



Everybody Plays: A Symposium on Neurodiversity and Games

"Play presents a popular pastime for all humans, though not all humans play alike." (Spiel & Gerling, 2021)

Neurodiversity is an evolving concept in critical disability studies and is increasingly applied to game studies. The concept of neurodiversity puts forward the idea that there are many forms of innate, but value-free neurological differences within normal human variation. People sharing a collective affinity (Kafer, 2013) with neurodiversity often have an official diagnosis (e.g., autism, ADHD, Tourette's, psychosis). Central to neurodiversity, however, is the variety of their experiences as expressed in phenomena such as perception, sociability, emotionality, learning, and attention (Stenning & Rosqvist, 2021).

With respect to games and play, most work in this area is on game accessibility and the therapeutic potential of videogames. In the humanities, research increasingly focuses on the potential of (artistic) videogames to have a social impact in more subtle, unplanned ways. More and more videogames are being made nowadays (in collaboration with neurodivergent people themselves) that engage with neurodivergent experiences, and there is also increasing attention to neurodivergent forms of play (Spiel and Gerling, 2021). This symposium brings together researchers, game industry professionals, and healthcare experts (both experts by experience and care workers) to examine and discuss neurodivergence, games, and play. Papers will be presented, games will be

demonstrated, and a panel discussion will critically examine the therapeutic potential of videogames.

We invite you to participate in our symposium on neurodiversity and games on **September 16th, 2022** at the R Building of the **Stadscampus** (Rodestraat 14 2000 Antwerp), **University of Antwerp**. We are aiming at an in-person conference with a hybrid option.

We welcome abstracts from researchers across the arts and humanities, the social sciences, computer science and engineering, and medical fields, as well as from experts by experience, artists and creative practitioners, game industry professionals, and advocacy

groups. Anyone can apply for the paper session or interactive exhibition and is free to provide an academic or non-academic angle. Researchers who are not necessarily researching games, but who can provide foundational insights into fields with a reasonable connection (e.g., other forms of media, play in a more general sense) which may be extrapolated to the field of game research are also welcome. We highly encourage junior researchers to apply.

Your proposal does not need to conform to strict academic standards. We invite contributions in various forms. Possible topics include:

- accounts of gaming experiences (e.g., modding, inclusive game spaces)
- representations of neurodiversity (e.g., the use of colours, sounds and music, visual effects)
- perspectives on storytelling
- game design (e.g., accessibility, game mechanics, game settings)
- best practices in development of games
- game analysis (e.g., critical discussion of features such as the game assist mode in Celeste or the lack of difficulty options in Dark Souls)
- development requirements (e.g., ethical recommendations, accessibility)
- accounts on evolution and future outlook (e.g., how have old standards been improved, if at all?)

These topics may be the subject of previously published work on related topics, or may be drawn from work in progress. Presentations should be 15 minutes long and will be followed up by a 15 minute Q&A. In the continuous interactive exhibition (accompanied by written or verbal explanations), conference attendees can engage more interactively with submissions such as videogames, artworks, or posters. Please indicate in your submission whether your proposal is intended for a presentation or the exhibition. **We would like to ensure that anyone who wants to participate in the symposium is able to do so. If you have any specific questions about accessibility options, please do not hesitate to contact us.**

We invite you to submit an abstract of **max. 500 words** in **English or Dutch** on any of these or related topics by **May 27, 2022**. Please send your abstracts in .pdf format to neurodiversityandgames@gmail.com and include a short statement with your name, contact info and affiliation details (current position if applicable) in your email.

Acceptance of abstracts will be communicated by the end of June after which you will have one week to confirm your participation. We will send out more detailed information on the programme over the course of the summer. In the meantime, you can check our website for more information:

www.uantwerpen.be/neurodiversityandgames

Cited works:

Kafer, A. (2013). *Feminist, Queer, Crip*. Indiana University Press.

Spiel, K., & Gerling, K. (2021). The Purpose of Play: How HCI Games Research Fails Neurodivergent Populations. *ACM Trans. Comput.-Hum. Interact.*, 1(1), 1–41.

Stenning, A., & Rosqvist, H. B. (2021). Neurodiversity studies: Mapping out possibilities of a new critical paradigm. *Disability & Society*, 36(9), 1532–1537. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2021.1919503>