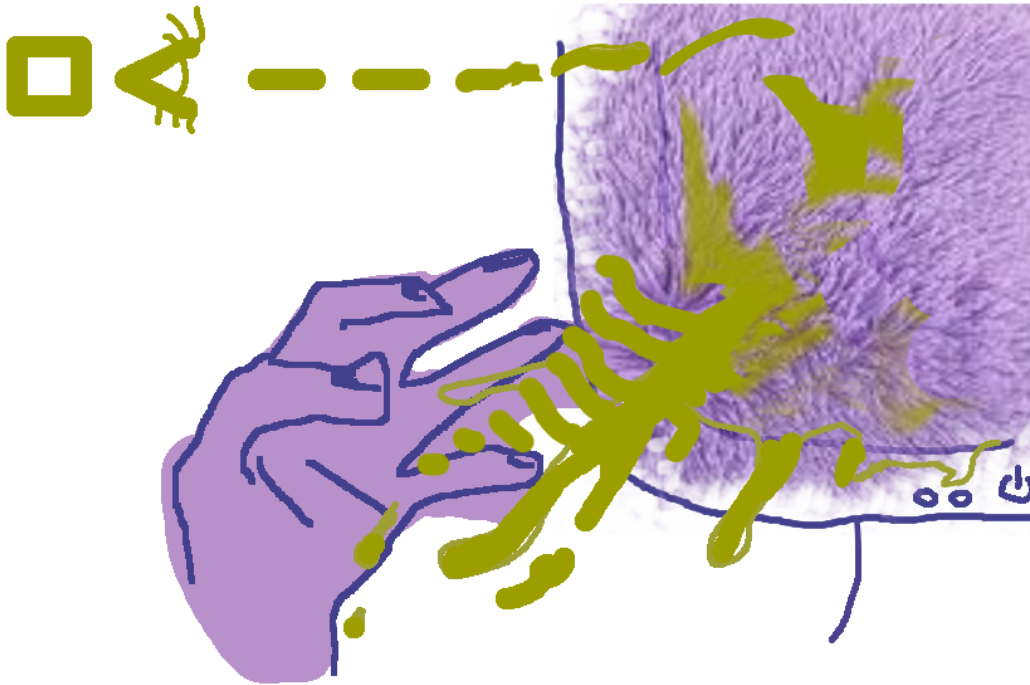


# Queer\_crip\_ing the play interface

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In the autumn of 2018 I was invited to create an artwork for a sculpture exhibition called *Eisen 2018* which took place in a redeveloped cloister building in Bredelar. I don't especially consider myself a sculptor, so the resulting work, which I named *teilchen/teile* (en: *particles/parts*), is less the result of a fine art sculpting process and more of a *hot mess* of bare wires, moisture and human\*machine entanglement. The work consist of a generative audiovisual landscape that can be played (as in *game*, but also as in *instrument*) by manipulating 32 iron strings hanging from the ceiling, embedded as they were into the brittle masonry of the cloister's exhibition space. The strings had been soldered to an Arduino-like d.i.y. microcontroller that relayed input signals to the digital scenery once players touched or otherwise connected different strings. So, a kind of embodied and embedded noise machine.

However, a small kink materialized in this system: Moisture within the ceiling plaster (which was quite moldy, on account of recent construction work at the cloister) would cause short circuits within the wire connections and generate phantom signals at the microcontroller interface. The result being, that occasionally the sculpture would start playing by and with itself. From this emerged a kind of fluid interaction space, where not only the human player and the game program were interfacing with each other, but also the material of the work and the surroundings co-acted through dust particles, moist plaster and air humidity.

This emergent "bug" nicely points towards a pivotal aesthetical/political framework contained within queer\*feminist d.i.y electronics and altgame / playful media toolsets and methods. For these contexts not

only critique, they *pervert* contemporary closed-source technology sociopolitics and the brutal aesthetics of bevel-less ("invisible") interfaces and design (also perceivable in design metaphors such as "the Cloud", "Games/Software as a service" and "Smart assistant"). They pervert technological politics, as in: Finding different modes of (co-)working that resist the crunch coding marathon (scrapware) and alienating (and often discriminatory) working conditions present within the mainstream games industry (now inevitably manifest in the push towards unionization of games artists and developers). And they pervert the brutal bevel-less-ness, as in: deconstructing, liquifying, hacking hardware and proprietary software to envision and enable different use cases and access to technology. People share pieces of code and toys that are just as broken as their creators, resisting normalization through jank-ness. And, as in the case of the sculpture exhibition, they deobfuscate the kind of kinky smuttness of the whole system, mold and metal and moist people and all.

This kind of material kink also provided a central frame for another exhibition i coorganized, which was called *Tickle my computertois*. The show was dedicated to an investigation of possibility spaces of games and interactive artworks dealing with themes of (queer) intimacy and sexuality – be these interaction spaces, visibility spaces or just plainly the physical room needed for a specific work. Especially queer/ed work often gets lost in between the "trade-fair"-esque politics and aesthetics of contemporary game exhibitions, where one screen and one space fits all... at least as long as the creator does not actively push against this by creating work that eludes any possibility of normalizing the interface space to an Xbox controller and expensive flatscreen monitor (by utilizing queer\*fem toolsets and appealing to other sensory spaces like smell, taste or different embodiment as dance, screaming, lying down, talking, melting, caressing, spitting etc.). For example, the installation work "What All the Fuzz is About?" by Pippi Rull is played by caressing its surface.

For creating these kinds of plays we had to get down and dirty, beyond the screen and keyboard and hardplastic Xbox Controller. What kind of input device should this thing have? What kind of interfacing and sensual possibilities do we enable or deny by choosing a mouse over a gunky touch screen, over a full-body motion sensor? This is not simply a question of accessibility (as this is a lie: "the device used most often will be unsterilized by everyone!") but has far reaching social consequences. What kind of plastics? Under which conditions was this controller mass-manufactured? What kind of bodies had the designer of this hardware in mind, and which bodies were left obscured as incompatible?

When curating and thereby opening up spaces for playful experiences (dealing with kink, fetish and sensuality), the production processes and aesthetic design processes are deeply intertwined and have to reflect on the material of the artwork. A queer, broken, crip, kinky kind of play cannot be enabled through the frames (bevels) of normative and normalizing tools. Tools that do not want you to toy with them and that are dehumanized by design will not enable queer\_crip\_ing play interfaces (though being dommed by your iPhone's *no-right-to-repair* policy is in itself a bdsm relationship, with sadly the crux being the questionable consensuality of those bonds).

<https://computertois.github.io/>

<https://github.com/voec/teilchen-teile>

<https://shakethatbutton.com/what-all-the-fuzz-is-about/>

<https://www.blog.radiator.debaule.us/2017/10/games-in-public-games-as-public.html>

<https://tinypalace.github.io/>

<http://tag.hexagram.ca/jekagames/cgsa-2017-queering-game-controls-slides-and-talk/>

<http://www.kunsthochschulekassel.de/studium/visuelle-kommunikation/?L=1>