可玩的新藝術

長久以來，藝術愛好者、評論家、電腦遊戲設計者和玩家對於電腦遊戲是否藝術這個問題展開了熱烈的討論。在這些討論當中，無可避免地會與「以往」的媒體進行比較。有許多人，譬如已故的著名影評人Roger Ebert，認為電影作為藝術的地位無庸置疑。他曾指出電腦遊戲的形式存在先天不足，導致它永遠都不能被視為藝術。Ebert 提出遊戲玩家，而不是遊戲設計者，總是處於主導一切的地位，彷如一位總是能決定下一步行動的主角。這與電影導演能控制觀眾的觀賞體驗，掌握何時製造懸疑、同威以及其他觀影體驗的規律背道而馳。

由於電腦遊戲本身是擁有互動性質的機器，他們很有可能產生遊戲設計者所不能預見的行為和可能性，從而令一切偏離設計者預設的遊戲進程。這似乎暗示我們應以一種特定的方式去理解設計者所扮演的角色，特別是設計者透過甚麼方法讓玩家獲得某種體驗。在過去數十年間，每當談到當代電腦遊戲的研究，大家都不能迴避的所謂「遊戲學與叙事學」之爭。這兩派學者爭論的焦點是我們不應該將電影視為直接的視聽體驗模式強加於電腦遊戲上進行分析。新聞遊戲、政治遊戲和其他使用「程序修辭學」的遊戲都證明電腦遊戲可以進行藝術、批判和政治方面的表述。除此以外，主流3A 電腦遊戲與荷里活電影在視聽體驗上有不少相似之處。電腦遊戲表述其獨特的邏輯，講故事對於電子遊戲的重要性遠不如它對電影的重要性。

一直以來，儘管我們面對不少抗拒改變的反對聲音，但在很多層面上將電腦遊戲融入一種藝術範疇已經是既成事實。例如，英國維多利亞和阿伯特博物館近來就委任了一位「駐場遊戲設計家」，而紐約現代藝術博物館在資深設計及建築策展人Paola Antonelli 的管理下，早在 2012 年就已經開始在博物館內收藏和展出電腦遊戲。這些發展都引領著我們，在不將其視作「庸俗」的情況下，把電腦遊戲視作藝術去欣賞。

反觀在過去數十年，市場上出現了不少具社會性和政治性的所謂「藝術遊戲」。他們大力提供了支持電腦遊戲作為藝術的理據：如果養肥了荷李活製作人的愚昧醜陋和騙人熱淚的浪漫喜劇都可以算是藝術，那麼探討人類嚴肅議題的作品——即使它們是遊戲——很難說稱不上藝術。在維多利亞和阿伯特博物館、現代藝術博物館以及其他著名藝術機構都可以看見電腦遊戲的蹤影，似乎足以證明我們可以探索電腦遊戲作為藝術的真正意義，而毋須囿於那是否正宗藝術的爭辯。我們不單要注視具有批判性的電腦遊戲，同時亦應該關注那些純粹有趣，好玩甚至帶點無謂的電腦遊戲。

有見及此，雖然這個展覽的主題是關於電腦遊戲，但是你們將不會在參展作品中看見任何傳統的電腦遊戲。

Douglas Wilson 的作品刻意迴避熒幕的霸權，希望進行非視覺的互動。嘗試參與他的作品，你甚至會忘記自己正在玩「電腦」遊戲。在傳統的電腦遊戲中，尤其是單一玩家操作的遊戲，整個經驗的重點就是科技本身——一如在大銀幕上觀影的經驗，哲學家 Don Ihde 曾經用「他者關係」形容這種經驗，科技在這種經驗中已成為我們與之互動的「他者」。在整個體驗的過程中，Wilson 的作品試圖淡化科技的重要性。在沒有科技的協助下，要進行 Wilson 的遊戲並非不可能，卻十分困難。例如 Johann Sebastian Joust 的玩家與科技的互動相當有限，反而是透過科技，玩家之間彼此進行互動。Wilson 的作品中，科技成為人與人之間好玩交流的中介，亦如所有工具，運作流暢的時候，我們根本難以察覺其存在。取而代之的是，假如我們有勇氣放下一切在藝術展
New Playable Art

The topic of whether computer games are art was for long a hot potato in discussions among art audiences and critics, game designers and players. In these discussions, comparisons to ‘previous’ media were abound—for example those convinced of film’s status as art, like the late film critic Roger Ebert, insisted that there is something in the form of computer games that prevents them from ever becoming art. Ebert implied that the player’s empowered position at the centre of events—i.e. as the protagonist capable of deciding what to do next—clashed with the position of the author supposedly holding the strings of the choreographed film experience and dispensing suspense, empathy and other ingredients of a cinematic experience.¹

While this certainly seems sensible—due to their nature as interactive machines, computer games can end up containing behaviours and possibilities for actions that the author did not

¹ http://www.rogerebert.com/rogers-journal/video-games-can-never-be-art
foresee, which can possibly wreck up any plot intended by the author—it seems to imply a very particular understanding of what it means to be an author, and, more specifically, of what kind of means the author has at her disposal to invoke experiences in the audiences. One of the most important takeaways from the so-called 'ludology vs narratology' debate\textsuperscript{ii} that characterised the formation of contemporary computer game studies in the past decades is that perhaps computer games should not be forced into the paradigms of the more linear kind of audiovisuality found for example in cinema. Newsgames, political games, and other implementations of 'procedural rhetorics'\textsuperscript{3} have shown that artistic, critical, and political expression using computer games is certainly possible, and, that despite the audiovisual similarities between mainstream AAA computer games and Hollywood cinema, computer game expression follows its own logic, for which storytelling is not as central as it is in cinema.

Despite some persistent critical voices, which we may consider as the ever-present resistance to change, the inclusion of computer games within an art paradigm is in many ways a \textit{fait accompli}. For example Victoria & Albert Museum (V&A) recently appointed a ‘game designer in residence’ and Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), already in 2012, under the direction of Paola Antonelli, the senior curator of design and architecture, included computer games in their collection. These observations invite us to appreciate computer games as art without reducing them into any ‘serious’ roles.

In contrast, consider for example the socially and politically laden ‘art games’ from the past decades. They served well to further the causes of computer games in the debate of what counts as art: if silly farces and tear-inducing romantic comedies produced primarily to fatten the purses of Hollywood stakeholders are considered art, it would be hard to not grant that status to works dealing with the serious problems humanity is facing, even if those works happen to be games. The sightings of computer games in V&A, MoMA, and other esteemed art institutions seem to suggest that it is possible to go beyond the legitimacy debate to explore the full spectrum of what it actually means that computer games are art. This amounts to paying attention to not only those examples which make it evident that computer games can fulfil various critical purposes, but including in the scope of analysis also computer games that are fun, frivolous, pointless, and not about anything else but themselves.

Having said this, and, even though this exhibition is ‘about computer games’, you will not find any traditional computer games among the works selected to this exhibition.

In his works, Douglas Wilson deliberately avoids the hegemony of screen and seeks to invite non-visual forms of interaction. When trying out Wilson’s works, you might even forget that you are playing a ‘computer’ game. In traditional computer games, especially in single-player ones,

the technology itself is at the focal point of the experience—very much like in the silver screen in cinematic arts. Philosopher Don Ihde, used the term ‘altness relations’ to describe these experiences, in which the technology becomes a ‘pseudo-other’ with which we interact. 4 It is in this context that Wilson’s way of pushing technology to the sides of the experience appears very interesting. While implementing Wilson’s games without technology would be hard if not impossible, players of Johann Sebastian Joust, for example, will interact with a technology in a very limited sense and instead interact with each other through the technology. In Wilson’s works, technology serves to mediate playful exchanges between people, and, as with all tools, when it is functioning well we will hardly notice it. Instead, what we cannot help noticing are the primarily social situations we find ourselves in if we are brave enough to leave behind our inhibitions and conventions about how one should behave in an art exhibition. The experience is not visual, but playful: the kind of experience you might remember from your childhood. Wilson’s works make it evident that such experiences, even though primarily spontaneous, emergent and non-reflective, can be composed, created, and orchestrated not unlike visual artists can choreograph audience’s gaze, or filmmakers manipulate our emotions.

While Tabor Robak’s works shown in this exhibition display evident references to computer game culture and aesthetics, they are neither interactive nor playable. With playability, I refer to the existential commitment that operates ‘on top’ of interactivity, a system thanks to which we can differentiate between better and worse ways of going about one’s business in a computer game. 5 Those playing a computer game and insisting to choose worse options over better ones will sooner or later find themselves in front of a ‘game over’ screen. This allows for instrumentality that can imbue events, objects and encounters inside computer games with meaning: some objects can be ‘useful’, others can be ‘harmful’, some objects can be more ‘valuable’ than others and some non-player characters may hand out useful information, while interacting with others would be a waste of time, etc.

While Robak’s works are non-interactive and non-playable, the aspects anchoring their audiovisuality to the aesthetic paradigms of computer games—like the abundance of ultra-HD graphics with maximum polygon counts—invite us to conjure the absence of playability in them into a presence. Consider for example Rocks—to those with experience in computer games it appears as resembling a display of collectibles available in a computer game—a catalogue of things to be found. While they are perhaps nice to look at, the things found in computer games and stored in one’s inventory, are most often be sold or otherwise exchanged to update one’s avatar, equipment, armor, etc. To an untrained eye, the crystalline fragments in Rocks appear primarily in terms of their sculptural qualities. To gamers, Rocks appears as screen-dump of

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5 Leino. O., ‘From Interactivity to Playability’ (‘Proceedings of ISEA2013 Conference’)
raw texture data, or, a cheat sheet printout downloaded from Thottbot to remind one of the in-game values of collectible crystals, except that here no values are displayed and it is up to our imagination to fantasise what kind of upgrades they could be traded for and in what kind of world would those trades take place. Hence, Robak’s works resemble the early experiments with monochromatic canvases and the omission of representation in visual arts, by for example Malevich and Rauschenberg. In all cases, something which according to the convention should be present is absent, triggering questions and imaginations to fill the place of that which was omitted.

I hope you enjoy the exhibition, whether it means having fun, being challenged, or something completely unpredictable. Let us explore together what new playable art could be!

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關於New Playable Art

About New Playable Art

在玩耍的輕佻與藝術的嚴肅之間，New Playable Art 尋求探索電腦遊戲與藝術的交匯點。Tabor Robak 運用錄像、裝置、圖像等構作的數碼世界，突顯對虛擬與現實的認知之間的模糊界線。Douglas Wilson 的實體遊戲，則將參加者從種種桎梏中解放出來，在跳舞墊上用四肢感受攀岩，又或者拿着控桿比武，穿梭來個兵捉俠。

Between the frivolity of play and the solemnity of fine art, New Playable Art explores the overlap of computer games and art. Tabor Robak builds digital worlds and highlights the ambiguities between the perceptions of the virtual and the real using video, installation, and still images. Douglas Wilson's physical games call for uninhibited commitment, whether it means rock-climbing on all fours on a full-body dance mat, or full contact jousting with a music-enabled motion game.