

experimental game cultures

Ludic Method Symposium

Play Things and the Materiality of Play

Auditorium, VZA7

22.04.26 13:00 - 18:30

Time Table 22.04.2026

- 13:00 – 13:30 Opening & Introduction
Margarete Jahrmann
- 13:30 – 14:15 Artifacts as Interface: Props and
Interaction in machina eX' Drahtwolken
machina eX
- 14:15 – 15:00 Building Game Worlds as Artistic Practice
and Existential Play
Only Slime
- 15:00 – 15:30 Cofee Break
- 15:30 – 16:15 Art, fantasy, toys, junk: The meanings of
gaming miniatures
Mikko Meriläinen
- 16:15 – 17:00 How to breed and train robot dancers
in your basement?
Ugo Dehaes
- 17:00 – 17:15 Break
- 17:15 – 18:00 Nocliping through Corporate
Subconsciousness
Total Refusal
- 18:00 – 18:15 Closing Remarks

Opening & Introduction

Margarete Jahrmann

The yearly symposium brings together contributions to the Ludic Method, a principle that is elaborated in *Experimental Game Cultures*. The event features diverse speakers, who engage in ludic research practice, new insights into cooperative and viable experimental game art, future society dynamics, artistic research, science and epistemic things.

The gap between our childhood bedrooms and experimental systems in artistic research seems big at first, but underlying is a deep desire to engage with our world and our own existence. The LUDIC METHOD puts play as strategy into the center. In this symposium we bring together two topics: Drama and Playthings, which connect the processual, the dimension of agency and small agency in play, new forms of agency beyond the introduced understanding.

Ludic Method propagates a new form of agency that is dramatic – but clear, thematizes traumatic contents – but dissolves it, into new realms of a conscious reflection of both, artefacts, playthings and the everyday object of desire, technologies and nature. We discuss, describe and reflect processes and approaches of Experimental Game Arts and Cultures. We elaborate through this method critical play and an idea of DRAMA PLAY relevant for society, that enacts democracy and history, presence and nature.

Ludic insight is caused by an ongoing psychophysical play with discourse objects/artifacts. But what are these objects, and what is the significance of the diverse research questions and topics tackled in experimental art using game mechanics and cultures?

Is it that it allows oscillation between outer space and the inner world? The experience between the physical, the body and the conceptual models we build out of this in our thinking system? And/ or is it the possible shift between players, artists, those who design the rule sets and artefacts and those who enact and activate these objects?

An artistic research approach on play, understood in this way is to develop new cultural techniques in order to continuously unlearn and re-generate objects to trigger methods of art as research. Research strategies emerge from the arts, technologies, culture and cognitive techniques. Experimental systems designed as performative practice and installations are only steps that lead to the next level in ludic method research: to generate artistic artefacts as epistemic objects that enable a sustainable flow of discourse.

Artifacts as Interface: Props and Interaction in machina eX' Drahtwolken machina eX

Lena Vöcklinghaus, member of the Berlin-based collective machina eX, will talk about the use of props in the game theater productions of machina eX. Props play a special role in the artistic practice of the collective: they not only contribute to atmosphere and narrative, but also function as playing devices – objects that can be touched, moved, and interacted with, serving as a crucial interfaces between the players, the room, and the story.



Candy Weiz

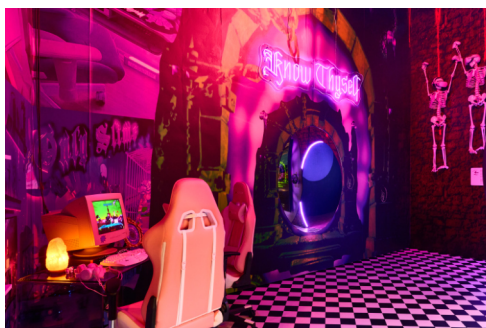
Drawing on the 2025 production Drahtwolken – a play about forced laborers in Nazi Germany, created in Weimar – Vöcklinghaus examines how machina eX deploys props across two registers: as narrative devices that carry and deepen the story, and as playing devices embedded in the game mechanics. The talk provides insight into the dramaturgical and design process of machina eX, as well as into the technologies deployed when turning objects into interactive props.

Building Game Worlds as Artistic Practice and Existential Play Only /ltime

The artist duo ONLY SLIME will share from their artistic practice, building digital and IRL game worlds in their stage pieces and installations, as backdrops and catalyzers for existential play.

Combining strategies and materials from theatre, opera, digital art, electronic music and immersive technologies, such as live motion capture and extensive use of game engines in various artistic contexts, the duo will elaborate on their philosophies of immersion and gamified worlds as contemporary, ritualistic storytelling devices.

The talk will cover various aspects of their day-to-day engagements with technology as worldbuilding- and storytelling tools, the impact of growing up in a hyperconnected age on contemporary social rituals and storytelling formats, and the implementation of compositional thinking in shaping engagement with an audience in an artistic context.



Rob Battersby

Art, fantasy, toys, junk: The meanings of gaming miniatures

Mikko Meriläinen

In a world with almost limitless digital entertainment available, what is the appeal of physical gaming miniatures - or in other words, toy soldiers? How and why do hobbyists engage with these tiny objects, and what meanings and value are assigned to them? Drawing from both his research and three decades of miniaturizing, game scholar Mikko Meriläinen discusses how miniatures are often much more than gaming pieces and considers the value of material play in our digital era.



Mikko Meriläinen

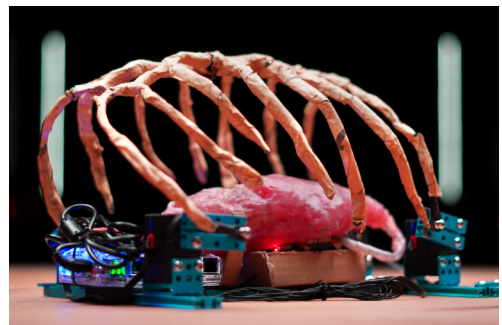
Mikko Meriläinen (PhD) is an academy research fellow at Tampere University's Game Research Lab. His research revolves around the role of games and play in everyday life, and he is currently studying the intersections of men, masculinities, and game culture to find hopeful futures for all three.

How to breed and train robot dancers in your basement?

Ugo Dehaes

Belgian choreographer Ugo Dehaes spent nearly two decades creating work for expensive, but also fragile and opinionated human dancers.

When subsidizers started demanding efficiency, cost-cutting, and optimization he did what any rational artist would do in our neoliberal society: he fired all his dancers to replace them with robots.



Ugo Dehaes

But without proper investors, Ugo had to breed his own robots in the basement. In this lecture, Ugo reveals the dirty secrets of the trade: how to hatch slimy cocoons into cute, but utterly dumb caterpillar-like creatures. You'll get practical tips on robot upbringing, movement training, and the fine art of off-loading unpaid labor onto enthusiastic audiences who think they're "participating". Tapping into the "World Wood Web" you can even give some AI to your robots.

The only catch? Once they mastered choreography themselves, even your job becomes superfluous. Efficiency, after all, must be optimized all the way to the top.

Noclipping through Corporate Subconsciousness

Total Refusal

While in most games produced in the 'West,' capitalism defines core mechanics, story, and worldbuilding. Consequently, they tend to reproduce rule-affirmative, militaristic, hyper-masculinist, authoritarian meritocracies. This is crucial to discuss, as video games are essential hegemonic machines, and democratic ideologies are rarely channeled into game design. By playing them against type and injecting left theory, Total Refusal explores methods to subvert these hegemonic machines.



Total Refusal

Total Refusal is an artists' collective which appropriates contemporary video games in order to both shed a critical light on their dominant narratives and their political significance as well as to misuse their resources to tell radical narratives that ignore the gameplay mechanics intended by the game developers.

Own Notes



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This symposium is a Ringvorlesung of Experimental Game Cultures

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