<u>Panel 5</u>
Digital Culture and Virtual Worlds

Digital Games as Critical Media:
Artistic Intervention and Intermedial Appropriation in the Works of Total Refusal
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As a pseudo-Marxist media guerrilla group, Total Refusal upcycles video games to reveal the political apparatus behind these media products, particularly how they conceal deeper economic and social control through their glossy virtual surfaces. This study focuses on the two creative practices of "intervention" and "appropriation" employed by the Total Refusal collective, analyzing how they critique and reflect on the hidden ideologies in mainstream video games through artistic reworking and re-creation. Through artistic intervention (subverting game settings and expectations alongside academic commentary), Total Refusal dismantles the original narrative frameworks of the games, disrupting their entertainment value and immersion, and showcasing the potential for resistance in digital life. At the same time, through appropriation, they recontextualize game imagery, alter narrative structures, and repurpose interactive mechanics to expose the operational and exploitative logic of capitalism in the digital sphere. This study, through analyzing works such as *Hardly Working*, *How to Disappear*, and *Kinderfilm*, will explore how Total Refusal translates game mechanics settings into critical artistic language, and engages Machinima as both an intermedial form and a mode of critique. It also examines how Total Refusal's academic, non-capitalist forms of production and collaboration redefine the creative boundaries of digital culture.

Biography

San-Yang Liu is an undergraduate in Film Studies at the Beijing Film Academy. He has presented papers at academic forums hosted by Renmin University, The Education University of Hong Kong, and Zhejiang University, and works with Cathayplay and the Beijing International Short Film Festival in research and curation.