

Candidate: Filip Hauer

Title: Digital Games and Algorithmic Work: The Politics of Exchange, Alienation and Performative Ideology

This excellent doctoral project clearly meets the evaluation criteria for an artistic doctorate, and my unreserved recommendation is that Hauer receives a pass grade. This dissertation stands out for its ambition, clarity, and incisiveness. As a whole, it constitutes a significant and original contribution to contemporary research led art practice, that offers a compelling insight into critical media theory, game design, and artistic research methods. The conceptual frameworks Hauer introduces are masterfully demonstrated in his game-based interventions. The dissertation also makes a notable contribution to new forms of knowledge and interdisciplinary understanding of videogames, particularly from the perspectives of game/interaction design and embodied user experience. The project demonstrates a profound awareness of its historical and artistic context by exploring Marxist and avant-garde traditions through game aesthetics and mechanics.

This dissertation contributes meaningfully to research led art practice by convincingly demonstrating how games and game design can be sites of artistic inquiry and critique. Hauer's work diligently and persuasively frames game mechanics and procedural systems as sites of ideological expression while conceptualizing the user/player's active, but ambiguous role in producing and contesting those expressions. Through his game design practice and game-based installations, Hauer has expanded the conceptual field of game art, his work demonstrates the application of novel artistic approaches to embedded mechanics. This artistic practice generates aesthetic and political space for imagining alternative modes of production and agency, deepening the relevance of games within critical artistic research (and the relevance of research led artistic research for interdisciplinary game studies).

Hauer's dissertation offers a distinctive contribution to knowledge that is codified in the three-level heuristic framework introduced in the fourth chapter. The framework builds on the comprehensive theory led discussion in chapters one to three of the dissertation, respectively focused on exploring game exchange, alienation, and performative agency. This framework functions both as a critical lens and a generative tool for future design and is palpably demonstrated in Hauer's artistic practice. The work convincingly indicates that users participate in the creation of novel ways of thinking through speculative mechanics and narrative friction and offers crucial guidance for artists and designers interested in applying these techniques.

The dissertation demonstrates a strong awareness of the cultural, historical, and disciplinary contexts in which it is situated. It draws on a broad lineage of artistic and critical practices, including Brechtian performance, situationist *détournement*, and xenofeminist critique, while



also engaging with the history of computational aesthetics. Hauer contextualizes his work within both avant-garde art practices and mainstream game cultures, identifying continuities and ruptures between them. This situatedness allows the research to reflect critically on its own tools and assumptions, positioning itself within an evolving discourse around art, ideology, and algorithmic platforms.

The formats and methods developed in this project are closely aligned with the aims of the research. The dissertation combines written analysis with original digital and card games and an exhibition that are integral components of the inquiry. Hauer's games *Lithium*, *Dreaming About Work* and *Workers Out of Office DLC*, are artistic interventions that thoroughly demonstrate this artistic research and heuristic framework. Hauer's methods and practice are shaped by the demands of the medium (games) and artistic method (game design). Each element—dissertation and games—coherently contributes to the overarching research led artistic project.

This dissertation strikes me as particularly noteworthy for six reasons:

1. Conceptual innovation: The dissertation presents an intellectually reframing of game design as a research led and critical artistic method using an original, coherent, and generative conceptual language.
2. Methodology: The demonstration of the dissertations theoretical depth was powerfully actualized in Hauer's games, modeling a strong example of research-through-practice.
3. Writing: The dissertation is clearly written and well-structured, balancing theoretical depth with accessibility and guiding the reader through complex material without losing sight of the argument.
4. Critical and political commitment: The work makes a crucial and compelling intervention in discussions of labour, extractivism, and ideology in game culture, game design and critical media art.
5. Artistic Contribution. The project demonstrates how detailed attention to game mechanics and player agencies has important implications for the political impact of game art in shaping performative agency and speculative thinking.
6. Interdisciplinary impact: It contributes to research led artistic practice and game studies, and to fields such critical theory, and speculative design, demonstrating how practice-led artistic research can speak across disciplines.

As a brief note on developing this work further, Hauer may consider expanding his impressive range of theoretical grounding (particularly in Marxist and feminist traditions), to consider perspectives from non-Western and/or Indigenous critical thought, especially in relation discussions of extractivism and ecological game design.

This dissertation is deeply thoughtful and beautifully executed, it reflects not only intellectual and artistic maturity, but also a strong sense of political and ethical commitment. It is rare to



see such clarity of purpose combined with such creative ambition, and it is clear that this project was pursued with care, depth, and integrity. It will resonate not only in the field of research led artistic practice, but also with those who recognise that art and play are not escapes from the world, but vital tools through which more just, possible, and humane futures can be imagined and begin to take shape.

Recommendation: Pass



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