

Preface

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Unique to the Clash of Realities – International Conference on the Art, Technology, and Theory of Digital Games, which takes place annually at the Technical University Cologne, is its fundamental principle: the dialectic of diversity and universality, coexistence, and cooperation. The research conference consists, to a part, of several specialized summits. The default subject areas are Game Studies, Game Design, and Media Education. Annually changing topical summits have investigated, e.g., game technologies, game entrepreneurship, or the relationship of games to music, film, and history. The diversity of themes ensures that specialists from very different disciplines and fields attend the Clash of Realities, academics as well as professionals, who otherwise hold their own conferences and rarely exchange ideas with each other.

On the main day of the conference, this diversity merges into one room and one joint discussion. The encounter produces a productive clash of the many disciplines and cultures around digital games. Academics meet artists. Indie developers argue with industry representatives. Humanities scholars, social scientists, and computer scientists exchange experiences. Established experts and professionals discuss with students and games enthusiasts. Together, we assess and debate the artistic design, technological development, economic conditions, social perception, and cultural reception of digital games. This bridge-building fosters research and education as well as creative and professional practice. Year after year, the conference generates strong impulses and surprising synergies.

The third indispensable element is the Young Academics Workshop (YAW). It brings together young researchers from all over the world and a wide range of educational levels—post-docs and doctoral candidates, master’s students, and exceptionally talented bachelor’s students. The workshops, focusing on changing topics, are always held as a prelude to the conference so that the young academics

are free to participate in the summits and the main day. However, this third element was only added in 2017, when—obviously—the academic discussion of digital games finally had developed a particular breadth and maturity.

The origins of the Clash of Realities Conference date back to those of the century. At the time, academia, like the general public, suffered from a lack of factual knowledge about digital games. Instead, there was mistrust and even outright hostility toward the new medium, which was falsely portrayed as inherently violent and addictive. The founders of the conference—Winfried Kaminski, director of the Institute for Media Research and Media Education at the then Cologne University of Applied Sciences, and Martin Lorber, at that time head of the press department at Electronic Arts, wanted to counter these prejudices. The first biennial iterations of the conference, in 2006 and 2008, focused on media education issues. The Cologne Game Lab participated in the research conference for the first time in 2010, the year the lab was founded, contributing a Game Studies and Game Design track.

After Winfried Kaminski's retirement in 2015, the two founding directors of the CGL—Björn Bartholdy and the author of this text—took over the steering of the conference. We repositioned the Clash of Realities more broadly thematically: as an annual international, i.e., English-language, academic and artistic research conference. In addition to the previous partners and sponsors—the Technical University Cologne, the City of Cologne, and Electronic Arts—we recruited new ones, most notably the University of Cologne, the ifs international film school, and as our main sponsor the Film- and Media Board North Rhine-Westphalia. Since 2015, the Clash of Realities has attracted academics, artists, and industry representatives from several dozen countries. Keynote speakers have included game scholars Ian Bogost, Alexander R. Galloway, Celia Hodent, Jesper Juul, Frans Möyry, Nick Montfort, Janet H. Murray, Mark J.P. Wolf, Nick Yee, and Eric Zimmerman, as well as artists and game developers Sam Barlow, Chris Crawford, Ian Dallas, Jörg Friedrich, David O'Reilly, and Nathalie Pozzi.

Perhaps the most important innovation, however, was the Young Academics Workshop. This forum for young researchers was conceived by two CGL research assistants and Ph.D. candidates, Federico Alvarez Igarzábal and Curtis L. Maughan, together with Michael S. Debus, then a Ph.D. student at the IT University of Copenhagen. Among the objectives was stimulating the intellectual growth and academic skills of young researchers, who may present the results of their scholarly research in a safe and encouraging atmosphere to their peers. The approach is as inclusive as possible. Digital games are researched by various disciplines, from literature and film studies to art history and game design theory to theater and performance studies, pedagogy, cognitive science, and computer science. The first two workshops investigated “Perceiving Videogames” (2017) and

“Violence and Videogames” (2018). The collected proceedings came out in 2019.¹ For some of the contributors, this was their first academic publication.

The subtitle of that volume – “New Directions in Games Research” – can also serve as a motto for the two subsequent workshops, the results of which this volume presents. In 2019, the focus was on “Play, Games, Mental Health,” the connection between mental health and play. In organizing the YAW, Su-Jin Song, research assistant at CGL, joined the founding team. Isabela Granic, professor and chair of the Department of Developmental Psychopathology at Radboud University Nijmegen and director of the Games for Emotion and Mental Health Laboratory, could be recruited as an experienced, encouraging, and enthusiastic mentor.

A year later, at the 11th Clash Conference, which was held entirely online due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the topic was “Atmospheric Propositions: Creating and Thinking the Aesthetics of Playable Atmospheres.” A mostly new team organized this workshop: While Su-Jin Song stayed on, Jimena Aguilar, research assistant at the ifs international film school, Miruna Vozaru, a Ph.D. fellow at IT University of Copenhagen; and Felix Zimmermann, a Ph.D. fellow at the University of Cologne, replaced the original YAW team. Dan Pinchbeck, co-founder and creative director of game studio Chinese Room, served as an engaged mentor combining academic and artistic perspectives.

The two parts of these proceedings unite—despite the diversity of the topics—on the one hand, their timeliness and, on the other hand, the freshness of the young scholars’ approaches. Both are evident from the contributions themselves and the commendable introductions and conclusions by the editors and my CGL colleague Sonia Fizek.²

Whether the future of media actually belongs to digital games as we know them or whether, in the coming decades, another new medium will challenge their current cultural supremacy might be a matter of debate. However, what is indisputable is first that the Young Academics Workshops have immensely enriched the Clash of Realities research conference and secondly, that young academics like the ones who participated in these workshops and contributed to this volume

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- 1 Igarzábal, Federico Alvarez, Michael S. Debus, and Curtis L. Maughan (eds.): *Violence | Perception | Video Games: New Directions in Game Research*, Bielefeld: transcript 2019.
 - 2 Miruna Vozaru: “The End is Never The End is Never The End. A Conclusion,” in this volume, pp. 117-125; Sonia Fizek: “Introduction: Slow Play. Notes on Enveloping Ambience in Video Games,” in this volume, pp. 129-146; Felix Zimmermann: “Conclusion: Toward an Atmospherology of Digital Games,” in this volume pp. 243-254.

are an essential part of the bright future of media and, in particular, games scholarship and research.