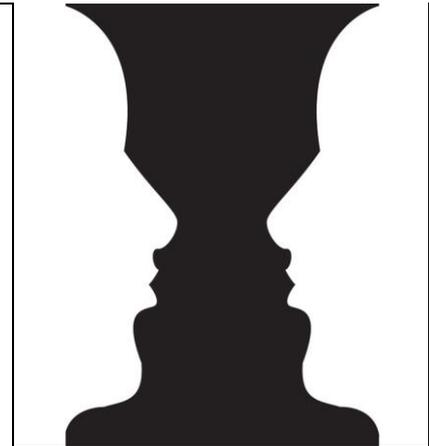


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## Video games and insightful gameplay

Editor's introduction to the [Themed Issue](#)

Doris C. Rusch<sup>1</sup>

Compaso's special issue on "Insightful Gameplay" looks at the insights we can win from playing and analyzing games and their players from a multitude of perspectives and before various disciplinary backgrounds. It explores games as social spaces where players form lasting relationships; it looks at games through the lens of philosophical concepts to investigate their contribution to relevant social discourses such as militarism and ethics; related to that, it investigates gameplay of philosophically-minded titles as a way to reflect on life; it probes the factors of meaning-generation in games – what makes a game, or genre of games, meaningful to players, where does meaning come from and what different kinds of meaning are there in gameplay? It proposes immersive strategies of gameplay as a fruitful method of studying games; it shines a light on the notion of paratext (e.g. game title, game description and readme file particularly in indie games) as interpretative clue to a game's meaning and a framing device for gameplay experience; it explores representation of gender in different videogame genres and how players – e.g. three-year-old children – make sense of their own gender roles through gameplay; it inquires how games can evoke empathy, foster learning and stimulate self-reflection about social issues such as immigration or war; it examines ludic identities – how identities are at play, constituted, defined and redefined through different gaming practices.

To me, this is as thrilling as it is amazing. It wasn't too long ago that a US court ruled that games were not worthy of first amendment protection. They were not understood as adequately expressive or communicative to justify it. Now, games are seen and studied as vehicles for meaning generation. They are a corner stone of our social practices and play a large role in our identity formation. Tell me what you play, and I tell you who you are. They make us think about life in ways that are just as profound as reading poetry or philosophical source texts. Games are truly coming of age and the articles in this journal are a testament to that.

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<sup>1</sup> DePaul University in Chicago, United States of America, [drusch1@cdm.depaul.edu](mailto:drusch1@cdm.depaul.edu)

But it is not just the games themselves that are “growing up” – it’s the players, too. It takes a generation for every new medium to be taken seriously. We trust games to be deep and meaningful, to have the potential of moving us profoundly, of making us think about life, the universe and everything. Attitude has a lot to do with it. It’s easy to be cynical, to claim games are just for kids. Or to be fearful and object to the medium because some of its messages and representations might be concerning. The special issue on “Insightful Gameplay” demonstrates that we can have a grown up discourse about a grown up medium and that makes me happy. It also makes me hopeful for future explorations of what games are capable of, what other insights can be won from analyzing and playing them. One thing that would be great to see in a future issue is how the design of games can evoke insights, too: game design as a spiritual practice, a practice of self-exploration and reflection. It is happening already. I just wish my game design colleagues who make these amazing, life-inspired, soul-searching projects were not too busy to also write about their experiences of the creative process. And participatory design of games about personal and social issues! That’s another rich avenue for future exploration. It’s amazing how much you can learn about a subject or a person by identifying the game’s possibility space with someone from a completely different experiential background, defining its boundaries and constraints together, identifying its variables and then messing with it, exploring potentials for change – how can we get from state A to state B? How can we do this together? Game design as a vehicle for discussion and transformation. I often think the designers get to have all of the fun. The players only get the result, the tip of the iceberg. There is so much more insight to be won from the act of creation. Another time, for sure. Until then: enjoy!

**Doris C. Rusch** is a game designer, researcher, play aficionado and holds a position as assistant professor for game design at DePaul University in Chicago where she founded the “Play for Change” lab. “Play 4 Change” is dedicated to the design and assessment of interactive experiences dedicated to personal and social change. Before DePaul University, she did post doctoral work at GAMBIT Game Lab, MIT, and Vienna University of Technology (Austria). Rusch's work is focused on the theory and practice of game design, particularly in regard to games that model the “human experience”, create empathy and can be used for mental health activism. She was the lead designer and vision holder of award winning and featured projects such as “Zombie Yoga” for Kinect, “Elude”, a metaphorical game on depression, “Akrasia”, a game that models addiction, and together with filmmaker Anuradha Rana conceived of and produced the interactive documentary project “For the Records” that deals with young adults and mental disorders such as OCD, ADD, eating disorder and bipolar disorder. Having completed studies in Literature, Philosophy, Comparative Media Studies and English at Vienna University, she received her Ph.D. in Applied Linguistics and Interactive Systems in 2004. Rusch's publications include academic papers, keynote presentations, conference talks, workshops as well as games. She has presented her research at international conferences such as Game Developer's Conference, DiGRA, SIGGRAPH, Futureplay, Future and Reality of Gaming (FROG) and Foundations of Digital Games (FDG), Meaningful Play, MIT Sandbox Symposium, Clash of Realities, Serious Play, Games 4 Change, Games 4 Health and G+L+S conference.