first.stage newsletter number 1/2018

Editorial

Dear reader, we would like to introduce you to the second first.stage newsletter. A lot has happened in our project since the first one, and we appreciate your interest. The whole first.stage consortium is pleased to say that the vision everyone has set out to achieve is coming ever closer. A first working prototype, so to say a physical manifestation of the ideas that led to the conception of the project in the first place, is almost ready. This, in conjunction with the in-depth testing conducted, will lead to a unique system, allowing professionals creatives e.g. directors of film productions to previsualise their ideas in a way that was not possible before. The feedback received, especially by our test-case partners Vogel Audiovision, Landestheater Linz, and arx anima was very promising. In this issue of the newsletter, we will endeavour to provide you with a short overview about visible activities of the first.stage project.

Please have a look to our website as well and follow us on Twitter, Facebook or YouTube.

Current activities of the first.stage project

first.stage at FMX2018

We were happy to present first.stage at FMX2018, Europe's most influential conference on digital visual arts and technology together with our project partner Rokoko. Thanks to all who stopped by for the interesting discussions!

VR Symposium at Ars Electronica

Frank Suttheimer from our project partner TOG (Landestheater Linz) presented the first.stage project in a motivational speech at the Virtual Reality symposium of the Oberösterreichische Zukunftsakademie (in cooperation with Ars Electronica)

Development Workshop

On the 14. and 15. of March our development team met with the application partners for a workshop, assessing the current state of the prototypes and discuss future development. We had two very productive days full of discussion and planning. The outcome is a development and evaluation roadmap for the next half year. We are looking forward to present you interesting new features in the near future.

Demonstrator Release 7

You can now capture performances with the RoKoKo Smartsuit. No need for a studio with an expensive camera rig for optical tracking, the Smartsuit uses inertial tracking to measure poses. And now you can stream live data straight from the suit into the first.stage software. Even small productions can now afford to include motion capture and computer-generated imagery.

Overview on recent publications

Thomas Muender, Thomas Fröhlich, and Rainer Malaka: Empowering Creative People: Virtual Reality for Previsualization (2018) CHI '18 EA.

Previsualization (previs) is an essential phase in the design process of narrative media such as film, animation, and stage plays. Digital previs can involve complex technical tasks, e.g. 3D scene creation, animation and camera work, which require trained skills that are not available to all personnel involved in creative decisions for the production. Interaction techniques such as virtual reality (VR) enables users to interact with 3D content in a natural way compared to classical 2D interfaces. As a first step, we developed VR based prototypes and performed an exploratory user study to evaluate how non-technical professionals from the film, animation and theatre domain assess the use of VR for previs. Our results show that users were able to interact with complex 3D scenes after a short phase of familiarization and rated VR for previs as useful for their professional work.

Thomas Fröhlich: Play While You Work: Productive Play for Digital Content Creation (2017) CHI PLAY '17 Doctoral Consortium.

In this paper, I present my ongoing dissertation project investigating playful interaction techniques for productive purposes. The objective to find out how users can effectively create digital content while actually playing. Building upon and extending the notions of gamification, serious games and games with a purpose, I focus on productive aspects of play where not a task is extended with playful interaction, instead I aim to create playful environments where play is the main activity, while at the same time, productivity can be achieved as a direct result of the game or play activity. A first user study revealed that the approach has a high hedonistic value, low learning curve and creative self-perception. At the same time, the work results are comparable to standard tools in a reproduction task.

Thomas Fröhlich, Jan von Oehsen, and Rainer Malaka: Productivity & Play: A First-Person Shooter for Fast and Easy Scene Design (2017) CHI PLAY '17.

Building 3D scenes for games can be a difficult task, especially for beginners and other non-experts wanting to contribute their own ideas in an easy way. Tools for map or world creation are often complex to understand and use, don't support the creative process of building a scene, and decouple design from player experience. To overcome these problems, we present a First-Person Shooter (FPS) game for level creation using game mechanics for all tasks, making the process more easy and enjoyable while also providing direct experience of the work from a player's point of view. We evaluated our approach in a preliminary study where we compared our game to a simplified version of the Unity editor, representing generic world building tools, and found that users enjoy our game, find it more usable, and feel more creative.

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