

Closed Circuit Electronic Playground

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Motivation

- Fill in the missing gaps in gaming history: 1940s – 1972
- Re-examine computational media history in this early period in relation to the development of game systems.
- Challenge the linear narrative of video game history, which places a primary focus on progressive technical advancement, equating it with game sophistication.
- Explore the effects of early home gaming on gender and media dynamics within domestic space in the early 1970's.

Project Details

- Period: 1940-1972
- Conceptual history from cybernetics to game theory to second order cybernetics and media theory.
- Technical and social history.
- Focus on individual games and what they reveal about forms of play, social dynamics, ideology, and interactions with computational media systems.
- Reproduction and emulation of lost game systems. Actual play is vital to the recovery of historical media contexts.

Context

- Most game studies scholarship neglects video game history before the mid 1970s.
- Computational history tends to relegate game history to “footnote status,” assuming that it was derivative of computational developments rather than a primary driver of them.
- Early game hardware had a huge impact on media history, but was rare and is now either inaccessible (lost or in special collections) or difficult to obtain and even more difficult to repair/operationalize.
- Early video games are rarely contextualized as being in dialog with analog game forms, such as board games.



Early **video game** development (1940-1972) drove **digital media culture**, yet remains inaccessible to academics. **This project recovers that history.**



Project Deliverables

- Completed archival research throughout US, UK, and Germany.
- Obtaining of historical artifacts for study.
- Reconstruction of lost game systems and prototypes (interdisciplinary collaboration at Pitt, including student-driven work and public showcases).
- Complete outline and plan for monograph.
- Initial article for publication.

Potential Impact

- A deeper understanding of the relationships between early digital computer development and game development, both technically and conceptually.
- A more robust understanding of early video game cultures and potentials, revealing alternatives to game cultures that solidified later.
- A better appreciation of the ideological contexts of video game history.
- Inspiration for game designers to explore forgotten possibilities of gaming, including deeper levels of player interaction and hybrid media forms that combine screen and tabletop modalities.
- Theoretical models to better conceptualize human-machine interaction and the relationship between machine-mediated interaction and the interwoven scales of media assemblages.