

Published by Inter Arts Center, Lund University
Text © The authors, 2024
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37852/oblu.362.c884>

1, 2, 3 Playtime

ISBN:

978-91-531-2612-6 (print)

978-91-531-2613-3 (digital)

Publications from Inter Arts Center, no 1

ISSN: 3035-7586

Suggested citation: Lundberg, J.-N. 2024, 'Bodies Commodities Playtime! Edition', i M. Edström & H. Jalhed (red.), *1, 2, 3 Playtime*, Inter Arts Center, Malmö. <https://doi.org/10.37852/oblu.362.c884>



Bodies Commodities Playtime! Edition, 2024. Installation view, *Malmö Gallery Weekend 2024*, IAC.
Jon Nicklas Lundberg

Bodies Commodities Playtime! Edition

Jon Nicklas Lundberg

Bodies Commodities Playtime! Edition (2024) is an experimental audio-visual instrument, or a participatory sound work, or a conceptual musical instrument, on the topic of exploitation. More specifically, it investigates human tendencies to habituate and unconsciously shift ethical boundaries while in immersive states. The work is presented in VR (virtual reality), video projection and 8-channel ambisonic sound, allowing participants to manipulate different bodies to create an aesthetic sound experience. Questions arise, as Kjell Vikhagen notes in *When Art Is Put Into Play: A Practice-based Research Project on Game Art*¹, as to whether a genuine artistic critique can be conducted within a game-like environment, where rules and immersive elements necessary for gameplay may limit the audience's capacity for free interpretation.

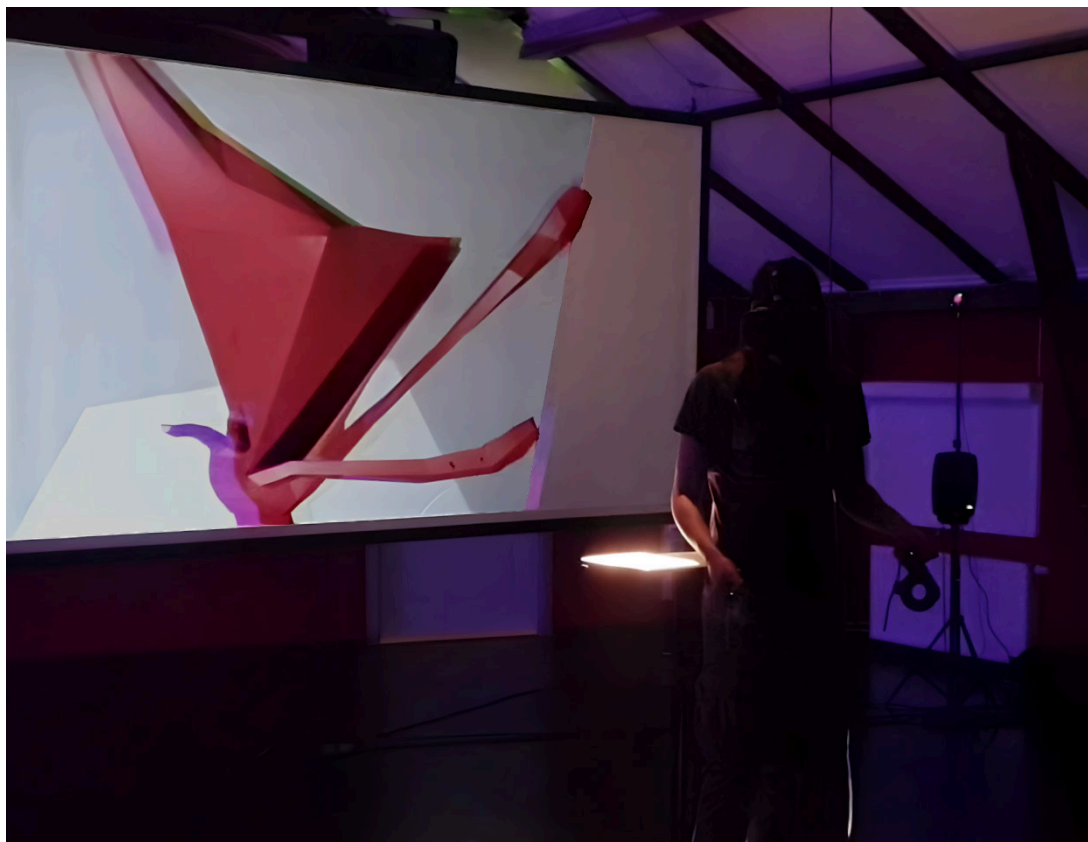
To exploit this flaw in the immersive game-art context and use it beneficially to illustrate the problematisation of the artwork, two modes of engagement are provided: one as an interacting performer, and another as a passive, distanced audience. The performer engages in an open layout, akin to a 'sandbox game', encouraging a strong sense of agency and freedom of self-directed action. To enhance immersion, the performer is experiencing the work in VR, using hand controllers to interact with the bodies, and is also positioned within a ring of speakers, creating an enveloping auditory environment. The circular speaker arrangement places the performer in a defined space that affords a sense of separation from ordinary reality, evoking the concept of the 'magic circle', not only in social and psychological terms but also as a tangible, physical space. Conversely, the passive audience remains outside this ring of speakers – outside the 'world of play' and its rules – and experiences the work

¹ Vikhagen, Arne Kjell. *When Art Is Put Into Play: A Practice-based Research Project on Game Art*. University of Gothenburg, 2017.

through sound, video projection, and the performer's actions. This spatial and experiential distance provides an alternative interpretation of the work, especially of the performer's violent interactions with the bodies. Through a game level-inspired design, the performer is at first exposed to interact with worm-like bodies with no human traits (named 'lesser life forms', in order to accentuate their insignificance), and is then, step-by-step, exposed to more complex bodies, to end with human-like ones.

The intention of this experimental level setup is to try to lure the performer into ultimately being quite ruthless with the humanoid bodies, compared to if the performer was to start manipulating the latter right away, and by this, mostly for the passive audience, enlarging the potential impression of shifted ethical boundaries. It is worth noting that the work was neither intended as a game, nor a primarily visual artwork; instead, it was conceived as an installation, centred around a musical instrument-like setup, where interaction with sound – specifically a sonic rendering of visual glitches in a game engine – forms its basic structure. Considering this, the presentation of the work within the context of *1, 2, 3 Playtime* gave rise to, what were for me, valuable reflections on the influence of context in shaping the impression of a multi-disciplinary work that by its nature offers multiple aesthetic-artistic-expressive entry points, including game-like aspects.

There is, from a human-cognitive perspective, an inherent hierarchy between different aesthetic expressions. By disrespecting this hierarchy (even further than I have done in this work), what potent dissonances occur? Could ethical habituation in immersive environments be further explored with artistic tools like these?



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