

Gaming After Dark: How Contemporary Institutions Can Support Gaming Industries and Communities

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ABSTRACT

What is the role of contemporary institutions, such as museums and libraries, in the modern gaming creative industries and corresponding community? With changing audience and societal values, these institutions must be relevant and inspirational for local, contemporary communities particularly in an evolving digital climate (Greene, 2013; Izzo, 2017). There are over 405 game development companies in Australia and Australians consumed \$AUD 3.96 billion dollars of digital, physical, and mobile games in 2021 (IGEA, 2022; Brand & Jervis, 2021). This clearly highlights that games are a crucial component of “contemporary media and art as well as leisure pursuits and modern consumer culture” (Chan, 2018). Taking this into consideration, many cultural institutions such as museums and libraries are seeking to understand how they can support both the industry and community of gaming in inclusive, educational, and socially oriented ways.

Responding to this, I am researching through practice what role museums have in supporting the modern games creative industries and communities through collaborative projects at the Powerhouse Museum - a contemporary science, technology & design museum based in Sydney, New South Wales (NSW). Modern institutions are redefining their established traditional roles to create meaningful engagement opportunities and stimulate creativity to strengthen reoccurring relationships with users and relevant communities (Black, 2012). Engagement as a priority is heavily emphasised in the recent definition of museums by the International Council of Museums where museums are not only to collect and conserve but are “open to the public...” to offer “...varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing” (ICOM, 2022).

Regarding the changing perceptions of what these spaces are, supporting gaming industries and communities extends beyond collections and exhibitions by exploring new and unique ways of engagement. Notably, hosting themed after-hours events to attract new audiences based on personal preferences has been a successful and widely adopted strategy (Easson & Leask, 2019; Choi et al., 2020). By creating informal learning and entertainment experiences, studies have shown these late events

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successfully satisfy a visitor's needs of education, entertainment, and socialisation (Choi et al. 2020). Additionally due to the nature of gaming, audiences can take games home and continue to be involved after their experience (Izzo, 2017).

This presentation will discuss the two specialised free events hosted by the Powerhouse in May and September 2022, 'Powerhouse Lates x GAMING', with 500 & 1,500 attendees, respectively. Recognising the needs and ambitions of the audience, which is the emerging Sydney games sector, both lates were designed to widely appeal and be inclusive. As the first major gaming events in Sydney since the pandemic, their purpose was to engage with the gaming community and create memorable experiences. Whilst for industry professionals it was to provide a significant venue to receive feedback on their work and a place to come together to socialise while creating a sense of validation of their craft.

Breaking down the contents of each event and their improvements, May's event featured game play and performances live streamed to Twitch by Lara de Witt and the women-led collective Empress. All interactives either had the capacity to be multiplayer or crowd viewed however, based on general feedback received, September's event considered and implemented the need for further diverse interactives and featured digital and analogue gaming showcases. This was achieved by partnering with both industry and community groups such as Game Plus, Exiles Gaming Community, Good Games Publishing and Wizards of the Coast.

Both events featured generalised industry talks, and later a panel targeting students, titled 'Levelling Up'. These were curated to highlight the depth and range of the industry from software engineers to accessibility making in games. Noting audience participation and enthusiasm for deeper discussion, the structure and subject matter of the 'Levelling Up' industry talks will evolve in future events into themed mini-lectures, panels and presentations.

Additionally, as gaming has been historically aimed towards a male audience and often establishes barriers to diverse and accessible play (Tue Le Ngoc, 2022; Beeston et al. 2018), these events sought to create a welcoming environment. By collaborating with key groups in September like Sydney GAYmers and Autism Spectrum Australia (ASPECT), we sought to establish safe interactions through handing out pronoun badges, assigned quiet spaces in the museum, and ensured all our knowledge sharing talks featured AUSLAN interpreters.

In this presentation I seek to discuss, and hope to receive feedback on, the intent in the design of these events, what we learnt and how this will shape future practices within the museum. This discussion will also be informed by quantitative and qualitative results on attendee demographics and industry case studies.

BIO

Chloe Appleby is an Assistant Curator at the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney, Australia. She seeks to examine the relationship between cultural institutions and local and wider gaming industries and communities through research and practice. Through this she hopes to understand and advocate for the mutual benefits and support networks these creative industries can produce.

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