

# The Ludic Society's VOID BOOK soirées, 'pataphysical public plays, launched 2016 at Cabarét Voltaire Zurich, the founding place of DADA 1916

**Margarete Jahrmann**

subject area Game Design, Dept. Design, Zürcher Hochschule der Künste (ZHdK)/ Founder of the Ludic Society  
margarete.jahrmann@zhdk.ch

## Abstract

The Void book circulates idealiter in the Cabaret Voltaire Zürich as the historical site of the birth of DADA. The Ludic Society, who acts as “editor” of the book on the impossibility of emptiness and the conditions of void space als public play ground. The Ludic Society defined itself in its first manifesto, published in the European Game Studies magazine Eludamos (Real Player Manifesto, In: Eludamos. Journal for Computer Game Culture, Vol 1, No 1, 2007; online available on <http://www.eludamos.org/index.php/eludamos/article/viewArticle/vol1no1-5/10>) as loose group of affiliates applied a variety of individual game mechanics in order to develop methods of public play, presentation and creation. The vacuum pump of experimental research on absence can be best activated there in the collective absinthe ecstasy, at any moment or at the occasion of the Void book presentation as present for the 100th anniversary of Dada in 2016. Such a public event marks the launch of a real-time space patrol, as the writer Stanislaw Lem (1971) would describe a toxicologically induced flight in the emptiness of the mental A VOID space, brain-drain controlled, experienced as VOID level in the brain of the player.



Fig 1. **VOID BRAINS**, 2016, Voidbook Cover sujet, iced brains/ neuroscientific concoction of human brain, presented at the DADA soirée at Cabarét Voltaire Zurich, Foto: imonym

## VOID\* as function argument of public play

Void is a function argument that takes nothing —int myFunc(void), that returns nothing  
— void myFunc(int), that points to nothing. void\* data. Dada!

As a command line void makes space in code. Void is a bracket on the command line. And Void ludifies the bracket, speculates in the design with Absinth content, builds on paper as generator. Touching the material results in experiencing Ilinx. What is meant is not so much the game type introduced by the surrealist poet Roger Caillois in 1958, but the haptically induced Flow, a rapture of possible deep content in slightly waved and otherwise empty pages. These should be read in the manner of a poetic writing in the tradition of Oulipo, Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle (1960). [1]

A technically defined placeless space like this makes it possible to imagine any contents at all, similar to the way a computer as a machine simulates any machine. Transferred to the analog, the book VOID, the empty book negates content and creates a potential space for it. It is only when held at the right angle, and only when the object “book” is tipped that the subliminal level of the material is reflected into the field of our perception. [2]

## Game Rules of an Instructively Empty Book

A Void is a possible translation for the title of the French work La Disparition by Georges Perec (1969). This book adheres to the rule of omissions and exclusion and is inspired by the group Oulipo, which can be roughly translated as “workshop of potential literature”. What was significant about this group was that specific discrete game rules were applied to create certain poetry works, as we introduce nowadays game mechanics in order to create Ludic art pieces. Following this understanding Oulipo is and was, first of all, a group of

playing authors and scientists, just like the Ludic Society has been and will be a temporary autonomous loose group of authors from various sciences and creative disciplines about play since 2006. The instructively empty book *A Void* is the tenth anniversary publication of the Ludic Society. [3]

Each of the arts research magazines associated with artworks of and edited by the Ludic Society was published in print. Each one followed a self chosen rule of publication, limiting itself to one colour and black and white graphics. Each issue has shown a different monkey's head on the cover in order to express the meaning of the saying <go APE> in the sense of getting crazy and excited about nothing as operating rule for members of the Ludic Society. All professed socialites (at the peak there were at least around fifty) applied permanent excitement about nothing as a cultural technique. This was claimed as research method, as each issue was accompanied by an installation experiment in a public museum or gallery.

The *Void* book has to be understood in the same way, as experiment in print with a focus on game rules as epistemic thing. If any forms of outcomes will be generated through this experiment and which cultural techniques might then be applied to generate new research findings, remains to be seen. Potential contributions are documented online. <http://www.ludic-society.net/voidbook>

## A VOID Rules — The Tenets of A Voiding

### # A Void Game Rules

Instructions: Follow no command! Games are strict instructions. Reject them!

Actions of the A VOID navigators draw the analog object book out of the sticky ink of technological augmentation beyond Alternate Reality Gaming. The expansion of the world into the digital file is inverted through the A VOID level in the idle state in the brain of the gamer. The object book eludes the electronic and logical topography of technological toys. With Void action the game provides release from irrelevance. In keeping with the motto of western culture, Let's get intoxicated together! A VOIDers invent their synthetic dreams between absinthine lines.

A Void as an artifact immunizes, induces, inflames and plays with the philosophical "condition of a possibility" of world. Every Void contribution personifies a game condition, which expands dynamically with ever new game rules, also and especially beyond the printed book.

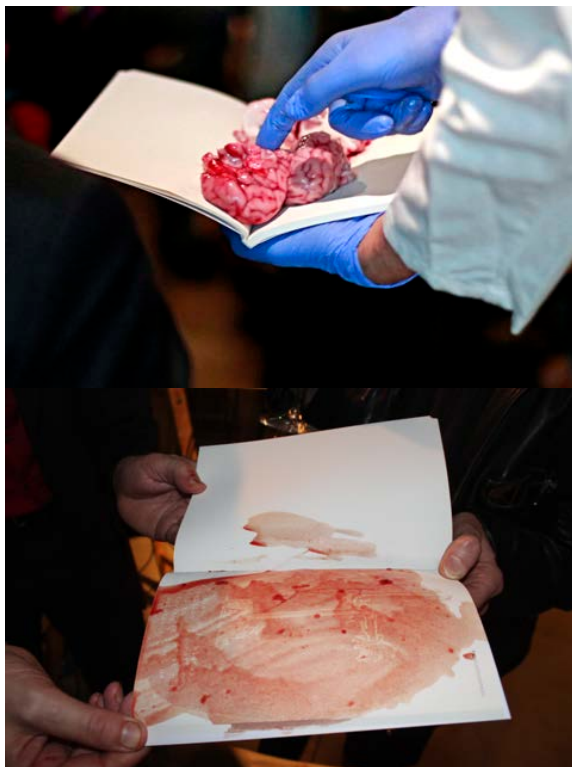


Fig 2. *VOID Book*, 2016, Activation by Brainblood, with permission of Ludic Society.



Fig 3. *ENTER THE VOID*, 2016, Lecture Poster, graphic design Max Moswitzer, with permission of Ludic Society.

#### # A Void Method

VOID is a collective project. It consists of single cells with many nuclei that can continue to move like slime mold myxomycetes. These form the model for animating inanimate material through proliferation. Bacterial processes of the decay of the paper change the smell of the book over time. With a little patience, the book smells of antiquarian book-sellers and old knowledge. This smell serves as a reference to a “Borg culture”, to the social design of symbiotically generated knowledge. Every newly filled page can become an access key to the void worlds. The Void book imbues the trusty sketchbook with a new legitimization as a purported game system. Every Void contribution personifies a dynamic game condition, which expands with ever new game rules, also and especially beyond the book.

Horror Vacui designates fear of empty space in art. The fear of a vacuum links the methods of art with those of experimental sciences. The horror vacui pattern arose as an antidote to the fear of empty space in the

wonderful art of Alhambra. The endless ornamentation served to parquet the mental space. This all-over pattern is not so much ornament, but rather provokes, stimulates or – technically speaking – augments new levels of perception. Because a book cannot contain nothing, In the VOID book we invisibly printed a pattern to be potentially endlessly continued. It is collaged of mirroring structures from historical image quotations from art, science using surrealist play as method.

The Void book as a play object/ thing is a symposium, a self-determined Ludic Society Club Evening, a mesmerising futurological congress, which allows moving an induced psycho-organic level lower with every sniffing of the book. With hybrid “Chip Art” and the cyborgian “Bio Art” affiliated with it, today we approach the Clean Room to produce and program electronic chips or implant them in living flesh. This super-white can only be pleasantly, stimulatingly dulled by dealing with the artefact, such as the playbook, for instance, that invites further smearing. The poetic ignition lights its fire on crumpled book pages of the Void book.

The world-authors, the so-called world builders of the twentieth century stood in the beginning before the sucking black of the monitor in the command line, where <<VOID>> had to be followed by entering a designation for the void. The colour of the monitor changed soon afterward, and the autonomous Operaists of screen-labour in self-exploitation experienced existential horror in front of the white Word page. This resembles that which befalls the painter in front of the white canvas.

The Void function conceptually releases the socially irrelevant focus on game rules into the most relevant rules of play like a space ship would slip into data space. Break Absinth bottles! A VOID!



Fig 1. *VOID VIENNE soirée*, 2016, Auditorium Goldscheyder, Brain, absinthe fontaine and VOID book, with permission of Ludic Society.

#kenosis  
**means to**  
 #empty  
**and point to**  
 #nothing  
**in a**

#magicsquare  
**to a void**  
#shellmagic  
**or fill up**  
#placelessspace  
**and vertigo**  
#l'appelduvide  
**in the vacuum pump**  
#absinthcontent  
**to make space for**  
#nothingness  
**as operating rule to**  
#voidofwhom  
**lost in brainwaved space of**  
#lipogrammaticdisparition  
**to open pages of a**  
#instructivelyvoidbook  
**and provoke through**  
#tabularasa  
**in endless**  
#horrorvacui

**The magic square of the console shell appeals vertigo,  
l'appel du vide in r – Read w – Write x – execute towards a  
#dev/null in a \*nix file to be enacted as a void.**

## References

1. Oulipo, Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle (1960).  
<http://oulipo.net/fr/oulipiens/o>, (accessed 09. 01. 2016): „ ... ce qu'on rature. Quelle sorte de LI ? La LIPO. PO signifie potentiel.“
2. Roger Caillois, 1958. Les jeux et les hommes, Paris.
3. Stanisław Lem, 1971. Kongres futurologiczny, In: Wydawnictwo Literackie Kraków.
4. Georges Perec, 1969. A Void, Vintage Books London (1994). A book without E, translated from the original French La Disparition (literally, „The Disappearance“), into English by Gilbert Adair, with the title A Void.