

## Real Player Manifesto

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*It's time for 1st Life. (2nd Life, Gamer after the worm crash, 2006)*

### Ludics

In the nascent discipline of Ludics, an investigator of games applies poetic practices of games and play as a method of research. Ludics constitutes a certain game system as a model for a optional poetic research discipline. This conception elucidated as a project for a subcultural play on science theories. It emancipated from this flummox and suspends now the conceptual disjunction of play and game, as introduced in game studies. As methodology in playfulness it appropriates the practices of game arts for research purposes. The term "Ludics" is derived from the Latin *ludus*=game, and the contemporary science terminology of *systemics*. Following the philosopher Heinz von Förster (1984), simply the ending "-ics" in the latter term describes the second order discipline in interdisciplinary research. This is addressed in Ludics too.

By introducing the "ludic" as a research area ranging from the narrower field of typical computer games to allegedly useless toys, the artist proposes this game system [of investigations] as a research model drawing from the fields of games research. Because artistic research on uselessness needs to apply specific methodologies, play shall also be integrated into the research principals suggested. Scientific games are not to be confused with the element of playfulness in games research. The artistic research system can be a game in itself. It is therefore reasonable not to try to extend the established fields of ludology and narratology, but to introduce a new discipline, Ludics. As a generic term it claims close circuits between game studies and art. As a self-referential game with its own set of rules for research, it is played to develop a field or discipline, in certain cases even as "lifestyle".

### Real Play

The research field of Ludics introduces the notion of "Real Players". With this bon mot a type of gamer is defined, who seek to frolic inside "Reality Engine", who considers common reality as the best game engine actually known. The ludic researcher plays as well in that game engine, as *penseuse maudite*, a wicked severe thinker, to speak with Deleuze (1965), a kind of manic thinker in the style of Nietzsche. This discourse-theoretical framework of playful formats of aphorisms and poetry, moves towards the latters vibrant dictum of a gay science. Ludic locative

plays, where only the conception method is transferred out of the sphere of computer games into real life, are distinct from Real Gaming, which normally addresses the phenomenon of incorporating computer games into real life. The Real Play highlights a certain social life and rule of play as willfully taken constraint, which deliberates from the freedom of Reality, for the sake of a poetic realisation.

## **The Ludic Society**

The ludic conception becomes more and more “en-played” towards a revolutionary theoretical assessment of a real players society. To speak with Constant Nieuwenhuis (1964), it is clear that a ludic society can only be a classless society. This society enters Real Life in Real Play. According to *Raymond Queneau in the Cahiers du Collège de 'Pataphysique (1952)* the curtain of playing rules is unveiled, it is time to life: «*Le vent se lève, il faut tenter de vivre!*» The Real Players assume in 1<sup>st</sup> life, instead of 2<sup>nd</sup> life. Because of this altered acceptance of a life in play, games are increasingly released into the “Real Engine”, often called “reality”. Both terms require a specific discipline to elaborate their relevance, which Ludics can offer.

Another aspect of a merge of game and play would be the trade of objects of massive multi-player environments on Ebay, as published and explained by the games researcher Edward Castronova (2006). With the increasing presence of computer games in everyday life, behaviour in real life changes as well. A good example of this thesis is the patterns of movement enacted by the Le Parkour scene in the suburbs of contemporary cities. One of the most promising starting points in this trajectory is provided by Barry Atkins (2004), who observes that the player is necessarily involved in a creative process by playing computer games, which simulate extreme movements, situating the computer game close to performing arts. This ambiguity of the back and forthness of computer games in life and the arts will be investigated by means of ludics.

## **Ludic Search Program**

As the title of a well known racing game, *Need for Speed 2* offers an allegory for the double twist of the ludic search program. On one hand, the release number “2” can be ludically interpreted as a metaphor for the second nature of games as life models. On the other hand, “2” stands for a reference to the epiphenomenon of (racing) games implemented after video games in real life. The interesting point is the formal backlash to the way these games are performed in the arena of computer games. The French Le Parkour jumpers move like Super Mario over walls, and change their physical abilities and experiences through these activities. Banlieues, the suburbs in France and elsewhere, are not built for living but for playing, either with cars or bikes or with your own body as a game character. The artificial freedom of interpretation allows the artist as ludic socialite to add some props (adding properties, props for short, to characters is a common practice in massively multi-player games) to the analogue video documentaries of the Parkour jumpers in banlieues. Players, for example the motorcycle speed runners, film their mad life-risking high speed race

over real highways with a camera in the first person “Real Player” perspective. It shows the street as if “I”, the viewer, were driving, showing the handlebars but never the face of the driver, reproducing exactly those images known from game consoles. So the exchange goes in both directions, into the bodily action and into its aesthetic representation.

## **Ludic Focus**

The research focii of the different Ludic Society chapters elaborate on experience-based research using a variety of experimental games, first person methodologies, and various concepts of ergodic search, consisting of *ergon* and *hodos*, work and path (Aarseth 1997), -- real epistemic plays. The goal is to show empathy with experimental anticipative research on conceptual art plays, live action role playing games, and computer games in at least a bi-directional way, both as a source and a target. Its topics are playful social practices from games in real space and extended gaming zones (Alberto Lacovoni 2004). It stresses the conceptual disjunction of game and play and its transgression into newly developed game structures for real life. Real Players incorporate a crucial role in the reconstruction of the rules of play as a vibrant element of today's ludic "Umwelt" (Uexkuell 1909).

## **Ludic Field**

Ludics is a model for imbuing the thinking machine with a sense of levity, providing the salvation that is embedded in the danger and joy of in-game technologies. Behind the books of physics and science, the methods and practices of 'pataphysics and *pata*-science fiction vanquish the physics of the rules of play.

In ludics, artists and practitioners directly participate in the development of this distinctive strain of ludic theory by presenting and theorizing digital or physical artefacts. Traces of certain social conglomerations and their practice are analyzed in ludics, but to the same extent, they are also constructed by playing game artists. By filtering “reality” through these traces, one perceives the reverberation of subversive recycling and aesthetic reconfiguration in contemporary culture. Role play, world games, and pervasive gadgets are the main elements to be analyzed in the nascent *société ludique*.

## **Ludic Toy Objects: GoApe Chindogus**

The new reality-constituting games need objects in order to facilitate an epistemic moment beyond the seduction of playing tricks and gaming. We propose the concept of toys as objects of investigation for ludic studies, of physically present *nouveaux machines célibataires*, which transgress the historical logic of art. These kinds of functional but absurd game interfaces illustrate imaginative solutions: the particular,

the extraordinary, the deviant, the contingency, the exception to the rule, and the artefact of fantasy, all of which elude any form of rationality.

### **Ludic Luddite Gamefigure**

The acoustic similarity of the term *ludic* to the historical term *Luddite*, (describing labourers opposed to technological progress, who destroyed labour-saving machinery at the start of the industrial age), conveniently coincides with the constitution of ludics. Instead of the destruction of the machine, its inversion is cultivated. Therefore a typology of game conversions is of special interest in the ludic discipline. Ludics informs game studies with the concept of Real Players and of the artist as agent of change. However, ludics stands apart from game theory, which is the abstract study of games. The main argument concerns the emergence of an experience-based, emotionally-charged reflexion that operates by playing through game systems under the auspices of aesthetics. Such plays are a sustained practice in glitching forms of *Lebenswelt* (life world).

### **Ludic Bands**

Cul-de-sac, the dead end street of games can be exited by destroying PC games, laptop music, as neo-Luddites in a lud/dic act, by literally smashing the laptop instead of the guitar as stage performance. The live demonstration of rolling the potentiometer soldered with hot air on the self-etched circuit board allegorizes a ride on monowheel. The stage tool is still a chindogu (useless object), but starts to work in a manner that is more *célibataire*, acts more self-sufficiently, rotating like a mill wheel for music and making the socialite even more attractive when playing with it. These are *objets célibataires*, sisters are doing it for themselves! Circuit boards imprinted with *expérience* as “objet de jeu, de vie et d'art”. This research practice stands for emotionally charged game (re)search, to counter-play the Christian Game Dev. Association (2005): “Playing for souls. No blood, no guts, no gore - emotionally full games.”. The parenthetically Fibonacci-spiraled layouts of most of their conducting paths become a design element in Ludics, an aesthetic merit, and cause potential glitches that are simply empowered by flexible resistors, which can be played like a guitar! The play (=on stage as a band) is a play in the living machine.

### **Ludic Method: Ouvroirs**

Peculiar game interfaces serve as broader digital archaeological evidence of a game culture. As an act of ludics their contingency is developed in an *ouvroir*, an old French word for garage, which was used by the group oulipo, *ouvroir de littérature potentielle*, a historic 'pataphysically inspired artists association for potential imaginative solutions. A research *ouvroir* opens up spaces for contingency.

In such temporary autonomous zones a potential 'pata-spiral of retortion thinking is opened up, where each step grounds the power of the next one. The rules of the pure observation of games, as is common in ludology and narratology, are broken in ludics like a stiff bike frame (Alfred Jarry's *cadre*, 1898) in a race.

## Ludic Practices

The cheat, another word for playing tricks, as a phenomenon and cultural technique is a good example of ludic practices. Playing tricks and cheating are phenomena in computer games as a medium, which have post-media real-life relevance. One such example is the trade of synthetic objects from massive multi-player on-line games (MMPOGs). Selling these objects to other players, who did not gain them by investing life time, is considered cheating. In network worlds such as Ebay, these game objects are priced and their trade generates an enormous amount of economic capital for those who have the time to play and the will to sell. Cheating is necessary to survive, both in MMPOGs, games like *GTA (GrandTheftAuto)* and in stock-markets: Still playing? It's just an illusion!

Sticking to mercurial thievishness as a massively Real Player authenticator obviously constitutes the first constraint of the level of LS Real Plays defined here. The second rule arrogates breaking the rules itself, a concept exemplified in *GTA San Andreas* as a seminal life model. To the 'patabiker in *GTA*, the monowheel appears as the most desirable vehicle to be driven. Just as in standard real life, it can be significantly more easily obtained by cheats.

## Ludic Style

*Nouveaux exercices de style*, the new lessons in freestyle gaming are provided by the play of the new series of *objets célibataires* on stage as the climax of their use. Gaming that takes place in the banlieue as a strategy to appropriate the architecture of urban life is an example of this attitude. If style is an attitude (Audrey Hepburn in *Breakfast at Tiffanys*, 1961), then the same claim can be made for the uninsured strolling workers and painters at the construction of the Brooklyn Bridge (which was once considered one of the technical wonders of the potency of engineers), who were forced by monetary and survival demands to risk their lives, but presented themselves and were perceived as proud players, real gamers with nothing to lose, who enjoy the work and their exploitation and develop a competitive sport out of it by hanging in the wires of the bridge, like skywalkers with no safety net. Following Roger Caillois' game classifications again, competition is one of the oldest and most fundamental types of play. Ilinx, physical experience leading to vertigo, is the second fundamental one, and both types can be applied to the real gamers on the Brooklyn Bridge, to the *Le Parkour* jumpers in the banlieues, to the car burners in the streets of Paris, Rotterdam, Northern Germany, and to *GTA San Andreas*.

## Ludic Joyful Jeux Stiffness

Sometimes stiffness is desired, as in certain moments in life or in the play with bachelor machines, as game studies, or in the focus of 'pataphysics on the production of texts and other objects of attention, although very playful ones, if you think of the low-tech appeal of the 'pataphon. But if the passion of Jesus is considered as an uphill bicycle race, each passion ride must be taken with a firm grip! The nouvelle 'pataphysicienne, Marguerite Charmante comme Rose Selavy takes white to play and win, finally du(cha)mpe the atomic elements of the crashed 'patabike for a self-sufficiently rotating monowheel, and then stitches glitches together on a ludic bread board.

## Ludic Mollusc

In "The Logics of the Imaginative" Roger Caillois (1973) suggests the mollusc as a soft conceptual model, which is obviously an adequate frame of experience for the proceedings of ludics (*Ludistik*) proposed here. The smooth new *objets célibataires* styled in the mollusc mood trigger electronic and 'pataphysical poetic glitches, as a follow-up to the series of *the Ludic Society* game-based search artefacts, the useless but technologically fully working game interfaces "GoApe-Chindogus". Here glitch designed means that the processing drawings for the printed circuits boards are curved, twisted, twirled, and spiraled, which is chic but abandoned in standard circuit board design, exactly because of possible electronic errors, called glitches for short. The spiral was not only the badge of Boris Vian, also on stage in *Projex Pere Ubu* concerts and at Oulipo meetings, it is also the PC layout for the relevant Ludic Society objects. The *nouvelle société ludique* is identified by the tin-plated circuit monowheel batch. If put on stage, it activates the Real Game and hands it over to each of us — the Real Players!

## Ludic Life

In their conception as live tools for performances in club contexts, the aforementioned *objets célibataires* can be compared to a playful *Lebensmaschine* = "living machine", in Christoph Schlingensiefel's sense. When he presents the re-make of the historic theater-machine animatograph, with its format he follows the work of avant-garde artists like László Moholy-Nagy, who constructed what seemed at first glance to be useless multi-layered spaces with his light-space-modulator, but which were actually stages for play in reality. From the ludics point of view, this new animatograph is intended to be a "graphical" glitch machine, which inscribes texts into the scene play and its surrounding realities. This black-boxed *deus ex machina* is an effort to liberate from the pure art forms, like the art form of the (stage-)play.

'Pataphysical circuit board designs, for example also in the form of a spiral, are worn as game-fashion gadgets by ludic socialites at club evenings, similar to the way Raymond Queneau and other members of the *Collège de 'Pataphysique* in the 1950s, or "the prisoner" in the 1960s TV series wore spiral badges. The fashionable

Ludo Club badge simultaneously functions as a circuit-board, but a useless one. Like Gilles Deleuze's retortion thinking, it expresses the rotation around ideas as method, mapping a playful game-based research artefact. Similar conceptions are developed in "gamefashion" as a genre introduced by the Ludic Society. A good example is the *Pong Dress* of 2006. The little black dress serves as an erotic real playground for the historical arcade game Pong. In the words of Ludic Socialite Jo Maier, [rgan]c, Zürich: "Apparently, Valie Export's <Tap and Touch Cinema> is sur-facing as the obvious analogue pop-art-cultural-reference to Max & Marguerite Charmante's <Ludic Pong Dress>. Whilst the games at dis\_play vary to some extent, the symbiotic dedication and obsession for the playground's finesse remain the same. Both experience-based designs build on the following contention: that a timely mediatisation of a current society's desires (transgressing sexual and ludic boundaries) builds on a convincing frontwall, will do the job of seducing the witnessing spectators. Both the privileged active players and the countless inter\_passive observers will be sucked into the game. The fundamental difference homes in entirely predictably: in its contemporary variety, the game will become a play with nothing but the products of one's associative power. While the 'touch and feel' quality of Export's predecessor has been paved away by the 'iconographic ardour', Charmante's LE.D.IS\_PLAY!"

### **Ludic topic: Ostensible Uselessness**

Uselessness was a game principal before the enlightenment period in western culture in the 18th century. Especially Goethe and Schiller attributed an educational function to any kind of play. Today many investigations undertaken in contemporary game studies apply this attribute to computer games. A counter-play is now to be made in this field with a more general application of playfulness to the basic elements of games and play, which were principally useless. The specific creative aspect attributed to uselessness will be investigated in the new ludic space. Re-introducing the emancipatory element of uselessness, which is often attributed to art (Schiller, 1791), into the field of computer games is the aim of the ludic investigation. When extending the field of inquiry into game arts, these "free" elements of uselessness are even more applicable and are absolutely fitting when it comes to the inquiry of techno-gadgets or toy objects.

Uselessness is defined in this investigation as the "ostensible uselessness" of toy objects. When talking about technological play artefacts, the term Chindogu seems to be appropriate. Kawakami (1997) refers to the real satire aspect of gadget industries when talking about Chindogus. Many game arts devices can be considered as Chindogus, and have recently been subsumed under the name "Device Art" (Device Art, exhibition, Kontejner Gallery Zagreb, 2006; Blasthouse, San Francisco, 2006; also see an essay by Machiko Kusahara, ISEA 2006 entitled "Device Art").

## Ludic Real Players

The topic of Real Players, also considered as con-dividualities, as conceptual entities for arts and other purposes, is linked to the etymological coincidence of the related terms *ludus* (=game), ludics (*Ludistik*) and luddism (*Maschinensturm*). The desperate attack of weavers against the new punch card driven weaving machines (Joseph-Marie Jacquard, 1752-1834) at the beginning of the industrial revolution in the 19th century in England, was led by an individual called General Ludd, according to the newspapers. However, "there is no basis for the story put out by The Nottingham Review on 20 December 1811, that an apprentice named Ned Ludd once smashed a master's machine near Leicester and hence gave his name to the action. It is more likely that the local Nottingham speech had an expression similar to the one in Cornwall, where sent all of a lud meant struck all of a heap, or smashed." (Revolution and the quintessential naysayers to odious and intrusive technology: <http://www.mindfully.org/Reform/Luddite-History.htm>)

General Ludd could be considered as first Real Player. In fact his identity was never clarified. His appearance as activist fictional con-dividuality could be compared to the progression of a game character, which can be used by anybody for certain purposes. A character is not necessarily defined by its faciality but by its possibilities for actions. So another face-less figure, El Sub Commandante Marcos, the masked South American Zapatist leader, who can never be killed or arrested because he wears a black racing mask (although accompanied by a revolutionary-styled uniform cap), could join this chorus line of Real Players investigated in ludics. That is why he is an activist for indigenes as well as a DJ in a Berlin club.

Whereas General Ludd (and Luddite, workers who attacked machines, the bugbear of capitalism that was based on machine industrialization in 19th century England) was still the project of a blurred play, the ludically proven real life model El Subcommandante Marcos masked his facial identity and thus became the mask of a social player that anyone could use – the cultural terrorist, DJ, and real life player. "Everyone is El Sub!"

## Ludic Principals

Basic elements of ludics:

1. Concentration on the objective itself [the computer game as art] and not on its attributed functions, such as education, training, conditioning to interfaces.
2. Playfulness as applied methodology for creating a work.
3. Setting up a game system as artwork or as investigation set-up.
4. Focus on "Real Play" understood as a game element transferred out of computer games into real life.
5. Ostensible uselessness as a principal, understood as a primary function and not as a secondary statement quality, which is attributed to art in general (according to Reck, 2002)



Ludic Credo: Read to play Ready played!

If one wanted to learn more about themselves, Game Studies would suggest hiring a therapist or counselor and rehashing the past. A Ludic approach would send someone out to travel and explore. (Norbert Herber, Fellow Researcher on Games and Culture. University of Indiana. 2006.)

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