Games Mechanics – Report on Guest Lecture by Head of Audio and Tech – Stephen O’ Callaghan

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The lecture on Friday February 10th which was made by Stephen O’ Callaghan who is Audio Manager and Head of Audio and Tech at Sony Playstation was all about the impact of sound on video games and the importance of sound in the process of game development. He also explained how to get into the games industry and how to display your talents in your preferred professions, e.g. Audio Programmer, Level Designer.

The most important lesson which was given to us by Mr O’Callaghan was to show off your individuality whether it is in the creation of video games or programming software as the process must be creative and original.

A lesson from the lecture which I found to be motivational was Stephen’s message to read more books on your interests as they contain very interesting information which will be useful for your preferred job. This proved to be intriguing as these educational texts and books are important for understanding the context within your chosen interests.

The implementation of audio into the development of games was explained clearly by Stephen as I found the simplification of the audio terms quite fascinating. This was strengthened by the PowerPoint presentation where he gave examples of audio in use in some of the video games that he contributed in. For example, I was impressed by the recording of the sports car for the video game “Driveclub” as microphones had to be installed into the car to obtain a proper sound for the acceleration of the sports car.

An important point that was made by Stephen was about how there are numerous layers within a sound effect. For instance, when Stephen bounced a tennis ball, the impact, the type of material, the throw and the catch all had to be taken into consideration. This was an incredible lesson for myself because these layers contribute to the realism of the sound that is made where it is not repeatable. This method overcomes the limitations of sound.

I was intrigued by the crossfading and pitching of a sound effect where Stephen demonstrated this by showing us the drawer opening and closing. This required a loop to display the interaction of the drawer because the sound of the drawer which increased its sound due to user interaction was important to see how the speed, direction and the force of the drawer would react to the parameters and events to trigger the sound. This made the demonstration impressive because of the utilisation of the drawer in the video.

The central point of the talk overall in my opinion was the main aim in utilising video games sound. A problem with sound is that the game industry is reinventing itself where many sounds need to be original. However, this problem can be resolved by being creative which can result in the freedom of sound becoming the soundtrack of the game.