States of Play: Roleplay Reality

22 March 2018 - 17 June 2018

Learning Guide

FACT's Learning Programme presents the art centre as an expanded classroom for lifelong learning, critical dialogues and artistic experiences.

The programme of activities at FACT turn the art centre in a space to think about our present and social dream about our future. Art practise promotes critical and creative thinking, and fosters personal development.

About this guide

Designed for educators and teachers bringing groups to visit FACT and gain knowledge and understanding of subject matter and enjoy and be inspired by the experience of an art centre visit while supporting learning across curricular dimensions.

This guide includes at outline of the artwork on show, as well as learning objectives, gallery discussions and ideas to stimulate the learning process around the themes of the exhibition.

Sensitive material warning

Some artworks in Gallery 2 contain material that is unsuitable for students under 18. FACT recommends to visit the exhibition or revise its contents before bringing a group as you should be aware that the exhibition contains material that some people might find challenging. You may also wish to prepare your students or groups for this before their visit. Teachers and educators will need to use their professional judgement and knowledge of their students in determining the suitability of the material for individual groups and whether they wish to seek parental consent.

General learning outcomes

- challenging existing attitudes and questioning values
- enjoying and being inspired by the physical experience of a gallery visit
- promoting research gathering and information processing and ability for children and young people to express themselves

School curriculum competences

- engage, inspire and challenge young people, equipping them with skills to understand and create art
- equip with the skills to think critically and develop perspective and judgement
- explore their ideas and experiences through art
- evaluate and analyse creative works and understand and develop art forms

This education resource has been co-design with Lindsey Kinsella, Greenbank Sports Academy, Liverpool; Heather Norton, Expressive Art Coordinator, Newbridge Learning Community, Wigan and Stephanie Plitcha, Teacher, The Studio School, Liverpool.

Plan your visit

We can accommodate class sizes of up to 30 pupils (split into two groups) and sessions will last from one hour to an hour and a half.

For more information, or to arrange a visit, please email:
education@fact.co.uk / learning@fact.co.uk

Find us at FACT (Foundation for Art and Creative Technology), 88 Wood Street, Liverpool, L1 4DQ or fact.co.uk/

Opening times Tuesday - Sunday 11am - 6pm, and entrance is free.

About the exhibition

The roles we play, both on and offline, reflect and shape our realities. *States of Play: Roleplay Reality* considers how roleplay - found in many video games - can be used as a way to reflect and question real-world power structures and suggest ways to move beyond these. We should not think of games merely as a way of escaping the real world but as a place where the imaginary and the real collide.

Advancement in technology has made game construction and design more accessible to a broader range of people, which in turn is offering more diverse games to the public and highlighting the limitations of commercially driven high-budget titles. Gamergate, a volatile scandal which exposed deep-rooted sexism in the industry, showed not only that the physical and virtual are inseparable, but also exposed the radically differing views that make up today's game culture. As the landscape of gaming changes - this reflects changes in our real environment from the rise of right-wing extremism to the rise in previously marginalised voices having a platform to offer an alternative narrative to traditional games, as well as an ever-increasing merging of the physical and virtual, fact and fiction.

Within this context, *States of Play: Roleplay Reality* brings together artworks and industry games to explore how the roles we play within these games expose our true realities: with all of our contradictory motivations, biases and assumptions. The result of this can be joyous and disturbing, freeing or overpowering, but now - more than ever - it it is impossible to separate our physical identities with the roles that we take up in virtual space.

Artists:
Atrax Games / Larry Achiampong & David Blandy / Bluehole Studios Inc / Alan Butler / Nina Freeman / Rindon Johnson / Youngju Kim / Reija Meriläinen / Minority Media / Kimmo Modig / David O'Reilly / Porpentine Charity Heartscape & Brenda Neotenomie / Jon Rafman / The Rodina / Tender Claws / Angela Washko / Werkflow / Jordan Wolfson / Pinar Yoldas

Curated by:
Lucy Sollitt and Lesley Taker (FACT)

Exhibition Design:
Chiara Stephenson

Activities

Key Terms

- Empathy & meaningful exchange
- Identity & roleplay
- Escape & games

Pre - Visit Activity

Discussion activity in the classroom / at FACT before seeing the exhibition.

What do you think the exhibition will look like? What kind of games will be there?

Possible Answers:
- What will the space be like
- Can you play the games > will we just watch them?

Why do we play games?

Possible answers:
- To escape reality > what do we need to escape from? Is it possible to really escape?
- To win > what does it mean to win? What does it mean to lose?

What makes a good game?

Possible answers:
- Teamwork / Solo player? > why?
- Exciting / Critical Thinking > why?

Who designs video games? And who plays them?

41% of gamers in UK are women in their late 30s to mid-40s

Analyse the quotes below:

"The definition of a person is where you look at them from. Everything in the world feels like that."
- Alan W. Watts, Philosopher, Everything soundtrack

"Often, when we guess at others' motives, we reveal only our own."
- Mara Sov, Destiny

These quotes are provocations for the exhibition that the students should keep in mind whilst viewing it and ask the following questions:

How do video games reflect and shape our identities?

How does the way we treat others reflect and shape our identities?

This discussion is ongoing throughout the activity.

Activity 1: Activi-kitty (8 year olds +)

Key term: Empathy & Meaningful experience

The Kitty AI: Artificial Intelligence for Governance, 2016, Pinar Yoldas, Turkish/American designer, artist and researcher based in Michigan.

Yoldas' film creates a near-future in which an artificial intelligence (AI), in the form of a kitten, has replaced all politicians and royalty. The Kitty AI not only carries out the tasks of a world ruler, but also loves and takes care of its citizens at a personal level.

Task:

Imagine a world where Kitty is in charge - there are no politicians and no Queen. The Kitty not only is in charge but cares about you. What decisions do you make in your day to day life? What decisions don't you get to make in your day to day life? What decisions to you make that affect others?

Imagine you are Kitty - what are the good things about being Kitty? What are the hard things about being Kitty? Who would make a good Kitty? Pick someone in the class to be Kitty - they get to decide who can play on what games. How did it feel to be the Kitty/not-Kitty? Did you make your decisions for you or for the group?

Pinar Yoldas, *The Kitty AI: Artificial Intelligence for Governance*, 2016.
Image courtesy of the artist.

6

ACTIVITY 2: Is this real? (11 year olds +)

Key term: Escape & Games

Papo & Yo, 2013, Minority Media, games studio in Montreal committed to producing cutting-edge VR products.

While hiding from his father in a closet, a young boy named Quico finds himself taken to a dream-like favela where he is constantly accompanied by a gigantic monster. This monster is mostly benign but when he sees a poisonous green frog, he has no choice but to eat it. This sends him into a rage, hurting everything around him (including Quico).

Task:

Discussion: Writing can be defined as either fact or fiction - however within the context of the exhibition video games are seen as a virtual reality used to escape from the "real-world".

- Do you think we can escape reality?
- How "real" should video games be?
- If a video game can alter our mood and emotions - does it then become real?
- Do you take reality into a game - your thoughts feelings and emotions?

Minority Media, *Papo & Yo*, 2013. Image courtesy of the studio.

7

ACTIVITY 3: Compare/Contrast

Key terms: Empathy & Meaningful Exchange

Survivor, 2017, Reija Meriläinen, Finnish artist working across moving image, installations and sculpture.

We have all experienced some form of power play in our everyday interactions. Survivor questions how far you would be willing to manipulate others in order to succeed. Inspired by reality TV shows, Survivor forces you to form alliances with other players, and ultimately eliminate them in order to progress. This may not be so easy when the other players begin to reveal their stories and vulnerabilities, making them feel more real.

Everything, 2016, David O'Reilly, Irish artist and filmmaker based in Los Angeles, US.

If we could occupy another living form - an animal, a plant, a microbe or even the cosmos itself - how would it change our perspective? Everything is an exploration of universe, in which you can experience the world from a vast array of viewpoints. It celebrates all beings from the micro to the macro, granting them equal status, and illustrates that each has its own unique role to play in the ecosystem.

Task:

Look at the two works above - in one game the object is to win at all costs. In the other there is no way to win but you can experience all other existences within an environment. Discuss the following questions:

- How important is winning?
- Why is it important to see things from other perspectives?
- Do you act differently in virtual reality? How important are consequences to the decisions you make?
- How important is the way we treat others?
- Do you still feel empathy for a character if they are not a real person?

Suggested Activity:

Werewolf, a game of secrecy and underhanded tactics.

ACTIVITY 4: Design the game (11 years old +)

Key terms: Escape & Games

"What is a man but the sum of his memories? We are the stories we live. The tales we tell ourselves."
- Clay Kaczmarek, Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood

Sym, 2015, Atrax Games, independent game developer that creates puzzle-arcade games on PC.

Sym is a puzzle-platformer that explores social anxiety. Players take on the role of Josh, a teenage boy affected by this disorder, as he goes through contrasting mazes of black and white, moving between reality and the world he has created to avoid his fears, which appear as in-game obstacles. Of course, Josh must take care: dangers lurk across the divide.

Task:
Design a game based on your own experience. Something that happened to you within the last year? It could be something you regret and you wish to test a difference scenario. Think of and design the following:

- Who is the player? What do they look like? What is their personality? What is their aim in the game? What other characters are in the game? What do they look like?
- Where is the game set? What doe the environment look like?
- Game Play > Are you part of a team of do you play alone? What is the aim of the game? How do you win? What happens if you lose?

Once you have mind mapped your ideas - present to each other and vote on the best game.