable within a few years, thereby jeopardizing their preservation as authentic cultural forms. This analysis is informed by perspectives from museum studies and curatorial theory.

By theorizing these issues, this exploratory article contends that video games should not be merely integrated into pre-existing curatorial frameworks. Rather, their exhibition demands the development of new curatorial models that address hybridity, interactivity, and technological ephemerality. Ultimately, this study contributes to broader debates surrounding digital culture, arguing that video games compel museums to reconsider both their curatorial practices and their foundational conceptual frameworks.

Keyworkds: Video games; Games; Museums; Exhibition; Curating; New Media Art.

Introduction

In November 2012, MoMA announced the acquisition of 14 video games to be included in its Architecture and Design collection. The list included classics such as *Pac-Man* (1980); *Tetris* (1984); *Another World* (1991); *Myst* (1993); *SimCity* (1994); *Vib-Ribbon* (1999); *The Sims* (2000); *Katamari Damacy* (2004); *EVE Online* (2003); *Dwarf Fortress* (2006); *Portal* (2007); *flOw* (2006); *Passage* (2008); and *Canabalt* (2009).

This decision marked the start of a process that projected the inclusion of 40 titles in their collection in the near future. The games were soon part of the exhibition *Applied Design* at the Philip Johnson Architecture and Design Galleries at the museum, which featured various distinctive design pieces. According to MoMA (2013), it showcased "outstanding examples of interface and interaction design, dynamic visualizations, products, furniture, 3D printed chairs and bowls, emergency equipment, and biodesign." In 2022, they included some of these games in *Never Alone: Video Games and Other Interactive Design,* an exhibition that brought together "notable examples of interaction design, a field that considers the points of contact between objects—whether machines, apps, or entire infrastructures—and people" (MoMA, 2022).

Curious or not, both exhibitions functioned as expansive design showcases, emphasizing a range of creative and technical possibilities in contemporary design practice and situating video games within a broader spectrum of creative production. In fact, when the games were purchased, they were recognized as art, yet, as Antonelli (2012) notes, they were viewed mainly as:

> Design, and a design approach is what we chose for this new foray into this universe. The games are selected as outstanding examples of interaction design—a field that MoMA has already explored and collected extensively, and one of the most important and oft-discussed expressions of contemporary design creativity.

The initiative was met with divided reactions and motivated harsh criticism, as demonstrated by the article "Sorry MoMA, video games are not art" published in the newspaper *The Guardian* (Jones, 2012). According to Jonathan Jones, it was almost offensive to call video games art when compared to a collection that included works such as "Ma Jolie by Picasso, Starry Night by Vincent van Gogh, and Vir Heroicus Sublimis by Barnett Newman."

After having been largely overlooked by the art world for decades, the notion of video games as art has gained increasing recognition in recent years (Romualdo, 2014). Historically, they were primarily regarded as entertainment, produced for commercial purposes and valued for their interactivity and goal-oriented design and the industry was rarely associated with artistic creation or merit, leading the art world to dismiss video games as unworthy of serious consideration.

More recently, both academic and cultural institutions have begun to acknowledge the medium's growing sophistication and potential, particularly its capacities for storytelling, aesthetic innovation, graphic design, and emotional engagement, highlighting its relevance as a form of cultural heritage "even if games themselves still straddle an uneasy line between popular and high culture" (Romualdo, 2014, p.

1). Nonetheless, their integration into art organizations presented diverse technical, curatorial, and social challenges. Key obstacles include the balance between tensions such as material *versus* immaterial, objects *versus* experiences, entertainment *versus* culture, or play *versus* contemplation. Other issues included the need to develop appropriate curatorial frameworks, accessibility for diverse audiences, and the management of technological obsolescence.

New Media Art and video games might not share goals, languages, and contexts, but there are common ideas that distinguish them from traditional art forms, namely the technological dependency for the production and distribution of pieces: "art that employs these technologies as its very own *medium*, being produced, stored, and presented exclusively in the digital format and making use of its interactive or participatory features" (Paul, 2008, p. 8). Besides, both are interactive systems, requiring active engagement from the audience or user, inherently temporal, process-oriented and often incorporating multimedia elements, such as visuals, sound, and motion, to construct experiences that blur the boundaries between art, entertainment, and communication.

Building on this idea, this exploratory paper draws parallels between New Media Art and video games, to analyze the theoretical and practical problems presented by the introduction of electronic and digital works in the art museum, with a particular focus on the challenges associated with their display in the white cube gallery. Adopting primarily a museological and curatorial perspective, it investigates the various tensions encountered by curators and the strategies employed to effectively integrate video games into spaces traditionally dedicated to the exhibition of other traditional art forms.

Video Games as an Art Form

The twentieth century was a period of profound transformation and expansion in artistic practice, characterized not only by the introduction of new concepts, ideas, and materials but also by the growing recognition of disciplines previously regarded as secondary within Western cultural hierarchies. Traditionally, painting and sculpture were considered the most prestigious artistic forms, however, design, architecture, cinema, music, and fashion increasingly assumed a prominent position within the broader spectrum of contemporary practice. Simultaneously, the cultural value of other popular art forms, such as television series, comic books, and street art, also began to be acknowledged, resulting in an expanded conception of art and a blurring of the boundaries between high art and popular culture.

Video games have historically been associated with popular culture for several reasons: they are industrially produced, mass-consumed, primarily valued for entertainment, and often perceived as a form of escapism or a means of avoiding reality. More broadly, games have frequently been construed as toys, potential hazards, or mere consumer commodities (Eklund, et al., 2019). The development of digital technologies and their increasing accessibility for personal use facilitated the transformation of video games from a niche subgenre into a widely popular form of home entertainment by the 1980s. Nowadays, their significance in daily life is well documented: "Video games today occupy an obvious place in our media lives through the spread of digital technology, and looking at video games offers insights into the everyday structure of the social world along with the role of digital technology in contemporary life" (Eklund, 2022, p. 2).

Video games meet many of the established criteria for art including intentionality, aesthetic composition, emotional resonance, and cultural significance which have been extensively examined by a range of scholars (Catlow et al., 2010; Eklund, 2022; Hjorth, 2011; Juul, 2012; Perron & Wolf, 2009; Tosca at al., 2009). Although the discussion regarding their defining characteristics and recognition as art falls beyond the scope of this paper, it is nonetheless important to clarify the field in order to critically explore its relationship with museums, as well as the challenges associated with its exhibition.

On one hand, artists recognized the appeal and expressive potential of games and play, incorporating their diverse qualities into artworks for a range of purposes, including escapism, social construction and transformation, and the subversion or critique of the mechanisms inherent in the games themselves. They engaged directly with gaming languages and cultures through new digital tools, producing game-based art that explored machinima (the creation of cinematic narratives from in-game footage), in-game performance, site-specific installations, and modifications (mods), among other forms (Hjorth, 2011). Notable examples include Natalie Bookchin's online project *The Intruder* (1998–1999), Eddo Stern's *Darkgame 2* (2007–2008), and Cory Arcangel's *Super Mario Clouds* (2002).

On the other hand, the art world has increasingly adopted the gaming community, recognizing a medium that has matured technologically, narratively, and aesthetically as there are works of considerable authorial, thematic, political, and social significance (Romualdo, 2017), that integrate visual design, music, narrative, interactivity, and dimensions such as "aesthetic pleasure, stylistic richness, emotional saturation, imaginative involvement, criticism, virtuosity, representation, and even special focus and institutional aspects" (Tavinor, 2009, p. 196), while still retaining its commercial and entertainment-oriented nature.

One of the most frequently cited distinguishing features is interactivity, often highlighted as a key factor differentiating them from traditional art forms. Unlike paintings, sculptures, or films, where the audience's engagement is primarily interpretive, video games require active participation, granting players agency to influence outcomes and enhancing emotional engagement:

> Video games present the player with challenges to be tackled, providing constant feedback between the user and the game itself. (...) Games are active, participative, and often competitive, and those who play have an interest in winning, a characteristic which might seem in tension with the nature of art. (Romualdo, 2014, p. 3)

However, interactivity is no longer exclusive to the entertainment industries and as digital art continues to evolve, numerous artists create time-based media works that require viewers active engagement, thereby extending the possibilities of artistic experience beyond traditional static forms.

While not all video games may be considered art, just as not all films, novels, or paintings achieve artistic merit, the potential for artistry within the medium is clear. As technology and creative ambition advance, it is reasonable to contend that video games not only can constitute art but also represent one of the most dynamic artistic frontiers of the twenty-first century. The creation of one single game demands

expertise across diverse domains, including design, computer science, illustration, animation, physics, architecture, and geography and as an audiovisual medium, they rely on the orchestration of images and sound to realize their aesthetic and expressive potential. Furthermore, elements such as genre, narrative, emotion, spatial and temporal design, graphics, style, and gameplay all contribute to the formation of its particular aesthetic.

The Intersection of Video Games and Art Museums

Despite their growing recognition as a legitimate art form, the integration of games into museum collections and exhibition programs has been gradual, with the most prominent initiatives arising primarily from larger institutions. Notable examples include the Museum of Modern Art (USA), the Smithsonian American Art Museum (USA), the Barbican Centre (UK), the Victoria and Albert Museum (UK), and the Library of Congress (USA), all of which have acquired or curated exhibitions that situate video games alongside painting, sculpture, and design in initiatives that challenge traditional hierarchies within the art world (Antonelli, 2012) while highlighting the artistic and cultural significance of the medium.

The Smithsonian's *The Art of Video Games* (2012) exhibition featured eighty games and traced the evolution of video games as an artistic medium. It included playable titles such as *Pac-Man* (1980), *Super Mario Bros.* (1995), and *Myst* (1993), alongside interactive components and interviews with developers. The Barbican presented *Serious Games* (1997) and *Game On* (2002), a highly successful exhibition that subsequently toured internationally across more than forty exhibition venues. The Victoria and Albert Museum hosted *Video Games: Design/Play/Disrupt* (2018–2019), while the Library of Congress began acquiring video games in 2006, encompassing both older titles and contemporary releases. By 2012, its collection comprised approximately 3,000 games across a wide range of platforms, 1,500 strategy guides, accompanying documentation derived from copyright filings, and roughly fifty examples of gameplay footage on VHS or DVD (Owens, 2012). In 2011, the United States Supreme Court affirmed that "video games are an art form qualifying for protection under the First Amendment of the US Constitution, alongside visual art, books, plays, movies, music, and other forms of expression" (Brown v. Entertainment Merchants Association, 2011) exemplifying the integration of video games into high-status cultural institutions.

Today, gaming is one of the world's largest and most inclusive forms of entertainment, transcending age, gender, race, geography, and religion, with video games taking part in the daily routine for approximately 3.32 billion people worldwide according to *Sporting Post* (Miller, (2025). Successful games are frequently developed into multimedia franchises, encompassing large collections of design products and adaptations into books, television series, or films, such as *The Last of Us* (HBO, 2023-), *Arcane* (Netflix, 2021-2024), *Fallout* (Prime Video, 2024-), *Halo* (Paramount+, 2022-2024), *Tomb Raider* (Lara Croft: Tomb Raider (2001) and Lara Croft: Tomb Raider – The Cradle of Life (2003), both from Paramount Pictures; Tomb Raider (2018) from Warner Bros.), *Resident Evil* (Constantin Film, Davis Films, Impact Pictures, & Capcom Co., Ltd, 2001 - 2021), *Angry Birds* (Columbia Pictures, Rovio Animation,

2016 - 2026), *Minecraft* (Warner Bros. Pictures, 2025), and *The Super Mario Bros. Movie* (Universal Pictures, Illumination, & Nintendo, 2023).

Games are widely accessible, available for purchase in physical stores, or as free downloads online, and playable on a variety of devices, including computers, mobile phones, and consoles. Engagement with video games constitutes a highly individualized experience, fostering emotional involvement, social connection, and sustained commitment, as players often dedicate considerable time to achieving in-game objectives.

Given their widespread popularity and economic significance, questions regarding their legitimization within the art world and inclusion in museums emerge (Romualdo, 2017), making it essential to consider how cultural institutions, traditionally unassociated with gaming, can contribute to the development of the medium and the understanding of its cultural and artistic value.

From the perspective of gaming culture, the inclusion of video games in museums serves to affirm their artistic and historical value, as well as their cultural significance, reflecting the profound influence they have exerted on contemporary society. As authoritative institutions capable of influencing social and cultural discourse, museums shape cultural heritage by determining which objects are preserved and exhibited and their endorsement contributes to their recognition among different audiences. Furthermore, museums provide a specific context and a framework for cultural engagement, and the incorporation of such pieces in these spaces actively contribute to the construction of meaning "above and beyond any significance they may already possess, whether as cultural artefacts or artworks" (Dziekan, 2012, p. 31), situating them within a complex network of historical, artistic, social, and political connections and into the broader discourse of history and criticism (Altshuler, 2008). Conversely, objects excluded from this system are often relegated to a secondary status.

For art museums, the expansion in their collections and programmes to incorporate diverse forms of contemporary artistic practice is closely connected to the evolving demands they face within a shifting cultural landscape. Now, they are increasingly competing with a wide range of innovative cultural organizations while simultaneously navigating the complex balance between their historical legacy, institutional mission, audiences, budgets, and programming:

> To be relevant in the twenty-first century, the gallery must be at once a permeable web, a black box, a white cube, a temple, a laboratory, a situation. It must take the form of a creative partnership between the curator and the producer, object, or idea of art. (Blazwick, 2007, p. 133)

New museology has shifted the focus of museums from collections and objects to the experiences of visitors (Hooper-Greenhill, 1992), a change further shaped by budgetary constraints that compel institutions to devise creative strategies for balancing internal finances. The prioritization of funding has increasingly emphasized the importance of attracting visitors, thereby influencing revenue streams such

as ticket sales, retail operations, and on-site restaurants or cafes. These facilities are now integral to museum sustainability, not only generating income but also enabling museums to function as cultural hubs capable of hosting complementary programs, including conferences, film screenings, and debates, while also serving as leisure spaces that enhance visitor comfort.

Another significant challenge lies in reconciling the museum's traditional mission, to study, collect, conserve, interpret, and exhibit artistic heritage, with the imperative to offer engaging programs aligned with audience interests. The growing emphasis on popular art forms with high visibility and mass appeal has directly influenced the inclusion of video games in their programmes, shaping how they present themselves:

> These shifts in focus show us how multiple actors are involved in shaping museum work, which is far from stable. Game exhibitions thus come to be in the cross-section of a multitude of material and immaterial aspects, from their material construction, to their status as cultural objects and expressions, to the institutional goals of museums and other custodians of cultural heritage. (Eklund et. Al, 2019, p. 447)

Understanding visitors' expectations is fundamental as they engage with museums for a variety of reasons, including the pursuit of knowledge, inspiration, aesthetic or emotional experiences, cultural exploration, and social interaction (Stylianou-Lambert, 2017). Contemporary visitor interest extends beyond traditional art appreciation and educational objectives, encompassing a broader museum experience and this engagement is often seen as a social activity motivated by the desire to generate shareable content for social media, as well as by the pursuit of entertainment and enjoyment.

According to some authors, the inclusion of video games in museums is also motivated by concerns regarding the preservation of their history (Lowood et al., 2009), as these works are inherently fragile due to their reliance on rapidly obsolescent technologies. By recognizing video games as cultural heritage and incorporating them into collections, museums assume responsibility for their conservation and maintenance, contributing to the development of protocols to ensure their long-term preservation and durability.

Exhibiting Video Games at the Museum: Critical Challenges

The inclusion of an everyday object in a museum's collection or exhibition means that it is removed from its original context of usability and is given a new symbolic meaning as a cultural heritage artifact that possesses historical, cultural, or artistic value. In this sense, the incorporation of video games into the collections and exhibitions of art museums transforms their status from popular entertainment artifacts into highly valued cultural objects. Exhibiting any object in a museum involves more than mere display, it requires careful curatorial consideration of preservation, presentation, and interpretation and in the particular case of video games, it presents unique challenges when compared to traditional artworks such as paintings or sculptures but similar ones to New Media Art. Both forms have prompted museums to reconsider established curatorial practices, moving beyond the

conventional white-cube model to spaces prepared for electronic and digital works with distinct characteristics. A shift that has required museum professionals, including curators and educators, to engage with the languages and practices of digital and gaming communities which are very distant from art history codes.

According to Brian O'Doherty, the idealized gallery space should adhere to the following principles:

> A gallery is constructed along laws as rigorous as those for building a medieval church. The outside world must not come in, so windows are usually sealed off. Walls are painted white. The ceiling becomes the source of light. The wooden floor is polished so that you click along clinically, or carpeted so that you pad soundlessly, resting the feet while the eyes have at the wall. (...) Unshadowed, white, clean, artificial-the space is devoted to technology of esthetics. (1986, p. 15)

This comprehensive description envisions the ideal conditions under which visitors should experience a museum and engage with artworks, namely, a moment that should be free from any external distractions and sufficiently tranquil to enhance the sublime encounter with art. The introduction of digital and technological elements has forced a reevaluation of the gallery environment and a new evolving relationship between visitors and art pieces.

At first, Video Art transformed the traditional white-cube gallery into a "black box," adopting conventions typically associated with the movie theater: darkened spaces, subdued lighting, and seating arrangements that allow visitors to view the work comfortably. While this adaptation facilitates comprehension of this artistic language by replicating codes that are familiar to audiences, digital art forms demand a more complex approach as it includes lights, sound, moving images, computer programming, algorithmic processes, interactivity, rules, goals, and immediate feedback within spaces originally designed for static objects.

As with many forms of digital art, interactivity and playability are central to the experience of video games, forming the foundation of the relationship between player and game. Outside the institutional context, gaming constitutes a specific moment within everyday life, typically associated with leisure, entertainment, and diversion. Its transition into the museum, however, entails a different set of conventions and behaviors, which are not traditionally aligned with the norms of the institutions:

> An exhibition of media art points us to very different cultural settings such as a computer games hall or an entertainment park (in each of these one often has to wait in line before getting a chance to "try" a particular exhibit) and also to a different type of cultural object (and, correspondingly, a different set of behaviors) -- a software program in a computer. In approaching a media artwork, we typically discover some elements of standard human-computer interface (a computer monitor, a mouse; arrows, buttons and so on); we have to read instructions which tell us how to us it. (Manovich, 1995, p. 1)

Visitors are now required to modify behaviors that, for decades, were considered correct and obligatory, such as maintaining silence, which is essential for contemplation, or refraining from touching artworks, a fundamental practice for their preservation. Whereas visitors were once largely passive, or what Christiane Paul (2006) describes as "art consumers—a passive role that has been accentuated by the sometimes excessive consumer cultures of the West" (p. 4), they now assume a more active role in the activation and unfolding of artworks, sometimes engaging physically or interacting with the work through bodily movement.

Engaging with a video game in a museum does not necessarily entail an understanding of its cultural, historical, or social dimensions. Institutions must avoid becoming overly focused on the entertainment aspect and transforming themselves "into a type of 'theme park' or amusement center, where the principal objective is to entertain visitors and not build a narrative that helps understand the many perspectives around the culture" (Naskali et al., 2013, p. 233). It is therefore imperative to move beyond the superficial perception of games as a mere amusement, developing curatorial narratives that recognize them as cultural artifacts, reconstructing their history, fostering critical reflection, facilitating social interaction, and emphasizing the medium's complex and multifaceted nature.

The duality between these two approaches, as discussed by Lev Manovich in the context of New Media Art, arises from similar challenges presented by certain artworks and consequently raises the question of whether visitors should be permitted to play the games during the exhibition:

> Is it possible to combine these with contemplation, perceptual enjoyment, and emotional response? In other words, is it possible to experience the work aesthetically while simultaneously learning how to "use" it? These include conventions for dealing with unrelated objects and settings (an artwork in a gallery versus a piece of software in a computer), opposing traditions of presentation (a rectangular frame versus a panoramic view; a movie screen versus a book page; a collective versus individual form of exhibition), and different mental processes and actions (perception and contemplation versus interaction and learning). (1995, p. 1)

The domain of gaming is highly heterogeneous, with each game situated within a specific sociocultural context of production, circulation, reception, and play. From a technological perspective, the diversity of options includes components such as computers, various consoles, arcade machines, smartphones, head-mounted displays, and associated technologies such as the Internet, audio systems, software applications, or augmented reality platforms. This results in a wide array of works, each with distinct formats and lacking a unified aesthetic framework.

Consequently, games cannot be approached, presented, or exhibited in a uniform manner and exhibitions must adopt a context-sensitive approach when displaying games as the use of standardized methods risks distorting both how games are represented and how they are understood by audiences. Different titles require tailored strategies for contextualization and necessitate diverse modes of engagement from

players and as Nylund (2018) argues, the manner in which games are presented in exhibitions depends both on the nature of the games themselves and on the curatorial and ideological choices guiding their display.

This need for differentiated curatorial methodologies becomes particularly evident when games are relocated from their original contexts into institutional spaces, where their meanings and modes of engagement are inevitably reshaped. The process of decontextualization that occurs when a game is removed from its original context and re-situated within a gallery setting requires curators to devise strategies that negotiate the tension between the popular culture origins of games and the institutionalized, 'white cube' environment of museums. Each approach to this negotiation carries both advantages and limitations.

Similar to the challenges posed by the exhibition of New Media Art, video games are marked by a fundamental division between the material and the immaterial as works are inherently immaterial but they rely on the material components that enable them, an interdependency describe by Christiane Paul (2007) as tense "The presentation and preservation of new media art therefore needs to be discussed against the background of the tensions and connections between the material and immaterial" (p. 252). This conceptual framework is further echoed by Sofia Romualdo (2017), who observes that the recent inclusion of video games as collection objects in institutions such as MoMA and the V&A "raises tensions between the medium and the exhibition spaces" (p. 24).

The tension between the tangible and intangible dimensions of games is materialized in the objects that represent them, such as retail boxes, storage media, consoles, computers, or arcade machines, as well as in the experience of play, and their broader contexts of production, reception, and cultural significance. Within the gallery space, these elements intersect to form a demanding and often difficult-to-reconcile network of interrelations. This complexity is further compounded by deeper tensions inherent to a technologically driven world, such as the negotiation between past and future, conservatism and progress, tradition and innovation, slowness and acceleration, evolution and ethics, or euphoria and anxiety.

Indeed, as Eklund et al. (2019) claims, understanding the multiple components that constitute a game exhibition demands equal attention to both the games themselves and the institutional frameworks that host them, including its history, mission, and practical constraints such as spatial resources and budgetary limitations, as well as the curatorial vision guiding the display. While some curators emphasize games as material artifacts, others privilege the experiential dimension of play as the central focus of exhibitions.

Video games are commonly associated with youth, popular culture, and various subcultural contexts (Barwick et al., 2011). Within the museum space, however, they must address and engage audiences of diverse ages, social backgrounds, and economic circumstances. Museum professionals are therefore challenged to encourage visitors to move beyond the perception of video games as merely playful or ephemeral pastimes, and instead to recognize them as

meaningful cultural experiences with intrinsic value, an understanding that is not immediately accessible to those without prior familiarity with the gaming culture.

While younger generations are often well-acquainted with the conventions, rules, and skills required to engage, other visitors may struggle to comprehend the underlying codes and languages. For this reason, institutions cannot overlook the educational dimension as they need to ensure they communicate correctly the cultural significance of games but also that all visitors can interact effectively with the electronic mechanisms presented, maximizing their engagement and preventing feelings of exclusion. This consideration is crucial, as audiences must be able to understand what they are seeing, how it is presented, and why those particular games occupy space within the museum, as well as the symbolic meanings attached to them. Curatorial practice thus plays a central role in constructing a coherent narrative that mediates a context often different from the ones typically encountered within museums.

Italian curator Domenico Quaranta reflects on the challenges of exhibiting digital-born works, such as Net Art in physical gallery spaces, which face similar complexities to video games, as they both emerge from contexts that appear distant from established art historical and museum frameworks. In his essay *Lost in Translation. Or, Bringing Net Art to Another Place? Pardon, Context* (2008), Quaranta argues that:

> The translation model lends itself very well to illustrating the issues that the curator interested in Net Art must tackle. Net Art, but not only that: digital data is just one of the components of a babel of old and new languages that need to be translated into the Esperanto of contemporary art. Which means that the contemporary art world will increasingly be in need of multilingual operators, and above all, good translators. (p. 77)

The use of the concept of translation underscores the curatorial responsibility to bridge disparate cultural, technological, and artistic languages and the author suggest that the transition from a digital to a physical context can be likened to the movement from one language to another, where both the source and target languages possess distinct rules that must be carefully understood in order to achieve a successful transposition. On one side lies the emerging culture of the networked environment, and on the other, the museum, whose conventions have been shaped and consolidated over the past centuries.

With genuine respect for both contexts, he argues, it is essential to ensure a meaningful and effective transfer. He is notably critical of certain curatorial strategies, the rigidity of some artists, and the inertia of many curators who appear more invested in enumerating problems than in seeking solutions. For Quaranta (2008), there can be no universal or ideal model: each work possesses particular needs that must be examined and addressed to prevent its meaning from being diminished or lost when transposed into a new space and presented to a new audience. In this sense, the curator must act as a mediator, taking into account the work's origin and intended destination, its material and conceptual specificities, the perspectives of the artists, and the

expectations of the public. Installing a computer in an exhibition space and using it to display a website or work of software does not constitute an act of translation. This is more akin to a foreignism "A word taken from another language when there is no equivalent in one's own language. Foreignisms are generally looked down on by translators, as they represent a failed act of translation, and when they are unnecessary they are usually reviled as barbarisms" (Quaranta, 2008, p. 71). The author continues, defending "translating a work of Net Art for "physical" space does not mean simply transforming it into an object or an installation: it means adapting it to fit the aesthetic, cultural and formal needs of an audience different to that of the Net" (Quaranta, 2008, p. 73).

This is a similar situation that curators face when working with video games in a museum: two distinct cultures, each with different origins, rules, and codes, converge within a shared space, making mutual respect and understanding essential. Experiential engagement alone has limitations and does not necessarily facilitate comprehension of historical modes of production and play. In other words, interacting with games devoid of contextual framing can be confusing and prone to misinterpretation. Visitors from non-gamer sociocultural backgrounds often struggle to grasp its idiosyncrasies without an understanding of the culture and the ways in which players, developers, and critics have historically interpreted and discussed them. This necessitates close attention not only to the original hardware but also to the broader contexts in which games have existed, including the alternative spaces that have shaped the industry and its communities over the past decades, such as websites, forums, magazines, and the voices of both players and developers. All games rely on cultural know-how and tacit knowledge, manifest both in the context of their development and in the context of their use (Nylund, 2019), and to full understand their conditions it is necessary to encompass material and digital artifacts as well as the symbolic frameworks surrounding them.

Finally, it is essential to recognize that the continual evolution of hardware and software renders many games rapidly obsolete or incompatible with contemporary technologies, posing a significant challenge to their long-term preservation and potential integration into museum collections. On one hand, advances in hardware, such as more powerful consoles, high-resolution displays, and faster processing capabilities, continually elevate consumer expectations for performance and visual fidelity. On the other hand, titles that were considered innovative and engaging only a few years ago may quickly appear outdated in terms of graphics, gameplay mechanics, and user experience. Moreover, more recent games may be available exclusively in a digital format, lacking any physical component as the online infrastructure underpinning them significantly contributes to their ephemeral nature. Many games depend on servers, software updates, and active community engagement to remain functional and relevant. The substantial costs associated with maintaining these elements can make long-term support challenging, placing the games' functionality and appeal at risk. This phenomenon reflects not only the gaming industry's relentless innovation cycle but also the influence of market dynamics that incentivize players to pursue novelty and enhanced performance.

This dependency implies that a game's original form, including its audiovisual quality and interactive features, can be lost within just a few years of its release. Such fragility undermines the ability of cultural institutions to preserve them as historical artifacts, as their authentic experience is intrinsically tied to the specific technological conditions in which they were initially produced and consumed.

For museums, this scenario generates complex curatorial and ethical challenges: How should obsolete hardware be substituted or represented? Should exhibition be pursued exclusively through documentation, or should emulation-based strategies also be implemented?

Effective preservation of a video game requires not only safeguarding the physical media and original hardware but also ensuring continued access to operational servers, controllers, and display systems, rendering maintenance both technically demanding and costly. Moreover, most museums lack the specialized staff necessary to manage such artifacts, as their preservation requires expertise in computer science and engineering rather than the conventional conservation skills typically found in museum departments. Large institutions, such as MoMA and the Guggenheim, have begun establishing media conservation initiatives and laboratories dedicated to the preservation and restoration of electronic and media-based works. However, for smaller museums with more limited financial resources, the technical and monetary demands associated with creating such facilities often present significant obstacles.

Conclusion

The incorporation of video games into museum collections and exhibitions presents challenges analogous to those faced by New Media Art. Despite notable differences in origin, conceptual frameworks, and function, both forms are rooted in digital culture, encompassing distinct histories, languages, and codes that diverge from traditional art historical paradigms. In the specific case of video games, which emerge primarily from gaming communities, their recognition as legitimate art forms has been gradual and although there still is some resistance regarding their full integration into museum contexts, acknowledgment by certain art institutions and academic researchers has played a pivotal role in reshaping perceptions of their artistic potential and broader cultural significance.

Museums, however, face a structural tension: while these institutions typically require substantial time to situate projects within wider historical, cultural, and theoretical frameworks, video games often demand rapid curatorial responses due to their technological and interactive nature. This situation necessitates a fundamental reconceptualization of long-established operational protocols and curatorial methodologies which forces institutions to rethink methodologies, internal practices, and curatorial models, a challenge that isn't always easily and quickly addressed. As Romualdo (2017) observes, no standardized approaches currently exist to comprehensively address the multifaceted requirements for the collection, archiving, preservation, and exhibition of video games.

These works pose not only technical and financial challenges but also cultural ones, for which many institutions appear ill-prepared "museums are struggling with how to work with games both as interactive, digital objects, and as cultural expression" (Eklund et al., 2019, p. 445).

While the variability, changeability, and instability of video games may initially be perceived as obstacles, they can equally be understood as productive opportunities. They compel museums to continually test their capacity to incorporate emergent art forms, develop flexible curatorial strategies, and provide audiences with distinctive, immersive experiences. Achieving this requires a paradigm shift: institutions must move beyond the mere display of games to actively sustaining playful, participatory, and interactive encounters that contribute to a richer, more inclusive understanding of digital play within the cultural heritage sector. Moreover, the adoption of targeted strategies that recognize community knowledge, embrace audience diversity, and foreground participatory engagement is essential to ensure that museums not only preserve digital artifacts but also foster meaningful cultural dialogue around them.

In this sense, video games challenge museums to expand their conceptual and operational boundaries, offering a unique lens through which to reconsider the intersections of technology, interactivity, and cultural expression. By embracing them, museums can not only adapt to evolving digital cultures but also assert their role as dynamic platforms for the preservation, interpretation, and celebration of contemporary artistic practices.

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