gameZ & ruleZ. The Mechanics of Play in Arts and Culture
20. & 21. October 2022

Zurich University of the Arts ZHdK, Toni-Areal, 5.K12 (Kunstraum)

Program: Thursday, 20. October, Room 5.K12

13.00	Opening
13.30	Matteo Bittanti (gamescenes.org, US): The Politics of Play / Playful Politics
14.30	Sjors Righters (studio rigters, NL): Concepts of the virtual sandbox and how to change them
15.30	BREAK & Coffee
16.00	Jörg Piringer (AT): text=code=play
17.00	Daniel Hackbarth (D/CH): Gamification of Politics
18.00	Guido Berger (ZHCH): Playing Farming Simulator (CH)

Program: Friday, 21. October, Room 5.K12

13.00	Opening
13.15	Sonia Fizek (Cologne Gamelab, D): Playing at a Distance
14.15	Max Moswitzer (Artist, Experimental Gameculture AW Wien): Avatar at Play
15.15	Experiments in Action: Sebastian Burckhardt (CH): Kloppyssimo
15.40	Experiments in Action: Kathleen Bohren) (CH): Accalmie
16.00	BREAK & Coffee
16.30	Nathalie Lawhead (US): The Joy of Silly Useless Software (Zoom)

20. October 2022

Matteo Bittanti. The Politics of Play / Playful Politics

Abstract
Walter Benjamin concluded his seminal essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility" (1935-1936) with the diagnosis that society stood at a crossroad: art could become political and/or politics could become aestheticized. The latter option would inevitably lead to friction, violence, and destruction. History tells us that his warning turned out to be prophetic. Keeping in mind that Benjamin used the term "art" as a synonym of what we would call popular culture – first and foremost, cinema –, in this talk I will argue that today we stand at another crossroad. Perhaps the most prominent manifestation of contemporary popular culture, video games, are becoming increasingly politicized. At the same time, politics are becoming "gamified". What are the stakes? What kinds of scenarios might these tendencies lead to? This talk provides an overview of the video games-politics nexus, exploring such topics as the politics of video games, the relationship between political propaganda and gaming, the increasing politicization of gamer culture, and more. Plenty of examples and case studies will be provided that hopefully will lead to a fruitful conversation.

Bio
Matteo Bittanti's academic research focuses on the cultural, social, and theoretical aspects of emerging technologies, with an emphasis on their effects on communication, visual culture, and the arts. His approach is interdisciplinary, connecting media studies, game studies, visual studies, and art history. He is an Associate Professor at IULM University where he teaches courses on media studies and game studies. Since 2019, He has been on the Board of the Doctorate program in Visual & Media Studies at IULM University, Milan. He lives in San Francisco and Milan.

Sjors Rigters. Concepts of the virtual sandbox and how to change them.

Abstract
"The popular video game Minecraft exemplifies the inner contradictions of the digital age. Lauded by many pundits as a highly creative form of entertainment, the so-called "digital LEGO" is a powerful vessel for neoliberal ideologies and hyper-capitalistic imperatives, with its frenzy of accumulation, extraction, circulation, production, and exploitation. An effective indoctrination tool now pervasive in thousands of US elementary schools, Minecraft is a techno-dream of endless growth, a manifesto for the perpetuation of devastating patterns of consumption, competition, and destruction. Informed by colonialist principles, its gameplay elevates numbing grinding routines into a recipe for the good life, casting the player as both a conqueror and an entrepreneur. In his video The Virtual Frontier, Dutch designer Sjors Rigters brings to the foreground the toxic message of one of the most successful video games of all time."

- Matteo Bittanti

'The Virtual Frontier' is a video essay that resulted from the research of Sjors' thesis 'Concepts of the Virtual Sandbox'. During his lecture, Sjors will present his video essay, outline his thesis and share his insights and conclusions from the research with us.

Bio
Sjors Rigters (b. 1995) is a graphic designer specializing in branding, web and social design. After receiving his BA in Graphic Design at the Royal Academy of Art, The Hague, he opened his own studio (Studio Rigters).

Sjors his practice is mainly defined by the way he works. Together with the client, he always searches for a core narrative to communicate. Based on this narrative and through a playful, albeit critical visual research, Sjors develops a system of design principles and decisions. This gives each project its own visual logic that can be incorporated into visual identities, publications, websites and more. His credo is therefore 'form follows content', since he believes that good design is guided by its content.

Sjors lives and works in Rotterdam, The Netherlands.

Jörg Piringer. text=code=play

Abstract

a talk about the interactive and playful aspects of jörg piringer's text-sound-works for computers, smart phones and gallery spaces: moving letters that react to sound, speech sound that is influenced by the the users, playful typographic videos, real time electronic voice-performance, ...

Bio

born 1974. currently living in vienna, austria. member of the institute for transacoustic research. member of the vegetable orchestra. master degree in computer science. works as a freelance artist and researcher in the fields of electronic music, radio art, sound and visual electronic poetry, interactive collaborative systems, online communities, live performance, sound installation, computer games and video art. https://joerg.piringer.net

Daniel Hackbarth. Gamification of Politics

Abstract

Nicht nur in den USA, sondern in aller Welt glauben Millionen an die QAnon-Verschwörungstheorie oder Bestandteile derselben. QAnon lässt sich in vielerlei Hinsicht beschreiben: Als Verschwörungskult, als rechtsterroristisches Netzwerk, als profitables Geschäftsfeld – und auch als eine Art Rollenspiel, das in einer alternativen Realität stattfindet. Letzteren Aspekt will der Beitrag näher beleuchten und dabei zugleich dafür argumentieren, dass Verschwörungskulte nicht blosse «Denkfehler» sind, denen mit Pädagogik und Factchecking beizukommen ist.

Bio

Daniel Hackbarth, geb. 1981, Dr. phil, ist Kulturrredaktor der WOZ Wochenzeitung aus Zürich. Ausbildung bei der «Stuttgarter Zeitung», seit 2016 bei der WOZ, zunächst im Internationalressort, seit 2019 Teil der Kulturredaktion.

Guido Berger. Playing Farming Simulator

Bio & Abstract
Guido Berger has been explaining games and technology on Schweizer Radio und Fernsehen SRF since 2006. He started to play with computers in the 80s. Since then, he has aquired a masters degree in history and has survived the Y2K bug and the bursting of the dot com bubble. He has two little sons and lives outside of Zurich. He manages the Discord community «SRF Geek-Sofa» where fans of games and geek culture meet and have a friendly chat: https://discord.gg/geeksofa

In this talk, he will explore why the structure of Farming Simulator is so relaxing and why it is a uniquely Swiss product.

21. October 2022, DAY 2

Sonia Fizek. Playing at a Distance

Abstract

Do we play video games or do video games play us? Is nonhuman play a mere paradox or the future of gaming? And what do video games have to do with quantum theory? In the keynote lecture based on her upcoming book *Playing at a Distance* (MIT Press 2022), Fizek will engage with these questions, proposing new ways to think about games and play that decenter the human player and explore a variety of play formats and practices that require surprisingly little human action. Idling in clicker games, wandering in walking simulators, automating gameplay with bots, or simply watching games rather than playing them—Fizek will argue that these seemingly marginal cases are central to understanding how we play in the digital age. Introducing the concept of distance, she will reorient the view of computer-mediated play. To "play at a distance", as will be argued, is to delegate the immediate action to the machine and to become participants in an algorithmic spectacle. Distance has been conceptualized as a media aesthetic framework that may enable us to come to terms with the ambiguity and aesthetic diversity of play.

Bio

Sonia Fizek is a games and media scholar. She holds a professorship in Media and Game Studies at the Cologne Game Lab at Technical University of Cologne (TH Köln). Fizek is also a co-editor-in-chief of the international *Journal of Gaming and Virtual Worlds* and a principal investigator of "Greening Games", an international project on the sustainability of video games (funded by the German Academic Exchange Service EU/DAAD). In her upcoming monograph *Playing at a Distance* (MIT Press 2022), she explores the borderlands of video game aesthetic with focus on automation, AI and posthuman forms of play.

Sebastian Burckhardt. Kloppyssimo

Abstract

What happens when the development process is approached in a playful way? Sebastian will show how he used "Play" as a tool for his experimental project "Kloppyssimo". He also explains why he always starts with the mechanics at the beginning of a game's development.

Bio

Sebastian Burckhardt graduated from ZHdK in summer 2022 with a Bachelor in Game Design. During his studies he focused on game mechanics and the bottom-up approach. He is also interested in 3D modeling and sound design. In his free time, Sebastian plays in a theater group and enjoys cooking.

Kathleen Bohren. Accalmie

Abstract

«Accalmie» is an atmospheric game inspired by mechanics found in meditation. The character floats through a garden, adding colour to a place that lost all of its joy. However, some distractions will get in the way of your goal. Discover your inner world through your weaknesses and become stronger by confronting them.

Bio

Kathleen decided to study game design after completing a vocational training as an interactive media designer and a year of internships at two different advertising agencies. To her, games provide a diverse range of artistic expression. Their ability to create strong bonds with players also drew her in. She mainly focused on two aspects during her studies: the art and design of video games and the game-feel.

<mark>Nathalie Lawhead. The Joy of Silly Useless Software</mark>

Abstract

Just like games, software can be silly, useless, and make us laugh. Software can bring joy to our virtual spaces. Let's explore some of that history, why it still matters, and how we can use these older design philosophies in our work today. Where games and software intersect, this talk will be about the quirky little things that brighten up our virtual spaces.

Bio

Nathalie Lawhead is a net-artist and award winning game designer that has been creating experimental digital art since the late 90's. Past works include titles such as the IGF winning Tetrageddon Games, "Everything is going to be OK", and the Electric Zine Maker.

https://gamezandrulez.ch/