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KONSTANTIN MITGUTSCH, JEFFREY WIMMER, AND HERBERT ROSENSTINGL

On behalf of the Vienna Games Conference: Future and Reality of Gaming (FROG Conference) chairs we are grateful to the Eludamos Journal of Computer Game Culture for the opportunity to share seven research articles based on the FROG-Top-Paper award winners determined by the FROG peer review. As the Conference name suggests our aim is to explore the gap between the reality and future of gaming and to highlight interesting trends and developments of game research and design. Since five years Vienna's annual Games Conference FROG is offering an open and international platform for leading game studies researchers and scholars, game designers, researchers and scholars from various other fields, education professionals, and last but not least gamers from around the world. The FROG is jointly organized by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Economy, Family and Youth, the City of Vienna, wienXtra, the Singapore-MIT GAMBIT Game Lab, the University of Vienna, the Danube-University Krems and FAMUS.

Regarding the focus of the FROG Conference, our first event in 2007 focused on the growing fascination with video games within our culture (Mitgutsch and Rosenstingl 2008). The second and third Vienna Games Conference explored the edges of gaming (Eludamos Special Issue 2009; Mitgutsch, Klimmt and Rosentingl 2010). The topic of the fourth FROG Conference was the intersection between games, play and society (Swertz and Wagner 2011) whereas the objective of the recent fifth Vienna Conference was to explore the phenomena of applied playfulness in our society. Thereby questions related to the application of play got examined from six different transdiciplinary perspectives: Game Studies, Game Design, Learning & Education, Consumption & Appropriation, Culture and Economy & Industry.

Applied Playfulness?

In an everyday understanding *playfulness* is mainly conceived as the creative, joyful, lively or even childish state of being and thinking. Moreover, from a theoretical standpoint playfulness is often defined as a non-purposive activity (cf. Gadamer 1998), which is free of necessities (cf. Caillois 2001, Suits 2005) and in opposition to work and serious pursuit (cf. Huizinga 1956). Therefore the application and utilization of play often appears to neglect the unobstructed and self-contained nature of play. Nevertheless, games are taken serious by their players as they create meaning and values through their play. As Hector Rodriguez (2003: s.p.) emphasizes: "The serious is not everywhere isolated from the playful." Thereby the question arises, how games merge with our everyday lives and how playful engagement can be applied in serious spheres. The study of players' experiences, competences and skills developed through playing games raises the following questions. How do we apply what we experience in games and through media to our everyday lives, to our culture, and

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society? How do different forms of media converge in our game spaces and impact our playfulness? And what are the applicable potentials games offer in theory and in practice? Today players use different forms of media to engage in games and novel forms of playfulness arise and are established. Thereby, playing does not stay limited to the actions proceeding on the screens, but reaches beyond the screen into our every day lives and cultural lives – a process which also feeds the current trend of gamification. The relation between play, society and culture is transforming and novel potentials and possibilities but also questions, challenge and problems arise.

The FROG11 focused on questions, challenges and innovation exploring the transition between different forms and activities of play, media and competences. The seven papers assembled in this special issue of Eludamos are distinguished examples about how to approach questions related to "applied playfulness". Thereby, different interdisciplinary approaches and methods are examined and a variety of topics reaching from transmedia storytelling, over playful reward systems and leadership, serious gaming and communicating, to urban gaming and prototyping are highlighted:

In the first paper "*Playing for plot in the Lost and Portal Franchises*" *Jason Mittell* discusses the rising prominence of transmedia storytelling in the digital era from the perspective of a television studies scholar. His essay explores how gameplay and storytelling co-mingle in the television series "Lost" and the game series "Portal". Mittell draws an interesting comparison how the ludic and narrative dimension in these different media forms collide and he highlights the cultural practices of "forensic fans" of both franchises.

From a philosophical perspective *Lasse Juel Larsen* undertakes "*a reading of the reward system in World of Warcraft"* by applying Derrida's notion of différance to the "*object of desire*" in the game. The article intends to investigate the implicit and explicit correlation between différance, desire and game structure in WoW. Therefore Larson outlines the importance of objects of desire and as driving factors in a reward system and for the emotional game engagement of the players. In the third paper *Ee Andrew* and *Cho Hichang* also examine WoW by investigating complex processes of leadership development within the game. From a social cognitive theory-based approach they follow the question that also titles their article "*What Makes an MMORPG Leader?*" Their findings support the idea that Bandura's and McCormick's frameworks are useful for explaining how game design and the feeling of self-efficacy contribute to leadership development within WoW.

The next topical cluster focuses on serious games and educational applications of games. In this sense, the fourth article by *Ida Toft* and *Amani Naseem* "*Designing a game for playful communication in families* " introduces the theory-based background and design approach of the game "Junomi". The authors explore how different elements and aspects of the family communication could be made playable to offer teenagers novel opportunities to play with the way they experience closeness and togetherness. The following paper "*Teaching Serious Issues through Player Engagement in an Interactive Experiential Learning Scenario*" by *Henrik Schoenau-Fog* is a study to aid the design of a serious game application – the "First Person Victim". His paper focuses on an evaluation of how player engagement can be applied to drive participants through a non-pleasurable experiential learning scenario

in order to communicate serious topics. Schoenau-Fog's findings suggest that feelings like hopelessness, fear, loneliness, and chaos could offer unique challenges for the educational usage of serious games. *Vanessa De Luca* and *Maresa Bertolo* explore the applied playfulness of urban environments in their article "*Urban Games to design the augmented city*". The authors observe recent play practices such as hybrid treasure hunts and geo-location games and discuss new models for negotiating the density of urban landscapes in a physically and digitally mixed reality. Thereby they examine two interesting methods to design the augmented city in form of 'rhabdomancy' and 'flânerie'.

The last chapter by *Jon Manker* explores the rhetorical dimension of video game prototyping processes and suggests a "*game design prototyping process model*" called "*Designscape*". His analysis is based on interviews with game designers and the application of rhetorical figures to prototyping processes. Manker follows the question how team communication in prototyping processes can be improved and offers a supportive model.

The remaining papers of the 5th Vienna are published in the Conference Proceedings (Wimmer, Mitgutsch, and Rosenstingl 2012). The videos of the FROG keynotes by Mia Consalvo, Lawrence Kutner, Jonas Linderoth, Cheryl K. Olson, Nathalie Pozzi, Christian Wessely, and Eric Zimmerman and from many other FROG talks are available at the conference video web site http://www.arimba.com/frog2011. The 5th Vienna Games Conference would not have been possible without the help of many passionate colleagues and friends that helped organizing, reviewing and moderating the FROG 2011 – we want to thank them all.

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