
Dr. Margarete Jahrmann
University of Applied Arts Vienna/ University of Arts Zurich,
The Planetary Collegium, CAiiA
margarete.jahrmann@zhdk.ch

ABSTRACT
This paper introduces a number of conceptual key terms around the art and politics of play, as Jouissance, Playsure Politics, Ludic Chindogu Interfaces and Ludics. The play with the technological artefact, seen as absurde ‘Chindogu’ (Kawakami 1995) of contemporary life, is introduced in this paper as a vehicle in order to gain an immaterial perspective on Ludic Interfaces as political tools. This is then unmasked by evidence in the arts of play as seminal practice for the development of a critical consciousness. Jouissance — as discussed by Julia Kristeva (1984) and Slavoj Žižek (2005), — is useful as technical term from cultural studies and political theories, in order to emphasise the quality of enjoyment and erotic attraction in the agency dimension of play with an object. As conclusion, the contemporary slave and master relation of players in everyday life and their relation to their technological objects can be identified throughout the paper as related to concepts of play and desire as driving forces for social agency in everyday life that really matters!

Keywords
Ludic Interface, Jouissance, Play Politics, Chindogu, game arts

Introduction and Overview

The emergence of Ludics as artform is informed by the practice-based research in the Internet of Things, expressed in Urban Games and Gamefashion by the artist Margarete Jahrmann. The methodological activist practice of Ludics was academically discussed in the author’s doctoral thesis, submitted at the Centre for Advanced Inquiry in Integrative Arts, University of Plymouth, UK. A selected number of case studies of activist interventions and exemplary activist artworks of the genre of game arts give evidence for the anthropomorphisation of political Ludic Interfaces of everyday life in a contemporary ubiquitous Ludic Society.

Our contemporary society appears to be heavily determined by ubiquitous technologies and smart toys with playful interfaces, including so-called smartifacts. Smartifact1 is a term first coined by researcher Harry Verteleyn at Apple Computers Coporation in the 1980s to refer to new forms of software-based agents. Smartifact is used in this article to connote the fictional concepts, as described by writers of the Cyberpunk genre, as Bruce Sterling (2005). According to observations of developments of consumer technologies over the last decade, the material affordances, as Miller (2006) describes it in the second wave of material studies, of these objects increasingly influenced the social design of urban spaces, private life, and the role of the self. Despite the factual presence of technological objects, critical theory in interaction design studies barely questions this technological materiality. The actual discourse mostly ignores the political brisance of the influence of technological objects on individual and social life. By contrast, game and play cultures offer a significant political commentary on these kinds of developments. Since the late 1990s, the new genre of game art started to mirror these cultures. This newly constituted field of artistic intervention embraced the increasing presence of playful interfaces, although it ignored its inherent political potentials in activism and social design. However, new forms of critical intervention in role-play, creative work and text began to emerge from the play with technological gadgetry in everyday life. In particular, this critical creative work, found in the deviant fields between irony and subversion in activist and arts Avant-garde provides evidences for the development of the idea of play politics, elaborated as ironic Playsure Politics.

This paper and the supporting research practice aims to provide models for further interventions into the conditions of technological artefacts, in order to develop a political consciousness about the master servant relation to machines in the internal dynamic of the player. In addition, it will suggest a theoretical framework, Ludics, for the field through the integration of anthropological concepts of play, pleasure and enjoyment in relation to practical examples of subtle erotic forces in play with absurd machines. The critical analysis of technological objects serves as a catalyst for a new socio-political theory of art and playfulness as a research question of urgency in contemporary ubiquitous computing worlds. The argument is elaborated through the following keyterms of Ludic practices!

1. Keyterms of Ludics practice

Ludics as practice-led research aims to offer a model of playfulness studies, which overcomes the lack of pleasure, politics and material consciousness in games studies of the last decade, as introduced by Juul (2003), Frasca (2001) or Pias (2000). With a survey of the dominant understanding of playfulness in the current electronic culture, it theoretically grounds subversive practices in play as political activism of everyday life. It is a model that subjects this to a critical evaluation relative to:

1. A critical assessment of playfulness as distinct from games studies in historic and contemporary theories and its synthesis as a particular dimension of political agency.
2. The classification of technological materiality by an in-

---

depth survey of cases of the anthropomorphization of technological objects and the consequential introduction of the new category of semi-synthetic play.

3.) Ubiquitous play as condition of social networks, based on recent activist evidences and examples of contemporary activist arts.

4.) A multifaceted evaluation of affordances of play in smartifacts and ‘Ludic Interfaces’, elaborated in a comparative analysis of proto-computational historic artefacts and the introduction of a material consciousness.

5.) Political subversion and synthesis in arts, presented as a theoretical narrative of cases of subtle erotic in role-play as precedents of contemporary play with the self in networked ‘Con-Dividualities’.

6.) Historic evidences of Ludic Interfaces and political role-play; the case studies show the power of playfulness as a consciousness strategy, when it is synthesised with theoretical concepts for a new understanding of politics in everyday life and technologies.

7.) Case studies of the author’s art work have contributed to the emergence of a new methodology of playful intervention and agency, which is coined as ‘Ludics’.

2. Ludic Chindogu

‘Chindogu’ describes a state of mind that is based on pleasure, attraction and amusement in regard to technological artefacts. Kawakami (1995) described the philosophy of Chindogus in Japan as a subversive practice in order to reach a particular consciousness in regards to useless objects. In the Western hemisphere Critical Arts Ensemble (1996) published fake advertisements of Useless Technologies. This addresses a particular kind of absurd technological object, which becomes a toy for amusement and joy, only by changing the attitude towards the object’s materiality. This particular pleasure gained by the existence of the artefact contains a dimension of subversive attraction, which is very much bound to the arts practice of the author. Moreover, the author’s engagement with certain aspects of computer technologies, interface cultures, network communities, online environments and play culture over the last decade integrate these two dimensions in a new form of Ludic Chindogus, called New Bachelor Machines, in which philosophy and art practice converge.

In Ten Tenets of Chindogu Kawakami refers to the real satire aspect of analogue gadget industries. He argues:

„Every Chindogu is an almost useless object, but not every almost useless object is a Chindogu. In order to transcend the realms of the merely almost useless, and join the ranks of the really almost useless, certain vital criteria must be met. It is these criteria, a set of ten vital tenets that define the gentle art and philosophy of Chindogu.“ (Kawakami 1995: 10)

Joy and pleasure are evoked by their appearance, which for them exists. It is obvious that their use is not the main target of invention. They are symbolic artefacts, toys between arts and amusement in a social configuration, which ironically mirrors associations, establishing power structures. Despite this, technological and other Chindogus are discussed and collected in playful societies. The association around the investigation of Chindogus expresses a particular interest in the gadgets used in everyday life for the deliberation of amusement. As part of this amusement of objects, a word play between ‘thing’ and ‘penis’ can be identified in the term ‘Chindogu’. The association reflects on erotic dimensions2. The inherent dimension of anarchy, found in sexual enjoyment combined with uselessness, is also expressed in the Chindogu manifesto: “Inherent in every Chindogu is the spirit of anarchy. Chindogu are man-made objects that have broken free from the chains of usefulness” (Kawakami 1995:14). The aspect of freedom merges in the useless object with the Jouissance of erotic attraction. In the case of the Chindogu, as described by Kawakami, the gaze on useless objects follows a path of ‘fetishisation’, as an ironic arts oriented project.

2 This is what the editors of the Website of the International Chindogu Society state: „Well, dogu is Japanese for "tool" and chin is Japanese for "weird" (not to be confused with the Japanese for "penis", which is also chin). Thus, a Chindogu is a weird tool. Likewise, chinchin is a weird penis. However, under no circumstances is Chindogu ever a penis tool. At least not yet!” http://chindogu.com/chindogu/ [Accessed: Jan 12, 2010].
Nevertheless, it uses means of expressing politics as the manifesto. Ten Tenets of Chindogu is written in this style. It claims that, similarly, in sports Chindogus are not only collected, but also produced. In paragraph two of the manifesto it states: „A Chindogu must exist, you are not allowed to use a Chindogu, but it must be made“ (Kawakami 1995: 12). The main difference of the gadget of everyday life is, according to the manifesto, found in its intentional uselessness when creating the object. Uselessness is defined as a joyful quality in analogue technological gadgets, according to paragraph one of the manifesto. This means that when looking at a device you cannot imagine its use at the first glance, but enjoy its aesthetic beauty of absurdity. This attraction of uselessness follows an attitude of enjoyment in relation to devices and the machines of technological cultures3. Similar to an erotic toy or a fetish, the joy of the existence of the object replaces its use and function.

An erotic pleasure gained by a look on hermetic machines is expressed as experience of technologically determined life in Western industrial culture. The understanding of Jouissance as dimension of play is supported by the conception of the absurd artefact as tool for critical enjoyment by play. The element of pleasure by the presence of uselessness gives the individual player the ability to feel free to critically take position. By subversion of functionality, certain useless objects offer a solution to circumvent the materialist approach of capitalist society. In a simple role-play the master-servant, relation between the object and the subject is switched. This shift enables a more profound political activism that goes beyond pre-defined boundaries of subject-object relationships. Enjoyment and amusement, caused by the absurdity of technological objects of everyday life, are identified as key element in agency. The Chindogu is identified in this analysis as crucial vehicle of Jouissance practices. This argument is grounded on a literature survey about useless objects of 20th Century.

Most importantly, the concept of Chindogu can be used to introduce uselessness and erotic attraction to technological fetish objects connected to play, as a subversive quality to critique hegemonic power conditions. In the technological dominance by the production chain of objects, the idea supports the development of an European Chindogu with a clear political interest, in contrast to the Japanese understanding of pure amusement through joy and erotic attraction. Apart from a recent hype based on a view on the Asian gadget, simultaneously to the rise of the concept in Japan, in 1995, the American artists group Critical Art Ensemble spoke about The Technology Of Uselessness, addressing an activist program against technological dominance by publishing newspaper advertisements about useless technologies. The artists activist argued:

„The expectation that technology will one day exist as pure utility is an assumption that frequently surfaces in collective thought on the development of society and social relations. (...) Having once left the production table, the technology that lives the godly life of state-of-the-art uselessness has no further interaction with humans as users or as inventors; rather, humans serve only as a means to maintain its uselessness. The location of the most complex pure technology is no mystery. Deep in the core of the war machine!” (Critical Art Ensemble 1994: 72)

This is juxtaposed with another radical position on Jouissance and uselessness, which is taken from contemporary European cultural history of political scholars such as the Viennese philosopher Robert Pfaller (2003). He coined the term Interpassivity (Pfaller 2000: 3) to describe the uselessness of the imperative interactions of certain technological interfaces relating it to the erotic attraction of technological objects. Interpassive consumption machines and the placeholder function of technology for enjoyment form the anchor points of his analysis The subtitle of his study Distributed Enjoyment, refers to the delegation of Jouissance in objects, which substitute sublime sexuality into technologies. The motive of substitution and enjoyment is further elaborated in Pfaller’s declaration of a rising emphasis on pleasure reached by technology’s cultural domination as a fetishisation process (Pfaller 2002: 160). By a critical analysis of the phenomenon of Chindogu, a philosophical strand of playfulness and enjoyment can be touched, which is – again not surprisingly – embracing the dimension, sexual enjoyment and politics, in playful Jouissance.

3 Chindogus inherently contain Play affordances. This term is suggested to be used in this paper in order to describe a theoretical and technical aspect of material studies within the field of contemporary technological interfaces. It draws on affordances as expression from design theories (Gibson 1977) and psychology, as an action that an individual can potentially perform in his or her environment. In this thesis, it is identified by a comparative analysis of technological artefacts and objects of contemporary everyday life that require practices of play as technique of interaction.

4 Jouissance is often defined psychoanalytically and culturally: “The usual English translation, “enjoyment”, does not carry the sexually orgasmic connotation of the French term, it does adds to the idea of taking pleasure in something. In Lacanian circles, Jouissance is distinguished from pleasure (plaisir) in that the latter indicates simply the search for psychic balance (homeostasis) through the release of tension, whereas the former is supposed to being in a perpetual state of and in violation of the pleasure principle. There is thus an implicit analogy drawn between demand and desire (see transgression). Julia Kristeva offers a slight development and a bit of wordplay: she uses plaisir for sexual pleasure and Jouissance (or jouïs sens, “I heard meaning”) as total joy due to the presence of
This section will define the theoretical concept of Jouissance as a subversion through the erotic dimension in play. Jouissance as political idea is informed by the origin French jouir or to enjoy. In order to introduce the conceptual entanglement of play and the Jouissance meaning ‘French for pleasure’, the trust of playfulness as a creative drive is used to identify the agency potential of concept for a new form of play politics.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary (2009) Jouissance is defined as ‘The possession and use of something affording advantage in the sense of enjoyment’. Lacan introduced Jouissance in his critique of psychoanalysis as a theoretical concept. In his famous Seminars XX at the University of Paris, Lacan (1972) suggested the use of the term for a sophisticated form of pleasure, which was informed by the relationship between objects, subjects and the creation and shifts between different aspects of enjoyment and the desire of the self with its complex appearances. By analysing this form of joy, Lacan constantly refers to Hegelian dialectics of ‘a master and a servant’ relationship. The ‘master and servant relationship’ as described in the theoretical object, is produced out of the enjoyed or obsessive relationship between subject and object. The Lacanian desire for ‘plus-de-jour’ (Žižek 1992: 82) can be understood as a wish for more enjoyment through play, which is tied to the object. Lacan suggested that the object of desire as an ‘objet petit a’ (Pfaller 1997: 27), constitutes enjoyment, which nowadays particularly includes the technological object. This is a reminder of the frame of technological materiality, where the bond to materiality is substituted with the surplus of enjoyment by play. According to the literature survey, free play appears as associated with Jouissance, desire and pleasure. Drawing on the idea of free play, this divide can be unmasked as pure construction of hegemonic suppression. The thinking framework of pleasure and play is based on concrete ideas of structural processes in society as dimensions of aesthetic education and enjoyment. In this argument, the anti-thesis of reason and sensuality are dissolved in a practice of identification with a political driven desire for ‘freeplay’. Derrida (1978) introduces the idea of freeplay:

„And, as always, coherence in contradiction expresses the force of a desire. The concept of centred structure is in fact the concept of a free play based on a fundamental ground, a free play, which is constituted upon a fundamental immobility and a reassuring certitude, which is itself beyond the reach of the freeplay.“

(Derrida: 1978:32)

This section’s observations of a pragmatic real politics of play and enjoyment in network technologies are supported by an analysis of the Jouissance concept by the political philosopher Slavoj Žižek (2005), who newly interprets and draws on Lacan. He discusses a conscious form of enjoyment in contemporary real politics. This theory emphasises the pleasures of popular culture and popularity, particularly in how Žižek declares joy and sexual pleasure as political. According to Žižek, the ‘other’ and ‘violation of constraints’ and ‘limitations’ take an important role in Jouissance. Enjoyment becomes paradoxical if it is combined with the necessary transgression or violation of constraints. Žižek talks about the obscenity of Jouissance, emphasising the concern of fetish theories in relation to sovereignty. In that sense, he approaches the politics of Jouissance masked in popular culture. The force of the desire for freeplay opens up the discourse into political efficacy. Accordingly, free play can be identified as the key element in understanding the mental aspects of play and Jouissance as crucial for political agency. This section considers an idea of enjoyment in play for political aims. It draws from a popular orientation of a political theory on enjoyment, also towards a critical dimension of popular play in the ‘Funware’ of present social network technologies.

In present times, comparably, smart objects and multiple selves infiltrate popular culture, as the following supporting evidence in art activism’s subtle enjoyments of play with the self will demonstrate. Corresponding to the observations of political role-play in activism, art will be presented in the last section. Accordingly, a literature survey of cultural studies scholars such as Žižek (1992) or Kristeva (1984) suggests that the shift to subjectivity, identity and playfully taken roles for political agency is closely tied to material affordances of contemporary technological materiality. However, it does go beyond its constraints in terms of mental effects. Playful arts practice, as one of the few remaining kinds of self-determined work, is identified in this section as a particular form of enjoyment, based on contemporary concepts of obsession and Jouissance. Jouissance is useful as technical term from political theories to emphasise the quality of enjoyment and erotic attraction in the agency dimension of play, related to desire as driving force for political agency.

4. Playsure Politics
In this keyterm of the paper, Playsure Politics is understood as erotic pleasure in play caused by the materiality of technological objects, which appear increasingly useless, according to market mechanisms. This directs the focus towards the aspects and relevance of politically conscious subversive erotic joy and pleasure. In short, Jouissance is related to the immaterial qualities of attraction regarding the technological object.

Politics is historically up to date with the discourses of political theories considered as antipode to play. This angle supports the bridge between play and politics through historical examples in the materiality and cultural theories of politics and agency, as a politics of play. In a survey of historical sources of a political use of playfulness, combined with an analysis of the current practices of play and the self in art activism, this relation extends the analysis into the mental conditioning and quality of playfulness in the player. This is where the concept of Jouissance, political conscious enjoyment as a subversive agency, informs a politics of play. Evidence of play and joyful activism exemplify the connection of joy and politics, according to a theoretical clarification of the Jouissance concept in relation to play. According to particular practices in electronic and networked life, the play with Chindogus includes the absurd technological gadgets of everyday life. The effects and strategies of agency by play developed in these activist plays can be subsumed under the term ‘Playsure Politics’. Things in society as constituting elements of thing politics, serve as inspiration for the suggestion of this paper, which is the idea of a politics of ‘playthings’. The concept will draw on three categories of Latour:

a- politics is no longer limited to humans and incorporates the many issues to which they are attached; b- objects become things, that is, when matters of fact give way to their complicated entanglements and become matters of concern; c- assembling is no longer done under the already existing globe or dome of some earlier tradition of building virtual parliaments. (Latour 2005: 80)

This listing opens possible comparison to technology and synthetic objects in the context of contemporary play cultures. In view of that, it can be said that objects become things, in the moment when its complex relations replace facts. If thing politics is as well regarded in a relational way, it brings efficacies of things and play into the field of view. This perspective directly results from a shift of focus from an understanding of politics as intentionally organised agency towards an experience of politics as constant intervention inherent to the affordances of technological things. The new contemporary form of ubiquity enforces this dimension of political agency, from nation states towards conceptual forms of social life. By acceptance of the political reality and social efficacy of things, technological objects and play are put to centre stage of a material consciousness and the artist as activist role-player.

player in the media, the 1990s genre of net art can be compared to actual playful arts practices in game arts and interventionist fine arts. In very recent forms of art such as Web 2.0, similarities can be observed towards interventions in real-life social systems and in activist role-playing. According to observations of role-playing in popular electronic social network applications, a subversive dimension of role-play activism can be observed in Web 2.0 (the participatory form of the Web on social platforms). Critical but joyful art can be increasingly found in these platforms, which represent a contemporary form of role-playing from the perspective of this section. For example, the ironic Web 2.0 Suicide Machine of the art group moddr (2010) exploits the enjoyment of destruction and intervention of big company structures in social web services. The service deletes Web 2.0 individual accounts and calls this script based action suicide of the online self. It draws its brisance from the relational structure of standardised social online environments and the double bind of such art work. It only gains content if it is communicated through further reporting in the realm of the mass media. In this case, play and pleasure, the role-play of the artist as liberator from the suppression of big companies of social intercourse merge against capitalisation of friendship and love. This does not mean that the artists who created the work deleted their appearance from the social web or did not capitalise personal friendship and love for their own career. By contrast, they forced their social web online appearance into the extreme, in the communication of role-play, in Blogs and news feeds and exploited personal relations.

This section identifies such contemporary interventions into the „funware“ of social networks as practices of role-play, which adapts existing consumer technologies for political intervention, like classical net art of the 1990s minor media operations. By applying these political lines of thinking with the investigation of consumer practices, Fiske called the results ‘micro politics of everyday life’ (Fiske 1989: 132). Considering requests for minor interventions, the contemporary role-play of the artist in the electronic realm can be redefined. The curator Andreas Brockmann (2001) introduced the term ‘minor media operator’ in order to describe an artist as an activist figure, similar to a political role-player. The focus on minor interventions by artists appears to be crucial in terms of efficacy. In that sense, performing playful arts in electronic networks has its effects. With the start of the network arts scene in the mid 1990s the term minor media operator was inspired by the trust in the efficacy of minor interventions on power structures generally inherent in technologies. As a method of role-play, the concept of minor media operator introduces the artist as equivalent to the attractive public intellectual.

Fig 4. Web 2.0 Suicide Machine by moddr (2010)

In reference to the description of the role of the artist as an activist
motivation for agency. According to the following case studies, the political practice of the activist’s role-play is driven by enjoyment of the new meaning introduced in regards to agency. According to the literature survey on activism, Umberto Eco (Eco 1967: 3) coins the expression ‘semiological guerrilla’ (1967: 3) to describe this shift of meaning in communication. This term describes a practice of inter-play of objects, meaning and subjects. Eco argues:

„The battle for the survival of man as a responsible being in the communications era is not to be won where the communication originates, but where it arrives.“ (Eco 1967: 142)

Semiological guerrilla tactics invert the communicated messages; in the moment, they arrive at a public audience and are enjoyed by role-play practices. In these cases, fictional identities are invented as a cover or a mask for political and activist purposes. The artwork evidence — (like Semacode Dress, 2010. (...) The Urban camouflage dress never shows reality on digital camera displays. It introduces particular Semacode fashion-patterns as urban dress code, which makes the wearer invisible for digital eyes. The fashion series conceptually aims to trickster mobile phones and surveillance cameras. (...) Similar to El Sub Commandante Marco's wool-mask, this piece of clothing makes the wearer invisible for electronic cameras of mobile gadgetry, as phones, which are increasingly used for surveillance purposes) — displays how political role-playing, as an Avant-garde arts practice, allows one to develop an understanding of the joyful agency mechanisms of play politics.

Ludic keyterms are informed by cultural and historical studies, anthropological and political theories, the arts and technical language. ‘Ludics’ as newly coined term can be identified as the most challenging concept, particularly in the way it is introduced and applied, in order to enable further analysis of the intersection of philosophy, anthropology, everyday life, play, politics and art

b. REFERENCES


Frasca, G., (2003), “Videogames of the Oppressed: Critical Thinking, Education, Tolerance, and Other Issues”. In First


As an internationally renowned artist she exhibited worldwide in the last ten years, as for example in 2010 at Digital arts weeks Xian, China; at the Urban Games exhibition Space Invaders, in the Netherlands Media Arts Institute NEMK Amsterdam and in the show gameArt at the FACT gallery Liverpool. A selection of further shows include 2009 Tales of Play, Alta Tecnologia Andina Lima and Enter_Act, Kunstmuseum Aaros, 2008 Arco/ Laboral Gijon, SESC/ File Sao Paolo, 2007 DIGRA Tokyo. She received major media arts awards as the distinction in interactive arts PrixArsElectronica 2003 and software arts award Transmediale Berlin 2004. 2006 she founded the international arts research association Ludic Society and since then edits the Ludic Society magazine. 2010 she submitted her doctoral thesis on Ludics — The Art and Politics of Play at the University of Plymouth, Caiia Centre for Advanced Inquiry in Integrative Arts with Roy Ascott as her director of studies. Her research focus lies on Play principles as cultural phenomenon in relation to media and agency. She investigates new participatory research methods and political activism and subversion in hybrid media forms of intervention by arts. She frequently curates and publishes in the field of electronic network arts and critical culture.

http://www.ludic-society.net/   http://www.konsum.net/

Curriculum Vitae Dr. Margarete Jahmann

Margarete Jahmann is an artist, doctor of Philosophy, and Professor for Game Design at the University of Arts Zurich. In Vienna at the University of Arts dieAngewandte Vienna she is lecturer in media arts and individual project leader of the European Union funded Humanities Research on creative FLOW and "Prosumer" cultures with the aim of an international exhibition in 2012 on Pervasive Prosumer Plays.