

Lecture at Areté explores relationship of video games & politics

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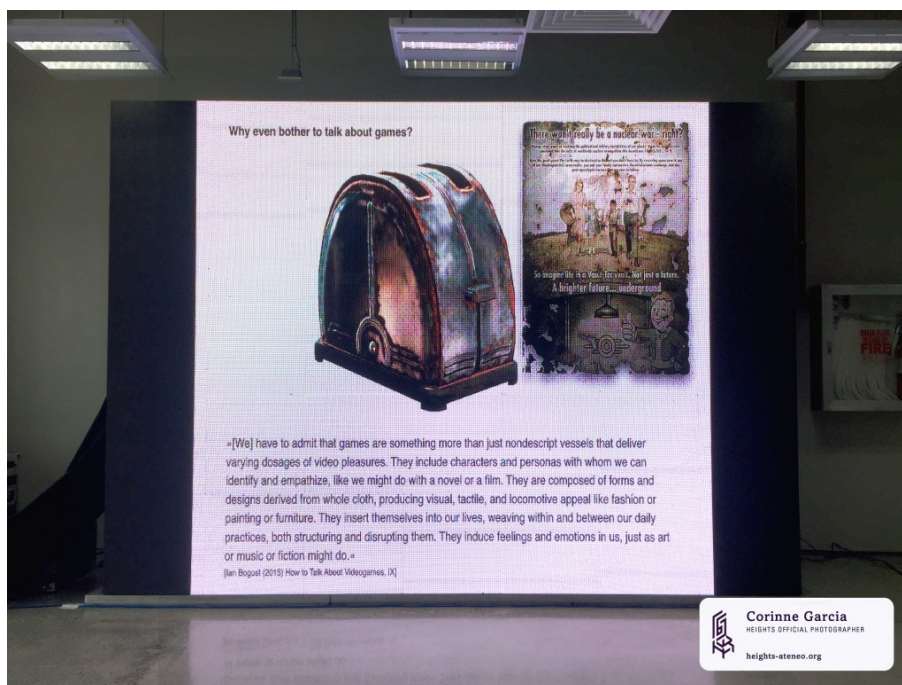
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Christian Huberts, a German media and culture specialist administered a public lecture on the theme: *Game World Views: The potentials and problems of politics in games*. His lecture discussed the presence of politically driven ideologies in video games as well as the layers and conflicts that influence game designers.

In the lecture, Huberts discussed four layers of politics in games: *political decorations, stereotypes, procedural rhetorics, and popular art*. He elaborated on how these are used by games, including some on exhibit.



According to Huberts, *political decorations* is the use of characters to represent differing parties on a certain issue. An example mentioned was of the game *Yellow Umbrella*, in which players are protesters defending themselves from evil politicians and policemen in a gameplay similar to *Plants vs. Zombies*.

For the second point, *political stereotyping in games*, he discussed the problematic use of stereotypes in “[making] your enemy look like an enemy” in video games by designing characters who fit these particular traits. Tom Clancy’s game *The Division* was used as an example for its design of rioters (who are enemies in the game) was very similar to the characteristics of Afro-American rioters.

For his third point, Huberts spoke of *Procedural Rhetorics* wherein games are to be geared towards the alteration of natural processes into computational processes in particular. He explained that a political rhetoric incorporated with a game’s scheme can pave way for further evolution. It may also center on civilization, modern history and science. The fourth and last layer discussed was *Popular Art*. “Most of our daily lives are transformed into games in one way or another. How people work is actually codified into games as a way of developing meaning and constituting opinions all around.”

Huberts also touched on internal conflicts in political games such as the balance between complexity and simplicity “If the game is too simple, it may become difficult for the player to fully immerse themselves in the game enough to discover its hidden meanings, or it may come off as propaganda. If it is too complex however, players may be unable to understand certain elements and end up discarding important ideas.” Another conflict mentioned was agency against powerlessness, in which the user takes on roles that might require empathy and feeling bad for the characters and their circumstances. These are what game developers must go over in their creation processes to make sure messages are conveyed properly.



(<http://heights-ateneo.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/GP16.jpg>)

As exhibited in the public lecture, artists and game designers explore the different political layers as well as the boundaries of the games they develop; they turn towards new themes that deliberately revolve around politics and social struggles. Recently, older computer games and other forms of digital consoles have been made into cultural property and displayed in museums for usage as well as admiration.

The talk of Huberts was done in accompaniment to the very first exhibit held in the Areté, the newly opened creative hub in the Ateneo de Manila University. The exhibit was made possible through the Goethe-Institut, in cooperation with ZKM | Center for Art and Media. *Games & Politics* is an interactive exhibition composed of 18 video games which demonstrate the existence of various political influences and themes in digital gameplay.

As Huberts said in his lecture, “Reflections on the phenomenon of computer games from the perspective of cultural sciences, however, continue to be and far between in the disclosure of art institutions. The Goethe-Institute’s exhibition *Games and Politics* is intended to close this gap, at least in part.”

Games & Politics has been exhibiting worldwide and is now in the Philippines through the partnership of the Goethe-Institut with the Ateneo Art Gallery. The exhibit will be in Areté until October 21, 2017.

More information and texts regarding the lecture are available on Huberts's blog www.schuanblog.de (<http://www.schuanblog.de>)

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Photos by Corinne Garcia

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