



<http://www.eludamos.org>

**“Play belongs to Everybody”:
An Interview with the Ludica Collective**
Cindy Poremba

Eludamos. Journal for Computer Game Culture. 2008; 2; 2; 259-285

“Play belongs to Everybody”:

An Interview with the Ludica Collective

CINDY POREMBA

I interviewed Ludica at 9:30 am on March 30th, 2007 at the Georgia Institute of Technology (Georgia Tech), following the third annual Living Game Worlds Symposium (organized by Celia Pearce in conjunction with the GVVU Center and the Graduate Program in Digital Media in the School of Literature, Communication and Culture), where several of us were speaking as part of panels on the theme of “playing with reality.” Fortunately, I managed to get through US customs with my backpack full of recording devices and wires for the interview (although I was blocked from bringing a dangerous 120ml bottle of face soap in my carry-on luggage). Although I have known Celia for a number of years, this was my first time meeting Jacqueline Ford Morie and Tracy Fullerton. Janine Fron was not at this event, and as such was not able to join us for the interview—although she was the first person able to comment on the interview after it was transcribed. Despite having just organized an entire symposium the day before, Celia was able to set up an interview room for us the morning following the event. After an initial break for coffee and pastries, and a quick check of the recording equipment, we began the interview...

CINDY POREMBA: I’m here now with Ludica and we’re going to go around and introduce ourselves...

JACKI: I’m Jacki Morie

TRACY: Tracy Fullerton

CELIA: Celia Pearce...and Janine Fron is not with us, but she’s ... [*TRACY:* She’s with us in spirit]...yes, she’s always with us in spirit.

JACKI: And today is March 30th, 2007.

CINDY POREMBA: Thank you. Thank you very much for sitting down with me and talking to me about your group. Can I ask you how you decided you needed Ludica; how the collective came about?

JACKI: It’s a great story

TRACY: It actually is!

CELIA: And of course Janine is the central partner...so that’s perfectly appropriate

TRACY: It is sort of funny. So, Janine had invited us all over to her home for a night of playing games and there were these beautiful games that she had designed, that were...the only thing I could say is that they were... embracing of the feminine perspective in games, that you rarely see, and we were just so *charmed* by them. And we had such a great time, that...I can't exactly remember—can you *exactly* remember how it all came about...

JACKI: Yes. [*laughter*] I remember sitting at the table, when Janine had shown us three games, in increasing complexity [*TRACY:* They were lovely] and they were each more gorgeous than the last. And they had...one of them had come about in the last week's time. So, after that one, I think we were all blown away, and we were just kind of sitting back, and Celia said: "This is amazing Janine! We never expected...this is just such a wonderful surprise. We should all work together somehow." And that's how Ludica was born.

TRACY: Yeah, it's just sort of a spur of the moment...

JACKI: A recognition...a mutual recognition...

CELIA: Although...it's...it's funny though, because I think it was building for a long time. I mean, I had wanted for a while to start a women's game art collective, but I've been really busy. Actually, I had a list with their names all on it somewhere...but it was kind of in the back of my mind...and we'd [*indicates the group*] also worked together previously for quite a long time. Tracy and I have been working together since...99? I think... [*TRACY:* Something like that] Jacki and I had worked together previously on a Siggraph thing, then we started this Narrative Unlimited, which was a weekly discussion group, with games in there, so...

TRACY: And Janine and I had been doing a running series of events at USC...things like Surrealist Games, New Games tournaments and things like that.

CELIA: And Janine and I had also been having conversations individually and en masse about games in general...oh, and there was Twicherati. Which I started with Janine [*JACKI & TRACY:* Twicherati, yes] Twicherati was a monthly salon that Janine and I started, of people who just wanted to talk about games. And we would get together for dinner...so, these were all conversations that had been floating around the air, and they just all started to congeal in this one moment with this ..sort of...what was really neat about it was it was a tangible example of what we saw as like, oh, gender inclusive, female ethosed, you know, a type of play we hadn't seen before. You know, Tracy was talking yesterday [*at Living Game Worlds III*] about "We need new game mechanics"...it was kind of that moment, where we had never seen something like this before. We knew this was it, whatever it was. Right...

JACKI: And Janine, I would also say, always...from the time I knew her in LA, was always trying to bring *women* together. She was always bringing women, who didn't know each other, to have these little tea parties at her house, and to get people acquainted with one another. She's very much what I would call a social catalyst.

CINDY POREMBA: Well, you guys have explained very well why the *collective* aspect is very important, particularly in Ludica. I know you do individual work as well, and I'm just wondering how your individual work relates to the collective. I mean

specifically too, how would you decide something *is* a Ludica project, as opposed to something that perhaps isn't a Ludica project.

JACKI: That's an excellent question.

CELIA: It is. I'm...you know, for me it's really clear. I consider myself a feminist game scholar, and all my work is coloured by that. But if I want to do something that is specifically *about* that, I bring it to them. And so, I have a lot of ideas floating around in my head, but the ones that seem to focus on that topic are the ones that I bring to the collective.

TRACY: Also I think one of the reasons it's clear is because we generate a lot of ideas. Every time we get together...actually, I'm always the one saying “We need to focus”... “We need to choose the ones that are”... [*JACKI*: “That's another paper...”]...Yeah...

CELIA: But you come up with plenty of ideas yourself

TRACY: I know, I do, I do, and then I say “Oh no, we can't do all of these,” you know...

CELIA: But we come up with a lot of them together, too.

TRACY: That's right. So it's clear, because we'll be sitting around talking, and ideas will come up, and it's clear this is something we should do together.

CELIA: And then what also happens is that an opportunity will come up. Often what will happen is that someone will find, like with the Philosophy of Computer Games [*conference*], someone found this paper submission, and popped it up, and we've had a lot of things we've talked about floating around. And also we have a lot of ideas that...whenever we write a paper we usually over-write [*TRACY*: Yeah] and then we scrape stuff off and put it in a pile, and go to it for the next paper [*all laugh*]

JACKI: Yes, it's a continually self-seeding process...and we usually don't start writing them until we have a call to write to... [*CELIA*: Yeah, usually there's a catalyst of some kind]...but we have a backlog...

CELIA: Or, what's happening right now, where what's happening is that we're kind of in a reverse catalyst, where something has happened at a conference that we're now trying to formulate a reaction to. So, those sort of things happen too.

JACKI: And I think what's interesting is that, if you've been to the website¹, everything that we do we call an *intervention*. So everything...papers, workshops, um...whatever arises from your [*indicates Celia*] comments at GDC²...those are all interventions. [*CELIA*: Yeah] Which I think puts things in a ...universal sort of approach for us.

CINDY POREMBA: What do you see them being interventions into?

TRACY: Into the hegemonic structure of the mainstream commercial game industry. I mean, I think that's one of the larger...

CELIA: And, also ... the implications that has on the academic game community. Which is one of the things that we saw clearly—that the male dominated ethos of the game industry has, by association, rolled into the academic environment. One of the issues that has come up for example is this emphasis on a game being something you have to *win*. Which is really something game studies has inherited from the game industry. Which we think is a very male oriented way to think about play. So, we bridge between the two, really, a lot. And more than most people actually.

JACKI: I think part of what the intervention is, is bringing the spirit of play into digital games...as, as Celia said, it's really one-dimensional. And there's so many dimensions to play, that's part of our human nature, that we want to bring back to this whole industry. Because it's so influential—it is the medium of this century.

TRACY: And I was going to say, it's not even just the game industry...so one of the things that we did was when we went to Siggraph³, we staged a couple of interventions. We did Junkyard Sports with Bernie DeKoven⁴, who's just been a great friend to Ludica, and an amazing inspiration... [*CELIA:* He's our muse] ...Yes, we did Junkyard Sports, which is essentially taking junk (and, you know, you get a lot of junk at Siggraph, right?)...

CELIA: Swag, actually in this case

TRACY: ...right...

JACKI: We sent everyone out to get more Siggraph swag

TRACY: Yeah...and we created a...well, first we did a golf course, of junk, in the hallway of Siggraph, right. So this is like this bastion of technology, and, how many polygons this, and rendering that, and we're making play out of junk, and...

CELIA: In the hallway of the convention centre...

TRACY: And it's the most analog thing you can do, and it's completely...

CELIA: And people were sitting along the walls with their laptops, completely oblivious to the fact that they were part of a golf course.

TRACY: [*laughs*] Exactly. But people started to stop, and play. And they had a great time, the ones that did. And the other thing we did there was, we did, actually, themed hopscotch, outside the convention centre, where we came up with a bunch of themes that were...

JACKI: Related to the theme of computer graphics, so, binary hopscotch, or you might have a fractal hopscotch. People were invited to come up with their... [*CELIA:* Open source hopscotch]...yeah, their own concepts that related somehow to technology...

CELIA: And actually one that was really interesting was DDR⁵ hopscotch. [*TRACY:* Right] Which wasn't in the plan, we actually made it up as we were playing. And it was really interesting, because it came out of an insight that DDR is basically hopscotch. And that that's kind of the point of it.

JACKI: Hopscotch in one location...interesting.

CELIA: And so we made a game where people would face each other, and they would imitate each other using DDR kind of moves....which was impossible.

JACKI: And the other story on that is that we...got in a lot of trouble for that one...
[Laughter]

CELIA: Yeah, so then the security comes out, and they're like “What are you doing? You can't do that? If you do that other people will...”

JACKI: “You're defacing...”

TRACY: “We're playing!” we said. “We're playing!”

CELIA: And they made us actually mop it up. They brought us buckets and mops and made us... and you guys had still...

JACKI: No, we had to *go get*...

TRACY: They said it would bring the wrong element. That our playing in public would bring the wrong element.

JACKI: And they were going to charge us \$300 to clean it up. And the head person for Siggraph was out there too, and she knew me, and she was like “I'm so sorry but...we gotta do something...So, we didn't have any way to clean it up, so I went and got an empty five gallon water jug from the guerrilla studio office. And we kept going back, into the convention centre, into the bathroom, and filling this up, from the handicapped sink (it was the only sink we could fill it up from), and taking it out and washing it. And I called my daughter-in-law, and she went and got us buckets and mops, and she pulled up and dropped them off, and ... this is all documented on our... the pictures are on our website. We actually haven't...we should tell the story.

CELIA: Yeah. Well, yeah, the pictures are on the website. And we also, the other thing we did at Siggraph was we brought games to the Guerrilla Studio. And interestingly enough, the Guerrilla Studio is this kind of hands on lab environment, where people can go use tools and make stuff. We were the first people to do a game thing in there—which is kind of amazing when you think about it. And what we did was we had a series of people...we invited different people to come and show projects they were doing...we had a wearables, do-it-yourself wearables workshop with Katherine Moriwaki. One thing, we consider our collective as sort of an extended family, so we work a lot with other people—we're actually putting together something right now with Mary Flanagan—so we sort of consider the collective as kind of extensible. And we also had Second Life⁶ come and show their environment. We've been doing a number of projects with them.

JACKI: Before anybody *knew* them. [*CELIA:* Yeah] And then we had the Torque⁷ workshop, so we had some more technical workshops, we had some more hands on workshops, people made things in the do-it-yourself wearables workshop that actually got into the cyber fashion show, so we had worked with Isa Gordon, head of the Cyberfashion Show, to say, what ever the best thing that comes out of the do it

yourself wearables workshop will be one of the featured things in the fashion show. And that worked out pretty well [CELIA: That was nice, yeah]

CINDY POREMBA: What would you say is your most successful project, or just your favourite project, thinking back into it?

JACKI: My favourite was the game board modding workshop at DiGRA⁸.

TRACY: That was good...[CELIA: That was pretty fun.] ...that was a pretty good time.

CELIA: And we're going to do something similar...we're proposing something similar for DiGRA this coming year. But that was really nice...we got some great...I think that one of the things that I really love, and it's why I'm a teacher actually, and why that was such a great experience, is that I really love empowering people's creativity in some way. And part of what was neat about that was that was the mix of men and women. There were quite a few women in the room, and they really came up with some great stuff. And one of the things we feel like a lot is that women in the game world don't really get encouraged and nurtured to come up with original, you know, female centered, ideas. One of the ones – I think it was Ivana Murder Mystery? Ivana Murder? [Janine confirms the game is indeed "Ivana Murder Mystery"] [TRACY: Ya.] Ivana Murder was this Clue like game where we were, I think Ivana Trump had been murdered or something, and you were in the apartment trying to find all these clues...

TRACY: It was like CSI meets Nancy Drew, meets...

CELIA : They used all this dollhouse furniture that we ...we brought piles and piles of stuff we had gotten from 99c stores and Salvation Army ...

JACKI: And gameboards. All kinds of gameboards that you could either use as they were, or you could repurpose or reconfigure.

CELIA: So, that was neat. Because people really felt they were nurtured to do something creative and inventive, and we had Tracy, who I refer to as "the game mechanic" there, to coach people along who couldn't really come up with a core mechanic...

JACKI: Yeah, I learned a lot [indicates Tracy] from you at that game workshop.

CELIA : She was the guru [...]

CINDY POREMBA: I noticed appropriation seems to play into a lot of your projects.

TRACY: I think that's a good way of putting it. I also think taking, you know, just giving things a twist...for example, the game modding workshop was a twist on the notion that you can take a technological game engine and "mod" it. So our point was...OK, that's really difficult to do, there's a huge barrier to entry there, and as Celia was saying, you know, a lot of women maybe don't feel comfortable jumping into that. I think there are definitely women modders, but it's a hardcore mentality in a lot of ways. So our thought was "OK, lets take these board games, and consider them our engines (if you will), and mod them." And everyone can play. There's no

barrier to entry whatsoever. If you can use arts and crafts materials, if you can glue, if you can cut up with scissors, cut up paper, and you know...we had the craziest games! We had this game about balancing with eggshells, and these [CELIA: People came up with this mad stuff...], Todd Furmanski made this...Todd Furmanski makes this emergent, actual technological code characters, but he made sort of a version of one of them using these wind up things, these wind up toys, in analog fashion. So it was like he brought his technological thinking to this analog game modding contest, which was sort of interesting and weird. And so I really enjoyed that.

CELIA: I think the other thing, sort of, that is interesting is that a lot of what we have been doing are analog interventions into digital culture. And the board game modding workshop I think is also sort of coming out of Tracy's long standing practice of doing paper and pencil playtesting with her students which is her whole teaching methodology, which, in addition to, I think what it does is it breaks people out of a lot of the computer game conventions and lets them start with a clean slate. But it's also very collaborative. And that's one of the reasons I like it is because it's really hard to collaborate on a computer. So, the working, modding environment...and also, it's the same kind of stuff that Bernie DeKoven does with his junkyard sports and new games – that you bring a bunch of people together and you sort of negotiate the ruleset through the process of playing...which, once you put something on a computer, you can't do anymore. So we think that's a really important epistemological way of working; getting to new kinds of game mechanics and designs. And also, we're trying...I think its really important to understand that we're not just about making gender inclusive games. We're also about making a gender inclusive game development environment. And we probably spend an equal amount of time on that, as we really try to develop these methods that we think are more embracing...

JACKI: And more long reaching. Because, doing one game or one paper isn't going to change the world, but instilling these sorts of inclusive methodologies in people, that's what we hope would make the difference.

CELIA: Janine has this thing she always says: “Play belongs to everybody.” And it's really one of our battle cries. Because we feel (especially in the videogame industry), that it really doesn't. There's a very elitist structure that says “ well these are the people who are sanctioned to make play, and you have to play by their rules, and if you don't like it, too bad.” And we...violently oppose that. [laugh]

JACKI: And I love Janine's other adamant thing: “You never call the players *users*” (CELIA: Right) *Users* is reserved for drug people....[laugh]...they're always *players*.

CINDY POREMBA: One thing I picked out from your website—I think it was perhaps a paper that Celia did—was this concept of embracing your outsider status, in terms of game culture and game design. As I mentioned before, that, to me, evoked bell hooks' notion of embracing the margin...

JACKI: I'm not familiar with the bell hooks' thing...

CINDY POREMBA: Her idea was that you could seize the power, rather than being *relegated* to the margin, to embrace that margin as something that is actually a

tremendous creative space, because it isn't confined by the rigid rules [*CELIA*: Mm-hmm...mm-hmm] of the inside [*JACKI*: Absolutely].

CELIA: Well, not only that, but one of the things that is really fascinating to me that has (and this really came out in particular at the Game Developer's Conference, which I'm going to have to tell you the story about that in a bit) is that there are a lot of men in the game industry who also hate that whole locker room mentality. And they gravitate towards us because we're offering an alternative that they also want to be part of. So we have a whole bunch of...kind of a male fanclub, who's like...they're not into playing shooters either. They have their own...they have a different kind of play pattern, and they come to our workshops and they read our papers, and we're also, you know, doing something *they* gravitate towards. We're also a magnet at the margins in some ways.

JACKI: Well there's no alternative. In many ways. There's just not been that, sort of, place to go. There's been just isolated pockets of people with that sensibility.

TRACY: I disagree. I mean, I would say, for myself, I never actually felt...I never actually acknowledged my position on "the margins" before working with Ludica. I mean, working in the industry, um, being successful, working on tons and tons of teams, with, you know, many many talented people—I never acknowledged in any way that I had any different sensibilities, right. And I think what's interesting in being in Ludica is understanding there is some power in acknowledging that very different sensibility that you do have. Rather than just sort of going with the flow...and maybe having some power within that, maybe not, but essentially being part of a ...I guess an underclass which isn't even acknowledged as an underclass, in the industry. So, this has been an interesting experience for me.

JACKI: I also think (and maybe this is not *quite* related but) having people like you [*indicates Tracy*] and Celia teaching, you are influencing the next generation of game people. And I think that is also changing the...making this more of an accepted way of thinking about games, I think, that's where we are.

CELIA: Well, I unabashedly indoctrinate my students. [*JACKI*: Absolutely!] I'm very clear with them; you know, I have certain ways that I work and that's just it. I don't...I have a thing where I don't allow any killing in any of the games my students make. And they freak out. I mean, every time somebody freaks out. And I'm like: you know, it's a cliché. All it is is a restart—come up with a different restart. And they always come up with something more interesting. [*JACKI*: So you at least challenge them] And then everyone's like "Oh cool, that was a great thing." You know, they're so indoctrinated with the conventions. And that's one of the things we're always trying to do, is question the conventions.

JACKI: Well, they come to you playing years of games that are built upon that particular premise. They don't have that inclusive game play...there's like, what, five genres?

CELIA: And they take it for granted. [*JACKI*: Yeah] A lot of the students that I get when they first start they don't know they are conventions—they don't know they are constructed. They think that this is the definition of a game.

TRACY: God has handed it down...[laughter]...

JACKI: And they don't get...

CELIA: The first person shooter is a god given, you know, biblical kind of form, that...[laughter]...that we can't question and interrogate.

TRACY: They can't even imagine that there was a time the adventure game was king, as opposed to, you know, the first person shooter. [CELIA: Right, right.]

JACKI: And they don't get the relationship of play, to games. That's the other thing. It's “competition”... it's not play. They're very different attitudes.

CELIA: Or they do, but they don't know how to *read* it. I mean, I think part of what we do, is we, (and when I say, I mean... you're teaching a game design class too [indicates Jacki] [JACKI: Yeah]) and I know with the work Janine did with the game design community at USC, we're trying to create a reflexive kind of process where thinking play, experiencing play ...the other problem I have a lot is when I work with, whether it's with this conference [referring to *Living Game Worlds III*] or with Games for Change⁹...If I work with people from outside the game environment, who want to do a game for change, the hardest thing to get them to do is actually play. I've had this happen a couple of times—where I've literally had to yell at a group of adult people who didn't...*refused* to play. “We just want to talk. We don't want to play.” And I'm like—you can't design a game unless you're willing to play! There's just no way to do it, you know. So that's also...we try to create playful environments, because we also see the process needs to be play, also.

CINDY POREMBA: It seems from describing your various projects, that you're primarily focused on cultivating that alternative space.

CELIA: I think as a group, yeah. [TRACY: Yeah] We do other things too, but when we get together...and the intervention aspect of it is really...like, we're always trying to figure out...we target the context, most of what we've been doing is at conferences, but we're pretty specific about what conference, and who the audience is, and what we want to bring to that social construction. So...and I guess the thing that happened at GDC was kind of an accident—we tried to do an intervention at GDC but we haven't been successful because we've never been accepted into the program. So we ended up doing this sort of spontaneous intervention [laughs] at the last one. JACKI: I would say that most of the stuff we try to do as an intervention is not...super confrontational. It's not meant to go out there and be political.

TRACY: Unless it's by accident.

JACKI: But...by accident, yes. Exactly.

TRACY: The chalk game thing was just completely by accident. We had no idea we were being so provocative. But as Bernie DeKoven said lately, he said “Oh yes, playing in public is a political act.” And we discovered that in a very visceral way [laughs].

JACKI: And play is still not accepted in this country as being something...it's closer to...our sidewalk stuff was closer to graffiti. It was the only thing they could compare it to.

CELIA: Yeah, they saw it as graffiti. That was what was so funny. And part of it was the context. If we'd gone to a playground and done that, nobody would have said anything. [*TRACY:* Right] But, even if we were in a playground—we're adults. And actually a lot of playgrounds would have probably kicked us out too. [*TRACY:* Yes, this is for kids] So, it's the place, but part of what's interesting to us is where play takes place. So playing at Siggraph and out in the hallway was actually a very subversive act. And, furthermore, without any computers. Right. [*laughter*] It seems like, throwing trash around and making a golf course, well, how subversive can that be? But in that context, it was highly subversive. So that's what I mean about targeting the context. And one thing I see with a lot of people doing game interventions is that they often don't think about that social context in which they're taking place. So we're very targeted about: *where* we do *what* with *whom*.

JACKI: We were very lucky with Siggraph too to be associated with Guerrilla Studio, which has the connotation of being the fringe element of Siggraph. So, had we done that without that, we would probably have been shut down totally.

CELIA: And the Guerrilla Studio has actually been an incubator. It started as a thing in the back of a room somewhere, as part of something else, and then the whole...

JACKI: The Edge. 1994. Thank you

CELIA:...The Edge, yes, she was actually...

JACKI: I let them be Guerrillas [*CELIA:*...yeah...] They said [*whisper*] "I don't know what we're going to do but we're going to solve a lot of stuff," and I said "Good!" And then they ended up spending the midnight hours recreating all the party tickets on the printing equipment.

CELIA: Yeah, that was great. That was how I got introduced to them...[*laugh*]...is that they made counterfeit party tickets for Siggraph on all their fancy printers. [*laughter*]

JACKI: Which led to all the companies doing things like lenticular screens on all their tickets so they couldn't be counterfeited...[*laugh*]...and the funny thing is, that has been a constant at Siggraph since 1994. Becoming its own venue, instead of just an exhibit within another building.

CELIA: So often...it's interesting—that's an interesting model, because that's a classic example of an intervention that has become part of the establishment in some way. But it also continues to be a place where interventions take place in that intervention, right?

JACKI: It's where anything can happen at Siggraph. It's sort of this, I call it, the spirit of Siggraph. Because the whole thing used to be like that. Now it's all... [*CELIA:* Its kind of an incubator, I think]...yeah, it definitely is.

CINDY POREMBA: What are some of your other inspirations, or cues you might take from other groups?

TRACY: Well, for me personally, and I think Janine as well, and I think these guys, but Janine and I had done a couple of *interventions*, if you will, before Ludica got together, and they centred strongly around the New Games Movement¹⁰. And re-creating some of those outdoor, cooperative, community based...they call them “tournaments,” but I would just call them “play festivals,” right. And that really came about through a class that I had taught at USC...it was the first game studies class taught in the Critical Studies division of the film school. And we had read parts of the New Games book, and parts of Bernie DeKoven’s *The Well Played Game*, and were tremendously inspired by them. And decided, hey, let’s try it. And Janine thought that was great, and she volunteered to...she had, where she was working at that time had this open grassy area outside of the office, and the resources to have sort of an event like that. And just by happenstance we happened to meet Bernie DeKoven, and Bernie came and trained us on how to facilitate an event like that. Which, you would think would be really simple, but, it was hilarious because, Bernie came and said: “OK, well how many of the games have you played?” And we said: “Oh, well we’ve read *all* the rules. We’ve read all the rules,” and he said: “You guys are just *way* too intellectual. Lets just go outside and play.” And so he took us outside, and he made us play these children’s games, these very simple games... But, in playing them with us, he taught us how difficult it is to get adults to play these silly games. And how there needs to be someone there to lead you through it, to create that sense of trust, and, so, we learned a tremendous amount from that, so I would say that, for me personally, has been a big inspiration. And actually, Janine and I as sort of a subset of Ludica had gone up and done another workshop at St. Mary’s College up north, and had used some of those games as well. So that’s for me a big influence.

CELIA: I mean, the first time I met Bernie, which was at a talk Tracy had hosted at USC, I went up and asked him if he would be my guru. And he said: “Is there any money involved?” And I said: “No, but there will be many citations.” And I think so far there have been about...ten. [*laughter*] If you consider...

JACKI: And a little bit of money involved.

CELIA: There has been a little...but that’s actually right. I was able to get him something small...

JACKI: And I got him some. And then we all paid him \$25 each to help us [*CELIA:* That’s right] with the Siggraph stuff, so ... he hasn’t gotten much, but he’s gotten a little bit.

TRACY: I can’t believe we did that...I forgot about that! [*laughs*]

CELIA: I totally...I would agree with that. And here’s the other thing, first of all, yeah, Bernie’s a big part of it...

[*Here the interview paused for a minor technical problem. We resumed 2 minutes later.*]

CELIA: OK, I was going to talk about the World game. Well, the World game was a game that was done about the same time as the New Games Movement, but it wasn't part of it per se, but it was, kind of...one of the interesting things, one of the parallels we draw...in fact, we did a paper for DAC¹¹ on this was parallel of a kind of socio-cultural milieu in which the New Games Movement was maybe coming about...which was the Vietnam war. And we kind of see a parallel with the Iraqi war. That it's another moment similar to that, although we have our own set of challenges, and issues, and cultures around it. But then the World game was a similar type of thing where it was a map of the world that filled a whole basketball court, and it was all about resource exchange. It was basically an environmental game. It was about environmental systems [...] I was also working with that, and actually got Bernie involved in that project. So this idea of kind of these...this social game and the idea of play as a social intervention...rewriting a lot about adult play, and ways in which it is marginalized and also ways in which it gets used to be...prevalent and growing as a sociological trend.

TRACY: Other influences are things like the Surrealist¹² games movement— I think that's another big one. And that also comes out of a couple of play events that Celia had come to...I think that was actually part of the start of Ludica coming together. Because Janine and I had put on two different Surrealist games days, and I think you [*indicating Celia*] came to the first one [*CELIA*: One of them, yes]...where I was wearing that poodle mask? And um [*laugh*]...Do you remember this at all? [*CELIA*: I remember you guys made me put something my head...]

CINDY POREMBA: Poodle mask?

TRACY: I wore...yeah, I had brought, I brought all these, like, Andre Breton reciting all these crazy poems on tape, and all this weird café music, and costumes. And so we all sat around, and we were playing these Surrealist games, and you [*indicating Celia*][*CELIA*: I had some crazy hat on] were wearing a crazy hat with ...oh, it was my, the hat with the fruit. All over it. [*CELIA*: Right, right, right...the fruit hat] The fruit hat! And I was wearing a poodle mask.

CELIA: And I ended up making...they had us make games—they had all these copies of newspapers and L.A. Weekly [*TRACY*: Right] and they said make a game with clippings from the newspaper, and I made...you know, the L.A. Weekly is this progressive magazine but its packed with plastic surgery ads. So I made this game called Botox Party, where I had all these different processes you could do to parts of your body, and you could [*TRACY*: It was hilarious] match up what you were going to... tuck your elbow, or you were going to nip your nose, or whatever. And you could make a combination of plastic surgery features [*TRACY*: That's right, that's right...] I still have that somewhere.

TRACY: And we made another game where we had words, and images...and somehow it was like voting...I can't remember exactly how it worked [*CELIA*: I remember that one] but it had to do with voting the different adjectives, and which described the images better, and things like that. But it was really a really interesting day, because, even though we do a lot of paper modelling of games in my classes, most of the students take the design exercises in the classes very seriously, so there're often very complex systems underlying them, and these were just games

that in many ways were just very *light*. You know, you had very little time to do it, and you know, you'd say, OK, lets just cut out of these newspapers...or...we went around the room and put words...everyone said a word, and then that became the game. So it was very, very light on the structure...

CELIA: And there was a time limit too...

JACKI: Yeah, but limited time is an amazing inspiration device. Because you cut to the chase of just getting something that is doable and playable. We did that for the...there was an NSF workshop that Z. Sweedyk put on, and we had to make games in two days. And we basically had three hours one day, and then maybe another hour to tie it up, and then we had to present them, and it was all women. It was a wonderful...

CELIA: Well, that actually...that event I think I would consider a precursor to Ludica too, [*JACKI*: Exactly] because I think that that inspired us to do some of these interventions [*JACKI*: Yeah, it was...] You told us about that, and we were like “Oh, we've got to do something like that.”

TRACY: That's right...I remember you telling us about that.

JACKI: This wonderful game we made, my group made, and ...Z had done it very well, each...there were four people to a group, and it was one student, one, sort of sociology/anthropology kind of person, an artist and a computer person in each group, but we didn't use computers. So, we cut up a book on fancy shoes and made a game kind of like *Sorry* or *Parcheesi* but it was called *Stiletto*. [*laughter*] And what was very interesting to me about the four games that were made was that every game had a story component. There was something about telling a story during your turn to convince the other players of the validity of your particular move or your interpretation of the card you got. And it was all story based, and it just hit me that this was such a different way of playing than we had ever done before. So, yeah, I would call it a precursor as well.

CINDY POREMBA: What's the role of mentorship for Ludica?

TRACY: Do you mean mentors *to* us? Or ...

CINDY POREMBA: How does Ludica...You've talked about people and ideas that have inspired *you*, how are you inspiring others?

TRACY: Oh, right! Well, that's interesting. I don't think we've done anything as a group, but we certainly do as individuals. We haven't formally done anything as a group but certainly we've...

JACKI: Well, I think people like Katherine Milton and Katherine Moriwaki; we've kind of inspired them to think bigger in some of their things, although Katherine Moriwaki was already doing...

CELIA: Yeah, they're kind of our extended family, but I think as far as younger women go...I mean actually, the whole...we should talk about the GDC thing, because, that was, for me anyway, that was very much inspired by one of the

students. Which is that there was this panel...the history of this also goes back ...we were sitting around last winter, or last fall, plotting...we have this whole crazy paper writing process that we need to tell you about [*JACKI*: Yeah, we should] We were in the process of doing our crazy paper writing process, and Tracy said that: “Did you hear that Eric Zimmerman is doing...”; he does this game design challenge every year, and this year he’s doing it on ‘needle and thread.’ And Tracy said: “I bet he doesn’t invite any women.” And, basically we waited to hear who was on the session, and indeed, he did not invite any women.

TRACY: It’s so disappointing, really.

CELIA: It’s really disappointing. And Eric...it’s a shame, because he is very good at coming up with games that are very gender inclusive; his Dickinson one year he did, love story...[*JACKI*: Well, probably the needle and thread too] Well, yeah, the needle and thread, so...

JACKI: And I’m always impressed...you know, we have this problem with the word “seminal,” and Eric never uses the word seminal, he uses “foundational.”

CELIA: Yeah, he always does which is fine.

JACKI: So...he’s a good guy.

CELIA: So...yeah. And he actually has more women working for him¹³ than almost any studio in the industry besides Maxis, basically. And, and so he didn’t have a woman, and a couple of nights before his panel, we had a dinner with Yasmin Kafai, and all the editors and some of the contributors from Beyond Barbie and Mortal Kombat, which is this book that is coming out that we’re contributing to, it’s a sequel to the work that was done by Henry Jenkins and Justine Cassell. And this came up over dinner. And, Tracy had been there for a little bit, and she left, and you [*indicating Jacki*] weren’t there, I guess you had the... [*TRACY*: No, she was there, she was there / *JACKI*: I was sitting next to you dear] It was actually a great evening, because it was all women, and (there were men who had contributed to the book but they weren’t at the dinner) and we started about all this stuff and eventually, like, all these stories started coming out, about all these situations we had been in [*JACKI*: Yeah, it was...] with male colleagues, especially academic male colleagues, which was really...*hilarious*. But then this needle and thread thing came up, and we were like: “Somebody’s got to do something and say something. We can’t just let this stand.” And T.L. [*Taylor*] was like: “I’ll write an email,” and bla bla blah. So we all went—most of us went to the panel, you [*indicating Jacki*] weren’t there because you had...[*JACKI*: I was gone...] You [*indicating Tracy*] were there too. So, but, most of the people at the dinner had gone to the panel, and so, the panel went, and all the men did their thing. And it was really interesting, because most of them, to varying degrees, ended up starting down a particular path and going towards, like ...My favourite one that cracks me up was he started out with the needle and thread, and ended up with an airplane combat game. Somehow he got from sewing to an airplane combat game. I mean, it was an interesting idea, but it was so funny how he was like: “Must go to the men’s restroom, must go to the men’s...” You know there was this homing device to take him to this other place. [*laughter*] And so...

JACKI: Which one was that?

CELIA: The one where he, it was a ...

JACKI: No, which person?

CELIA: Um...

JACKI: The Tetris guy, or the previous year’s winner, or ...

CELIA: It was the previous year winner guy.

TRACY: Mmmmm?....

CELIA: It’s in the blog.

JACKI: Well, we won’t take time up.

TRACY: I can’t remember who.

CELIA: So, each of them to a certain extent, you know, took it in a very different direction that I think any of us would, lets say it that way. Anyway, and I was sitting there, and it ended, and I looked around, and I didn’t see anyone getting up. So I got up. I was at the worst place you could possibly be: at a far corner of the room, completely opposite from where the mic was, and so I got up and in pretty much complete silence, walked (it seemed like it took an hour to walk to the mic) And then I asked Eric, you know, this was an interesting panel as usual but, I’m just curious, women, having dominated sewing for thousands of years, as a cultural practice, why are there no women on this panel? And he sort of hemmed and hawed and said, well, gender wasn’t really an issue in their decision (something like that). And, we ended up having this whole discussion on the blog which Eric got involved in, where I said, “When you have a group of people, in which there are no, there is no representation from one entire gender, *gender is an issue*. Period. And it fascinated us, because we’d just written this paper where we had talked about Simone de Bouvoir and the subjective male position, and how that dominates in the game industry, and he was just embodying that in some funny way, even though he...to us, he’s a good guy...

TRACY: Yeah...I think Eric...I just want to stress, I think Eric’s intentions are [*CELIA:* Are great, yeah] entirely good ones [*CELIA:* Yeah] And I think that, I think that he believes (and not to speak for him) but I think he believes that by presenting these—I don’t want to say female gendered because they are not, they certainly are not typically gendered, design challenges...by presenting design challenges that are on the margin, if you will, that he is sort of creating a discussion. That he is opening up the discussion for a more gender inclusive design process. But unfortunately, what he’s really doing is taunting all the female game designers that sit out in the audience and wish they could take that challenge. Right? Because that’s sort of...and often I’ve actually considered, post the sessions, doing my own, just privately you know? I was just like: “I should just make my own...”

JACKI: Oooh...the Salon des Refusés! [*laughter*] For the needle and thread challenge. We should do a Salon des Refusés.

TRACY: Well...I mean, the think is, though...is that I would like to do something that is an effective change. Something that actually puts a women up on that panel. And me sitting there just doing it myself I don't think would have made much of a difference.

JACKI: But I think you would make a point with something like that.

TRACY: By the way, it was actually David Jaffe that did the airplane. [*JACKI:* Ah, OK][*CELIA:* David Jaffe...Who was the...] Harvey Smith was the defending champion.

CELIA: Ah, OK. He was the one that did the adventure game that was kind of Zelda like.

TRACY: Yes, yes, yes. The one where you put the needle in so far, and its all about penetration...and it was measuring how far you put the needle in, and take it out—and it was like oh my god!... [*laughter*]

JACKI: So, yeah, I think Eric was trying to come up with themes that made the men think differently, but its actually showing just how ingrained their thought patterns are.

CELIA: And this one, I mean...for us, this was a particularly personal topic. [*TRACY:* Right] Because Jacki sews, Tracy's sister makes costumes, and I'm from two generations of professional seamstresses.

JACKI: And we'd been planning this quilting bee. This sort of electronic quilting bee, with Katherine Moriwaki ...and, that's been on our mind. It's sewing as a domain that...

CELIA: We've actually designed a game where you actually use a needle and thread. So...

TRACY: Exactly. And as a kid, you know, that was...my sister and I both had sewing machines and those were some of our favourite toys. You know. That was actually a toy that our mother bought us...little ones, just like her big one, you know? And we would make costumes for all our different theatrical productions, and things, and films and stuff like that. But, it's definitely something that is ingrained in my consciousness as a social activity, as a creative activity, as a playful activity... [*CELIA:* Right] as something I think would make a great game! And then, to see these guys sit up there and essentially make it into fighting...was really disappointing. And I'm not saying they weren't good ideas, they were really interesting ideas, but I think that a woman designer might have had a different perspective.[*laugh*]

CELIA: So that's kind of been...this is what I was saying about an intervention that comes, a spontaneous intervention. And now what we're trying to do is we're trying to strategize what to do next. And we have a couple of ideas, in fact we are meeting about it this afternoon. Just to figure out, in a positive way...because we try not to do stuff... I mean, this is the first time we've done anything that's actually really pissed anyone off.

JACKI: Right, this is the most provocative act so far.

CELIA: And I take the responsibility for it, because I’m really the one that pissed everyone off.

JACKI: Celia’s our most provocative person.

TRACY: She is. She is actually pretty good at that...[laughter]

CELIA: But I, um [JACKI: My hero] I think what we want to try to do now, is sort of harness the opportunity to come up with another positive intervention in the spirit of the other things we’ve done. [TRACY: Right] But we might end up doing something very specific as a kind of follow up. We’ve been talking about writing some kind of statement, request if you will, to the organizers of the Game Developer’s Conference...

TRACY: Well, I feel pretty strongly that, no matter what we do, it has to actually effect change. So, I don’t want to just make a statement. I want to make a change. So I think we actually do have the power to make that change. Whether or not their have been women up on that panel, there are very influential and important women who are associated with the game industry, and we should be able to get them together and there should be someone who can convince CMP or whomever needs to be convinced, that their should be at least one woman on that panel next year. And that’s the kind of change I would like to see.

CELIA: And also in general...I mean, in fact, I was just talking to Jacki last night that our [...] survey, you’re just listening to us in processing. A survey of the last couple of GDC programs, and just count who’s there, and what they’re talking about...[JACKI: So we have the data...when we write the letter]...because one of the things we find, I find that there are some women that speak, very rarely are they allowed to speak about game design. And that’s the thing that I am the most concerned about. Then we get this ongoing mythology—that there are no women game designers, that’s why we don’t have any, on the panels, bla bla blah...

JACKI: I think when we do the survey, and have the numbers and the data, that we also have a list of people that they could invite. You know, with some sort of little description.

TRACY: One of the things—so Celia’s talking about this myth that there are no women game designers...And this is a problem, because, in order for there to be women game designers, there need to be role models for younger women, especially the women that we teach in our classes, to look at, so they can imagine themselves as game designers, right? And this is a ...when Eric says something like gender isn’t a part of ...it isn’t a factor...[CELIA: Right]...well, it is harmful, actually. In the absence of role models, it actually is a harmful thing. So, I take the Game Design Challenge into my classes every year, and I show...You know, after I take pictures up there and I show them “these were the ideas that came up”, and “isn’t this great,” “You know, there’s really this adventurous spirit of game design going on in the industry”, and la da da...Well, you know there are young women in those classes, and they look up there, and they just see three guys sitting across the table. And, you know, I’m not going to critique those particular designers. You know, I think they’ve all been really wonderful designers. I mean, my got, how could you not love Alexey Pajitnov, you know? I mean, he’s just like a completely amazing guy, right? [murmurs

of agreement] But on the other hand, wouldn't it be wonderful if there was an equally wonderful women designer up there that the young women in my class could use as a role model. And, to imagine themselves in that position. And this is crucial.

JACKI: The other thing that I have a problem with, and I'm sure (we've not talked about it, but); having panels about gender, that are all women. And then the people who come to them are 90% women. [*CELIA:* Yeah, well that's what I meant about looking at...] I mean, segregation that's very insidious.

CELIA: Yeah. You know, it's really unfortunate. And that's one of the things we've talked about over the dinner, was that how often we've been the only women at an event, and all been on a gender panel, or gender and race panel, or whatever.

JACKI: And that's why what Tracy's talking about—having these people on “normal” panels is critical to the role model, um...

CELIA: Yeah. And actually, part of the thing that instigated me at that moment...I was sort of thinking about doing it all day, actually, but just before the session, I ran into one of my students. And she's a PhD student here at Georgia Tech, her husband is a game designer and a graduate from [...] And he works at a mobile phone company, and he was very devastated a couple of weeks ago that for one of the projects he'd been asked to design a “Hooters” game. And so this has been really plaguing him. And the two of them had, just prior to the session, got into an argument with two male game designers, who had insisted there were no women game designers out there and that women don't play games. And they were just, they had—she came up to me with all the sort of blood drained out of her face, and really upset. And part of what I was thinking about at that moment when I got up there was, you know, I've been coming to the Game Designer's Conference for a decade, and, I have given up at seeing any palpable change in my lifetime. But when I saw them, and I thought: “My god, in another 10 years, they're going to be feeling the same way I feel right now.” Then I thought, well at least I can do something that is going to make it a little easier for them, so that he doesn't have to have a job where he's asked to make a Hooters game, and she doesn't have (a PhD candidate, who's a brilliant women, who knows more about games than anyone I've ever met) doesn't have a couple of punks telling her there are no women game designers. I would like to see that not happen. And that's the mentoring part for me; is that as teachers, we have a sense of continuity that...like, we really work to get our students into positions that [*TRACY:* Yes]...not just jobs of any kind, but something that's not going to suck all the lifeblood out of them.

TRACY: So...you asked about mentorship. So, I mean there are very specific examples of young women (young men too, obviously, but) young women specifically, that (like we were talking about here) in my classes that I feel like I have—set on a path. You know? I mean one specifically comes to mind, that is that...she wasn't even a major, but she had come to the beginning game design class, and had studied many things—she was one of those people who had sort of that eclectic academic curiosity, right? And came to the beginning game design class, designed her first game, and, had a revelation. I mean she immediately...[*CELIA:* Who was this?] This is Jen Hollcraft [*CELIA:* Jen...that's what I thought. She was in my class...] And she, it was like—all of a sudden she would

come to class, and she would be like: “I’ve been up all night working on my game.” I mean she was just...she had a *fire*. And she could imagine herself suddenly in this role. And then of course she took all the other classes, and rararara...And a person who’d gone from, you know, just sort of jumping around, I think, taking classes in everything, she just had a passion all of a sudden. [CELIA: She found her calling] And now she’s working as a game designer, and she came...she’s working at EA, and she’s working on the Steven Spielberg project, she’s working with Doug Church, she’s...it’s like, she’s absolutely in her glory, right? And she comes back on the first day when she gets her business card that says “Jen Hollcroft game designer at EA” and she actually stood on the table in the middle of a class and just like shouted to everybody going “I did it...it can be done!” [*laughter*] You know...

JACKI: Do you have a collection of these cards? They’d be great to put on the website.[CELIA:That’s a good idea.][TRACY: She was just like, I did it!] There are no women game designers, please go to www.ludica.

CELIA: Right, right...

TRACY: It was a huge personal victory.

CELIA: ...That’s a great idea...we should do that.

JACKI: I’m putting it down...

TRACY: She’s sort of living the dream, basically. And there are other great women too...Kellee Santiago’s another good example...

CELIA: And Susana and Ashley...Ashley was one of Tracy’s students who’s a designer...

JACKI: And Heather. Heather Logus.

CELIA: Yeah, Heather. Heather was a student here, that Janet kind of mentored, and she kind of...I’ve been kind of working with her as well, she worked with us on one of our projects.

TRACY:...So, yeah, I think there are any number of examples. I think it’s...it’s not to say that, actually the young men are not as important as students, because they most certainly are, there is no question about that. But I think there’s a special place, like Celia is saying...for kind of clearing the way for people a little bit.

CELIA: Well, also...the thing that is really difficult is...the guys are already motivated. And they don’t have any problem envisioning themselves, they’re very ambitious, and to a lot of extent, a lot of them are ambitious beyond their skills and intellect. I mean, I have a lot of students that think they are going to be Will Wright, and they never will, and that’s just it. But we don’t have to have that conversation—they’ll learn that. They’ll find that out, eventually. The thing that really concerns me; I mean, a great example is, um, Vivian who works for Whyville. Who was a student of mine at UC Irvine, and she, one, had a meeting with me, and she was, you know, her Dad’s an engineer, and she’s been playing games since she was six years old and she knew how to program by the time she was fourteen, and, we had this lunch, and she said,

you know, the thing I really want to do is be a game designer, but she said, I just don't know if I can make it in that industry. And, here is a person who could have just walked away. She could have gone and done something else, and all that talent and skill that she had could have been completely lost to us. And, what I did is that I got her an internship at Whyville, because I knew if I put her in a place with a female role model, where she could do some stuff, I knew she would like it. I knew what kind of games she liked, and she could really shine. And she ended up, after she graduated, she's been there for about four years—she loves it. I've given her other opportunities to look at, she just loves it there. That's one person, but I made the difference between her being that game designer that she wanted to be, or not. And that means a lot to me.

CINDY POREMBA: In this context, I want to ask a difficult question: you're all white, you're all women of privilege, you're all academics. How do you critique power and privilege in terms of what Ludica wants to do?

JACKI: I think being in that position can be an advantage in being able to reach a lot of people with this message. Which, if we were not in a privileged position, it might be more difficult. That's one way to think about it.

CELIA: Well, there's a couple of layers to it. And one of them is, we're at the margins of the privileged. Both in academia and in industry, we are marginalized, even though we're part of the privileged sector. The thing that I still haven't been able to sort out is stepping outside of the race and economic space. There aren't very many people outside of that space—male or female—that are doing game stuff.

JACKI: I think that they're starting though. I mean, with Afie's stuff, the Global Kids, and things like Rob Peglar's doing... I think we're beginning to see that. [*CELIA:* Yes] And I think we can be a good mentor to them, and help them get access to things that might not be available.

CELIA: Yeah, so individually—I know I have a couple of things going on working with this Studio for Social Intervention arm, trying to come up with this activist big game project, and also with Skawennati of course... and that's a really great example, which is this project (that AUTHOR is also involved in) which is an aboriginal game modding program that I'm developing with Skawennati Fragnito and Jason Lewis. So, that's actually—those are things we are trying. But, you know, for me for example, just meeting her...I would have had no way to reach out to that community without having met her. So part of it is finding the people who we can then connect with, like Rob and like Afie and ...

JACKI: Yeah, I'd love to do more of those kinds of collaborative...collaborations [*laugh*].

CELIA: Well, one of the things that's really great about what Global Kids does, that I think we also see, is that the process of making games is a really good way to teach. [*TRACY:* Yeah] Making a game about something is a great way to teach a domain specific area, which is what Global Kids is part of. And it also teaches collaboration. So I think there is a lot of what we *could* do in that area.

TRACY: I think though (and this is where I come into play with the focus, focus, focus) is to remember that; you know, we say we’re a collective but really we’re four individuals who have very busy stressful careers. And we formed this collective because we enjoyed being together and talking together and coming up with ideas together and acting together. We can’t solve all the world’s problems, and so we need to sort of pick our battles. And the battle that is closest to home is that of gender and games, and not necessarily...socio-economic class and games, although it’s a huge and incredibly important topic. But we also have to have some perspective on what we can do. We’re not an organization...[*laugh*]...with a lot of manpower.

CELIA: Yeah, but that’s why those other two projects, like I was saying before, I haven’t brought them to Ludica because they are related but they’re not really on topic. [*TRACY:* Yeah] The other thing we should just briefly talk about, too, is process. The writing process that we have. Which is not in the question list, but kind of interesting. We might just want to say a few words about that before we...

TRACY: Sure...our crazy wacky writing process.

JACKI: Yeah...well we could just describe our last paper writing round, which was, we were doing three at once [*CELIA:* Yeah]. And we started them over the Christmas break, in my living room, with [*CELIA:* Piles and piles of books...] piles and...

CELIA: I brought an entire suitcase of books along with me.

JACKI: And so did Janine. Janine had her pile of books and I had my pile of books. And you [*indicating Tracy*] were still in some foreign country [*TRACY:* Singapore, I was in Singapore] at that point. And we just started with the topic, and looking through books and coming up with inspirational quotes, things that we thought might pertain. Then Celia would start writing about the topic...

TRACY: Celia’s really good at just jumping in and like...*ra ra rarara*. [*laughter*]

CELIA: The thing is what we would do is we’d capture all these quotes and we’re all sitting around reading each other quotes from books and papers and stuff. And then I would sort of make this master document of all the stuff we had been reading, and then I would just go... *bbleaaupppb*...and just basically [*JACKI:* There’s *got* to be a better word!] get as much into sentences, you know... [*laughter*]...I mean, it’s basically... [*JACKI:* Brain dump]...yeah. It’s a brain dump, exactly. Try to turn those into sentences, and give some, you know, qualitative discussion based on what we’d just been talking about. And then there’s this whole editing process...

JACKI: This round robin sort of thing. But we had three going on at one time, and that was quite interesting. We actually have a little schedule that goes “Tracy to Janine to Celia to Jacki,” and this one starts “Celia to Tracy to Janine to Jacki”...

CELIA: And some of the reference moved around. We had a few things...what it was; was this dress up, was this space, is this hegemony, is this blah...so we kept moving stuff around, and figuring out; “Well, I think this [...?] in this paper...”

JACKI: Plus the extra material that is the fodder for the next paper.

TRACY: My job, usually is to, again, be the mechanic, essentially. I mean I think first, that's just sort of the way my brain works. Is just trying to make sure everything is on point. You know what I mean?

CELIA: Well, Tracy is good with then formulating my "spontaneous whatever" into an *actual argument*. [*laughter*] You know, so you actually build up to a point.

JACKI: And I take your stuff and actually organize it into more topical areas, which you then refine, and then Janine adds more inspiration...and then we start the—you add more, and I cut. And then you make things on point, and

CELIA: Yeah, you guys are good at cutting things. They're the good cutters. I'm not a good cutter. It's always twice as long as it is supposed to be when I get through with it.

JACKI: Janine's a good adder.

TRACY: Oh my god! [*laughter*] She always has one more thing we have to put in there.

JACKI: She's probably the person we thank for the next six papers.

CELIA: One of the things that's really important though, is also where we go (you asked the question about where we go for inspiration). So, for example this paper that we wrote about...and one of the things we've done consistently in all our work is try to get *beyond* the digital. So, for the costume play paper, for example, three quarters of the paper has nothing to do with computers. We just talk about the cultures of costume play from different perspectives, and also look at virtual and anthropology and things like that. And then, it kind of comes together; "Oh and this is how it happens in computers."

JACKI: Well, part of that is because there has been this...not much academic work on the topic of digital roleplay in costume, so being one of the first, we had to go back to primary sources.

CELIA: Well there actually wasn't much about regular costume play. What was really interesting is that we found it to be a very understudied area. But we were able to, from our own experience and from some work that we found, cobble together...And with the space paper, which talks about gender and space in games, we were sort of...

JACKI: More literature than anything.

CELIA: Yeah. And we were drawn...we looked at Henry Jenkins' "Complete freedom of movement," which is a paper about game space and gender, and in that, he promoted this idea of, you know, "Maybe Barbie needs to kick some butt." And we sort of felt like, why should Barbie kick some butt? Why can't women do things in space they are comfortable in and indigenous to. So we drew from a lot of literary sources where space was part of the narrative, like the Wizard of Oz, and the Secret Garden, and, Little Women [*JACKI:* Jane Austen] Jane Austen, we talked about domestic space as a domain of play.

JACKI: Virginia Woolf...I mean, called it a space of one's own.

CELIA: So it starts out with Virginia Woolf, actually. And parallels actually how that paper is written, when she goes through all these different writers and says here's how this writer embodies... [..?..] so we kind of took that idea. And then we talk specifically about games we saw doing that as well, but the first half of the paper there's no reference to digital at all.

JACKI: Which is good, I think. [*TRACY:* Yeah] It gets people out of the digital rut.

CELIA: And it also...one of the things we thought was really interesting was that...in that paper what was really fascinating was the domestic environment has been a perennial of novels since their inception. And yet the domestic environment is virtually non-existent in games. We have only a handful of examples of games...

JACKI: More with boardgames, [*CELIA:* Yeah, and I mean] though than with digital games.

CELIA: Exactly. And then of course...[*JACKI:* Sims. The Sims of course is a ...] there's the .. [..?..]...which is our kind of quasi-polemic about the game industry and these board games. Again, to compare, the way in which boardgames were kind of more broadly targeted...

JACKI: And developed.

CELIA: Lots of box covers with women on them. And Tracy found this fabulous book where we found out that all these games were provoked by women and playtested by women. And then, AHA, lightbulb goes off above the head. So, we're also...

TRACY: So, it's an interesting thing, because it was in Massachusetts, Parker Brothers. And of course there's a huge history of industrial, women working in plants. Industrial plants there. [*JACKI:* With sewing machines...] On sewing machines, exactly. And doing very detail oriented tasks that translated almost exactly to the making of game pieces. So they had these very specific skills that translated exactly to the...

CELIA: From the sewing machine to the French jig saw.

TRACY: The French jig saw, exactly. So the plant recruited all of these women to actually make the games. So you have this complete reversal, of course, then, than what we have today. Where it was considered the domain of women to actually make the physical pieces of the game. Which we thought was just fascinating. And of course they playtested as well, that's the other thing. That's really important. So there's actual photographs of George Parker playtesting his games with a number of women factory workers all dressed up like Gibson girls. Really fascinating, *different* cultural perspective, that I think influenced the games that they made.

JACKI: Well, and also look at the whole social milieu at the time for games, when they were often teaching tools for morality or etiquette.

CELIA: Yeah. So “games for change” were just common.

CINDY POREMBA: Or critiques of morality.

JACKI: Well, yeah. Well, the Landlord Game...[*CELIA*: Yeah, yeah]...is definitely a social commentary.

CELIA: The first board game was in a sense a “game for change.” The first published board game. Which was *The Mansion of Happiness*.

JACKI: That was the first published board game?

TRACY: In America.

JACKI: In America, OK.

CELIA: So, in the end, we found a whole bunch of these social games. And then, the other thing that was fascinating was the representation on the packaging. And almost every box we found (with few exceptions) had women on it. [*JACKI*: And families] And families. And always showing a group of people, with a grandmother and a child; a father, a mother. It was this idea that *everybody* was playing the boardgame. And then we show some ads from the videogame industry and show how exclusive they are, how exclusionary.

JACKI: Even though what people have found is that people, families play games together. [*CELIA*: Yeah] When they come home, they play games...

CELIA: In spite of the fact that they’re “not supposed to.”

JACKI: They’ll be in different rooms on different computers, but they’ll be playing the games together. I think another thing we should probably note for the interview is that we’ve just sort of announced Ludica to the world. We’ve had it for a couple of years...

CELIA: We’ve been too busy.

JACKI: But we got through all the paper writing and Janine made the website, and we just sent the announcement out a couple of weeks ago. So we hope that we’ll have a lot more influence in the future as people start to find out about us. And I think that’s going to be the case.

CINDY POREMBA: Well, that’s an excellent ending note for us too. I would like to thank you all so much for talking to me. And I’m absolutely thrilled that we’ll have the opportunity for people to hear the interview and share what you guys have shared with me. I’ve had an absolutely wonderful time listening to everybody. And I just wanted to thank everybody again.

LUDICA: You’re welcome. Thank you.

CELIA: It was great. We had fun.

JACKI: We have three new ideas now.

TRACY: Exactly. We have more stuff to do.

CELIA and TRACY: Aaghhhh!!!!

TRACY: More things to do!...

[From Janine: "It has been a pleasure collaborating with Celia, Jacki, and Tracy, with hope that our body of work continues to playfully challenge and inspire new generations of game players, game makers, artists and educators. I think we all started something special together in the spirit of friendship – may the games carry on."]

[End: 65:00]

References

- Fron, J., Fullerton, T., Morie, J. and Pearce, C. (forthcoming) Getting Girls Into the Game: Towards a Virtuous Cycle. In *Beyond Barbie and Mortal Combat*. Yasmin Kafai, Carrie Heeter, Jill Dener and Jen Sun, (eds.) Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- (2005) "Sustainable Play: Towards A New Games Movement for the Digital Age." *Digital Arts & Culture Conference Proceedings*, Copenhagen, December 2005.
- hooks, b. (1990) "Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness," *Yearnings: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*. Boston: South End Press, 1990. 145-153.
- Ludica. (n.d.) Website. Available at: <<http://www.ludica.org.uk>> [Accessed 23th April 2007].

Notes

- ¹ <http://www.ludica.org.uk>
- ² The Game Developer's Conference (GDC), organized by the CMP Game Group (a division of CMP Media; a large publisher of computing and industry books, magazines, and online content), is a large annual gathering of video game developers. Primarily focused on industry, the event also supports an expo, various social and networking events, award shows such as the Game Developers Choice and Independent Games Festival awards, as well as a conference featuring talks, panels and workshops (such as the annual Game Design Challenge).
- ³ The annual SIGGRAPH Conference on Computer Graphics and Interactive Techniques is one of the most well-known technology conferences in the world focusing on innovation in computer graphics and computer-based and interactive

arts. It is run by ACM Siggraph (Association for Computing Machinery's Special Interest Group on Graphics and Interactive Techniques).

- 4 Bernie DeKoven is a self-described “funsmith;” an author and play evangelist best known for his 1978 book *The Well Played Game*. His philosophy of games stresses the primacy of fun and agency in the playing of games (and the living of life), highlighting the ability for players to both play and create the game, rather than be confined by it. DeKoven has also initiated the idea of “Junkyard Sports,” cooperative games designed in part by the players with recycled, found objects. As Ludica notes, “DeKoven is empowering people to become cultural producers of deep play, embedded with values that resonate with timely forms of activism and environmentalism...His exemplary efforts beg consideration of not only how players engage with games, but most importantly, their accountability of how they interact with each other (“Sustainable Play”).”
- 5 Konami’s *Dance, Dance Revolution*
- 6 Second Life is a popular Internet-based virtual world/avatar-based community space developed by Linden Labs. The environment provides many opportunities for customization of avatars and environments.
- 7 Torque is an inexpensive 3D game engine distributed by Garage Games oriented towards independent game developers.
- 8 Digital Games Research Association (DiGRA)
- 9 *Games for Change* (a branch of the Serious Games Initiative) is a U.S.-based group that provides support, visibility and shared resources to organizations and individuals using digital games for social change. In a broader sense, however, “games for change” has come to represent the idea of socially aware and activist game-making.
- 10 Ludica explains: “[T]he New Games Movement [was], 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.” The New Games Movement focused on the role of players as people and as agents of change, re-envisioning games as interaction models for a more sustainable and socially conscious society. States Brand: “you can’t change a game by winning it, goes the formula, or losing it or refereeing it or spectating it. You change a game by leaving it, going somewhere else and starting a new game. If it works, it will in time alter or replace the old game” (“Sustainable Play”).
- 11 The annual Digital Arts and Cultures conference.
- 12 The Surrealist movement (and to some extent, its sister movement Dada) used games and puzzles as methods of non-rational artistic inquiry—the most well known example of a Surrealist game is the game *Exquisite Corpse*. In the visual variant of this game, a player begins drawing an image on a folded piece of

paper, with lines extending across the fold. They then fold the image over and pass the paper along to a second player, who without looking at the first player's image, continues the work by picking up the lines (and following suit). When all players have contributed, the image is unfolded and revealed.

- ¹³ Eric Zimmerman is one of the founders the New York-based Gamelab, a game development company focused on smaller-scale, highly innovative online games.