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S u s t a i n a b l e *play*

Photo Credit: Kurt MacDonald NEW GAMES DAY, November 19, 2004, presented by The USC Game Design Community at the Institute for Multimedia Literacy, Annenberg Center for Communication, University of Southern California

Towards a New Games Movement for the Digital Age

play hard play fair

N O B O D Y hurt

Oral Presentation Notes

Good morning. I am honored to be here in Denmark to present our paper on behalf of my colleagues, Professor Tracy Fullerton, Ms. Jacki Morie and Ms. Celia Pearce. My name is Janine. We are an intergenerational group of women based in Los Angeles, the entertainment capitol of the world, called Ludica, which is a clever tongue-in-cheek pun on the word Ludology. We hope to inspire other girls and women to make games for each other and build an appropriate scholarship around this.

The title of our paper is "Sustainable Play: Towards a New Games Movement for the Digital Age." The concept of "sustainable play" refers to the contemporary vernacular we are using with respect to the environment. We should keep in mind, that it is quite possible, within our lifetime, that we may be competing for very precious resources, including breathable air, drinkable water, edible food and inhabitable shelter . . . all the more reason why we should consider alternative ways we can play together, NOW.

A few years ago, a scholar from the MacArthur Foundation asked me how can games help solve the world's problems? Poverty? Illiteracy? Starvation? Political Atrocities? How relevant are digital games on the most fundamental, humanistic levels? I am not sure how to answer his question to this day, but I hope that the work my colleagues and I have done with our students is at the very least, one small leap in the right direction for the game studies community.

Our paper suggests a re-visitation of the New Games Movement, formed by Stewart Brand and others in the early 1970s in the United States as a response to the Vietnam War, against a backdrop of dramatic social and economic change, fueled by a looming energy crisis, civil rights, feminism, and unhealthy widespread drug abuse. Like-minded contemporaries, R. Buckminster Fuller (World Game), Robert Smithson (Spiral Jetty), and Christo and Jean-Claude (Valley Curtain), responded in kind to these environmental and sociopolitical quandaries with their "earthworks." As digital game designers and theorists embark upon developing new methods to address the creative crisis in mainstream game production, against a similar backdrop of climate change, a controversial war, political upheaval and complex gender issues, we propose a reexamination of the New Games Movement and its methods as a means of constructing shared contexts for meaningful play in virtual and real-world spaces.

We believe Stewart Brand's work is equally important as it is inspiring. Stewart Brand is HIP, an iconoclast of sorts for our generation. He wrote the award winning book, the *Whole Earth Catalog*, a toolkit for building socially conscious communities based on eco-friendly lifestyles, concepts that were fundamental to his

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launch of the WELL, a modeling of Marshall McLuhan's Global Village. More recently, he formed The Clock of the Long Now Foundation.

Mr. Brand was friends with Gregory Bateson [Margaret Mead's husband], and Brian Eno; and he was photographed by Annie Liebovitz in *Rolling Stone* magazine. He was so RAD. I like to think of him as a vintage game modder. The underlying characteristics of the New Games Movement was his political intervention to take typical military training exercises and their props, like parachutes and cage balls, and essentially use them to make his own Woodstock. If anything, Stewart Brand's efforts are exemplary in finding ways of using games and social networks to bring people together to form equitable communities. He was game modding and building social games long before they became in vogue, and even before some of us in this room were born. Stewart Brand is a prolific activist and counterculture provocateur who we can all learn from.

When I was working at the University of Southern California, Tracy Fullerton and I co-formed an interdisciplinary game design community, which attracted more than 80 like-minded students and faculty across campus who were interested in both playing and making games, and sharing new ideas. It was integral to our community that everything we did resulted in some form of action, and in the case of our New Games Day, this paper is evidence of our efforts and our ideas. It is worth noting that our students enjoyed the New Games Day the most for it's sense of history, but also, the sense of freedom, creativity and spontaneity these kind of games support. For many people, for the very first time, it seemed as if the playground was finally safe.

While there is an inherent rule structure to Stewart Brand's games, players are empowered to change the rules, and essentially make their own new games. The New Games paradigm provides a liberating way of combining the iterative process of both playing and making games in real-time. In some cases, making the game is the game.

The paper describes in detail the history of the New Games Movement, the games we played during our event at USC with Bernie DeKoven, co-director of the New Games Foundation, and offers some insights and suggestions on how to bring this ethos into the digital world. We're not suggesting that everyone go out there and start playing the original new games, for it is difficult to get an earth ball, however, we do think what can be learned from this movement is that p l a y e r s are more important than games, and it is empowering to consider ways of creating playful environments that encourage and support communities of players to make their own rules on their own terms.

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While we were writing reflections for this paper during SIGGRAPH this past summer, Ludica facilitated the first game design atelier at the conference in the Guerrrila Studio. Drawing on our new games experience at USC, we congregated in front of the convention center in downtown Los Angeles at the opening of the conference to mod hopscotch, a la computer graphics content . . . for example, we made fractal hop scotch, and binary hopscotch, powers of ten, and spiral and even teapot hopscotch. To our surprise, we were "chalk-busted" by the LA convention center, and were warned if we did not remove our games from the premises within 20 minutes, we would be fined! The reason being, they did not want to attract undesirable people (a.k.a. the LA-lians) from the surrounding neighborhood to encourage graffiti and vandalism . . . so it would seem, in addition to the smog, the great outdoors are not safe for play in LA. All the more reason to consider ways of bringing this ethos into the digital domain.

Another intervention we made at SIGGRAPH happened at the end of the conference. Outside of the Guerrrila Studio, we played Bernie DeKoven's Junkyard Sports, which are defined as sporting games that are made from recycled materials with a focus on participation rather than competition. We collected tradeshow schwag and other conference materials we found throughout the building and designed a miniature golf course and a bowling game.

Working and playing with recycled materials was a most intriguing experience in game design . . . players collectively developed a unique value system with regards to which materials were important and how they would be integrated into the overall game structure. This is an unusual direction to explore that simultaneously responds to socially conscious issues that raise eco awareness in both the real and digital domains. Our experiment was playfully challenging and opens another dialogue for perhaps another paper about the future of recycling pixels and protecting the virtual environment.

I'd like to conclude with my own personal reflections, some ideas I have been pondering since I attended DiGRA this past spring. Upon recently re-watching Stanley Kubrick's *2001*, in particular, the first 20 or 30 minutes, I have come to believe that PLAY equals CONSCIOUSNESS. PLAY belongs to ALL OF US. It is in our genes to be playful. We ARE what we PLAY. Margaret Mead said a small group of people can change the world. And I challenge all of us, including myself, to not only collectively discover new ways of making better games, but finding better ways of being in the world with each other. *Rock, Paper, Scissors. Play Hard, Play Fair, Nobody Hurt.*

I hope you enjoy the rest of the conference. On behalf of my colleagues, I thank you.

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Oral Presentation Notes

DAC 2005: *Digital Experience: Design, Aesthetics, Practice*
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Ludica is a game design and art collective devoted to developing innovative concepts that explore the potential of games to express women's narratives, aesthetics, culture and play.

Integral to this objective is to create a female-friendly ethos that supports and encourages a range of departures from the male cultures of game-making that dominate both computer game production and contemporary game art. We are not interested in producing "games for girls," but seek to develop games that address a diverse range of alternative audiences and contexts through inventing and promoting both new game genres and new modes of game-making.

Our modus operandi is pro-active, rather than re-active. Since we are, by definition, outsiders, we revel in our outsider status and leverage it to support our cause.

Our activities include:

• creating a prolific and diverse range of innovative games, game concepts, game interventions, and commentary (through publication)

• developing new, female-friendly work methodologies, tools and techniques for game-making

• disseminating our projects and philosophies to the general public, the game industry, the game art community, and practicing and aspiring female game designers through a variety of tactics

• organizing events where we can share our individual work and the work of other women game artists/designers, as well as conducting workshops and brainstorming sessions to develop new work and methods collectively

• creating publications that support a more balanced view of both game design and culture, and women's contributions to computing

• mentoring and encouraging young female gamers, aspiring designers and students, from K-12 through college, through workshops and participations in our projects, to develop their own unique vision for the future of game culture

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