

INTERACTIVE EMPATHY — CITIZENSHIP & STORYTELLING IN VIDEO GAMES

exploring the artistic and ethical potential of video games



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Goethe-Institut Kroatien and Institut français de Croatie wish to thank their partners for the realisation of this project:



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ART IN
GAMES
FESTIVAL



PROJECT OVERVIEW

LEVEL 1

Dubrovnik, Croatia

Interactive Empathy panel at REBOOT

Develop Blue conference

LEVEL 2

Zagreb, Croatia

Narrative video game workshop at the World Festival of Animated Film - Animafest Zagreb

LEVEL 3

Osijek & Zadar, Croatia

Video game localisation workshop at the University of Osijek and University of Zadar

LEVEL 4

Rijeka, Croatia

Presentation of *Interactive Empathy* project at the Art in Games festival in Rijeka

LEVEL 5

Zagreb, Croatia

Wrap up of the project at the Zagreb Film Festival and REBOOT Infogamer gaming fair

INTERACTIVE EMPATHY- CITIZENSHIP & STORYTELLING IN VIDEO GAMES

This project was developed in 2019 by **Goethe-Institut Kroatien** and **Institut français de Croatie**, within the framework of the **Franco-German Cultural Fund**.

The **Franco-German Cultural Fund** was set up in 2003 to mark the 40th anniversary of the Elysée Treaty; it encourages and supports cultural cooperation initiatives that are managed jointly by both the French and the German diplomatic networks in a third-party country.

This programme demonstrates France and Germany's desire to reinforce their cooperation in the cultural sector, by supporting projects carried out by national cultural institutes and the cultural offices of embassies, in close collaboration with local cultural stakeholders. The Fund intervenes in numerous areas and is involved in a wide range of cultural and artistic activities.



PROJECT INTRODUCTION



PHOTO AUTHOR: VIDA TURKOVIĆ

The potential of video games for entertainment and creative expression seems to be nearly inexhaustible, as proven daily by innovative products made by both large and independent studios. Video games have become an inescapable part of our everyday life, whether we merely pass our time by playing a simple game on our smartphone or we spend entire days in the virtual worlds of online multiplayer games. However, besides filling our everyday life, games also shape it by influencing culture and society. Video games change the way we perceive the physical world (*Pokemon GO*), create powerful economic systems (*EVE Online*), offer an opportunity for creation (*Minecraft*) or simply provide platforms for parallel virtual lives (*World of Warcraft*).

Through our project, we decided to explore

the artistic and ethical potential of video games in the context of the development of active civic engagement. Our concept for the project was inspired by a recently produced array of video games by independent European studios, such as *Orwell* (Osmotic Games, Germany) and *Bury Me My Love* (The Pixel Hunt, France) which use elaborate stories and simple mechanics to respectively simulate a personal impression of social control and migration. Naturally, playing such games will not necessarily stir a player's empathy; however, it will nevertheless paint them a vivid picture of the world from another, marginalized perspective by shifting them from the position of "omnipotence", normally characteristic for games, into a position where any given choice they make need not result in victory. We chose the development of interactive narratives as a backbone for the transfusion of important social issues or touching personal subjects into the medium of the video game.

With an intensive workshop, systematic support to the development of new game projects and the organization of panel discussions and masterclasses, *Interactive Empathy* connected the video game industry and the Croatian cultural scene to experts from France and Germany, spreading out to as many as five Croatian cities in the process. The project was started by a panel discussion at the REBOOT Develop Blue in Dubrovnik, one of the most

important video game industry conferences in Europe. It continued in Zagreb with a narrative game workshop organized in cooperation with Animafest and under the mentorship of French narrative design expert **Emmanuel Corno** and the Croatian game studio **Gamechuck**. Eight motivated teams spent five days intensively developing their projects, after which two games were selected for further development with Gamechuck's support. The project continued in Osijek and Zadar with video game localization workshops at the local universities, followed by a presentation of the project at a panel discussion at the Art in Games festival in Rijeka. The award-winning German experts **Florian Köhne** and **Hans Böhme** rounded up the project by giving a joint masterclass at the Zagreb Film Festival. They were joined by **Vjera Matković** (Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Croatia), **Davor Švaić** (Vice-Dean for International Cooperation at Academy for Dramatic Arts, University of Zagreb) and our Animafest workshop mentors to discuss whether an artistic hit game can be created within the European context. The workshop games were exhibited at Institut français de Croatie and at REBOOT Infogamer gaming fair, where our stand was visited by **Andrej Plenković**, Prime Minister of the Government of the Republic of Croatia, and **Nina Obuljen Koržinek**, Minister of Culture of the Republic of Croatia. During the year, the **Croatian radiotelevision (HRT)**

has presented the project three times in various shows.

The *Interactive Empathy* project has encouraged young artists to engage with video games, as well as spurred young translators on to learn more about game localization, thus connecting the growing Croatian video game industry to some of its potential workforce. The project has also raised awareness of the importance of approaching video games from an artistic perspective in the context of the impending establishment of a video game design study track at the University of Zagreb, linking Croatian experts to European ones in the process. Lastly, the project enticed creatives to explore the limits of a medium shaping our everyday life by using it as a tool to tackle social issues they wish to bring closer to the public.

Srđan Laterza

CREATOR AND CURATOR OF THE INTERACTIVE EMPATHY PROJECT

Srđan Laterza works as a writer and a creative director, crafting interactive experiences and communication strategies for leading brands, advertising agencies, IT companies and cultural institutions. He is the author of indie game exhibition *Politics of Emotions*, (Croatian Designers Association, 2018) and festival *1000 new lives*, focused on many ways games impact art and society (Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb, 2019).

LEVEL 1

INTERACTIVE EMPATHY PANEL AT REBOOT DEVELOP BLUE CONFERENCE

APRIL 11TH, 2019, DUBROVNIK, CROATIA

The *Interactive Empathy* project aims at connecting industry professionals with the cultural scene and young creatives. The project was launched in Dubrovnik at REBOOT Develop Blue, one of the most important European gaming industry conferences.

The esteemed panelists with both AAA and indie studio experience discussed the impact games have on our everyday lives, analyzing their possible role as a tool for social change. Since video games are the most powerful entertainment medium of our time, we questioned the authors' and studios' responsibility for making socially impactful games.

The power of games for 'social dreaming' was the topic that inspired our panelists the most. They tried to tackle questions about how can we use such an immersive medium to prototype better futures.

PANELISTS:

Anne Toole, WRITER (US)

Renaud Charpentier, TOWER FIVE, GAME DIRECTOR / CO-FOUNDER (FR)

Hendrik Lesser, REMOTE CONTROL PRODUCTIONS / EGDF, CEO / PRESIDENT (DE)

Andrej Kovačević, EXORDIUM GAMES, GAME DIRECTOR / BOARD MEMBER (CRO)

Srdan Laterza, MODERATOR (CRO)



PHOTO AUTHOR: REBOOT DEVELOP BLUE



PANELIST BIOS

Anne Toole

WRITER

Writers Guild Award-winner Anne Toole has written for video games, TV & digital series, animation, comics, and more. Her credits include *Curse of The Pharaohs for Assassin's Creed: Origins*, *Horizon Zero Dawn*, IGF nominee *Where the Water Tastes like Wine*; and the Emmy-winning webseries *The Lizzie Benner Diaries*. She also created *Alles Liebe, Annette*, a short-form series for the German market. Next, her work will appear on Netflix's anime series *Cannon Busters*.

Renaud Charpentier

TOWER FIVE, GAME DIRECTOR /
CO-FOUNDER

Renaud joined the games industry more than two decades ago when he helped a few friends on what would today be called an Indie game. He then designed games for Ubisoft, Insight Games and Sega at Creative Assembly, working on brands like *Rayman*, *Splinter Cell*, *Largo Winch*, *Corunea* and *Total War*. His last position before leaving Creative Assembly was that of game director. Currently he is quietly and secretly working as game director on his next big thing at Tower Five, a completely new studio he has recently co-founded! Game design, game rules and systems, including artificial intelligence remain his primary interests, with a focus on transforming player experience intentions into systems which actually materialise them.

Hendrik Lesser

REMOTE CONTROL
PRODUCTIONS / EGDF, CEO / PRESIDENT

Serial entrepreneur Hendrik is well known as the CEO of the international production house *remote control productions* and President of the EGDF. After starting out in the industry as a Producer and Product Manager he has been building a family of independent development studios throughout Europe for over 13 years, which today consists of 13 teams in five countries with more than 270 passionate game makers. Hendrik is also a co-founder and Executive Producer of Chimera Entertainment, the 60 heads strong development studio behind the AAA mobile productions *Angry Birds Evolution* and *Angry Birds Epic* (100+ million downloads) and a yet to be announced title. Besides his roles as CEO and producer, Hendrik is also an avid lobbyist for the political and academic acceptance of video games as goods of cultural value.

Andrej Kovačević

EXORDIUM GAMES,
GAME DIRECTOR / BOARD MEMBER

Andrej's passion for games as a medium is spilling over into many different fields. This is shown through his capacity as Managing Director and co-owner of Exordium Games, who are most known for their acclaimed adventure series *Bear With Me*; through his work on an indie column for the regional gaming culture magazine *Reboot* as well as his very active participation in CGDA with lobbying and building a better eco-system for game development in Croatia.

LEVEL 2

NARRATIVE VIDEO GAME WORKSHOP AT THE WORLD FESTIVAL OF ANIMATED FILM - ANIMAFEST ZAGREB

JUNE 3RD - 8TH, 2019, ZAGREB, CROATIA

This narrative video games workshop was the central part of the *Interactive Empathy* project. Aimed at students and young professionals in the field of the arts and creative industries, it was created to fill the void in game development education in Croatia. Since the country still has no public university program for game design, most enthusiasts learn about game development in various workshops mainly focused on mechanics and programming. *Interactive Empathy* was the first workshop in Croatia dedicated to the development of interactive narratives for games.

Esteemed French game designer and narrative design educator **Emmanuel Corno** led the workshop with the help of **Aleksandar Gavrilović**, **Igor Kolar** and **Jan Juračić** from Croatian indie game studio **Gamechuck**. The workshop games also received an in-depth analysis by **Cécile Blondel**, Head of International Relations at **Gobelins** in Paris. **Dominik Cvetkovski** from PISMO Games Incubator (Novska, Croatia) presented the possibilities of game development and funding within the incubator.

In our call for applications, we asked the workshop applicants to think of a subject that is close to their heart, be it a personal experience or a social issue they think needs more attention. Eight dedicated teams worked for five days to develop their narrative projects. To

effectively create a synergy between technical, mechanical and narrative aspects of the game development, we decided to use Gamechuck's software for interactive comics creation.

Diverse teams, both students and professionals, tackled the subjects of migrations, abusive relationships, ecology and mental illness in their works. At the end of the workshop, we chose two games we think best incorporate



PHOTO AUTHOR: SAMIR CERİĆ KOVAČEVIĆ, ANIMAFEST



PHOTO AUTHOR: SAMIR CERIĆ KOVAČEVIĆ, ANIMAFEST

our project concept, offering them a development support within the Gamechuck studio. Interactive comic games ***Empathy Path*** and ***There is no Cure and That's OK*** were developed over the course of summer and autumn 2019 and presented in November at the **Institut francais de Croatie** as a part of **Digital rendez-vous** programme, during the **Zagreb Film Festival**.

The workshop was organized in collaboration with the **World Festival of Animated Film - Animafest Zagreb** at the **Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Computing, University of Zagreb**, which is a part of the **Edu4Games** project. The goal of the project is the creation of standards of professions and qualifications as well as new study programs in the field of video game design and development, implemented between multiple faculties within the University of Zagreb. The *Interactive Empathy* workshop was the initial impulse for possible future collaboration of Croatian, French and German gaming educators within the Edu4Games project. Finally, as a way to make the effects of the project even more sustainable, the two institutes are looking for ways to utilize some of the newly developed games as a language and culture-learning tool in German and French classes in Croatian primary and secondary education.



PHOTO AUTHOR: EMMANUEL CORNO

Workshop mentors

Emmanuel Corno

Emmanuel Corno (France) is a game designer engaged in creating storytelling algorithms and interested in artificial intelligence. He worked on the game *Endless Legend* by Amplitude studio, after which he opened his own studio and went on to create the game *Event [O]*, nominated for the most prestigious international awards for independent video games. *Event [O]* is a superbly designed game in which the player needs to build a relation to an intelligent spaceship computer in order to successfully return to Earth. Besides working on video games, Corno teaches narrative design at ICAN, the graphics, design and web graduate school in Paris.

Gamechuck

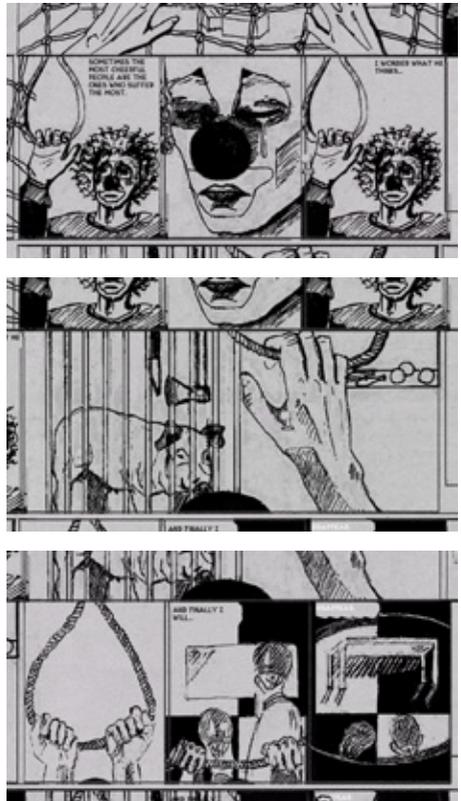
Gamechuck is a Zagreb-based studio who develops independent video games and has made a name for itself with the interactive comics *All You Can Eat* and *vApe Escape*. The founders Aleksandar Gavrilović and Igor Kolar explore the connection between video games and other creative disciplines such as product design and writing. Gamechuck is the first Croatian studio who receive video game development support from the MEDIA fund for their project *Trip the Arc Fantastic*.

GAMES DEVELOPED IN COOPERATION WITH GAMECHUCK

EMPATHY PATH

BY MATIJA VIGATO AND ANDREA PLEŠA

Empathy Path is a horror video game in the form of an interactive comic, permeated with notions of morality and philosophical quotations. It is based on the theory of **Heidi Maimon** who divides empathy into affective (for example, when we cry because we see someone else crying) and cognitive empathy (when we put ourselves into other people's shoes by reflecting). The players of this game will find themselves in a slaughter house with five characters: a trapped girl, a suicidal clown, a pig, a butcher and artificial intelligence. In order to free the girl, the players need to empathize with all the characters, since all of them play a role in her liberation. By empathizing with individual characters, the player must literally delve into their perspective, which turns the character - an object - into the subject. Such changes of perspective and "empathy paths" lead the players to the initial position. However, we must warn the players of the responsibility before them, because the "empathy path" continues within them.



COPYRIGHT: MATIJA VIGATO & ANDREA PLEŠA

THERE IS NO CURE AND THAT'S OK

BY ALMA TRTOVAC

The game is conceived as a simulator of first-person experience, based on the stories and experiences of people suffering from mild and severe mental illnesses. It deals with the conditions in which they find themselves and the changes of their perception of the world during the performance of ordinary activities. As the player explores the world around them and interacts with it, glitches, i.e. discrepancies in the perception of reality occur. Interaction with the world can be (de)motivating, depending on objects and persons in the given situation. The aim of the game is to make players aware that mental illnesses are not and should not be a taboo and that everyone deserves a chance and other people's understanding in these sometimes sadly immutable situations. However, the latter can be controlled, thus maintaining the quality of life, if individuals and their environment invest a great deal of effort and willingness.



COPYRIGHT: ALMA TRTOVAC

INTERVIEW

EMMANUEL CORNO, NARRATIVE VIDEOGAMES WORKSHOP MENTOR

Explore the Uncharted Lands of Interactive Storytelling!

Emmanuel Corno, academically trained game designer and educator, reveals the secrets of connecting the right story with the right game mechanics and describes how he pushes his students to discover new ways to tell interactive stories.

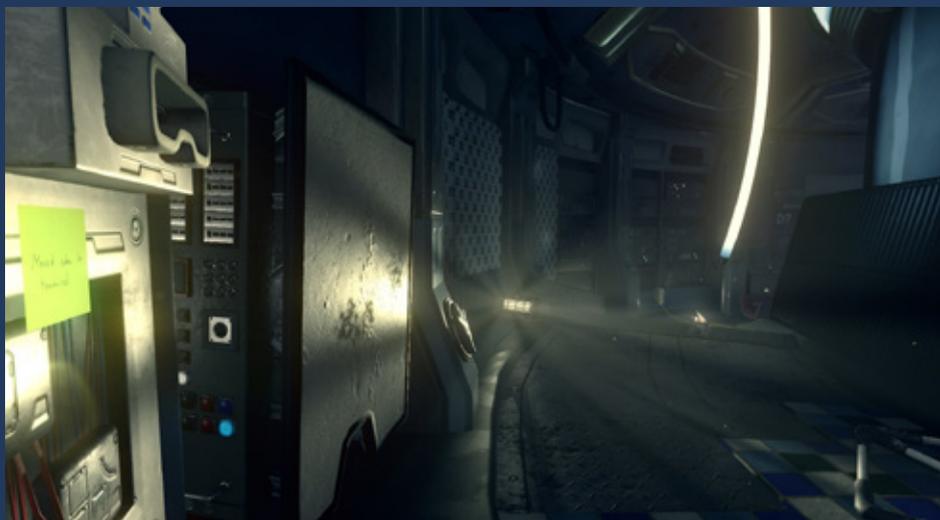
What are the skills needed to construct a successful video game story? What is your process?

— It is hard for me to speak for successful games, as I see everyday plenty of good games being released without being successful on the market. But I can still speak about the process of building a good game story. The most important thing is to start working on the story

at the same time you start creating the gameplay. Too many game studios think about the story only once they have a playable game prototype.

If you do it right, your narrative will feed your gameplay and vice versa. For example, in *Event[0]*, the first thing we started developing was the chatbot (gameplay). But what kind of character would be interpreting our technology? When we decided it would be the main computer of an abandoned spaceship (story), we thought it would be awesome for the player to have extravehicular exploration (gameplay). Then, we added events outside (story), and so on.

Apart from this, there is no golden rules for



storytelling. You can have branching paths, or a linear scenario. You can have cinematics, or interactive sequences. You can have a strong background for the main character, or let the player play an empty shell. As long as your choices are consistent with the intended game experience, your game story will be good and, hopefully, successful!

You've been mentoring our narrative games workshop this summer at Animafest. What was this process like for you? How did the creatives who had never created a game embrace the interactive medium?

— It was really interesting to jump into a group of people with very different backgrounds than the ones I'm used to work with. We had professionals and students with knowledge in science, art and philosophy, all of them just curious about video games or already very passionate.

I'm not afraid to welcome newcomers in our industry. In fact, I think they often bring a fresh look on things I don't see anymore. During this workshop, the amount of good ideas and the diversity of ideas proved it again.

The real challenge was to scale down the projects. If you don't have experience in making video games, it's easy to be fooled by your own ambitions. I strongly encouraged the participants to make paper prototypes, i.e. giving life to their ideas by making a game with paper and pens. It's easier this way to see what works, what is too long to do and what is optional.

You studied video games development at an art academy, then went on to create a hit game about establishing an empathetic relationship with a spaceship comput-

er. Now you teach narrative design. How do you empower your students to push the boundaries of the medium and explore socially engaged themes?

— If I have been able to come with a concept like *Event[o]*, it is because I had teachers who showed me games of a new kind. Now a teacher myself, I try to open my students to things they would not play or even sometimes would not know about. I show them uncharted lands of interactive storytelling and tell them: "You're students, this is the best time to try something new! Once in the industry, everything will be more difficult." And it's true! I had the luck to start *Event[o]* as a student, and I don't think I would have dared to launch this production in a professional context.

It is a real dilemma for them, as studies are also a time to build up a portfolio in order to find an internship in a game company. They are aware that weird games or political games can sometimes scare recruiters. Game studios making mass-market games often want ready-to-work juniors. The trick for these students is to highlight in their portfolio all the challenges they took up. I remember how I explained during my first internship interviews all the writing I had to do for *Event[o]*, and how we resolved the specific edge cases. And it worked!

What games should filmmakers play to learn more about the craft of interactive storytelling?

— They are many games that deserve an in-depth analysis, but if I had to pick only three of them, it would be *Inside*, *Life is Strange* and *The Stanley Parable*.

Inside achieves to tell a very dark, rich story without one single word. It's only gameplay, environmental storytelling and dramatization.

Life is Strange is a more classical game with strong cinematographic influence. But it has something that movies cannot have: interactive storytelling. The player has to deal with very tough choices while playing a teenage girl able to travel back in time.

Finally, *The Stanley Parable* is the game that has many references to other games, but stays very accessible and unique to play. It questions the limits of interactivity and choices with humor and relevance.



LEVEL 3

VIDEO GAME LOCALISATION WORKSHOP AT THE UNIVERSITY OF OSIJEK AND UNIVERSITY OF ZADAR

OCTOBER 2019

Despite the fact the global market is to a large extent dominated by the English language, many players find it important to be able to play a game in their own language. This particularly applies to narrative games, which require an accurate understanding of their content in order for the player to successfully progress through the game and enjoy an integral game experience. Furthermore, if we consider a game's text to be a work of literature, then all its peculiarities need to be taken into account when translating i.e. localizing it.

With that in mind and with **Aleksandar Gavrilović's** help as mentor, we designed and organized two localization workshops for the video games ***Empathy Path*** and ***There Is No Cure and That's OK***, developed after the Animafest workshop. German Language students at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Osijek (class of **prof. Sanja Cimer Oraica**) and French Language students at the Department of French and Francophone Studies at the University of Zadar (class of **prof. Vanda Mikšić** and **prof. Matea Krpina**) had their first opportunity to familiarize themselves with video game localization and learned more about the peculiarities faced by translators in the context of accommodating video games to individual markets.

"The workshops were extraordinarily useful and have already begun to bring about an effect of synergy amongst normally unrelated actors - in this case, game designers and local stu-

dents in translation study tracks", Aleksandar describes his mentoring experience. The co-operation started between the two groups will possibly allow for future student internships for translators-to-be, thereby steering them in the professional direction of an exceptionally interesting industry.



PHOTO AUTHOR: IVO TURK

Workshop mentor

Aleksandar Gavrilović,
LOCALIZATION WORKSHOPS MENTOR

Aleksandar is the CEO of Gamechuck, a game studio which developed several video games, the newest of which is *vApe Escape* which was published by Humble Bundle. Currently he is working on *Trip the Ark Fantastic*, the first Croatian game selected by the EU's MEDIA fund for the development of video games. It was featured on local and international events such as AzPlay Bilbao, Filmteractive Warsaw, Zagreb Design Week and many more. Currently Gamechuck numbers around a dozen employees.

LEVEL 4

PRESENTATION OF THE *INTERACTIVE EMPATHY* PROJECT AT ART IN GAMES FESTIVAL IN RIJEKA

Goethe-Institut's **Hrvoje Ryznar** took part in the first-ever **Art in Games festival** in Rijeka, participating in a panel titled *Games in art or art in games?*, together with *Interactive Empathy* workshop participant **Matija Vigato** and gaming professional **Dejan Radić**. The panel was moderated by **Zeno Žokalj**. While discussing the panel's topic, Ryznar presented the results of the *Interactive Empathy* project, focusing on the impact it had on the Croatian art scene. Finally, game designer and young scholar Matija Vigato gave an interesting philosophical touch to the event, analyzing the aesthetic notions behind today's perceptions of video games, which often vary between highbrow disapproval and wide appreciation of games as a form of art.



PHOTO AUTHOR: MIRELA ŠAVRLJUGA



LEVEL 5

WRAP UP OF THE PROJECT AT THE ZAGREB FILM FESTIVAL AND REBOOT INFOGAMER GAMING FAIR

**NOVEMBER 13TH - 14TH, 2019
ZAGREB, CROATIA**

Zagreb Film Festival's industry program, attended by numerous local and regional creative industry professionals, arts students and journalists was a great place to wrap up our project by organising German and French expert masterclasses, a panel on artistic video games and the presentation of the video games developed during the project. REBOOT Infogamer is one of the largest European gaming fairs, attended by 100 000 visitors every year. Our workshop games have been presented at our partner Gamechuck's booth.

MASTERCLASS: FLORIAN KÖHNE, HANS BÖHME THE MAKING OF TRÜBERBROOK

**NOVEMBER 13TH, 2019,
HUB 385, 14:00**

Trüberbrook is a sci-fi mystery adventure game, characteristic for its unique visual style. The entire scenery and backdrops were built from scratch as miniature models and staged with real-world filmic lighting setups. How do you turn miniature models into levels for a computer game and make them interactive? In their masterclass, Florian Köhne and Hans Böhme will show their long journey from first experiments to the final product. Florian Köhne is Head of the Game Development Department at btf, as well as the author and director of *Trüberbrook*. Hans Böhme is Lead Artist at the Game Development Department at btf.

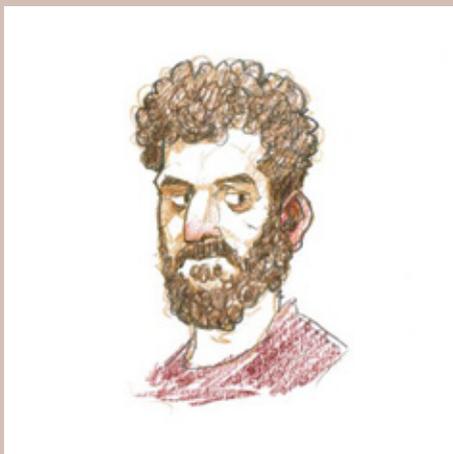


ILLUSTRATION AUTHOR: HANS BÖHME

Florian Köhne

Florian Köhne is a German designer based in Berlin. He graduated at the Potsdam University of Applied Sciences in 2012. In 2013, Florian started out as a designer and art director at btf, focusing on music videos, motion graphics and main titles for TV shows, series and films. Working as author and director of the award-winning adventure game *Trüberbrook*, he became head of btf's newly formed Game Development Department in 2016.

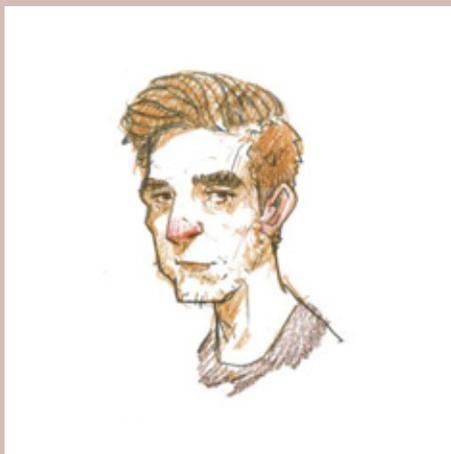


ILLUSTRATION AUTHOR: HANS BÖHME

Hans Böhme

Hans Böhme studied Intermedia Design at the University of Applied Science in Trier with a focus on film, animation and games. Since then he has worked on various projects and in different design disciplines as a freelancer, as well as on cooperation projects. He joined btf during the development of the company's second game title, *Game Royale 2*, and wrote his master thesis about *Trüberbrook*'s workflows and pipelines for asset production. Hans is now Lead Artist at btf's Game Development Department.

ROUND TABLE: CAN YOU MAKE AN ARTISTIC HIT GAME?

NOVEMBER 13TH, 2019,
HUB 385, 15:00

This round table discussion explored the many facets of artistic approaches to video games: how game designers and artists create games that push the creative limits of the medium; the use of interactivity in telling stories players can empathize with; approaches to educating and empowering young creators to explore the artistic possibilities of video games, as well as the ways of creating an environment in which creative video games can flourish. The discussion was moderated by **Srdan Laterza**, the author of *Interactive Empathy* project.

PARTICIPANTS:

Florian Köhne, BTF GMBH, WRITER AND DIRECTOR OF *TRÜBERBROOK*

Hans Böhme, BTF GMBH, LEAD ARTIST, *TRÜBERBROOK*

Emmanuel Corno, CREATOR OF *EVENT[O]* AND MENTOR AT THE JUNE WORKSHOP WITHIN THE *INTERACTIVE EMPATHY* PROJECT

Prof. Davor Švaić, VICE-DEAN FOR INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AT THE ZAGREB ACADEMY FOR DRAMATIC ARTS AND COORDINATOR OF *EDU4GAMES*, AN EU PROJECT FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN M.A. IN GAME DESIGN AT THE UNIVERSITY IN ZAGREB

Vjera Matković, HEAD OF THE MEDIA AND AUDIO-VISUALS OFFICE AT THE CROATIAN MINISTRY OF CULTURE; CULTURAL MANAGER AND PROMOTER OF ANIMATION ARTS

Aleksandar Gavrilović, CEO OF THE ZAGREB INDIE GAME DESIGN STUDIO *GAMECHUCK*, PARTNER OF THE *INTERACTIVE EMPATHY* PROJECT

MASTERCLASS: EMMANUEL CORNO NARRATIVE DESIGN FOR VIDEO GAMES

NOVEMBER 14TH,
INSTITUT FRANÇAIS DE CROATIE, 18:00

This masterclass discussed the tools that a young game designer needs in order to build convincing narratives. It tackled the subject of giving meaning to game mechanics and the idea of a video game as a political comment. Emmanuel Corno is a game designer specialized in storytelling. He teaches narrative design at gaming schools. With his colleagues, he co-founded a studio in order to make *Event[o]*, a science-fiction game that has achieved both critical and commercial success.

Workshop games presentation

Emmanuel Corno's masterclass was followed by a presentation of the games developed within the *Interactive Empathy* project. The games *There is no Cure* and *That's OK* and *Empathy Path* were presented by their authors **Alma Trtovac**, **Matija Vigato** and **Andrea Pleša**.

The general public was able to play the games during November at the **Institut français de Croatie** in Zagreb, within its **digital rendez-vous** programme.



PRIME MINISTER OF THE GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA ANDREJ PLENKOVIĆ AND MINISTER OF CULTURE OF THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA NINA OBULJEN KORŽINEK VISITING THE *INTERACTIVE EMPATHY* STAND AT REBOOT INFOGAMER (NOVEMBER 12TH, 2019). PHOTO AUTHOR: ZENO ŽOKALJ



PANELISTS WITH MODERATOR SRĐAN LATERZA AT HUB 385 (NOVEMBER 13TH, 2019)
PHOTO AUTHOR: ZFF, SAMIR CERIĆ KOVAČEVIĆ



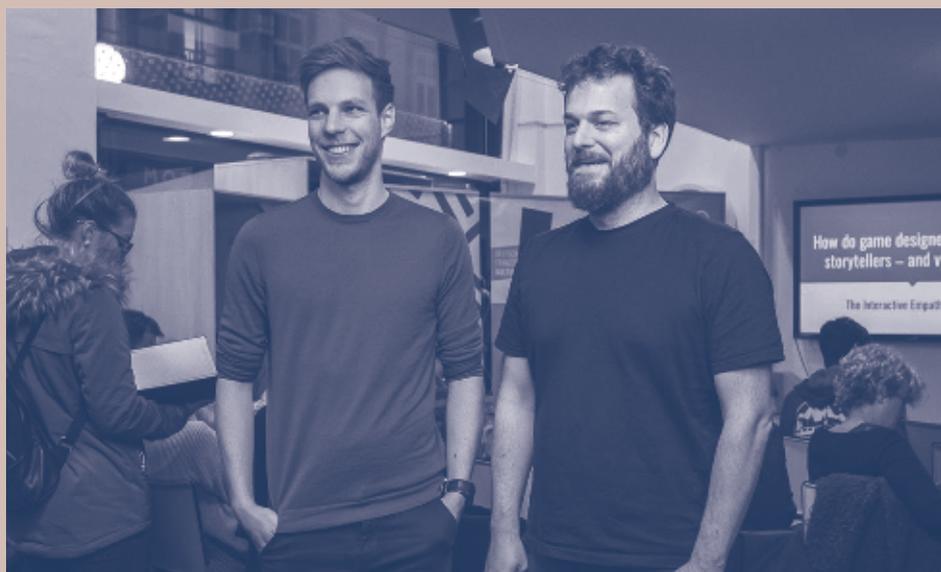
INTERACTIVE EMPATHY PANEL AT HUB 385, AS A PART OF ZAGREB FILM FESTIVAL'S INDUSTRY PROGRAM (NOVEMBER 13TH, 2019). PHOTO AUTHOR: ZFF, SAMIR CERIĆ KOVAČEVIĆ



THOMAS SCHNABEL, CULTURAL ATTACHÉ AT THE EMBASSY OF FRANCE TO CROATIA AND DEPUTY DIRECTOR AT INSTITUT FRANÇAIS DE CROATIE INTRODUCING EMMANUEL CORNO'S MASTERCLASS (NOVEMBER 14TH, 2019). PHOTO AUTHOR: ZFF, SAMIR CERIĆ KOVAČEVIĆ



EMMANUEL CORNO'S MASTERCLASS ON NARRATIVE DESIGN IN VIDEO GAMES AT INSTITUT FRANÇAIS DE CROATIE (NOVEMBER 14TH, 2019). PHOTO AUTHOR: ZFF, SAMIR CERIĆ KOVAČEVIĆ



FLORIAN KÖHNE, WRITER AND DIRECTOR OF TRÜBERBROOK, AND HANS BÖHME, LEAD ARTIST OF TRÜBERBROOK AT INSTITUT FRANÇAIS DE CROATIE (NOVEMBER 14TH, 2019). PHOTO AUTHOR: ZFF, SAMIR CERIĆ KOVAČEVIĆ



PHILOSOPHY STUDENT MATIJA VIGATO PRESENTING HER WORKSHOP GAME *EMPATHY PATH* AT INSTITUT FRANÇAIS DE CROATIE (NOVEMBER 14TH, 2019). PHOTO AUTHOR: ZFF, SAMIR CERIĆ KOVAČEVIĆ



WORKSHOP GAME EXHIBITION AT INSTITUT FRANÇAIS DE CROATIE (NOVEMBER 14TH, 2019). PHOTO AUTHOR: ZFF, SAMIR CERIĆ KOVAČEVIĆ

INTERVIEW

FLORIAN KÖHNE & HANS BÖHME, ZAGREB FILM FESTIVAL MASTERCLASS LECTURERS

Local Inspiration, Universal Themes & the Magic of Interactive Storytelling

How did 1960s Germany become the setting of a beautifully crafted sci-fi mystery adventure game? The creators of *Trüberbrook*, the winner of the 2019 Best German Computer Game Award, reveal how they used Joseph Campbells' monomyth to develop the game's story and how photogrammetry helped them create spell-binding levels.

What inspired you to take the local inspiration from a German small town and blend it with sci-fi ideas?

— The initial idea was to tell a story that takes place far away from well-established settings, to build a world that is somewhat unique, yet familiar. Instead of an entirely fictional fantasy world, or, say, a well-known real world setting like the United States – which can certainly be helpful since most players from around the world can relate to it, given the fact that the US has been a dominating factor in popular

culture – we wanted to look at places that we ourselves are familiar with, places we can tell stories about, and tried to turn this familiarity into something exotic, something that might be appealing for people who haven't seen this before. We had a feeling that the German province can be bizarre and strange enough, especially for someone who didn't grow up with it. Doesn't it look kind of weird from the outside, through the eyes of an international visitor who was just dropped there?

This is a recipe we've borrowed from, for example, the many successful and famous Scandinavian TV series, which are often set in a more local context, but dealing with universal themes like love, friendship and loss.

Most of our team grew up in small rural towns across Germany, and *Trüberbrook* draws a lot of inspiration from that. During the game's creation, we also visited a lot of small towns in the more remote German mountain areas and *Trüberbrook* became a fusion of different features one could find there. Of course, this builds on a somewhat clichéd image of Germany, which was useful for us to flesh out the idea a bit better.

The special time period in the 1960s additionally gives an interesting background for a mystery story, as there's the smoldering conflict between two very different post-war German states, the constant dangers of a foreign threat, competing intelligence agencies, the race to the moon and so on. Of course, all of this in-



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tensifies the atmosphere and the feeling of seclusion in that little village.

Finally, taking all these premises and mixing them with a plot which might have come straight out of a sci-fi movie was also very tempting for us – and probably not done too often before. We wanted to mix some very different genres, to make the game entertaining yet exciting, funny and a bit scary as well. You can expect parallel universes and time travel, mad scientists, secret underground laboratories, dinosaurs, aliens and sea monsters, secret agents, ghosts, an artificial intelligence, medieval knights, a lot of strange villagers and a cat named Klaus. Also, in the end, **Tannhauser** of course needs to save the world.

How did you create your main character in order to make him believable and to make the audience empathize with his quest? Did you use movies and TV series for inspiration?

— No matter how bizarre and strange the environment and the setting may be, we believe it is important to have relatable characters. In our case, the main character Tannhauser is kind of a “fish out of water”, allowing players to see the strangeness of a place otherwise familiar to us through their own eyes. This helps a lot to emphasize all the little details, and some of them would probably go unnoticed by someone who is too familiar with the setting they’re in.

We used a story structure that is based on **Joseph Campbell’s** monomyth. Like in the hero’s journey, the world of *Trüberbrook* is split into the known and the unknown. Our protagonist Tannhauser rather unwillingly embarks on an adventure to explore both of these worlds. The lighthearted and carefree physicist is at first not all too motivated to

embark on this journey, not even after someone steals his paper on quantum physics. But then paleoanthropologist and daring explorer **Greta Lemke**, acting as a kind of “call to adventure”, urges Tannhauser to go on a joint quest, also guiding and mentoring him in the first half of his adventure. Tannhauser’s journey begins in the “known”, a dusty old German town, but rather quickly he (literally) descends into the “unknown” to uncover the mystery behind (or beneath) Trüberbrook. He returns to the known world transformed, with newly gained knowledge and a new mission to save the world.

One of the core themes every character in our story has to deal with is their relation to the concept of home, especially the feelings of rootlessness and homesickness. While Tannhauser is primarily a stranger in a strange land, far away from home, Greta is a somewhat dislocated character, always on the road and searching for an anchor or something to hold onto. This heavily applies to the third main character of our story, **Lazarus Taft**, who is introduced to the narrative as a mysterious thief who steals Tannhauser’s paper on quantum physics, but later emerges as Tannhauser’s transcendental teacher and deeply attached friend, even as his soulmate and the love of his life.

Taft is a trans-dimensional traveler of sorts, who found himself stranded in Trüberbrook on his journey through various dimensions and galaxies. He had to flee, as something really terrible happened back in his home dimension. His body weakens under the influence of our dimension, and he desperately needs to return home. Over the course of the last few years, Taft has worked meticulously on his journey back, slowly realizing that he sadly lacks the necessary knowledge in quantum physics.



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He is a manifestation of the feeling of being homesick, as he has literally lost connection to his home and is trapped in a most hostile environment. His main effort to return back home is anchored so deeply in the concept of *Trüberbrook*, that his homesickness even manifests itself in a physical condition, namely his slow dissolution into blue goo while remaining in our dimension for too long.

Being an interdimensional traveler dislocated from home, Taft is both rooted and rootless in many different and distant places. In *Trüberbrook*, the longing for such places and the feeling of homesickness are not to be seen as two contrasting ideas, but are instead close to one another and could possibly be the same thing. Similarly, Taft's physical dissolution represents both the longing for distant stars and the nostalgia of homesickness.

How did you use handmade scenery and lighting to create the unique atmosphere of the game?

— Our photogrammetry workflow is kind of a delicate technical process. We decided to go for a handmade miniature model look to emphasize a fairytale-like, nostalgic feeling in the world of *Trüberbrook*, but also because we already had some experience from previous projects with miniature models.

Photogrammetry is an integral but not the sole part of our workflow to digitize these miniature



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models. First, we stage the different miniature sets with atmospheric lighting, just like you would stage tiny film sets, and photograph them from an angle that is about the same as later seen in the game. Those are our “beauty shots” of the scenery and they make up most of what can later be seen in the game.

Next we switch to a more neutral light setup with an even light distribution across the whole miniature model, in which no part of it is too dark or too bright. We then take between 100 and 300 photos of the set from different positions around the model. This second set of images contains the actual photogrammetry images that are used in a specialized software to calculate a digital 3D model.

The photogrammetry software compares pixel data across the images, which is why the images should not have too bright or too dark sections – those hold no detailed information and are hard for the software to make a connection between images. The result of the photogrammetry process is a highly detailed 3D model of the miniature set which is made up of millions of triangles.

This amount of detail is fine for renderings in film, but too much for a game engine that has to render an image at least 30 times a second. To make the 3D model “game ready”, we have to reduce this triangle count down to a few thousand polygons.

The following steps are more commonly used

in matte painting workflows for films: We project the beauty shots of a miniature set back onto the simplified 3D geometry and capture these projections as a texture for the 3D model. Now all the details and lighting information actually come from the beauty shots and thus from the real lighting of the miniature sets. By fading between such images or textures we can also simulate the change of lighting scenarios. For example, a beauty shot of a dark room and another one with the light switched on can be faded back and forth in a way that gives the impression of a flickering light — a technique that is often used in stop motion films, too.

These finished 3D models are later combined with characters and assets in the game engine. The characters are made in a bit more conventional computer game pipeline. They move through the sets interactively and have to be able to react to different lighting situations — for example standing in the shadow of another object, standing on one side of a light source, standing on the other side and so on. So we recreate the lighting set up from the real sets again with digital lights in the engine and try to match the look of the characters as close to the miniatures as possible. This set up of digital light also allows us to let the characters cast shadows into the scenery in real-time.

Which recent video games you think push the boundaries of the medium?

— In terms of worldbuilding, of course blockbusters like *Red Dead Redemption 2* recently set the bar very high, allowing players to immerse into a detailed and believable world teeming with life, with hundreds of well-scripted random encounters, where you can be absorbed by just roaming free through that massive world.

Regarding storytelling, of course *Life is Strange*, already a modern classic, pushed the boundaries by telling a gripping and emotional coming-of-age story with some great twists, thoughtful worldbuilding and lots of believable characters. Without spoiling too much (because we would like to recommend the game to everyone), it was probably the first game which made us cry a lot.

We would also like to mention *Kentucky Route Zero*, which did a really good job in creating a dense and quite magical atmosphere with very reduced but intriguing dialogue. *Firewatch* and *Virginia* mastered this, too, both in terms of worldbuilding and storytelling on a somewhat minimalistic, but really gripping and intense level.

Papers, Please, however, goes about a completely different way than all of the abovementioned games to tell its story. In *Papers, Please* the simple mechanics merge into the worldbuilding and narrative both seamlessly and subtly. For us, this shows the rich potential of the medium that lies in interactive storytelling.

WORDS FROM OUR PARTNERS



PHOTO: VJERA MATKOVIĆ

Vjera Matković

HEAD OF MEDIA AND AUDIOVISUALS' OFFICE, MINISTRY OF CULTURE OF THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA

Video games have been awarded their due status under the 2018 Audiovisual Activities Act, whereby the prerequisites have been created for supporting one of the most pulsive segments of the audiovisual industry which has a growing creative and economic importance. The Croatian video game industry has recently recorded a 50 percent growth in income and employment. It is extremely important to encourage study programs to develop quality content with artistic and educational significance, in order to emphasize and utilize the positive influence of video games on the contemporary digital society as a whole.



PHOTO: MIRKO SUŽNJEVIĆ

Mirko Sužnjević

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR, FACULTY OF ELECTRICAL ENGINEERING AND COMPUTING, UNIVERSITY OF ZAGREB

While I work in a formal education institution, I strongly believe that informal education is essential for the complete education of our students as well as the broader public. The Interactive Empathy project brought forth educational content in the area of game design and development, which is particularly important because there are still no publicly funded educational programs in this area in Croatia (although the situation is changing for the better). It is also very valuable for the participants to get the knowledge and different perspective from the lecturers from both Croatia and abroad. Projects like this encourage more young people to enter the ever-chang-

ing game industry, which benefits the industry struggling all around the world with a lack of skilled workforce. The project also benefits the students, especially in the arts, by providing them with an opportunity to express themselves and work towards an income significantly higher than Croatian average, even for entry-level jobs.



PHOTO: MATEA MILIĆ

Matea Milić

PRODUCER AT WORLD FESTIVAL OF ANIMATED FILM - ANIMAFEST ZAGREB

The World Festival of Animated Film - Animafest Zagreb has since 2013 been organizing a yearly video game workshop as part of its Animafest PRO programme, thereby providing a platform for connecting programmers, animators and illustrators, as well as a tool for them to familiarize themselves with the connections between animation and computing. The workshop has from its very beginning been the result of cooperation between the festival, the Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Computing and the Academy of Fine Arts and its goal was to encourage creativity and competitiveness amongst young artists and IT experts.

Thanks to partnerships with the Goethe-Institut Kroatien (2018) and the Institut français de Croatie (2017), we have provided our workshop participants the opportunity to learn from the most renowned foreign experts in the gaming industry. It is therefore our great pleasure that all the above partnered with us for the organization of the Interactive Empathy project and we're happy that this year's workshop, which was held as part of Animafest, was one of the main activities in this worthwhile project, which contributes to raising awareness about the importance of civic engagement and mutual understanding through the development of interactive content.

INTERACTIVE EMPATHY — CITIZENSHIP & STORYTELLING IN VIDEO GAMES

exploring the artistic and ethical potential of video games

A FRANCO-GERMAN CULTURAL PROJECT HELD IN CROATIA DURING 2019

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