

Exploration of the Impact of Dynamic Narrative Approach on Public Exhibition Experience

Siqi Chi*

School of Design, Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing 100105, China

*Corresponding author: Siqi Chi, 15692274006@163.com

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Abstract: In today's exhibition field, the dynamism of the narrative approach as a mainstream trend has permeated various aspects such as visual design, exhibit display, and media communication. On one hand, this is due to the development of digital media technology providing practical operational pathways; on the other hand, it is also a result of the information explosion brought about by the maturity of digital media technology, forcing exhibitions, as an important form of public cultural service, to stimulate public interest to the fullest extent in competition with other cultural products. In such a coincidental yet inevitable combination, how to effectively utilize a dynamic narrative approach within the exhibition field to provide the public with a sense of unfamiliarity in dimensions, boundaries, and situations, thereby constructing a unique perspective that enables people to perceive alienation relationships and ultimately resist the control of the technological landscape on humanity, becomes the key issue determining whether the integration between the two can be beneficial.

Keywords: Dynamic narrative; Exhibition curation; Audience experience; Experience design

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1. Preface

In today's era where the maturity of new media technology and the disaster of information explosion coexist, the distraction of attention brought about by fast-paced living causes various cultural products to continuously attempt to strike people's nerves in innovative ways. As an essential component of public cultural service, exhibitions face the urgent task of fulfilling their knowledge production function amidst the complex and bustling era. Intervening in visual design, exhibit display, and media communication fields with digital media tools to create dynamic and diverse curation languages has become the prevailing trend for future development. Therefore, this paper will focus on the application of the dynamic narrative approach within the exhibition field, analyzing its role at different levels through specific cases and further discussing the various transformations in the public exhibition experience that it triggers.

2. The application level of dynamic narrative in exhibition venues

2.1. Visual design

In the curatorial context, visual design primarily refers to the transformation of abstract information into elements such as symbols, images, and colors, and the use of metaphor, symbolism, personification, and exaggeration to organize the narrative process. When discussing the application of dynamic expression in exhibitions, one often mentions the emblematic image of the 2000 World Exposition in Hanover, Germany. Designed by the QWER Studio, this logo has been widely acclaimed since its inception due to its subversion of traditional design principles, both in its expressive form and the underlying theory. It is a constantly evolving symbol, and the designer's use of diverse shapes and combinations vividly and perfectly embodies the theme of "humanity, nature, and technology" for the expo ^[1].

Today, an increasing number of static exhibition materials are gradually being replaced by digital media such as screens, projections, and VR, making dynamic presentation methods a recognized trend ^[2]. By orchestrating the order of graphic, textual, and auditory elements, designers ingeniously inject more dimensions such as space and time into the visual aspects of exhibitions, thereby forming a certain dynamic logic in the viewer's cognition. In a narrow sense of narrative, it organizes events into a coherent series in a specific order. However, dynamic design in exhibition visuals often lacks a complete storyline, giving rise to unique interactivity. This enables people to actively perceive and comprehend informational content through the autonomous selection of cognitive systems formed during the process of image composition and dynamic operation, rather than passively receiving information in a linear narrative mode ^[3].

2.2. Display of exhibits

The application of dynamic narrative in the context of exhibits can be discussed from two perspectives. Firstly, it refers to the use of dynamic storytelling techniques within the exhibits themselves. Secondly, it involves the curators' dynamic treatment of the display methods. In terms of the former, technological advancements not only enrich the means of expression for creators but also provide precise parameter settings that satisfy the audience's intellectual needs during dynamic viewing experiences ^[4]. As the main component of exhibition structures, exhibits presented in digitalized forms contribute to the overall dynamic transformation of exhibitions. For instance, in the 2019 Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA) Graphic Design Graduation Exhibition, numerous digital media exhibits were showcased, with McKenna Sanderson's "Flow: A Design Practice" being the most representative. The artist uploaded a piece of text they designed onto an LED circular multimedia platform, forming unique 3D dynamic arrangements through interaction with the audience.

The second form of dynamic narrative occurs during the exhibition process. With the maturity of technology, various digital carriers enable curators to have diversified control over conveying exhibit information and shaping exhibition styles.^[5] This breaks the traditional presentation format that is flat and static, becoming an emerging trend. Alongside the increased manipulability of display media, audience participation has become an indispensable element in the dynamicization of exhibitions. Furthermore, the enhanced sense of presence experienced by the public in exhibitions further promotes knowledge absorption. Under the influence of immersive experiences, the unidirectional narrative output gradually evolves into a bidirectional emotional flow. The dynamicization of such exhibition spaces can be traced back to the early signs in the 1980s when the Tsukuba Expo '85 was held in Japan. With the theme of "Dwellings and Surroundings – Science and Technology for Man at Home," this expo employed a large number of robots and lighting technologies to create an innovative and interactive virtual atmosphere, constructing a mediated landscape beyond nature.

2.3. Media communication

In an era where mobile internet has become the main channel for information transmission, the dynamic trend of exhibition design is aligning with the form required by digital media communication. In terms of promotion and publicity, an aesthetic style characterized by interactivity is gradually being established, giving rise to diverse forms of expression such as dynamic mobile posters, self-media promotional videos, interactive H5 programs, and online digital exhibition halls ^[6]. According to data surveys, the attention received by dynamic display content is 5–10 times that of static design, and it also ranks first in the interest distribution of mobile users at a proportion of 28.26% ^[7]. Taking the media communication of the artwork “teamLab: Universe of Water Particles in the Tank” by the Japanese new media art group teamLab as an example, browsing their official website reveals that each exhibit is accompanied by dynamic video recordings, allowing the audience to clearly and intuitively understand the creative concepts and the experiences they can expect from the exhibition. Additionally, viewers can click buttons to share the exhibition on their personal social media platforms, enabling them to engage in secondary editing and dissemination of the exhibition content ^[8,9].

3. The experience transformation of public exhibitions in a dynamic narrative

3.1. Expansion of dimensions

The most intuitive experiential change triggered by the application of dynamic narrative techniques to static exhibition spaces occurs at the “dimensional” level. Here, the term “dimension” primarily refers to the number of independent spatial and temporal coordinates within the scope of physics ^[10]. With the application of dynamic media, limited exhibition spaces are injected with more rich narrative elements in terms of time and space. The audience is no longer situated within a still viewpoint composed of a single perspective. Instead, the multiple spaces intertwine, infiltrate, and superimpose on each other over an extended period of time, allowing for the perception of the past, present, and future ^[11]. The Shanghai World Expo’s exhibition of the painting “Along the River During the Qingming Festival” can serve as a representative example. The exhibit departs from the original two-dimensional visual expression and utilizes 3D animation and holographic projection technology to dynamically restore the street scenes of the Song Dynasty. This places the audience in a completely new world that simultaneously transcends both time and space.

Furthermore, on a broader “dimensional” level, the application of dynamic narrative techniques in exhibition spaces will bring about infinite expansion of public contemplation space. Digital media replaces established exhibition entities with information spaces rich in variability. The unpredictability of narrative content leads to uncertainty and insecurity, providing viewers with a more active mental engagement. For example, the first exhibition held by Swiss artist MARCK in Shanghai, titled “MARCK’s Rock Box,” extensively continues the artist’s previous creative style. Digital media carriers are installed in a wooden geometric exhibition space, where nearly lifelike dynamic images are played, eliminating the static state of traditional sculpture during the exhibition process and allowing the exhibition space to expand.

3.2. Disappearance of boundaries

Implementing the “breaking of walls” on inherent exhibition boundaries is the second level of transformation in the public exhibition experience brought about by dynamic narrative techniques. This is consistent with Kant’s discussion of the “experiential reality” and “a priori conceptual nature” of space. As a physical space with certain boundaries, the exhibition space provides a realistic possibility for curators to display digital devices and for viewers to observe dynamic exhibits within it. From this point of view, its boundaries are experientially real. However, it does not have absolute reality. With the dynamic changes in digital media, the virtual space

perceived by the audience is constantly reconstructed. The space sensed here is the subjective experience formed by the audience's pre-existing spatial and temporal concepts before attending the exhibition. Therefore, its boundaries are limited to the realm of experience, despite being experientially real. The handling of spatial boundaries in the digital immersive exhibition "Dreamed Japan, Images of the Floating World" can serve to illustrate the above point. The exhibition displays creatively processed dynamic images of ukiyo-e paintings in a fully projected venue. The transitions between different scenes are achieved through the opening and closing of wooden doors or the surging of water surfaces, making the inherent boundaries of the exhibition site ethereal and unpredictable as the scenes change.

Furthermore, presenting multiple dynamic exhibits simultaneously in the same space will further subjectively deconstruct the boundaries of the exhibition site. Just as Kant said, "The concepts derived from experience all have extensions; the space that cannot contain infinite things has no extension, it is only infinitely large, and its parts are just certain limitations within the infinite largeness" ^[12]. Therefore, the narrative space divided by multiple digital media within the same exhibition site we are referring to here is also merely the subjective experience of the viewer towards each part of the overall space. The overlapping of multiple dynamic spaces, where each set of points, lines, and surfaces forms a new area, further shatters the original separation between parts ^[13]. For example, when artist Hito Steyerl's "Power Plants" was exhibited at the Serpentine Gallery in 2019, multiple LED screens displayed plant images generated by neural networks, simulating the natural growth momentum and dissolving the boundaries between the original display devices, creating a reflective artificial ecological landscape.

3.3. Reconstruction of context

As an important form of public cultural service with knowledge production functions, exhibitions have the ultimate goal of triggering experiential transformation in exhibition spaces through dynamic narrative techniques, aiming to construct a scenario that facilitates a smooth transition between production and viewing. In this context, Brecht's theory of alienation is highly instructive, stating, "Firstly, familiar elements in characters or events in drama should be removed, thereby arousing curiosity in the audience about their essence" ^[14]. By applying dynamic images, perspectives, camera angles, and other elements of language to the space for information transmission, the inherent narrative modes in conventional exhibition scripts are disrupted. In this process, the virtual space of the internal textual content of exhibits, the physical layout structure of exhibition halls, and the psychological space of public emotional experiences all undergo a process of alienation and extension. Moreover, the dynamic elements are detached from pure narrativity and serve as a means to disrupt order, becoming an important tool for creating possibilities amidst fragmentation.

In addition, the context reconstructed by dynamic narrative in exhibitions lies more in the broad sense. By dynamically and organically combining irrelevant elements, a new layer of construction that is different from the initial context is born ^[15]. It is in this constructed unfamiliar context that the observer moves away from the usual experience mode of exhibition, thus obtaining a critical perspective. For example, artist Tony Oursler's 2014 exhibition "Obscura" created a human eye matrix by projecting images onto fiberglass spheres. The reflection on the surface of the cornea displays the focus of gaze outside the screen, symbolizing humanity's consumption of image narrative. When visitors enter this matrix, the uncomfortable position of the viewer will be highlighted, and then they can observe the relationship between the human body and the screen from a detached perspective, and question the spectacle of popular culture viewing trend in the reflection layer.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, digital media technology, as the foundation for visually presenting dynamic narratives, provides a feasible approach for the dynamicization of narrative modes within exhibition spaces. However, its mature development has led to an information explosion, posing significant challenges to exhibitions as an important form of public cultural service. This, in turn, has made the application of dynamic narrative techniques in exhibition spaces a necessary trend amidst competition. In this combination of both contingency and necessity, the question arises of how dynamic narrative language can leverage its strengths in the visual presentation, display, and communication of exhibitions to effectively enhance the alienating experiences for viewers in terms of dimensions, boundaries, and contexts. Ultimately, constructing a unique perspective that enables the discovery of alienated relationships, using technology as a means to resist the control of the technological landscape over humanity, becomes the key issue in determining whether a beneficial integration between the two can be achieved.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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