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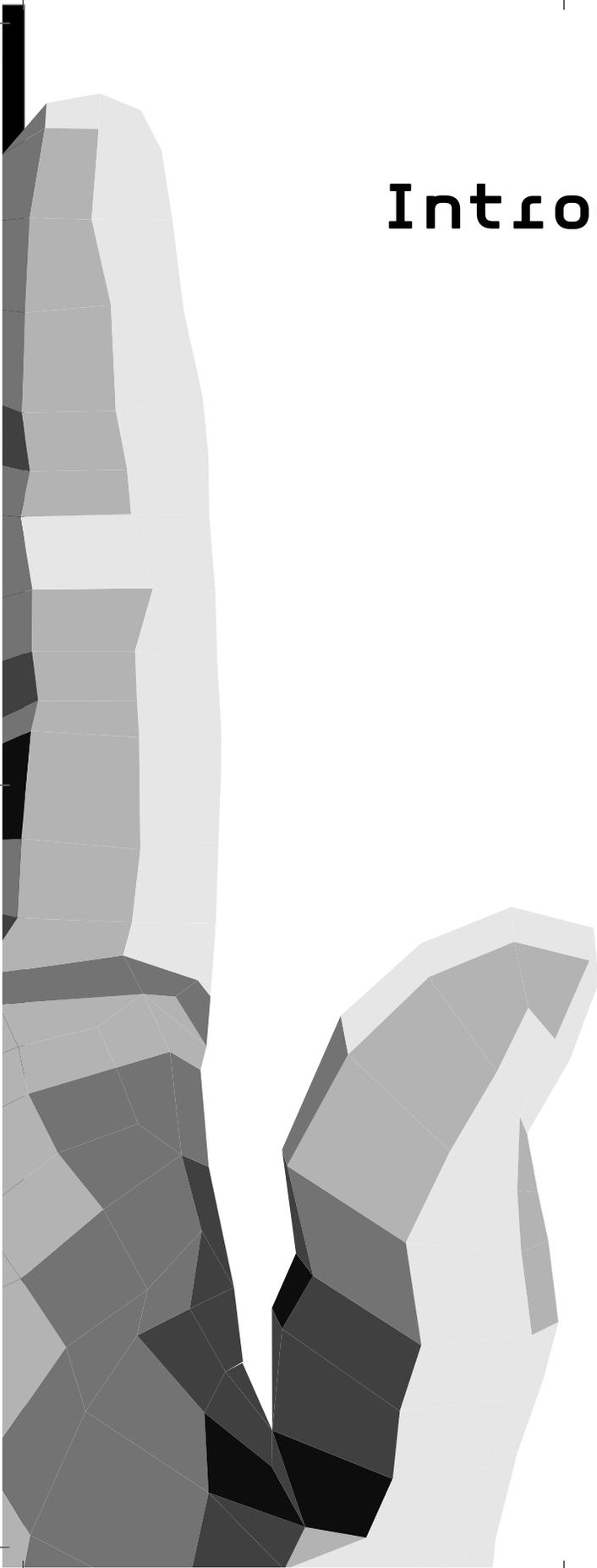
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Introduction



DIGRA WELCOME

Frans Mäyrä

There are echoes of games playing in the halls of academia

Digital Games Research Association (DiGRA) aims to rise awareness on the various aspects related to games as a subject of research as well as to create possibilities for games research community to congregate and evolve. An international academic conference dedicated to present the state of digital games research in various countries is key actions to attain such goals.

It has become obvious to everyone working in this field, that the last couple of years will stay in history as a watershed moment in the academic research of digital games. The interest and activity has been gradually rising for years, but lately we seem to have reached the 'critical mass': it is suddenly possible to find a community of knowledgeable individuals who are working on similar subjects, critically discussing each others' work. It is possible to compete for research funding in the most highly acclaimed fora for academic financing, and be seriously regarded (and occasionally even win some grants). It is possible to start building a career and degrees in games research.

Simultaneously, we have to be aware and openly discuss the fact that this field is still in its infancy. The short history has its pros and cons; there are not so many basic concepts, theories and methodologies in game studies that would have been tested and found sound by years of critical research. Most researchers who are experts in games are quite young. This also means that the field is not calcified to any single dogma, and it is actively exploring and finding some core areas that create its own identity, while also testing various interdisciplinary approaches that create variety and exchange with some long-established academic disciplines.

From this angle, the programme for the inaugural Digital Games Research Conference 2003, 'Level Up', organized by Utrecht University in collaboration with DiGRA, is very promising. The emphasis has been on providing a showroom for the variety and scope of academic games research as it currently practiced. As you take a look at the programme, and read the proceedings (both the printed Selections as the electronic Proceedings) you will see that it is quite many things: aesthetic criticism and theory, games design oriented research issues, papers that deal with social dimensions of games, development of artificial intelligence and many other important research topics.

Yet, this is just the opening: the young researchers, students and veterans of academia as well as games research and design professionals meeting in Utrecht will no doubt be the pioneers who will continue to create even more stimulating, challenging and high-quality research in the future, accompanied by newcomers.

On behalf of the DiGRA Executive Board, I welcome you all to the first Digital Games Research Conference 'Level Up' in Utrecht!

Frans Mäyrä
President, Digital Games Research Association

LEVEL UP

Marinka Copier
Joost Raessens

Introduction

Level Up, the inaugural Digital Games Research Conference 2003, is organized by Utrecht University in close collaboration with DiGRA. Located in the heart of the Netherlands, Utrecht University is firmly founded on tradition. Utrecht University, which recently celebrated its 365th anniversary, has developed into one of Europe's largest and most prominent institutes of research and education. With 14 faculties and 70 degree courses, Utrecht University offers a wider range of subjects than any other university in the Netherlands. In the organisation of the university's teaching and research, quality is the key. The conference will take place at one of the most famous buildings of The Netherlands, the Educatorium, designed by the architect Rem Koolhaas.

Within the Faculty of Arts, the department of New Media and Digital Culture was created in September 1998 as a research and teaching center. Its institutional research setting is the Research Institute for History and Culture (RIHC), its educational setting the Institute for Media and Re/presentation (IMR). The New Media and Digital Culture department is an interdisciplinary research and teaching center in which there is a close cooperation between Film and Television Studies, Communication and Information Studies and Gender and Ethnicity Studies. One of our points of particular interest is Game Studies, in the Bachelor's and Master's degree programmes as well as in our research programmes.

Level Up is a dynamic academic conference and festival that goes beyond the borders of the university. The conference aims to promote high-quality research of computer games and the recognition of game studies as an academic field of enquiry. We would like to encourage dialogue between researchers, practitioners, commercial organizations and policy makers. Therefore we have set up a conference programme which includes different disciplines working on digital games research that will be brought together in interdisciplinary paper, symposia and workshop sessions. Leading researchers and designers from all over the world will present different points of view and approaches from which computer games can be considered. We further would like to support students in digital games and curriculum development at the various academic, art and technical institutions. Therefore we invited students (BA, MA, PhD) to the conference, and encouraged them to present papers and organize symposia or workshops. And we would like to disseminate work produced by the association's community by setting up our conference website (www.gamesconference.org), publishing the Conference proceedings beforehand and the documentation of the Conference (done by a special team of our

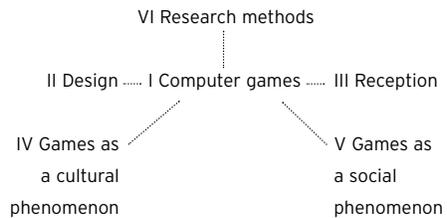
students) which will appear as soon as possible after the Conference.

Apart from being a traditional academic conference Level Up is a festival with numerous gaming activities. The Level Up Game Exhibition focuses on computer games and art. It shows how artists deal with the design of virtual game environments. During the Level Up Gamefest the two floors of dance club Tivoli will be filled with games, music and drinks. On the ground floor, you can find well-known Dj's, Vj's, several experimental computer games and spectacular game installations. One floor up cocktails will be served, inspired by the best computer games of the last few years. You can participate in a LAN party workshop organized by the HKU, Utrecht School of the Arts (department Design for Virtual Theater and Games). You can go to the Cave in Amsterdam, the biggest virtual reality environment in The Netherlands. You can visit the Teylers Museum Haarlem, the oldest museum in the Netherlands (1784), where you can play and be informed about the educational computer game Teylers Adventure which was developed by Waag Society Amsterdam. A big-screen game tournament will take place in cinema 't Hoogt where you can play with and against world-leading game players. In the Educatorium a market place is set up where you can find gaming books and gadgets. We hope that the Level Up conference will inspire game researchers, game designers, the gaming industry, gamers, and the general public.

Level Up proceedings

These proceedings open with two keynote lectures, 'This is not a game: play in cultural environments' by Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman, and 'The game, the player, the world: looking for a heart of gameness' by Jesper Juul. In the rest of the proceedings different points of view from which computer games can be

considered are developed and explored. Because they are abstracted from existing research, these approaches are ideal types that are not to be found in pure form. Most contributions will employ one of these approaches, while at the same time touching on others. This structure was inspired by the *Handbook of Computer Game Studies* (MIT Press, 2004, in press) which was edited by Jeffrey Goldstein and Joost Raessens. We distinguish the following six approaches:



In the first section ("Computer games") we concentrate on computer games themselves. We present six sub-sections: 'What's in a game?', 'What games are made of', 'Narrative', 'Exploration', 'Text and textuality' and 'Pervasive games'.

Section II ("Design") is concerned with the relationship between the designer and the game. Two sub-sections describe game development from the designer's point of view, 'Design patterns' and 'Artificial intelligence and avatars'.

The third section ("Reception") focuses on the individual player's relationship to the computer game. Empirical research on the psychological effects of computer games is reviewed in 'Kids and fun'.

Section IV ("Games as a cultural phenomenon") takes a cultural approach. In 'Gender and ethnicity' we focus on the representation and construction of various forms of cultural identity.

Section V, "Games as a social phenomenon," considers normative aspects of computer gaming and

the effects of games on social behavior. Issues include 'MMOG', 'Marketing, politics and war' and 'Participatory culture'.

In Section VI ("Research methods") we concentrate on questions of methodology. We maintain that 2003 can be seen as the year of computer games methodology. During the conference, our students who participated in the MA-course "New tendencies in digital media: computer game research" (2003-2004) will present the results of their research which focuses on game research methodologies. Also, we pay attention to it in the sub-sections 'On a roll: a study of Super Monkey Ball' and 'Reflections on game research'.

We would like to thank all authors for sending in the excellent work to be included in the proceedings. Because we worked under considerable time pressure, we decided not to edit the English nor the content extensively but let each author present their work according to general instructions. With the selection of papers in the Level Up book, we wanted to represent a broad range of topics, therefore good papers were not included in the book, we are glad

that you can find them on the cd-rom that is part of the book.

Off course we could not organize such a large-scale event alone. Utrecht University collaborates closely with DiGRA, HKU, Utrecht school of the Arts, Cinema 't Hoogt, Tivoli and numerous other academic and non-academic partners in the conference implementation. Within the Utrecht University, our special thanks goes to the University Board, the Faculty of Arts, the Research Institute for History and Culture (RIHC), the Institute for Media and Re/presentation (IMR) and the Centre for Information and Multimedia (CIM) for their support, financially and otherwise. Also, we would like to thank our sponsors, Electronic Arts, N-Gage Nokia, Nintendo, the Mondriaan Foundation and the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO). We thank Nintendo (GameCube) Microsoft (X-box), Sony (PlayStation 2), Nokia (N-Gage) and Electronic Arts for their support in demonstrating their latest consoles and games, Game Face and the World Cyber Games (Ducyco, the gaming company) for their cooperation.