

Interviews with management and artistic direction

The motto of this year's Creative Gaming Festival (from November 14th to 17th, 2019 in Hamburg) is "Of Monsters and Games". In these interviews the festival organizers Christiane Schwinge talks about this year's theme, awards, the exhibition and special events; Vera Marie Rodewald about the workshop and advanced training programs; and Andreas Hedrich about the digital games culture, the festival location and cultural diversity.



Christiane, how did you arrive at this year's theme and what monsters are involved?

CS: Everyone associates something with monsters. They appear in literature, films and, of course, in games. We want to talk about monsters and make them tangible and experienceable. What are today's monsters? Are they frightening, hairy ogres or do we think of cute little Pokémons? How are monsters represented in games? What stories are told? We are not only concerned with concrete figures, rather also with the inner demons that paralyze us and make us ill and with depression and actual violent experiences. It is also about monsters in politics and society. We want to playfully

and creatively address the entire bandwidth and ambivalence of the theme.

Regarding playful and creative: Why is PLAY a festival?

CS: The initiative's motto is "Playing with Games", and we implement it in our festival, to be precise by playing together for a specific time in different locations. We invite our attendees to exchange ideas on games and to develop games together. It's always amazing to observe how school classes are often disappointed when they visit our exhibition and don't find the usual popular computer games; but then are captivated by new games and aesthetics and, by analogy, entirely different communal experiences. We intend to irritate, to actively break rules, to alter perspectives and to collectively create new designs - and all of this within the context of a colorful many-faceted festival program.

What does the specific program contain? Are there defined sections?

CS: There is the PLAY Exhibition for example, in which theme relevant games are featured and can be tried out. In the Monster Lab attendees can actively create their own monster games at various stations ranging from character design via storytelling to programming and sound. At the

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Speakers' Corner which was introduced and very well received in 2018, it is possible to do a 15 to 30-minute public presentation on an exciting digital games cultural topic, to do an experience sharing session or to present a new project. Topics for the Speakers' Corner can be submitted starting August 15th. PLAY on Stage will feature theater performances and evening events such as Rock & Wrestling, and in the Artist Talks fascinating guests such as synchronous speaker Alexander Merbeth or sound designer Mathilde Hofmann can be heard. I am especially pleased with the PLAY Friends; these are partner events that take place in advance of the PLAY Festival. In addition, we have organized visits to Hamburg's development studios during the Festival.

And then there are also the awards?

CS: Right. For the fifth time we will present the Creative Gaming Award. Nominated games, media productions and prototypes will also be on display in the exhibition. The international prizes will be presented in the following categories: *Most Creative Game Award* to the most creative project and the *Most Innovative Newcomer Award* to the best new generation production. A competent jury selects the winners who will be announced at the Award ceremony on August 16th.



Vera Marie, you are responsible for the workshop program. What is on offer this year?

VMR: Christiane already mentioned the Monster Lab. In addition, diverse two-hour workshops will be offered on such themes as Storytelling (Mattias Kempke and Aljoscha Jelinek), Sound Design (Mathilde Hofmann) and Character Design (Dominik Johann). Katharina Appel and Christina Metzler will demonstrate how to build alternative controllers and in a second workshop how to create a Let's Play video. Heiko Wolf will hold a game design workshop with Bloxels, and Andreas Rauscher provides an overview of the history of monsters in games. Two other workshops are very interesting: Dom Schott is concerned with the "inner" monsters and Mareike Kochansky focuses on parasocial relationships to Pokémons.

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And then there is the Zombie Workshop?

VMR: Yes, that's right. The director and actress Christiane Pfeifer enables participants themselves to become zombies. How does one behave as a monster, how does one move, how does one express oneself? But also, the two Fundus Theater workshops will include performances: attendees will develop monsters together and in addition create instructions for a Monster Search on the festival site. Everywhere it's about the various facets of monsters and their design.

What advanced education workshops is PLAY offering this year and who is the targeted audience?

VMR: Our advance training program is directed, above all, at teachers and subject specific pedagogues. Nico Nolden and Alexander Buck explain the use of digital history games (histogames) in the classroom. The Initiative Creative Gaming will give a practical workshop on the Creative Gaming approach.



Andreas, how important is PLAY for the festival location Hamburg?

AH: PLAY is internationally acclaimed and consequently occupies a firm place in the city's festival culture and is just as important as the well-known literature, music and film festivals in this city. PLAY is unique in its form because it unites the areas of media art, discourse and education with the digital games culture. We want to make it clear that games have great creative potential, that they have long since become relevant to society and educational institutions and address a wide range of people from young people to senior citizens.

What specifically does that mean?

AH: Games tell stories, give impulses and stimulate processes. With our Festival we want to make this cultural diversity visible and experienceable. PLAY is a rallying point, a place of shared discovery and idea exchange. Games do not stand alone; rather, just like film, literature

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and music, they address social development and change. PLAY intends to deal with these socially relevant themes and highlight the artistic and technical continuing development in the games space, as well as emphasize the inclusion of computer games as an important element in youth culture in schools and other educational institutions. This theme-mix captures the interest of our attendees.

What is your target audience and how many people attend the festivals?

AH: Every year we have approximately 5,000 visitors. Our attendees are primarily game developers, scholars, researchers, pedagogues, students, school classes, film makers, media artists, sound designers and, of course, those in the general public who are interested in games and culture.

The sector network Gamecity is located in Hamburg and in general there is significant political support for the Games sector as an economic factor in the city. Where do you fit in? Who are your sponsors and partners?

AH: The Initiative Creative Gaming who has hosted the festival starting in 2008 in Potsdam and since 2013 together with jaf - Verein für medienpädagogische Praxis Hamburg here in this Hanseatic city. We are closely connected with many stakeholders; there is a continuous exchange of ideas. Governmental responsibility remains problematic because we are active in the culture, education and scientific spaces and only indirectly in the economic sphere. Here we would like to see more transparency and collective progress; however, we are on the right track. In the city we are supported by the Behörde für Schule und Berufsbildung Hamburg (BSB), dem JIZ - Jugendinformationszentrum Hamburg also (BSB) and gamecity:Hamburg. On the federal level, our long-standing cooperation partner is the Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung/bpb and its Plattform spielbar.de on the Subject of Computer Games. We have many fans in Hamburg politics and already organized major events in previous years (including those in the Town Hall) with them. Thus, we are very pleased that Carola Veit, President of the City Council will once again open this year's PLAY, not least because she has personally supported the Festival for many years.

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