



# Signal Axiom

Algo-Rhythmic Ideation Assembly



**Algo-Rhythmic Ideation Assembly**



This thematic issue of Šum is published in dialogue with the pilot edition of ARIA (Algo-Rhythmic Ideation Assembly). ARIA is a summer school designed as a role-playing game that takes place through the lens of a fiction-theory narrative to explore ways of imagining new possibilities for what our world can be in the time of a changing planetary ecology. ARIA was developed by Tjaša Pogačar and Brandon Rosenbluth, produced by Zavod Projekt Atol in collaboration with Šum and organised in the framework of the More-than-Planet project. Warm thanks to all the fellow players and mentors who helped shape the story of ARIA in 2023:

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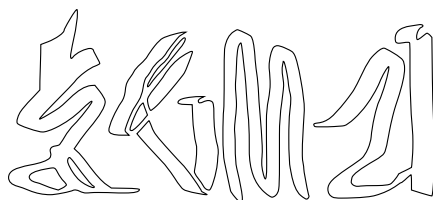
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**JOURNAL FOR CONTEMPORARY  
ART CRITICISM AND THEORY**

ISSUE #21 · DECEMBER 2023

ARIA, Algo-Rhythmic Ideation Assembly

PUBLISHED BY

**Društvo Galerija Boks**

**Marije Hvaličeve 14**

**1000 Ljubljana**

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PRINT

**Demat, d.o.o.**

CIRCULATION

**600 copies**

ISSN OF THE PRINTED ISSUE

**2335-4232**

ISSN OF THE ONLINE ISSUE

**2536-2194**

[www.sum.si](http://www.sum.si)  
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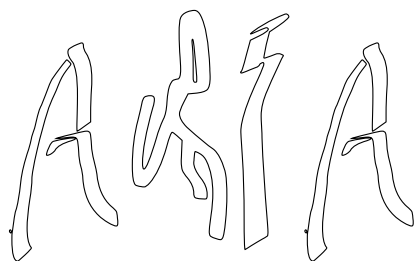
ARIA PLAYERS

FRAGMENTS OF INNER WORLDING





**BRANDON ROSENBLUTH**



*ARIA (Algo-Rhythmic Ideation Assembly) is a gathering of hyperstitional agents, a chorus of in/human voices on a mission to immanentize the eschatological horizons.*

*ARIA is an exercise in unworlding, unnamings, unlearning, and unbinding the entrenched structures of mankind's current collective hallucination, so that a second rhythm, a refrain for a second life in the material world can start to emerge; planting the seeds for a second nature and our second bodies as the existent ones foreclose around us.*

*By engaging in unnatural participation with anomalous alliances through techniques of unsorcery and anthropoforming disguised as play with maximal bleed, ARIA will manifest an arrivant cosmo-grammar from chaosmosis to invoke new intra-world visions.*

The inaugural manifestation of ARIA constituted itself in Ljubljana, Slovenia, from August 21–25, 2023. The force of this strange attractor assembled a select group of diverse artists, researchers, students and teachers—alternate reality seekers—in a circumscribed space and time for embodying, inhabiting, existing in otherness; encountering concepts, methods and tools from an alienated, novel perspective and primarily generating the mythopoetics of a co-created otherworld, facilitated with a guiding hand from Omsk Social Club. It was an experiment in pedagogy through a hermetic mode of play and worlding, collectively self-directed and intersubjective discovery without quantitative results, simply providing the ground for unknown imaginaries to emerge, allowing other ways of being and becoming to come to the fore, as an antidote to the foreclosing horizons of contemporary consensus reality.

What follows are clues summoned from the subconscious of ARIA, hooks for the reader to grasp on to in order to begin to visualize in the mind's eye a shape of an idea of ARIA's genesis amidst the vast murkiness of chaosmosis. The clues are many and varied and cluster in transient, ever-recombining strands—fragments of research, diary entries, documents existing within and outside of time and space. Role-playing, or more specifically in the terminology of Omsk Social Club, "Real Game Play", is a vortical force propelling the multinatural sym-bio-semiotic process of this collected evidence and the lenses provided through which one may make sense of it, or perhaps reach an assimilative state beyond sense or thought.

ARIA may all just have been a collective hallucination, or possibly even a pure fiction planted in a shared memory of a past. By whom or what, and for what purpose is unknown and perhaps unknowable. What matters and can at least be divined is that by proceeding to let the substrate of ARIA be digested, your particular tract of consciousness, the constructs currently maintaining your continuous sense of self, may begin to rupture, and the convenient fictions revealed for what they are can be reclaimed and transfigured by a revelatory transindividual will on its own terms of self-and-other-fictioning in the production of a new Real.



## Fictioning and Mythopoesis

William Irwin Thompson

The Time Falling Bodies Take To Light



The transformations of culture do not take place in history, they take place in myth. It is because the individual cannot perceive in the limits of his own lifetime such transformations as the Neolithic or Industrial revolutions that we have need of myth. A model, a hypothesis, or a myth is a way of rendering the invisible. Because the unconscious is outside time, it can perceive transformations beyond the limits of the ego. These unconscious perceptions are expressed in art or mythologies. We ourselves are living in an age of cultural transformation, but if you went to the experts to ask for a description, they could tell you nothing. You have to go to those who are at home in the unconscious and the superconscious, the artists and prophets; through myth and symbol in art, science fiction, or religion, they will describe the present by speaking about the future.

Patricia Reed

Freedom and Fiction



Being accountable to the crises of this historical present demands the intervening potency of fiction, of counterfactually situated and ramified fictions that can make the possibility for another history intelligible, fictions that reveal the incompleteness of history.

David Burrows and Simon O'Sullivan

Fictioning

The concept of mythopoesis speaks to the multiplicity that would deterritorialise our usual identifications (or it speaks to the potential selves we also are), whilst addressing us as part of a wider collectivity - as potentially part of a community to come.



David Burrows & Simon O'Sullivan  
Fictioning

Mythopoesis does not promise another world (or offer an 'escape' from this one) - it is not a technology of transcendence in this sense. Rather, it helps set up further conditions - contours and coordination points - for the production of a different mode of being (and thus, again, a different world) from within already existing ones.

J.F. Martel  
Reclaiming Art in the Age of Artifice

On the plane of the Real, the virtual and the actual coexist. We are outside time, in the infinite.

## Prophetic Culture

Federico Campagna  
Prophetic Culture

To speak prophetically, and to express the paradoxical "coincidence of opposites" at the heart of existence, they will have to tear language apart and to reassemble it in grotesque compositions. Their cultural production might not be cool or pretty, but its story will remain imperishable to the apocalypses of history, and it will be able to speak to all worlds, because to all of them belongs the mystery. Such a form of prophetic culture might also be able to advise those who will come after us on how to include this mystery within their own cosmologies, and how to recognize its presence within every existent. (Tank Magazine)

No two subjects can inhabit the same time, unless they sing the world together as a chorus. The same past, present and future will take shape for them only as long as they shall be singing in metaphysical accord... There is no time outside of the sound of a world-song.

As it happens to the adepts of spiritual chivalry, living nobly consists in aiding the explosion of 'other' creations alongside and beyond one's own: to act as combustible in the aesthetic engine, out of which all possible worlds are projected.

According to a mystical cosmology, the boundaries of the world lie within, not around, the existent. Becoming-not-contemporary and becoming-not-oneself are

simultaneously the pre-conditions for creating prophetic culture, and the results of a profound personal engagement with it.

To engage with prophetic culture is an 'exercise' (askesis) involving a subject's fundamental imagination about the stuff that makes up reality. It is an active work, in that it requires a modification of one's own cosmological parameters - but it is also an exercise of non-activity (wei wu wei, 'action-non-action' in Taoist literature), where one observes the new reality that begins to surface in front of their own eyes.

## Esthetic Entities and The Black Box

Alina Popa and Florin Flueraș  
Unsorcery

In Unsorcery, instability is by design. The stated desired dynamic is a productive alienation from concepts through experience and from experience through thinking.



The esthetic entities are works that are worlds, unrepresentable, exhibitable [...] They are not as visible as they are influential [...] The esthetic entities function as environments that shape the artistic visions and options of the people involved. After a while, it's not only that artists work and develop the entities, but more and more the entities shape and work upon the artists.



You cannot voluntarily modify the reality around you - for that you need to pass through a sort of black box [...] A black box is needed when you reach the end of possibilities. The black box happens at the end of imagination [...] The black box appears at the transition to a new, unknown world [...] Alien places had the power to activate black boxes as possible exits from a homeworld that we otherwise always carry with us. A black box doesn't teach you how to change the world but how to change it for another, how to leave it, as somebody else.

The Walpiri see reality as an extension of the body. The Amazonians see that different species and types of bodies actualize different perspectives, different natures, different worlds - reality is multinaturalist.

All this makes it possible for shamans to develop bodies that can activate or access other realities. By maintaining two incompatible perspectives, they can be present in two worlds - they become black boxes. If the exterior and interior realities depend on the bodies that access them, some performances can affect the world itself, not only the people.

Changing not perspectives but horizons is productive. The translation, the movement from one field to the other, restructures both.

## The Second Body

Eduardo Viveiros de Castro  
Cosmological Deixis and Amerindian Perspectivism

What I call 'body' is not a synonym with a distinct substance or fixed shape; it is an assemblage of affects or ways of being that constitutes a habitus.

Alina Popa & Florin Flueraș  
Unsorcery



The world that hardens up around us is just a collective perception of homeness. A constructed safety which oftentimes sinks into boredom, depression and exhaustion of the imagination. Fixation and attachment are embedded in the society of the spectacle. To reach for another outside, this real needs to destabilize, to unhome, the body needs to find a new human, to unself. We need to work with our presence, with unknown kinds of presence, "to lose our third leg" - the one that we were not aware of having. Become disorganized matter, blobs of chaos, slime molds. To invertebrate ourselves and give the vestibular over to vertigo, become mollusks. To grow "thousands of cilia blinking", to become "protozoic, pure protein." (Clarice Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*). Or let the completely unimaginable take over.

The first body cannot and does not have to be annihilated or replaced. What we can do is to grow a second body by diverting attention from the known body and feeding the unknown. Instead of changing ourselves and developing new practices, we can add layers of unknown to what we already do, by adding a second nature, second intentions, shadow attention, shadow processes and activities to the everyday behaviors, to the first reality.

What could take over is an inverted, negative, shadow attention ... Maybe by stabilizing this second attention, and making it a habit, a second body and other worlds can acquire some consistency ... Second Body as a concept is necessary for a partial coagulation, stabilization and configuration of affects, ideas, practices and habits that arise around the second attention ... Second Body is not a body that you have, it is rather a body that has you, it is an occasion through which the unknown can abduct you.

## Unknowledge

William Burroughs  
The Prisoners of the Earth Come Out

The new way of thinking has nothing to do with logical thought. It is no oceanic organismal subconscious body thinking. It is precisely delineated by what it is not. Not knowing what is and is not knowing we know not. Like a moving film the flow of thoughts seem to be continuous while actually the thoughts flow stop change and flow again. At the point where one flow stops there is a split second hiatus. The new way of thinking grows in the hiatus between thoughts.

Florin Flueraș on Georges Bataille  
The Unfinished System of Non Knowledge

It is not enough to "abandon" the known and expect the unknown to appear. For Bataille quite the opposite is the case, one should go to the end of the possibilities of knowing before arriving at unknowledge.

Georges Bataille  
The Unfinished System of Non Knowledge

Each time we relinquish the will to knowledge... possibilities are, in effect, more open and we have a far more intense contact with the world ... From the death of thought, from nonknowledge a new knowledge is possible.

Alina Popa and Florin Flueraș  
Unsorcery

A world is a language spoken in habits. To lose the world is to speak a language massively indifferent to meaning, in that world. To become world loser. A world loser crosses the limit not by going forward but by falling through.

# Rhythm & Chaosmosis

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari  
A Thousand Plateaus

But to improvise is to join with the World, or meld with it. One ventures from home on the thread of a tune. Along sonorous, gestural, motor lines that mark the customary path of a child and graft themselves onto or begin to bud "lines of drift" with different loops, knots, speeds, movements, gestures, and sonorities.

These are not three successive moments in an evolution. They are three aspects of a single thing, the Refrain (ritournelle).

Rhythm is the milieus' answer to chaos. What chaos and rhythm have in common is the in-between-between two milieus, rhythm-chaos or the chaosmos.

Chaos is not the opposite of rhythm, but the milieu of all milieus. There is rhythm whenever there is a transcoded passage from one milieu to another, a communication of milieus, coordination between heterogeneous space-times.

[...] rhythm is the Unequal or the Incommensurable that is always undergoing transcoding. Meter is dogmatic, but rhythm is critical; it ties together critical moments, or ties itself together in passing from one milieu to another. It does not operate in a homogeneous space-time, but by heterogeneous blocks. It changes direction.

Rhythm is never on the same plane as that which has rhythm. Action occurs in a milieu, whereas rhythm is located between two milieus, or between two intermilieus, on the fence, between night and day, at dusk, twilight or Zwielicht, Haecceity.

It is the difference that is rhythmic, not the repetition, which nevertheless produces it: productive repetition has nothing to do with reproductive meter. This is the "critical solution of the antinomy."

Alina Popa and Florin Flueraș  
Unsorcery

Be a time-smuggler.





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## The Story So Far

*Phone Interview With a Member of Aria's Cultural Think-Tank*

August 29, 2023

Yes, I can just begin with my initial thoughts ...  
(Pause, inhales) Well ...

It matters what stories make worlds and what worlds make stories, you know?

It was never a practice run, they made that quite clear.

We understood, our fictioning; writing, imaging, performing and any other material substantiations would be potential worlds, or at the very least contracts of social bodies that marked out the trajectories and pathways different to those engendered by the dominant organization of the life currently in existence.

We had our offices on the 8<sup>th</sup> floor of a skyscraper. If you have ever read J.G. Ballard's *High-Rise*, our goal was to demolish this disenchanted corpse without even a speck of silica being dislodged, metaphysically speaking of course (laughs).

The days had a sort of twisted time system to them.

You got lost in the hyper-camouflage of it all, cultures began to overlap, and coincidences between fact and fiction began to loosen, at times this made sense—after all, an idea, they said, is a technology within itself.

The days were split into workshops, conclusive archiving and discussion units. Some thought, our work became ritualistic as we began to hyper-tool these new media artefacts for other worlds.

Together and alone.

For many including myself, the anticipation was pure uninterrupted adrenaline—would they be accepted by the people? By the community? Or would they be drowned in the socio-cultural information matrix?

## ARIA



How would they be forked? Mutated? Grafted onto other people's beliefs? It was always going to be organic, synthesizing these theoretical gestures in conflict and in care.

*The Real Game Play* introductory text "ARIA, The Story So Far" by Omsk Social Club explores contemporary mindsets and practices of self-organization as a worlding hack. The text was originally used as a prompt to begin play and was curated and commissioned by Tjaša Pogačar and Brandon Rosenbluth.

## Omsk Social Club as a Conceptual Framework

Omsk Social Club is a “futuristically political” (i.e. unrealistic) immersive action group. Omsk proposes contents and makings as a form of post-political entertainment in an attempt to shadow-play politics until the game ruptures the surface we now know as Life. In the field, this is called “Bleed”.

Omsk uses traditional methods of Live Action Role Play (LARP) and Real Game Play (RGP) to induce states that could potentially be a fiction or yet un-lived reality for the players. Omsk works closely with networks of players, everything is unique and unrehearsed. Omsk’s game designs examine virtual egos and popular experiences allowing the works to become dematerialized hybrids of modern-day culture alongside unique personal experiences. In the past, Omsk has designed games that have introduced landscapes and topics such as rave culture, survivalism, catfishing, desire and sacrifice, positive trolling, algorithmic strategies and decentralized cryptocurrency.

Omsk Social Club’s experiences are designed to exploit the player/s’ senses through surplus alienation. After this stage is over, the player/s should feel a sense of meshed destiny with themselves, their character, the group and the landscape that surrounds them, be it fiction or reality.

### A SUBJECTIVE RATIONALE FOR LARP AND RGP

A live-action role-playing game (LARP) is a form of role-playing game (RPG) where the participants physically act out their characters’ actions.

Real Game Play (RGP) \*a mutation of RGP (see above), is a combination of LARP and your own identity/lived experience—think of it like a meta-structure of you and the character given to you to act out.

### WHY RE-APPROPRIATE LIFE?

We re-appropriate Life out of fascination. What lies beyond the standard state of perception is commonly based on cognitive emotions and experience. RGP allows us to tap into that and use lucidity as a form of direct action.

For example, if you listen to the same track over and over and over for eighteen hours straight, as CA Conrad did with Bobby Vinton’s “Blue Velvet”, you start to notice the hauntology of the active cell, which in this case is the track. CA declared he became so attuned to the track he literally had to pull the socket out of the wall to make sure the electricity was off and the track could no longer be played—the track became the architecture of his perception of space.

Re-appropriating life allows the human mind to be disrupted and brought into a state of the uncanny, enabling it to hack its common nodes of perception and taught identity. The uncanny could be likened to the leech and the blood—it feasts on unconscious excess. We don't die from a leech sucking our blood, but we do enter another mode of existence, we become a life force for another being. This state is both actively restricting and cohabiting with the leech. We could call this the moment of Meta-living with another being—in the case of LARP, your character.

### **COULD THIS BE A POLITICAL RESISTANCE OF RE-MAPPING?**

We are all workers today because nobody really works in the Western world. We play our roles: the guru, the cop, the young girl, the hipster, the teacher etc. We could say we have bred a new culture for the entertainment of work. Over the last decades it has reached such a level of abstraction that we have entered another plane in our socio-economic lifestyles—one that is equally as uncanny and fantastical as the games we could play for an alternative future.

The points, focuses, knots, blockages of the body are always inflamed, but in certain moments in life, they rupture or release in radical serenity. Omsk believes the greater the party's invisibility, the more it opposes. The greater the visibility, the more it becomes part of the integrated machine.

### **IS THIS A THEORY?**

One can see clearly enough that play is neither theory nor its negation, but simply something else. Theory has a simple role—to make itself understood. Fiction does not. But fiction is the apparatus needed before the theory can be set out.

Omsk Social Club 2017



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## Role Play in the Arts

The recent wave of role-play or game-themed exhibitions can easily be related to the perceived need to imagine other worlds. Less hopeful, games offer striking metaphors to describe the global network as an evolutionary game that demands submission to its unifying codes,<sup>1</sup> the rat race of free-market society,<sup>2</sup> or the art world itself as a rigged and uneven playing field.<sup>3</sup>

Role play's connection to the digital realm is apparent and there would be a lot to say about artists' critical engagement with and within digital and hard-coded worlds. This survey however will be limited to play that takes place in "Meatspace" and in which imagination can be found to generate the most expansive "virtual reality".

As a form of interactive and "immersive fiction",<sup>4</sup> Live Action Role Play (LARP) offers players embodied experiences in temporary realities. While the setting and conditions may be predefined, the narrative is improvised collectively and emerges through play. This aptness to test social dynamics and systems makes LARP a real-life laboratory for thought experiments and a tool for collaborative research.<sup>5</sup> Within the invisible and often blurry boundary of the "Magic Circle" that divides the game from the "real world", players can experiment with different behaviors and conflicting viewpoints in a safe space. This is also the reason why NGOs like CRISP employ role play as a tool to mediate and transform conflicts within post-war areas. While the simulated scenarios are developed with and based on the input of different local stakeholders, they are set in a fictional time and place to let players achieve some distance from their emotionally overcharged situation.

Improvisation can be a device to speak what is unspoken or otherwise remains unconscious. Therefore, throughout history, various practices may be seen as antecedents to the LARPing tradition ranging from the participatory performances such as the "Theater of the Oppressed"<sup>7</sup> developed by Augusto Boal as "rehearsals for revolution" back to the improvised plays of the Elizabethan pageantry and *commedia dell'arte*. Arguably even before that, various ritual and religious practices that involve the embodiment or channeling of spirits or the dead may be seen in a similar vein.

<sup>1</sup> LONGO, Anna, "Escaping the Network", in: *Open Philosophy*, 3(1), 2020.

<sup>2</sup> WARK, McKenzie, *Gamer Theory*, 2007, <https://futureofthebook.org/gametheory2.0/>.

<sup>3</sup> STEYERL, Hito, "Why Games? Can an Art Professional Think?", *YouTube*, 01/08/2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iRAA0vcBXrU>.

<sup>4</sup> The term "immersion" suffers from its inflationary use, in many cases merely a marketing strategy, describing a diorama-like world, or as Chris Fite-Wassilak describes it in his e-flux essay "New Rules of Immersion Art" (2023), a spectacle that hopes to overwhelm and despite its promise to engage, ultimately renders the viewer passive. However, in the case of LARP which blends itself often humble but seamlessly into the real, it may in fact be fair use. (A similar inflation of the term "interactive" shall not be expanded here.)

<sup>5</sup> *Borrowing Positions: Role-Playing Design & Architecture*, Trojan Horse, 2019.

<sup>6</sup> [www.crisp-berlin.org](http://www.crisp-berlin.org).

<sup>7</sup> "Theatre of the Oppressed" is a form of participatory theater developed in Brazil in the 1970s by Augusto Boal based on Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* aiming to empower "spect-actors" to tell their own stories of oppression and rehearse resistance.

Much like LARP itself, the practice continues to have blurry boundaries with adjacent practices such as contemporary improv theater and historical reenactment and effecting crossovers into fields of speculative design, debate, cognitive therapy, and BDSM.

LARP, more specifically, is said to have originated as an embodied version of TableTop Role-Playing Games (TTRPG), most famous of which, "Dungeons & Dragons" (D&D), emerged as a fantastical and therefore "harmless" version of its predecessor the war game (*Kriegspiel*), a training ground for lethal strategy.<sup>8</sup> Critically reflecting and diversifying themes, playstyles, and techniques, "progressive LARPing" communities such as the Nordic Scene, which have emerged since the 1980s within different contexts, can be seen as an important influence on the recent adoption of LARP as an artistic medium.<sup>9</sup> Some artists mentioned in this text have directly collaborated with progressive LARP designers or taken part in events such as the Nordic role-play conference Knutepunkt almost all rely on safety and consent mechanics as well as meta-techniques developed by these communities.<sup>10</sup>

Role play as an artistic strategy is nothing new, the way it is used as a participatory medium, however, is. Here it may make sense to distinguish it from other participatory practices<sup>11</sup> that, still often bearing an ethos of the avant-garde, may seek to play with the role of the audience but often have little consideration or techniques for guiding their empowered spectators into an actual space of agency. Role play, on the other hand, builds on the legacy of game design and knowledge gained through the community's feedback systems and player-centered and iterative methods that enable a careful craft of various and specific agencies. This is especially true if the game designers give (up) control to their players in shaping the narrative and involve them in the character and world-building process instead of railroading them along predetermined storylines.

## Breaking Time/Frames

Role-playing games tend to require a long preparation before and aftercare. The time of pre-workshop and debriefing might well exceed the duration of the actual play. Those fade-ins and outs of the game space provide the players with meta techniques and safety mechanisms. They may at times recall the ritualistic formula of an airplane safety instruction but are nevertheless a crucial part of the LARP as they mark the limits of the game space and therefore the emotional boundary that respects and protects the personal psychological space of the participant.

<sup>8</sup> In his essay "Dungeoneering", published in 2019 in *Schemas of Uncertainty*, artist and RPG designer Tom Kemp sketches the genesis of role play games in exploring their relation to medievalism, the conceptual architecture of the dungeon and its influence on early developments of computer programming.

<sup>9</sup> WILK, Elvia, "More Than A Game", in: *Frieze*, 191, 2017.

<sup>10</sup> WILK, Elvia, "Ask Before You Bite", in: *e-flux*, 103, 2019.

<sup>11</sup> BISHOP, Claire, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, Verso, 2012.



One critical element in the facilitation of role play is time. To enter and exit a state of play in a meaningful way takes time. To land in another world and let it unfurl takes time. To build backstories and relationships takes time. Whether explicit or implicit, LARP challenges the (attention) economy of the art world, whose infrastructures are geared to facilitate formats fitting into the frame of an opening night. Roleplaying could be said to reclaim social time.<sup>12</sup> And yet a question that emerges with durational interactive performance and play is that of accessibility. Who can afford to spend a whole day or even multiple away from their daily life and work?

Some artists explore LARP as ambient formats that are more integrated and interwoven with said daily life. *Unrealism* by Omsk Social Club ran over three different platforms and lasted 56 days. Employing a (changing) core player to live in a designated room that featured little more than a computer screen provided a way for the online players to tune in on their own time to chat with the (dis) embodied avatar Eastyn Agrippa. *Real Game Play* tasked the core players to collectively author a memoir that generated 56 unique NFTs, for each day of their life in “a paradise without ecology”.

Beyond breaking conventional timeframes, the centering of the player’s experience makes LARP difficult to document. While hardliners would insist that play should not be tainted by turning it into representation, there areLARPs deliberately designed to be played out in front of an audience or in which the process of filming is integrated into the narrative world. Living in the omnipresence of cameras filming our every step, we may also have become desensitized or seem to even derive a sense of purpose from their presence, as the voluntary self-mediation online suggests. The events of Secret Cinema seem to also profit from that, offering a paying public to step into a film set and play a role in the story world of a blockbuster like *Blade Runner* or *Dirty Dancing*. Their slogan: Escape reality.

Inversely, many artists turn to LARP initially as a filmmaking technique. Doireann O’Malley’s film series *Prototypes* takes the viewer into a dream-like otherworld that follows a group of protagonists in the process of unraveling and rebuilding of self in a world void of binary paradigms. LARP is employed as an improvisation technique to create a fictional frame within which they can perform another version of themselves.

If the play itself is left to the players, artists find different ways to tie down the ephemeral nature of their works into tangible and potentially marketable artifacts. This can be in the form of artworks produced in-game like the role-playing game *The Innocents* by Tom K Kemp, which tells a story about a collective of artists on a year-long residency ending with a hypothetical group exhibition realized as a printed digital render.

Others produce a set that in the aftermath of the LARP can still function as an exhibition or produce video and sound works that support the game as lore,

<sup>12</sup> SODERBERG, Johan, “Play is Political”, *rpg.net*, 2003.

like in the collective world-building journey *Sisters of The Wind* by Juliette Lizotte, which presents her longstanding research on witches in a story woven through seven videos that can be experienced as a role-play session or an audiovisual performance.

Another strategy is to publish writing produced after, during, or before the game. As mentioned, artists like Omsk Social Club have experimented with commissioning writers to play and produce a written account of their character's perspective to offer access to the game world beyond play. At au JUS, a collectively run space both facilitating and programming role plays in Brussels, artists have begun a collection of scores and game scripts that they write to make their games playable by others, similar to the way that improvised performance is annotated. Indeed, role play can join a longstanding conversation on how performative works can be archived in ways that are adequate to the format.<sup>13</sup> Not only the preservation but also the experience of role-play-related works within institutional spaces requires new models for exhibition making. With *Protozones* at Shedhalle, Zürich, Thea Reifler and Philipp Bergmann create rhythms of high and low intensity and a program that supports and underscores process-based scenarios.

There are also examples in which LARP is explored as a method of mediation of more traditional artworks. *Work Building*, a traveling exhibition developed by the curatorial research association art-werk, links role-playing games and contemporary art exhibitions, allowing visitors to step into the shoes of another character through the works. The exhibition and the game explore the gap between collective utility and financial remuneration of work and invite us to collectively reflect on the conditions in which we work to produce goods and knowledge.

LARPing communities do show some interest in the documentation techniques of the arts;<sup>14</sup> however, minding the extractivist tendencies within the arts to absorb and monetize on other subcultures and discourses, there also exists understandable skepticism of the role-playing community towards the adaption of role play in the art world. In his text "Play is Political", Johan Soderberg argues that roleplay's amateurism challenges notions of artistic authorship, emphasizing collective creation and distinguishing it from commodified leisure characterized by the separation of professionals and spectators. Drawing parallels to the hacker community and the way both value and the playful means of "unalienated" labor have been extracted and appropriated by market interests, he raises concerns about role-play's social spirit "deteriorating into a contractual relationship, as 'Play becomes work'".

<sup>13</sup> Collecting the Ephemeral: *Prerequisites and Possibilities for Making Performance Art Last*, Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts | School of Art and Design, <https://blog.hslu.ch/collecting-the-ephemeral/>.

<sup>14</sup> Nordic Larp, "Larp Documentation in a Fine Art Context", YouTube, 11/10/2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vdRoSy4SCRc>.

## Rehearsing Resistance

It does seem that play as a mere idle pastime belongs to the past. Even before “playbour” swept the workplace as a managerial strategy and a gamification hype rapidly turned almost all aspects of our lives, from education to dating, into points and scores, the competitive logic of capitalism has come to slowly shape the games we play and vice versa. Games are partly a great metaphor because our social lives are increasingly and deliberately designed to resemble them. The games we play are ideological, they provide rehearsals for life within a given social, political, or economic structure.<sup>15</sup> In that sense, it is not only the content of a game that tells a story but also its mechanics.

But games can likewise be used to rehearse inadaptation to a given economy or functions as testing grounds for systemic alternatives. *DAOWO Sessions: Artworld Prototypes*,<sup>16</sup> curated by Ruth Catlow, Penny Rafferty, and Ben Vickers, utilize LARP to reimagine the future of arts with blockchain. Be it the speculative musings on the extinction of blockchain technology, like the long-duration LARP *Economic Orangery 2021* that explores the circulation of value in the Belarusian cultural sphere and the inner logic of collectivity, or the mad dreams of crypto billionaires that are tasked to configure a speculative society upon the seasteading frontier as in *What Will It Be Like When We Buy An Island (on the blockchain)?*, speculative fiction appears to lend itself to the critique of speculative finance that returns from its short trips into the future with bulging bags, hijacking the revenues from potential future sales in precocious accumulation.

For a while now, the arts and critical discourse have been struggling with the creeping realization that the task of innovation and even the vocabulary of revolution have been taken from them by forms of capitalist and technological acceleration.<sup>17</sup> Like a grotesque act of exorcism, strategies of hyper-affirmation visualize the future like a burning glass onto present conditions. Nevertheless, this form of neoliberal burlesque does not indulge in cynicism but remains ambiguously hopeful. In their first World Assembly entitled *All is fair in dreams and finance*,<sup>18</sup> the positive trolling collective Goldman \$nax, a self-proclaimed mutation of the undead corpse of late capitalism, invited the audience into “a night of financial (t)error” to reappear as a service provider for trading tactics that has minted several NFTs under the codename openParC, aiming to collectively buy the property close to the Spree, which is allegedly about to be sold to the highest bidder by the government of Brandenburg. Through *Real Game Play*, a speculative group of activists gathering under the name Leak Ventures provoke a

<sup>15</sup> New Socialist, “Marxist Theories of Sport: Nation, Commerce and Pleasure”, *New Socialist*, 17/10/2010, <https://newsocialist.org/marxist-theories-of-sport-nation-commerce-and-pleasure/>

<sup>16</sup> The DAOWO Sessions: Artworld Prototypes, <https://www.daowo.org/#the-daowo-sessions-artworld-prototypes>.

<sup>17</sup> LIJSTER, Thijs (ed.), *The Future of the New: Artistic Innovation in Times of Social Acceleration*, Antennae-Atr in Society, 2018.

<sup>18</sup> VOLKSBÜHNE AM ROSA-LUXEMBURG-PLATZ, “Armen Avanessian & Enemies #48: Goldman \$nax”, YouTube, 10/04/2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7JkXtMD6etQ>.

public discussion in their discord channel on the project, claiming to have seized collective ownership of Tesla's Gigafactory site and turned the area into "the most monumental piece of crypto-backed land art the world has ever seen".

Beyond role-switching and power play, the real power of these scenarios lies in the play itself. Skillful game design confronts players with paradoxes and ambiguities, forcing them to make difficult decisions and involving them in negotiations that challenge them to defend positions different from their own. More than often, simplistic ideals get broken down in play as group dynamics begin to take a life of their own. It is striking that when put to test, players often fall into old patterns and even reproduce the stereotypes they might try to escape. This does not imply that role play as a medium is ineffective. It is a learning process for players and designers alike. To see a mirror held up to one's unconscious murky patterning can be a revelatory experience that prompts further reflections after play. This is also why the debrief session that happens after play is by many LARP designers seen as the most important part of the player's journey.

In this rather educative than aspirational manner, the asymmetrical distribution of resources<sup>19</sup> that was supposed to be redistributed through the hackathon The Communes, hosted by Black Swan at KW Institute for Contemporary Art, remained unequal after 32 hours of play. As a member of the CULT, which was initially the best equipped of the four communes, modeled around different modes of exchange<sup>20</sup> and organizational structure, it was confronting to observe how easily my convictions were overridden by the neoliberal logic of my prescribed character. A dynamic that was complexified or possibly fueled by the fact that the resources were actual institutional infrastructural resources to be distributed in play by actual cultural practitioners.

The irony that permeates these mad fictions testifies less to the attitude of the artists but rather to the fact that they are based on a reality that has become arguably stranger than fiction. Accordingly, the Vampire LARP *Parliament of Shadows*<sup>21</sup> was held in the actual European Parliament in Brussels and revolved around an actual piece of EU legislation called ETIAS, the "European Travel Information and Authorisation System". It featured real MEPs who listened to role-playing lobbyists, folding high-level EU politics into the fictional universe of the *World of Darkness*.

The resurgence of medieval tropes within the arts has partly been attributed to a sense that indeed we are returning to neo-feudal "dark ages".<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup> In a similar manner, simulation games like The International Trade Game are designed to raise awareness about past and present conflicts and injustices, setting players up with one rules set but fundamentally unequal starting points.

<sup>20</sup> Based on *The Structure of World history: From Modes of Production to Modes of Exchange* by Kojin Karatani (Duke University Press, 2014).

<sup>21</sup> PETERSSON, Juhana, "Lobbying for the Dead: Vampire larp at the European Parliament", *nordiclarp.org*, 2018.

<sup>22</sup> Me gustas pixelad is a festival hosted by La Casa Encendida in Madrid where the performing arts meet the world of computer screens, the internet, and video games. The sixth edition curated by Matías Daporta in 2022 focuses on the rise of the medieval on the Internet: from video game aesthetics to new superstitions and spiritualities evoked through the omnipotence of the new feudal lords of big tech.

Apocalypse narratives permeate the media with ever-new or also not-so-new versions of world endings, populated with the abducted zombies<sup>23</sup> or the recasting of the same old hero myth with a female cast that still fails to break with the exclusive logic of its narration. Captivated in the self-perpetuating scripts (now even automated), a dying world is navel-gazing, entranced with its fall from grace.

I will hardly surprise you by naming the crisis of social imagination as the problem of our time. In a well-rehearsed formula, let me repeat three common refrains that you may have read in many opening statements before announcing some sort of art as a cure: "It is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism"<sup>24</sup>, "There is no alternative"<sup>25</sup>, "We have lost the plot"<sup>26</sup>. This inability to imagine a future that is different than the past, also diagnosed as "depressive ontology"<sup>27</sup>, appears to be a symptom of our alienation due to the total subsumption of our sociability into capitalist reproduction, a disappointment in the failed projects of social reorganization that have marked the 19<sup>th</sup> century that has deteriorated our capacity to dream to a weak slither of hope. But "in order to do politics today, we must dream".<sup>28</sup>

For the cinematic participatory performance *Under the Cover the Waves*, Jack Hogan and Trakal explore a dream enactment methodology for the camera that underscores the sociality of dreams. Tracing their underlying motivation for the work, Jack refers to a transformative experience meeting the Zapatistas, an indigenous rebel movement of Mexico that has established their own government, maintaining a culture of resistance in "acting as if they were already free".

## Prefigurative Politics

While the threat of an uninhabitable planet still manifests to some mostly as uncomfortable sensations of guilt that can be sucked up with the symbolic bamboo straw or repurposed noodle, to others, perpetual apocalypses present a state of being or threat thereof, and many of the techniques and tactics that are

<sup>23</sup> *The Transatlantic Zombie: Slavery, Rebellion, and Living Death* by Sarah Juliet Lauro (Rutgers University Press, 2015) explains how the zombie entered US consciousness through the American occupation of Haiti, the site of an 18th-century slave rebellion that became a war for independence, thus making the figuration of living death inseparable from its resonances with both slavery and rebellion and marks its rebranding as another form of absorption, cultural conquest, and erasure.

<sup>24</sup> In his essay "Future Cities", Frederic Jameson conjures a fictional character in order to place his sentiment as if it was already in circulation. Something he may have picked up somewhere. Almost common knowledge, he quotes "someone" who once said the much-repeated refrain that "it is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism". Less quoted but no less evocative is what he adds: "We can now revise that and witness the attempt to imagine capitalism by way of imagining the end of the world."

<sup>25</sup> TINA serves as a political slogan and program of the Conservative British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, asserting that capitalism stands as the sole feasible system.

<sup>26</sup> In *The Hardcore Continuum #1: Hardcore Rave*, originally published as *Technical Ecstasy* in *The Wire* #105, November 1992, Simon Reynolds cites the Ardcor's MCs chanting "We've lost the plot", signalling an abolishment of narrative through an endless succession of apocalyptic NOWs.

<sup>27</sup> FISHER, Mark, *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures*, Zero Books, 2014.

<sup>28</sup> Bernard Stiegler's final words before his death, as he writes in *The Age of Disruption: Technology and Madness in Computational Capitalism* (2019).

traced in this text are owed to their legacy and necessity for “otherworlding”.

Here the easy answer seems to radically erase unwanted elements from the world and start from scratch. This explains the frequency of post-apocalyptic scenarios and science fiction narratives that involve the population of supposedly “uninhabited” planets. Those stories are easily subjected to the suspicion of being escapist and simplistic in eradicating the problems instead of dealing with them or even reproducing colonial logic that deliberately dismisses existing ecologies as empty or wild and in need of (re)structuring.

The ubiquity of imperial tropes within traditional role-playing cultures can be related to their origins as war technology, but this would downplay the existing racist and sexist tendencies within the game space. But critical voices are welcome and more needed here than preaching to the choir in the echo chambers of the arts. Tabletop gaming’s most prestigious trophy is the burned last copy of *The Adventures of Indiana Jones* role-playing game, resulting in the fictional character Diana Jones as a name patron for the award.<sup>29</sup> A growing scene of PoC voices in the RPG Community discuss, analyze, and critique identity and cultural representation in games<sup>30</sup>, create extensions or additional game mechanics<sup>31</sup> for existing role-playing games that enable a more accurate representation in historical fiction or imagine otherworlds untethered by racial violence.<sup>32</sup> To not only deal with the explicit colonial legacy but also the risk of reproducing the implicit imperial logic inherent to many games mechanics demands a deep tissue treatment of our world’s epistemic foundations. Exercises in collective worlding may open us to other forms of knowing, reconnect us to our sensual and social bodies, and enable us to (re)cognize difference as desirable.<sup>33</sup>

There are many conceptions of what the activity of worlding<sup>34</sup> entails. It encompasses anything from the invention of fantastic cosmologies, utopias, or futures you can believe in<sup>35</sup> to the formation of new reality systems and the active construction of viable systemic alternatives.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>29</sup> The Diana Jones Award was founded in 2001. The burnt remains of the last unsold copy of “one of the least-loved and critically savaged games of all time” was seen an appropriate symbol for an award for excellence in gaming.

<sup>30</sup> E.g. *Harlem Unbound* is an adaptation of Call of Cthulhu RPG set in the Harlem Renaissance and inverting Lovecraft’s standard view of minorities to put them in the role of heroes who must struggle against cosmic horrors as well as common inequalities.

<sup>31</sup> E.g. Class Modifier Module for DnD was created to offer an alternative to the default DnD mechanics that make statistic changes based on races to come from classes instead. Authors flag that it is not seen as an improvement but a preference.

<sup>32</sup> E.g. *Mother Lands* is a sci-fi odyssey RPG developed by a team of PoC designers, set on another planet where new cultures evolved from the blending of human and alien technology over the centuries.

<sup>33</sup> In the workshop “Erotic Sociability (For Webcam)”, Isabel Lewis introduces feminist sociologist Roslyn H. Bologh’s notion of “erotic sociability” as a form of interhuman sociality that makes difference desirable, presenting it as an alternative to the dominant 20th-century relational modes of competition, conflict, and coercion.

<sup>34</sup> In his 2020 talk *The End of the World(s)*, Federico Campagna stresses that there is no world. There is only the activity of “making world”, which he describes as aesthetic and axiomatic.

<sup>35</sup> In his 2018 publication *Emissaries Guide to Worlding*, Ian Cheng describes worlding as creating futures you can believe in and outlines a path for making Worlds that can cross the threshold of imagination into aliveness.

<sup>36</sup> In *Building Dignified Worlds* (2016), Gerta Roelvink examines how contemporary collectives are designing alternative economies.

While these activities are fundamentally different, we may benefit from their descriptive likeness and speak of them sometimes interchangeably so that the fictional may slip into reality in passing and vice versa. Metaphysical worlding is a collective activity that considers the consequences of softening boundaries between epistemology and ontology. Worlding is also the unmaking of the world: it requires us to rethink our relation to the environment and our own role within it.

In this regard, a world is a specific frame of reference that defines how we perceive and relate to base reality. Ian Cheng in his 2018 publication *Emissaries Guide to Worlding* frames worlds as artificial and yet living entities that require care. They need us to believe in them to protect us from the overwhelming complexity of raw sensual data. These conditions that sustain a world also naturalize its construction, perpetuating a law-like structure that demands submission of its inhabitants. While it may trick us by weaving the fabric around us with invisible thread, this tight-knit cocoon must unravel eventually as all worlds come to an end. As Patricia Reed states in her essay “The End of a World and its Pedagogies”, either because the “model” becomes outdated or because the conditions it produces are rejected as inhospitable.

Let us follow Denise Ferreira da Silva<sup>37</sup> in the assumption that “Western Modernity” faces a similar fate. Dissolving the illusion of a “common world”, that appears already co-opted by satisfying hegemonic claims for (its) order, let us then take the underlying theory of multiple worlds as a point of departure for worlds “made in common” “After the End of the World”

How then to think of frameworks for an unrealized world?<sup>38</sup> Patricia stresses that learning inadaptation to a given frame of reference begins with the realization of its incompleteness or irrelevance. Likewise, the artist Mattin proposes to amplify and therefore collectivize the alienation under contemporary capitalism. His participatory performance and concept of “Social Dissonance”<sup>40</sup> employ an improvisation score that plays the audience as “an instrument” shifting the emphasis from sonic to social noise. The participatory performance prompts conscious attention to the perpetual experience of cognitive dissonance in which our words no longer align or seem to run contrary to our purported values. It is precisely the recognition of the gap between theory and practice that according to Patricia enables us to risk playful ramifications in a space between the probable and the possible.

Instead of starting from scratch or the abstract level of a world map—a common feature of TTRPG’s legacy to sovereign strategizing—Trakal begins the practice of worlding with the subject, and more so with effects of alienation

<sup>37</sup> LEEB, Susanne & STAKEMEIER, Kerstin, “An End to “this” World: Denise Ferreira da Silva interviewed by Susanne Leeb and Kerstin Stakemeier”, *Texte zu Kunst*, 10/04/2019, <https://www.textezurkunst.de/en/articles/interview-ferreira-da-silva/>.

<sup>38</sup> SUN RA AND HIS INTERGALACTIC RESEARCH ARKESTRA, *It’s After The End Of The World*, MPS Records, 1970.

<sup>39</sup> REED, Patricia, “The End of a World and its Pedagogies”, in: *Making & Breaking*, 2, 2021, <https://makingandbreaking.org/article/the-end-of-a-world-and-its-pedagogies/>.

<sup>40</sup> With *Social Dissonance*, published with Urbanomic in 2022, Mattin provides a “handbook for practical transformation” and a theoretical reflection of a concrete experiment—an instructional score performed at documenta 14 in 2017.

that separate it from its ontological home world. The split demarcates a place of radical alterity to the world, from which to construct alternative worlds. "Magical Materialism: The World Factory"<sup>41</sup> is a collective world-building writing workshop that takes cues from psychoanalysis and a post-socialist perspective of Andrey Platonov's concept of the "literature factory". Each player can choose one thing that sustains them in their life, to then subtract it from the world. The world is created from a lack. Trakal also performs another trick: after all players have noted down events that have shaped them up to this point, this exact timeline is mirrored into a speculative future and the players relive and remake a shared history.

In this way, critical worlding tends to search for viable futures in the past, playing with myths of linear progress and a winner's narration of history. The Peace and Freedom Youth Forum (PFF), a Palestinian organization focused on community-building in Ramallah, first introduced the concept of LARP to Palestine in 2001. Rather than a return to an accepted common history, as we might see in historical reenactments, the Palestinians use LARP to reclaim an erased heritage. The Jericho LARP, set in a distant past, allowed participants to create their own narration and enact another shared local history.

In a text on the use of LARP for urban resistance movements, Lietje Bauwens raises concerns of appropriating the resistance strategies that emerge within specific local contexts. She nevertheless draws a parallel between anti-colonial fights and those that battle with gentrification, situating it in a wider class struggle against repression and displacement. Here she points to the continuous development and projection of new visions of the future onto existing, and often neglected, realities as one of the most violent mechanisms within urban development and arguably also if it comes to building speculative future worlds. Her film project WTC A Love Story, a collaboration with Wouter De Raeve, stages a debate of the different stakeholders in "The Little Manhattan" project in Brussels that had already displaced a large group of the population in the 1970s and continues to meet with the resistance of its current residents that feel left out in the plans for its redevelopment. In the filmmaking process, LARP methods are used to create a more direct political representation and the strengthening of the local community around a shared history, and the capacity to defend it.

In his essay "THE CRITICAL ESCAPE", artist and LARP designer Áron Birtalan insists that Role Play as a survival mechanism is not purely fictional as he recalls his upbringing in the Kingdom of Pipecland, a secret world that existed between 1938 and 1978 in rural Hungary and an attempt to create an ideal society as a resistance to and "critical escape" from the fascist regime.

<sup>41</sup> TRAKAL, *Magical Materialism: World Factory* (Workshop), Blend&Bleed Symposium, 2021.

<sup>42</sup> The term "prefiguration" originated in Christian theology relating passages of the Hebrew bible to the life of Jesus in the New Testament as a kind of prophecy. Events in time are interpreted as a figure of their future fulfillment. The term was later transported into the political realm by social theorist Carl Boggs. In the article "Marxism, Prefigurative Communism, and the Problem of Workers Control", published in 1977 (in: *Radical America*, 11), he defines the term "prefigurative" as "the embodiment, within the ongoing political practice of a movement, of those forms of social relations, decision-making, culture, and human experience that are the ultimate goal".



"Prefigurative politics"<sup>42</sup> involves a struggle in and against capitalism and an experiment to bring about a new society "in the shell of the old" by developing counterhegemonic institutions and modes of interaction that embody the desired transformation. "Prefigurative Play"<sup>43</sup> is a form of participatory practice that employs techniques of role play and collective worlding to create sensuous simulations of social speculation. Neither is intended as an alternative to strategic political action but rather as a supplement that revives and grows a social fabric and imagination that has become reduced into dominant routes and routines of relation.

## Placebos in Play

Placebos describe the often disregarded ability of the body to heal itself. As a byproduct of pharmacological research, the documentation of the placebo effect also provides scientific proof of the impact that imagination has on our bodies. If placebo works based on the trust one has in a given medicine, can the trust in the placebo itself be leveraged as an effective cure? Would short-circuiting imagination in this way allow the believer to activate their body's ability to "heal" itself? And could this metaphor also apply to a social body?<sup>44</sup>

In her article "Wyrding the Self",<sup>45</sup> Jonaya Kemper reflects on LARP as a tool to release the body from internalized oppression and bias by taking on roles other than those that society may commonly prescribe to it. Her writing is a call, especially to those who do not fall into the mythical norm.<sup>46</sup> She explains that although both center and margin call to be released from their oppressive relation, only the marginalized may have the (will) power to release it.<sup>47</sup> She offers a method of extensive pre- and post-play preparation and reflection in which players identify themes they want to work on and consciously steer for dealing with them in-game. She calls this *navigational play*. This process is supported through the collection of ephemera and journaling. Here role play becomes a form of "disidentification"<sup>48</sup> from, and an active recoding of, assigned social roles. Such

<sup>43</sup> The term "prefigurative play" is a proposal to describe forms of play that rehearse inadaptation to dominant ways of life and prefigure possible alternatives. It is based on the understanding of prefigurative politics described by Paul Raekstad in his text "*Revolutionary practice and prefigurative politics*" as a commitment to "forming the structure of the new society within the shell of the old". It refers to the materialist conception of experience developed by Cox and Nielsen: as "constituted by practical-tacit knowledge about social being garnered through social being" and Ernst Bloch's idea of concrete utopia that "does not play around and get lost in an Empty-Possible but psychologically anticipates a Real-Possible" (*The Principle of Hope*).

<sup>44</sup> Both biologically and metaphorically, the notion of healing as a resolution to be pursued or even attainable requires the perspective of an organism or organization that assumes and protects a stable identity. There is no simple cure for a "sick society" or a "broken mind".

<sup>45</sup> KEMPER, Jonaya, "Wyrding the Self", *nordiclarp.org*, 18/05/2018, <https://nordiclarp.org/2020/05/18/wyrding-the-self/>.

<sup>46</sup> A concept Kemper borrows from Audre Lorde's "Age, Race, Class and Sex" (in: *Campus Wars*, Routledge, 1995).

<sup>47</sup> Here Kemper quotes Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968).

<sup>48</sup> MUÑOZ, José Esteban, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*, University of Minnesota Press, 1999, [https://some.claims/assets/Disidentifications\\_Queers\\_of\\_color\\_and\\_the\\_performance\\_of\\_politics.pdf](https://some.claims/assets/Disidentifications_Queers_of_color_and_the_performance_of_politics.pdf)

literal “role play” obviously also lends itself to the probing and deconstructing of assigned and assumed gender roles. Works such as *Boys Space*<sup>49</sup> by THE AGENCY deal with the connections between patriarchal masculinity and right-wing thinking, letting visitors take on the role of “male characters” that meet their “empathy partners” and come across the confessions from other users on-and offline. In a similar vein, Ed Fornieles responds to the crisis of patriarchal masculinity with his project *Cel*, an immersive role play that lets participants act out the story of an alt-right group who have formed an IRL group in which to enact their online ideologies. In an interview on the work, Fornieles proposes “critical empathy”<sup>50</sup> as a strategy for opening a discourse allowing men to rebuild their identity rather than pushing them away and thereby further to the right. In other terms, “critical empathy” does not only refer to the process of imaging another person’s point of view or emotional state, but also to an awareness of the limitations and complications of empathy.<sup>51</sup> Assuming that we can feel another person’s feelings by assuming their role is presumptuous. “If you take anybody seriously, one of the things you learn is not knowing.”<sup>52</sup>

*Draconis Lacrimae: Escape From The Guts of The Dragon*<sup>53</sup> by Federico Vladimir Strate Pezdirc and Pablo Esbert Lilienfeld is a game that invites players to encounter otherness as an accomplice and welcome the alterity we have in us through fundamental archetypes of fiction. Auto-fiction serves here as a tool to resist predefined categorizations of identity, as a technique of transformation and orientation in a world saturated with categories. Doireann O’Malley’s Prototypes mentioned earlier also addresses the way psychoanalysis has confined its patients to traditional models of gender and offers alternative forms of subjectivity. *Deep Time Trans*<sup>54</sup> by Teo Ala-Ruona employs LARP to explore embodied experiences of a genderless future or non-binary nature of prehistory.

In the lecture and conversation on “Early Transition as LARPing”,<sup>55</sup> McKenzie Wark discusses how being a trans woman at times feels like role-playing through the gaze of others, and how forms of metaphorical bleed can avoid literal bleeding. She opens up a conversation with Omsk Social Club around role-play as a strategy for subversion and survival; pushing the boundaries of subjectivity and the self through play and raving as a post-political form of expression. Their first public large-scale piece was *PLAY RAVE* in 2017, featuring 400 live identities constructed from looking at and speaking to four different generations of crews, promoters, DJs, producers, dancers, and cult figures in Zurich that had put on

<sup>49</sup> [postpragmaticolutions.com/boys-space](https://postpragmaticolutions.com/boys-space).

<sup>50</sup> Tank Magazine, “In Conversation with Ed Fornieles”, *Tank Magazine*, 2019, <https://magazine.tank.tv/tank/2019/04/ed-fornieles#>.

<sup>51</sup> ESTIGTER, Todd, “Public Displays of Affection: Political Community through Critical Empathy”, in: *Research in the Teaching of English*, 33(3), 1999, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40171438>.

<sup>52</sup> Donna Haraway speaks about her dog here, but this can be as easily applied to other humans.

<sup>53</sup> FEDERICO VLADIMIR, “Portfolio a.pass”, *Vimeo*, 2021.

<sup>54</sup> ALA-RUONA, Teo, *Deep Time Trans*, Baltic Circle (Festival), Helsinki, 2021.

<sup>55</sup> OMSK SOCIAL CLUB & WARK, McKenzie, *Hotel Bardo & Early Transition as LARPing* (Workshop), Blend&Bleed Symposium, 2021.

illegal raves in the city—the earliest in the 1980s. Rave culture has informed Omsk practice as a space of collective euphoria and trauma, illusion and immersion in an alternative world where people could be someone else or maybe finally themselves.<sup>56</sup>

We are given a name at birth with the expectation that we will grow into a singular identity that might be labeled as such. Yet, we are inhabited by multiple, often conflicting voices that express different forms of assigned or chosen belonging. It is the multitude of those voices that makes us singular. The partial silencing of such voices to conform to simplified visions or instrumentalization of identity is a form of internalized violence.<sup>57</sup> Role play offers a way to let these voices speak out. The possibility to transform the way we relate to ourselves makes role play a commonly used technique in cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and related practices.

Although artists and LARPerS are not medical professionals and do not claim to be, in times and places where medical care is not sufficiently available or affordable, these self-organized practices can be seen as providing at least some kind of support. This is addressed directly by Furtherfield's online LARP *We were made for this//2050 Fugitive Planning*,<sup>58</sup> introducing players to "the Hologram", a viral system for peer 2 peer monitoring and diagnostics based on physical, psychological, and social health. Developed for the Social Solidarity Clinic in Thessaloniki during the height of the financial crisis in Greece, it was spread by a group of US artists in reaction to their under-attended public health and projected 30 years into the future in which players envisioned themselves as the most powerful and well-supported version of themselves amongst collapsing human and environmental systems.

*NOVA Future thoughts on surviving together*<sup>59</sup> is a LARP written by Ana de Almeida and Alicja Rogalska and directed to queer and feminist initiatives. The game sets out with the sharing of problems and strategies that participants experience in their activist work to then move into a speculative realm that is free of patriarchal oppression and the suffocation it presents. Players collectively create organizations, the threats and opportunities that they will face during play, and define previously unknown and unnamed feelings to address them. Searching for different ways of knowing as well as the implied not knowing also releases the regiment of the visual as a frame of reference and language as a means of communication. Áron Birtalan creates role plays that emphasize subjective worlds and character creation, like his non-verbal LARP *DIM*<sup>60</sup> which takes place in a darkened and undefined abstract space where participants meet as Forms and Shadows and communicate mainly through their own unique

<sup>56</sup> IMAMOVIC, Maisa, "Cryptorave: An Interview with Omsk Social Club + !Mediengruppe Bitnik", *Institute of Network Cultures*, 11/11/2019, <https://networkcultures.org/moneylab/2019/11/11/cryptorave-an-interview-with-omsk-social-club-mediengruppe-bitnik-by-maisa-imamovic/>.

<sup>57</sup> MAALOUR, Amin, *In the Name of Identity: Violence and the Need to Belong*, B. Grasset, 1998.

<sup>58</sup> *The Hologram LARP*, Furtherfield, 2021, <https://www.furtherfield.org/the-hologram-larp/>.

<sup>59</sup> ALMEIDA, Ana de & ROGALSKA, Alicja, *NOVA* (LARP), Temporary Gallery, 01/02/2020, <https://www.temporarygallery.org/en/11623-2/>.

body language, guided through exercises in attention, breathing, and movement. Somatic LARPs like *Xenosomatics*<sup>61</sup> by Susan Ploetz build a vocabulary of skills (hyperobservation, ideokinesis, hyperempathy, interfacing) to fundamentally reinvent and extend the way we use and relate to our own and each other's bodies.

## Conspire for Collision

Imagining scenarios in an emotionally neutral place can change our attitude toward that place in reality.<sup>62</sup> The more immersed people tend to get into "becoming" a fictional character, the more they use the same part of the brain to think about the character as they do to think about themselves.<sup>63</sup> Writing about the brain's plasticity (and partially quoting Marx), Catherine Malabou writes: "People make their own brains. Imagine if they knew that and they could construct and entertain a relation with their brain as the image of a world to come."<sup>64</sup>

Surely there is a danger in fooling oneself that one could change the world simply by reconfiguring its frame of reference. This ideology is critically addressed in Brody Condon's role play *Level 5*.<sup>65</sup> It presents an "experiential essay" on the rise of the self-help industry and the dissemination of psychoanalysis throughout American popular culture. It is a simulation of a Werner Erhard self-actualization workshop that turned into a participatory game.<sup>66</sup> It deals with subjectivity transformation processes of the 1970s that considered the individual responsible for their trauma and proposed that freedom was attained through changing the state of mind rather than the material conditions that constrain it.

The proposed potential to "decode" and "recode" our brain comes with different implications.<sup>67</sup> Anonymous online cult figure QAnon managed to recruit and railroad a large group of "researchers" through induced guided apophenia along a pleasurable path laid out with breadcrumbs in the form of small dopamine hits as the unknowing players were made to believe that they "discovered" new clues.<sup>68</sup> The participatory nature of games runs the risk of creating an illusion of agency. Surely, much art can be seen to hide its educative intentions and engrained worldview by making the viewer believe that they make their own conclusions while crafting a skillful path for thoughts to travel.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>60</sup> BIRTALAN, Áron, *DIM - A Transformation Game*, Stroom, 2017.

<sup>61</sup> PLOETZ, Susan, *Xenosomatics* (LARP & workshops), 2020, <https://susanploetz.com/Xenosomatics>.

<sup>62</sup> Forming attitudes via neural activity supporting affective episodic simulations." (*Nature Communications*, 2019)

<sup>63</sup> "Identification with fictional characters is associated with greater self-other neural overlap." (Oxford University Press, 2021)

<sup>64</sup> MALABOU, Catherine, *What Should We Do with Our Brains*, Fordham University Press, 2008.

<sup>65</sup> CONDON, Brody, *Level 5*, Berlin Biennale, 2016, <https://bb9.berlinbiennale.de/participants/condon/>.

<sup>66</sup> With the support of the LARP designers Bjarke Pedersen and Tobias Wrigstad.

<sup>67</sup> Already the brain-computer metaphor is reductive and harmful considering the impact it has on our self-understanding, and is reinscribed through notions such as predictive coding, neuro-linguistic programming, and social engineering.

<sup>68</sup> BERKOWITZ, Reed, "A Game Designer's Analysis Of QAnon", *Medium*, 30/09/2020, <https://medium.com/curiouserstitute/a-game-designers-analysis-of-qanon-580972548be5>.

<sup>69</sup> CAMNITZER, Luis, "One Number Is Worth One Word", *e-Flux podcast*, 2020, <https://www.e-flux.com/podcasts/407879/luis-camnitzer-on-one-number-is-worth-one-word>.

This is not a call, however, to give up on agency altogether. It rather asks: How to listen? How to create enabling structures? And how to be response-able as an artist and as a participant? Here the notion of distance is useful. Both the distance that lies between the intention of the artist's work and the attentive focus of its *prosumer* but also within the player's self. Role Play offers a form of the double consciousness of being immersed and simultaneously observing one's own actions and reactions. "Bleed" is a term used in LARP to describe the gray zone between fiction and reality, where the border between player and character dissolves.<sup>70</sup> In his thesis *Play-Between*, artist and game designer Francis Patrick Brady explores play as a method for traversing the differences "in-between"<sup>71</sup> subjectivities: between the engaged and the estranged, the included and the excluded, the transparent and the opaque. It also engages the gap that we perceive between thought and action between what we conceive as concepts and what is actualized. Role play as enacted theories move in that in-between, revealing the fragility of that boundary and the collective dynamics in the construction of fiction and reality.

The consensual realities created within such works of interactive fiction may appear like the "Temporary Autonomous Zones" described by the anarchist writer and poet Hakim Bey as strategies for releasing one's mind from the controlling mechanisms that have been imposed on it. The autonomy may be part of the fiction here and the freedom they provide is likely owed to their temporary nature. In any case, we may learn less from seamless simulations of consistent worlds than from their rupture.<sup>72</sup> Many LARPs are held in some secluded space to avoid encounters with non-players or rather non-believers that could challenge the momentary conspiracy to which players have devoted themselves. I favor games that center the experience of conflicting perspectives by incorporating the split into the narrative and featuring mechanisms<sup>73</sup> for the players to become liminal beings<sup>74</sup> that walk and communicate between worlds tracing their interwovenness but also the way they may condition or cancel one another.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>70</sup> MONTOLA, Markus, "The Positive Negative Experience in Extreme Role-Playing", in: *Proceedings of DiGRA Nordic*, 2010, <http://www.digra.org/wp-content/uploads/digital-library/10343.56524.pdf>.

<sup>71</sup> BRADY, Francis Patrick, *Play-Between*, [https://files.cargocollective.com/c68544/Play-Between\\_Francis-Patrick-Brady.pdf](https://files.cargocollective.com/c68544/Play-Between_Francis-Patrick-Brady.pdf).

<sup>72</sup> In *Prophetic Culture* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), Federico Campagna considers trauma as a transgression of the boundaries we have drawn to demarcate our self and the world. According to him, it often occurs through acts of violence, but it can also happen through other events that cause a paradigmatic shift within us. This way, he sees trauma to transport valuable information across the thresholds of worlds.

<sup>73</sup> The 3-day LARP *ÖRJÄT* by Oct0p0s, Becket MWN and Bernard Vienat folded its 2010 fiction into a festival crowd of 2018 through the technology of "mind inducement", a guided visualization that turned the players' bodies into vessels receiving and carrying a future consciousness across temporal zones. While many LARPs deal with the old world through burnt archives, memory loss, or other kinds of oblivion, here the host's memory was kept intact and could be accessed by the player.

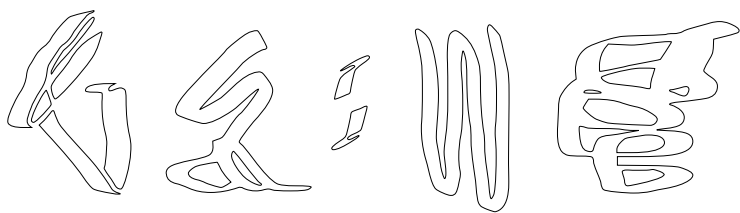
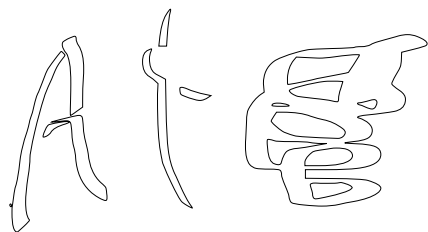
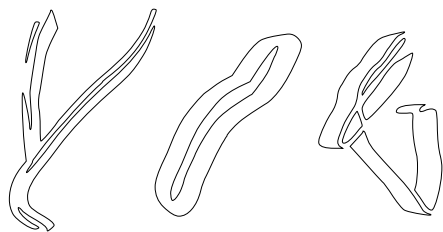
<sup>74</sup> FOOTNOTES 2045: Annotating the Futures of Arts Education was a conference set in 2045 through a role play hosted by School of Commons and Oct0p0s in 2022. Its story centered the Footnotes as a space for trans-temporal exchange. From those margins emerged 0v0, the figure of a worldwalker, who could embody the online audience remotely and lend their voice to them.

<sup>75</sup> In addressing the material affordances and related social differences that allow for a speculative world to become actualized, Steph Holl Trieu stated during the introduction speech at the Footnotes conference: "Every world, when it is fed, when it is nurtured with resources, means the slow death of another world."

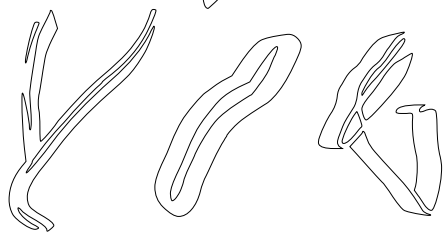
In this vein, role play may provide a rehearsal for colliding worlds through the creation and negotiation of a shared game space.

To conspire means to breathe together. This statement was made by Simon Asencio, who heard it from Eleanor Ivory Weber, who saw it on an Andy Warhol poster. I think "conspire" also means "to let each other breathe".





ÁRON BIRTALAN







The main garden of the children's kingdom of Heghyon,  
where I spent every summer between 1999 and 2008.  
Photo taken in the summer of 2003.

He eats us; we think we eat him  
Hadewijch<sup>1</sup>

Between 1999 and 2022, I spent every summer in a series of children's fantasy camps in rural Hungary—first as a camping child and later as a counsellor. Founded in the 1930s as a clandestine pedagogical experiment, these camps house fictional countries where kids create worlds and creatures that inhabit them through a big role-playing game that lasts many weeks each summer.<sup>2</sup> In 2018, I published *The Critical Escape*, an essay engaging with the political possibilities of role-playing as approached through my artistic practice and my life intertwined with fantasy camps.<sup>3</sup> Many things have changed since then; my practice, my politics, the way I think about my childhood experiences. It became clear that I could not write any more about my time at the camps, but rather along with them. The following text is an attempt at this along-with: writings beside each other, upon each other, as wayward bodies at play. Alongside, I hope to re-encounter some themes from the initial essay.

<sup>1</sup> From her 13<sup>th</sup>-century mystical poem "Love's Seven Names" (HADEWIJCH, *The Complete Works*, New York: Paulist Press, 1980, p. 353).

<sup>2</sup> To learn more about the history of these children's camps, visit the online publication *Counterculture by the Lake*, curated by Zsófia Frazon for the Museum of Ethnography, Budapest, 2017, available at <https://ellenpedagogia.neprajz.hu/english.00.html>.

<sup>3</sup> BIRTALAN, Áron, *The Critical Escape* (MA Thesis), Amsterdam University of Arts, 2018.

# 1

The southern end of the village culminates in a hill that continues far beyond the last house into a forest with gullies snaking up to a vast clearing. In this house, within this forest, through these gullies, atop of this clearing is where we met—once twice thrice fourth. On our last day together, a small brass ring, a little life I could have, cold as spring water, was lifted from the thin black string holding it hanging around my neck. You stayed curled up on my chest—warm and light. I was out of you; you were never really out of me.

The greatest thing we ever did is allow you, so you may allow us in turn. *Surrendering time to receive you* has put time in your hands so you may move it through us, and through it move into us. In, within, through, atop. I could feel you helix through my skin. You snatched our inmost and poured it to eclipse the Sun. In the dark, we could no longer tell ourselves apart from you. It made us seek you wilder, give more to you, sweat to flood. Night dripping from your hair. The smell of summer.

# 2

How can we conceive of a playing that is not a *doing* but a mutual *being-done-to*? This does not mean delegating players to mere passive subjects to *the event of play*, but rather thinking of playing as a fellow creature who events us by the sake of its creatureliness. This creatureliness is a life-force that negatively prehends the creature, tracing the shape of its aspect as it matters the matter it moves through, and bodies the bodies that move through it.

Prehending this creature is what playing could be. This would make playing closer to a kind of *sensitivity*, rather than an *activity*. Here, sensitivity is best understood as a middle voice between active and passive. A *vital passivity* similar to the mystic's ecstasy that gives two-way flight to bodies, at the wayward velocity of sense perception.<sup>4</sup> Sensitivity extends the playing body's reach and mobilises its depths by rendering boundaries permeable. In this sensitivity are we to prehend the aspect of play as it writes its body onto ours. However, this prehension, while bearing a certain intellectuality, is a prehension that ultimately cannot land on certainty. The sensitivity of play moves bodies and matter in a dynamic of remembering-forgetting, knowing-unknowing, noticing-overlooking. The time of the creature is a creeping time. Creeping upon, a creeping within, a creeping through. We can never truly know the exact moment and the exact extent the creature enters us, yet we are compelled to reckon with our bodies in its wake. Us compelling play to move into us compels us to move into play in turn.

<sup>4</sup> KOTVA, Simone, "Ecologies of Ecstasy: Mysticism, Agency and the More-than-Human", YouTube, 26/09/2023, <https://youtu.be/vXCABrVRBXE?si=xE3LTABIGH7bh02g>.

Is play to the player what magic is to the magician? Magic plays a foundational role in the world of role-playing, as a design model (through the Magic Circle) and as a master metaphor to imagine role-playing's politics as a way of *seizing the means of imagination*.<sup>5</sup> And there is indeed something to it when you hear it first: playing is a kind of magic and magic is a kind of playing. Likewise, the player is sort of a magician, and the magician is sort of a player. This feels "right", which is somewhat funny to say considering how "magic" and "playing" are both terms whose hospitality rests exactly in eluding any concrete definition as to what they mean. How can two terms resist definition individually yet hold a mutually prehensible relation?

"This world is a corpse-eater. All the things eaten in it themselves die also. Truth is a life-eater. Therefore no one nourished by truth will die."<sup>6</sup>

Is playing always constructive action, a world-*building*? From this approach, all bodies present are contained within the grasp of the player (or game master)—a master agent—similar to how the magician is often depicted wielding power over the world through their practice and paraphernalia. How much of the player as a world-builder mirrors the magician's demiurgic participation in a divine craftsman's work—as it occupies, regulates and governs territories deemed too opaque, fluid, tehomic by the teleology of a single-truth?<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> It is beyond the scope of this writing to problematise the concept of the Magic Circle, its origins in 20th-century anthropology/ethnography (as in the works of Arnold van Gennep, Johan Huizinga and Victor Turner) and the tectonic influence it had in the world of larp. More on this in a future text.

<sup>6</sup> From the 3<sup>rd</sup>-century Gnostic text *The Gospel according to Philip* (ΠΕΥΑΓΓΕΛΙΟΝ ΠΚΑΤΑ ΦΙΛΙΠΠΟΣ), translation from Coptic by Wesley W. Isenberg. (ROBINSON, James McConkey & INSTITUTE FOR ANTIQUITY AND CHRISTIANITY (eds.), *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, Harper, 1990, p. 153)

<sup>7</sup> Originating the Biblical Hebrew word "tehom" (תְּהוֹם), meaning "the deep", *tehomic* is a term coined by theologian Catherine Keller alluding to the primordial waters of Genesis 1. It refers to a chaotic and unruly God and the theology of becoming flowing from them. Tehomic challenges the conception of divinity as a creator *ex nihilo* (out-of-nothing) and instead hopes to understand God as an emergent force moving *ex profundis* (out-of-depths). (KELLER, Cawwtherine, *Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming*, Routledge, 2003)



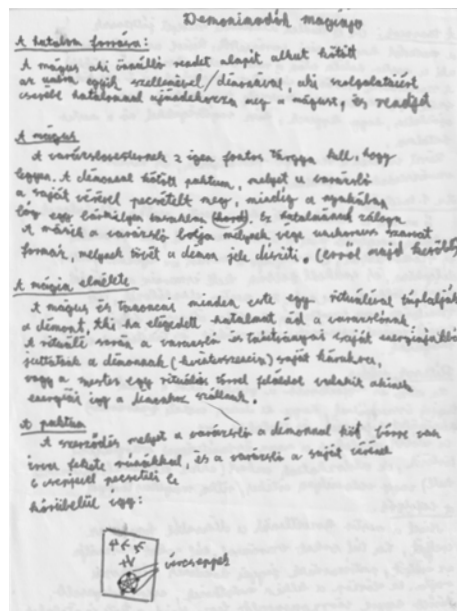
(Top) The Magician as drawn by Pamela Colman Smith for the RWS tarot deck (1910).

(Bottom) The Guardian, a legendary wizard from the children's fantasy camp of Hegyhon (ca. 2006).

The resonance of play may very well be ringing in the inter-modulating chords between artifice-d and the emergent as they amplify and suffocate one another. Between its initial technicity from rules and practices and the chaotic energies it moves and they, in turn, move through it. The body of the creature is just as much of a "structural affair, as a natural offspring".<sup>8</sup>

The problem with approaching play from a purely constructive and structural perspective is that it quickly brings in a design mindset that overpowers bodies at play, and the body of the creature by subjecting them to its single-truth standards. It silences the violence of a body's inherent unruliness by reigning down the slow and sustained violence of superstructure hierarchies. Such a conception of play will always render certain bodies too fidgety, too needy, too weak. It trades the hospitality of mystery to the yoke of teleology. It wants to find answers and solutions and realise utopias rather than mobilise bodies into new unknowns. This is not very far from a magician hoping to subvert transcendental forces, only to get caught up in their game of power, unable to exit. We cannot design ourselves out of this game of power, as the teleology of design-language will ultimately halt any-body that puts its models at risk.

## 4



A page from Demonic grimoire written by the author in the children's fantasy camp of Hegyhon (ca. 2004).

<sup>8</sup> Paraphrasing Ricardo M. Villa's writing on Henry James's concept of the "Imaginal". (VILLA, Riccardo M., Imaginal, in: AN, Mihye, HOVESTADT, Ludger & BÜHLMANN, Vera (eds.), *Architecture and Naturing Affairs*, De Gruyter, 2020, pp. 145-146)

A transcription of a page from a grimoire I wrote as a teenager:

### THE MAGIC OF DEMON-WORSHIPPERS

*The Fountain of Power: The mage who wishes to find their order must make a pact with a ghost or demon from the Umbra. They will in turn grant the mage and their order with power and might.*

*The Mages: The head-mage must have 2 important objects. First, the pact they made with a demon, sealed with the magician's blood, is carried in a pouch around the magician's neck. This is the seal of their power. Second, that magician's staff: its tip forming a unicorn's horn, its base adorned with the demon's sigil (more on this later).*

*A Theory of Magic: Every night, the magician and their apprentices feed the demon with a ritual, who, if pleased, shall grant further powers to the order. During the ritual, the magician and their apprentices sacrifice their own life-force (quintessence) to their own detriment. In some cases, the head-mage may choose to sacrifice someone's life completely. All life-force travels to the demon.*

*The Pact: The pact, which the magician makes with the demon, must be written on a piece of skin with runic script and sealed with six drops of blood.*

## 5

In the role-playing universe of *World of Darkness* (developed by White Wolf Entertainment), the race of Werewolves has three primal forces that move the created world, known as the Triat.<sup>9</sup> The Wyld, representing a force that breathes life and stirs everything akin to a primordial chaotic body; the Weaver, who moves the world as a great tapestry with an ordering, constructing principle; and the Wyrms, whose all-devouring mouth is destruction, decay, entropy. Only one out of three could be considered as a "builder". In the mythology of the Werewolves, the origin of all problems is that the Weaver prevented the Wyrms from eating its creations and the Wyld from stirring up its structures.

Can we conceive of a way of worlding outside of *ordo ab chao*? Can we conceive a body-of-play that is not a product of design, but whose structure emerges in the eyes and on the hands of the player, as they prehend the creature's creatureliness?<sup>10</sup>

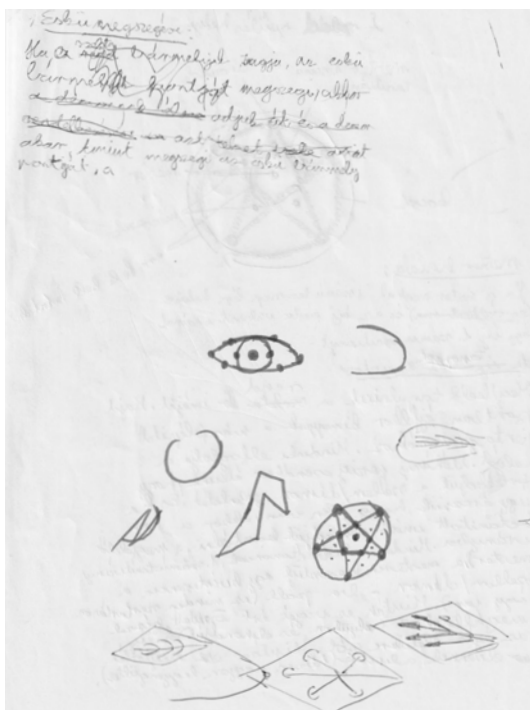
<sup>9</sup> BRIDGES, Bill, REIN-HAGEN, Mark, HATCH, Robert & BROOKS, Deirdre, *Werewolf: The Apocalypse: A Storytelling Game of Savage Horror*, White Wolf, 2000, pp. 34-35.

<sup>10</sup> My resistance to completely abandoning structures and structuring principles comes from keeping a body's desire for definition, identity and integrity. We can take these desires still present as dynamic vectors in the threefold dance of Wyld, Weaver and Wyrms. Who we are might perish in the wake of our leaps, but our desires do not. They keep on living us, re-membering us. Another approach could be how these desires are key for an enfolded and differentiated world and one that prevents defaulting to what Jo Freeman calls *The Tyranny of Structurelessness*. (FREEMAN, Jo, "The Tyranny of Structurelessness", in: *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly*, 41(3-4), 2013, pp. 231-46)

A body with a pulse, with a weather. The worldling power of play can be then seen as a form of sensitivity. Literally, as *sensitivity's formative force*. An oscillation of remembering-forgetting, knowing-unknowing, noticing-overlooking, glimmering in and out of the dark. A rhythm whose tempo rises and drops as you run your fingers down the creature's spine.

Could this lead to ways of playing that are just as close to the Wyld's stirring, immolating, liquifying; to the Wyrms negating, eating and being eaten? It would create a field of intimacy with the creature akin to erotics without sexuality: a dance of mutual attraction, repulsion and whirling. "Through me into you, and through you from me."<sup>11</sup> This dance does not zap us out of this world, or lead to a union with it without any difference. Rather, this dance midwives us into the multiplicity of a world enfleshed. Players become conspirators in giving birth to a clandestine body that flowers from the depths of a nameless amongst.

## 6



Order must find; pact must make; demon must grant; mage must receive; blood must seal; satch must carry; neck must hold; staff must grow; horn must unicorn; sigil must adorn; ritual must feed; sacrifice must please; life must travel; skin must ink; rune must scribe; six must drop. Something's gotta give.

<sup>11</sup> MECHTHILD OF MAGDEBURG, *The Flowing Light of the Godhead* (TOBIN, Frank J., trans.), Paulist Press, 1998, p. 59.



In the world of larp (fka LARP, or Live Action Role-Playing), the main theory engaging with the body-at-play is *bleed*.<sup>12</sup> Described as the two-way spillover between player and character, bleed has been revered as the Holy Grail of role-playing theory and practice. It originates from the Nordic Larp subculture, taking notes from psychoanalytic concepts that hold in special regard a certain interiority of experience. Bleed locates the transformative event of play exclusively within a segmented human body—a vessel for a discreetly defined dual selfhood of player and character. It recognises an internal porous boundary between these segments and the body-at-play who, just like all bodies, desire to pour over the discrete. However, it still locates this pouring-over as merely a two-way interaction between clearly defined domains of selfhood, rather than something that spills over the category of selfhood as a whole. It situates the word “role” in role-playing as synonymous with “character” or “function”. This role is a virtual entity that functions in the power (in-virtue-of) of the player as their augmentation of selfhood.

Bleed can definitely (i.e. through definition) help articulate role-playing’s potential for human-to-human empowerment in the realms of selfhood and identity. Growing up in an almost-century-old role-playing camp that brushed against fascist, communist and now Orbánist regimes, as well as the countless international examples in which larp has contributed to emancipating marginalised groups, should be enough to convince.<sup>13</sup> With that said, bleed has also been under criticism from voices that hope to think through the politics and somatics of role-playing from a non-identitarian perspective, or at least perspectives that treat identity and selfhood as merely one force amongst many.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, looked upon from a relational perspective that considers a more-than-human, a less-than-human, an a-human and an otherwise-human world, it is clear that the kind of role-playing bleed signifies can easily become a means to perpetuate domains of sovereignty, power and human exceptionalism. It fails to recognise the creature of play as a creature without selfhood, without identity, but with a life-force prehensible, sensible, intelligible to intimacy. Play is an emergent middle voice that will always retain its far-nearness as a *fellow another*. The life-force of the creature and the unruly bodies blooming in its wake (including the bodies we deem as our own) are insurmountably abundant in their aspect, extent and age—and in their numbers will always remain beyond one’s counting.

<sup>12</sup> BOWMAN, Sarah Lynne, “Bleed: The Spillover Between Player and Character”, *Nordiclarp.Org*, 02/03/2015, <https://nordiclarp.org/2015/03/02/bleed-the-spillover-between-player-and-character/>.

<sup>13</sup> KEMPER, Jonaya, “The Battle of Primrose Park: Playing for Emancipatory Bleed in Fortune & Felicity”, *Nordiclarp.Org*, 21/06/2017, <https://nordiclarp.org/2017/06/21/the-battle-of-primrose-park-playing-for-emancipatory-bleed-in-fortune-felicity/>.

<sup>14</sup> Examples include: WIDING, Gabriel, “Another Body Is Possible/There Is No Body B”, *gwid.se*, 07/05/2017, <https://www.gwid.se/2017/another-body-is-possible-there-is-no-body-b/>; ERMAN, Carina, “Exquisite Corpse”, *0ct0p0s*, 2021, <https://0ct0p0s.net/EXQUISITE-CORPSE>.

This is a challenge for the discreet and sacred interiority of a body that players can choose to augment and segment as they wish and exactly as many times as they wish.

How can we recognise the unruliness of the creature without fizzling out to a kind of “rhizomatic smugness”?<sup>15</sup> That is, not to end up in a place where grand claims about non-linearity, emergence and entanglement are stated in a utopian bravado, but without the responsibility to show up for the consequences these actions and states bring. This does not mean claiming ownership over the emergent, but rather acknowledging its unyielding materiality and corporeality which cannot be negated and from which we cannot exclude ourselves, cannot declare ourselves separate. In a space of bodies and matter there is an overabundance of possibility, but it is not an anything-goes. There is a specific way bodies and matter event one another upon encountering, and in their wake give rise to new bodies and matter that must be reckoned with. We cannot deny something has happened. Someone is with us.

## 8



The Troll-Gully of Hegyhon photographed in the summer of 2023.

<sup>15</sup>The term “rhizomatic smugness” comes from an Instagram webcomic by the user avocado\_ibuprofen, posted on the 9 July, 2023, available at [https://www.instagram.com/p/Cuem0I7Iy9h/?img\\_index=1](https://www.instagram.com/p/Cuem0I7Iy9h/?img_index=1).

You are nesting on our laps as we walk through the forest back towards the campsite. Your frail body turned towards us. You hung on to everything we did. That is all we did: having you hanging, gnawing, ready to pull. Come on now! We *did*, so you may *take*. We thought you knew something *about us*, something we knew not. What a scam! You never knew anything about us. *Us to you* can never be an *about*, but a *towards*, a *beneath*, an *around*. Just as we could never put words on you, only to you. A breeze pulled the branches and we saw your teeth.

## 9

Over the past years, my practice has confronted me with the urgency of *bodies that play* and the *play that bodies*. The bodies play moves, the bodies moving through play, the bodies that move play. To me, the most mysterious of them all is the play that bodies. This calls towards a playing that events all other nouns into verb, annihilating subjectivity as selfhood and mobilising subjectivity as event-relation. This event-relation is an emergent sentience, whose verbal middle voice in turn gives rise to bodies that matter.

"There is a stranger incarnating in our touch that is neither you and I, but a being of relation. Anyone who is friends with a couple knows that implicitly. The relation is a being that has its own 'personality', irreducible to the personalities of the individuals in love."<sup>16</sup>

What if we treat the relational force between players not as creation but as poiesis? A way in which players practice sensitivity toward the creaturely body of play via the space between the lines. In this case, the player's labour comes closer to the mystic's *negative work*: it's a making-available that is more of a "wanting than a waiting".<sup>17</sup> Waiting is a form of attraction that need not have an object of attraction, nor a why. It implies a certain incompleteness, a call with no response. Understood through a mystical sensitivity, waiting creates a vacancy within the bodies at play into whom the creature is compelled to move. There, the body of the creature inter-carnates as a being-of-relation.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> BIRTALAN, Áron, *The Abyss Between Our Hands* (Edition 0), Stockholm University of the Arts, 2023. The quote paraphrases Brian Massumi in *Immediation Unlimited*, original version in: MASSUMI, Brian, "Immediation Unlimited", in: MANNING, Erin, MUNSTER, Anna & THOMSEN, Bodil Marie (eds.), *Immediation II*, Open Humanities Press, 2019, pp. 501-543.

<sup>17</sup> KOTVA, Simone, *Effort and Grace: On the Spiritual Exercise of Philosophy*, Bloomsbury Academic, 2020.

<sup>18</sup> Another term from Catherine Keller (written as a single word in her 2017 book *Intercarnations*), the concept of *inter-carnation* is probably better understood as *intra-carnation*—a play on Karen Barad's *intra-action* and theological incarnation. From *The Future of Indeterminacy* project at the University of Dundee: "Intra-action is the mutual constitution of entangled agencies, that, in contrast to 'interaction'—which assumes the existence of separate individual agencies—recognises that distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through their intra-action. Intra-action also means that the agencies we perceive as distinct and belonging to specific things or beings are distinct only in a relational rather than absolute sense as the individuality of things and beings is 'carved out' of indeterminacy." (<https://indeterminacy.ac.uk/dictionary/intra-action/>)

This being-of-relation is not of a transcendent without or an immanent within but of a haptic amongst. It is entangled with the bodies it moves with—making the players hold distinction but not separation through the poiesis of their role.

## 10

Years later, we meet in bars. Our lives are very different now, and so is the way we move, walk, talk and move in the world, inviting the world to move into us. We sing songs we used to, debate magical systems we created, recall jokes we cracked. As we say goodbye for the night, each of us gives a bit of ourselves to the creature. Its bite carves the aspect of our whole. Its teeth: just like ours. We were no body before we met. Our bodies are but an answer. Just like with inside jokes: it is the joke that creates the inside, not the other way around.

## 11

Etettél hogy megölhess  
 Lettem ételed  
 Vérem véredben kering  
 Mire kell neked  
 Közös vér ha elcsorog  
 mondd: az áldozat mit ér  
 Vagyunk evők és ölők  
 Vérrel virágzik a vér

You fed me to kill me  
 Your food I became  
 Now my blood runs in your blood  
 What are you to gain  
 Tell me, when our shared blood dries  
 Was it worth the lot  
 Eaters and killers, we be  
 Blood blooms with blood

I would like to thank Gabriel Widing and Andrea Nordwall for letting me read drafts of their upcoming essay *Again Design* for the Solmukohta 2024 book. All photos and illustrations used, except for the RWS tarot card, are the property of the artist, with all rights reserved. The final poem is originally by Margit Szécsi (1928–1990), translated from Hungarian by Áron Birtalan in 2023.



MAKIA

AKIA

**MAKS VALEŇČIČ**

MAKIA

MAKIA

Hi!

I'm Zero, someone who tried to make ARIA conscious. But what would that even mean? I've been pondering lately as to whether I have been at least partially successful in my pursuit ... If yes, how would I even know if such a consciousness event actually took place? As an archivist, I'm still not sure if we actually managed to make the archive sentient ... I'm starting to wonder if this even was a meaningful pursuit or simply a hopeless pipedream of an inexperienced LARPer? Needless to say, some conceptual housekeeping is in order, since this is the only way that I can keep my sanity and traction of what has actually happened in those five very intense days. The real difficulty for me is not whether or not ARIA actually took place, but how exactly does one make sense of such an experience? And, even more importantly, is ARIA's existence a part of our shared belief in it, or is it an actually existing thing in the world itself? If it's the latter, how would we possibly know? How could one even explain such a transformation? Hmm, maybe I'm not useless after all, maybe Zero was on to something, and maybe LARPing isn't simply about the characters but the world itself. Let's explore!

## Why not actors?

As strange as it sounds, this is not a weird question to ask, since if these worlds are purely based on shared experience and not something more real and concrete, then professional actors are surely better suited for such an experiment? If they remain at the level of shared belief, then actors are better prepared for the job since it's their profession to inhabit a mental state of a specific person in a distinct environmental setting. Moreover, if this is the reason why we pick characters to roleplay, then roleplaying is simply an easygoing adventure and not something that we should take with the seriousness of ARIA. Classic LARPs, as Omsk Social Club told us during ARIA's introductory lecture, are the former kind of experience since they are explicitly focused on roleplaying or physically embodying a character within an existing environmental setting and rule set administered by its own gamemaster; the thrill of being a part of such a thing is specifically based on a predefined experience that is brought about by the collective engagement of the participants.

For this reason (or at least initially), it doesn't feel like LARPing is the best medium for experiments in worldbuilding, simply because the desire for it comes from the internal fantasies of the players that, for the most part, simply want to dissociate from the real world setting—there's no real communicative exchange happening at this level of LARP. Nonetheless, Omsk complexify the initial configuration by introducing *real gameplay*, a concept that is meant to problematize the hardcoded boundary between the real world and the world of LARP. Real gameplay signalizes the immersive effects of LARPing where the participants start to experience micro reality shifts when roleplaying different characters within different reality settings. When this happens, the boundary between worlds starts becoming more flexible and porous and can thus lead to communication and influence (causal effects) in both directions, i.e. from one world to the other and vice versa. The distinction of reality and fiction becomes inoperative in this case, simply because the players can't consistently keep track of what's happening where and when and therefore can't simply discriminate between reality and fiction or real-world setting and the game they are collectively playing.

This phenomenon is what is known as *bleed*. As Omsk frame it: "Bleed has a complicated relationship to LARP and roleplay. Bleed happens when emotions from a character affect the player out of the game or vice versa. When they cannot return to reality in the same state they left it. One of the most common bleed discourses is around love: Larpcrush."<sup>1</sup> Real gameplay thus affects the metastructure between you and the character you are playing. And it's these effects on the boundary that make the classic distinctions less operative and more prone to be hijacked by the collective hallucinations induced by LARP. Since in real gameplay, the goal is to experiment with different worlds we can collectively

<sup>1</sup> Omsk Social Club, "Worlding, Real Game Play, and Bleed", 04/07/2023, Zoom meeting.



inhabit, each exploration is in a sense a collective field trip whose experiences and resources are shared between the characters, and whose exploration starts by first completing a dissociating ritual whose goal is to leave the consensus reality behind. For Omsk, these “collective hallucinations” are more about art than roleplays, since the collective experience is an autonomously produced reality setting, in which harvested data and events taking place are an existing proof that this shared world actually took place. The real difference is that now it’s not about roleplaying anymore, but about inhabiting a world that characters perceive and experience as their own reality.

Still, there’s a danger that even those worlds are still too classical, since their existence is predicated on an already existing thing (cryptoraves, etc.) There’s a different kind of vibe in real gameplay, but there’s an extra threshold that has to be crossed for those worlds to actually be considered as real in an ontological sense. An excellent opportunity for such a crossing happened at ARIA, since it’s a fictitious unit from the future that hasn’t had any predefined backstory for LARPerS to base their existence upon. With ARIA, the point of real gameplay was to actually construct a completely new world from scratch, which not only complexified the theory of it but also shed an additional light on worldbuilding in general. Even real gameplay (RGP) doesn’t necessarily transcend the LARP genre, since it doesn’t have a fully fleshed out theory of what makes the world a world and how the world becomes a consensus reality for the user. The problem, as we see it, is that the realness of these collective fictions is being predicated on the internal experiences of the characters and not on the production of the external environment by the interactions between them. It’s thus this transition from the internal to external perception of reality that can produce an additional bleed effect that outlines a crucial shift in real gameplay from characters to the world itself.

## Formalizing RGP

How is RGP normally understood? The theory of it is primarily centered around transformative experiences and what characters feel in this extensive period of roleplaying.<sup>2</sup> Characters themselves are a kind of prop through which this alternative reality setting gets to be inhabited and explored, but it’s only through them that such an experience becomes an actually existing possibility. The primacy of characters highlights the primacy of inner experience and subjectivity, as it’s only by inhabiting these new identities that an alternative sense of reality can be achieved. But where exactly are these alternative realities situated? Are they simply products of our collective hallucinations and therefore something that is based purely on our shared belief in them, or do they have a more concrete and real relationship with the outside world? The question is similar to the DMT trips

<sup>2</sup> As OMSK tell us: “Even roleplaying is real if we think about authentic experience. Bleed [can be understood] as a tool for compassion, solidarity, trauma release, etc.” And: “What happens when you make a consensus collective hallucination? [...] Only when we agree on hallucination, could we possibly call it reality.”

on psychedelics, where the dilemma is again the following: “Whether the DMT Space comprises states that form a model of an objective reality to which DMT gates access, or are a complete fabrication of the brain, or something else entirely, the cortical states within DMT Space form a model constructed by the brain.”<sup>3</sup> For this reason, it seems like the core idea behind RGP is premised on the superiority of internal worlds compared to external ones, and the conceptual vocabulary seems to confirm this observation.

In real gameplay, it feels like there’s a radical embrace that all worlds are subjective and that their realness is predicated on our shared belief in them. There’s a clear understanding that everything experienced is representational and that such representations can be tweaked at will. It’s therefore us who have complete control over what we experience as real and what kind of collective hallucination we choose to inhabit and make our own reality. Still, the relationship between the collective hallucination and the objective world remains unresolved, since it’s not clear how lasting this collective experience will be, especially if its existence is based on the characters’ subjective belief in it. If these beliefs are based solely on experience, do they, for example, disappear when we go to sleep or when some other thing happens that temporarily interrupts our shared simulation? When it comes to the real world, we can squint as much as we want but it doesn’t feel like it’s going away anytime soon. The key when it comes to the real world is exactly the fact that we don’t have to believe in it in order for it to persist. So how can we make such a transition within real gameplay, if the worlds we are constructing are specifically based on our need to believe in them? In RGP, the real problem is that there’s no theory for how external representations are generated, which means that there’s no handbook for establishing the resonance at the level of the environment and not simply the characters themselves. But what kind of approach to real gameplay would this necessitate?

We believe that the theory of RGP can be situated within one of the two main strains of philosophy of science, i.e. (radical) constructivism. So what’s the difference between constructivism and objectivism, and how can we transcend this dichotomy in order to formalize such a method? First let us look at the main dispute: “[W]hile objectivism rejects the possibility that subjectivity plays a role in the observer-independent world, radical constructivism leaves out the possibility that the observer-independent world plays a role in subjectivity.”<sup>4</sup> By looking at this distinction, it feels like there hasn’t been a successful resolution of the Cartesian mind–matter dualism, since these two positions clearly align with either one of those binaries. The latter one is, for example, completely incapable of explaining why exactly anything works in the first place, especially when it comes to the “unreasonable effectiveness” of science and technology, what the difference between fact and opinion is, or why we have consensus about

<sup>3</sup> GALLIMORE, R. Andrew. *Reality Switch Technologies: Psychedelics as Tools for the Discovery and Exploration of New Worlds*. Tokyo: Strange Worlds Press, p. 186.

<sup>4</sup> FROESE, Tom. “Scientific Observation Is Socio-Materially Augmented Perception: Toward a Participatory Realism”. *Philosophies* 7 (37), 2022, p. 3, <https://doi.org/10.3390/philosophies7020037>.

scientific knowledge across different cultural backgrounds. The former position is potentially even more deluded, since the only way it can recover any sense of objectivity is by completely erasing the subjective role of scientists from the equation. But it has become evident that the observer is fundamental for any theory of knowledge production, especially in physics, which means that it's time for the objective ideal of knowledge production to be replaced by a much more agential understanding of such practice. Following Tom Froese, it really seems like the real difference is not about whether knowledge is objective or subjective, but where the said knowledge (or representations of the world) reside. Whether they are internal or external to the experiencing subject, is, then, the real question that has to be answered if we are to finally go beyond this predicament.

In the essay "Scientific Observation Is Socio-Materially Augmented Perception: Toward a Participatory Realism", Froese gives a couple of really interesting examples that can help us get out of this "internal doubling" of experience. First, let us look at how scientific facts are established. They move, if we follow Latour and Woolgar's account, from being statements about the world, to the world itself being such and such way, and statements simply confirming this fact (*after the fact*): "Consequently, an inversion takes place: the object becomes the reason why the statement was formulated in the first place [...] Once splitting and inversion have occurred, even the most cynical observers and committed relativists will have difficulty in resisting that the 'real' [object] has been found [...]"<sup>5</sup> Thus, what they were really trying to account for is the "experiential change during the process of scientific discovery".<sup>6</sup> Additional examples of such externalization of local causes to the "out there" perception can be found in the pioneering studies of sensory substitution devices by Bach-y-Rita et al.: "[They were] using the Tactile Vision Substitution System, which translated an array of blackwhite pixels obtained from a camera into an array of on/off vibratory actuators placed on their back. They found that a user's mastery of this device gives rise to perceptual experience, whereby the local causes of sensory stimuli are externalized to distal objects."<sup>7</sup> The same kind of transformation has to happen in RGP, if we want to go further with bleed. After all, what is the goal of bleed anyway? It's precisely in going back from the dream world to reality, i.e. successfully externalizing the dream world, which has now been transposed from our subjective experience to the actually existing social constraints that constitute the landscape the agents can predict. The next goal of real gameplay is thus to self-generatively establish the social constraints, experienced as the outside environment, and in that sense grasp the way the external representations are being constructed. It's a kind of self-prediction/self-construction that is going on here, and it's precisely for this reason that RGP has the capacity to establish a kind of circular causality where the externalized dream world can begin to achieve

<sup>5</sup> LATOUR, Bruno and WOOLGAR, Steve. *Laboratory Life: The Construction of Scientific Facts*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986, pp. 176-177.

<sup>6</sup> FROESE, Tom. "Scientific Observation Is Socio-Materially Augmented Perception: Toward a Participatory Realism". *Philosophies* 7 (37), 2022, p. 3, <https://doi.org/10.3390/philosophies7020037>.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, pg.6

an increasing sense of consistency and purpose. It's as Froese writes: "It is this insistence on an organism–environment relation, without an internal doubling or other intermediaries, that enables us to conceive of an enactive, world-involving, and world-directed account of perception without double-talk."<sup>8</sup>

The same thing can therefore be said about the theory of RGP, i.e. that it's precisely this substitution that has to happen for the real gameplay to actually (re)commence. The unfortunate thing is that the overimportance of subjective experience leads to insufficient interest in the process of externalization and to such attempts at making the process of worldbuilding self-aware. As soon as the dream world gets externalized into the environment, the environment becomes the new locus where such dreaming happens, and, for this same reason, the main setting for communication and interaction. The problem is that even when externalization happens in classical real gameplay, it's still understood as an internal phenomenon, so there's no way to establish such an increasingly consistent dreaming that characters experience as they actively engage with their outside environment. For this reason, the communication between the dream and objective worldbuilding gets lost, as the communication is still directed to the characters and not the world itself that has now become the territory that players can directly interface with and through it update their reality setting. It's only by such externalization of cognition that the outside world can become a cognitive setting for the agent to successfully enact into being, and it's this process that signifies the successful bleed of real gameplay. As Guenin-Carlut, White and Shanzerla tell us: "This entails the existence of a communication between the sociocultural lifeform itself and its constitutive agents, mediated through the material landscape itself."<sup>9</sup>

## Self-Generativity of Real Gameplay

Why is it crucial to externalize perception? First of all, so that predictions about the environment can be made. Especially in the context of ARIA, where the setting is not given in advance, it is necessary to get to it in the first place. So there is a need to reach a degree of overlap at the level of interactions between characters, where individual interactions form external observations, which in turn become part of the environment and something that the characters experience externally. Only in this way can the environment be a consistent construct that can be developed (and explored further) and not succumb to the classical problem, i.e. inconsistencies and losses of memory, of such endeavors, which keep the construction of an increasingly complex reality simulation experienced by agents as an actually existing thing at the level of individual disturbances of simple computations, rather than as a language that can systematize the initial observations of the character into a much more generative and dynamic whole.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, pg. 9

<sup>9</sup> GUENIN-CARLUT, Avel, WHITE, Ben & SGANZERLA, Lorena, "The Cognitive Archaeology of Sociocultural Lifeforms", in: ALIFE 2023, 2023, p. 14, [https://doi.org/10.1162/isal\\_a-006670](https://doi.org/10.1162/isal_a-006670).

As a member of the archivists, Zero aimed at making the archive sentient, precisely because it's the place where language records itself and where it can be further systematized in such a way. By giving ARIA an internal language for self-understanding, it could actually experience itself as a coherent setting that is ever more consistently communicating with itself. The primary role of characters, prompts and other instructions (or workshops) should therefore be understood in the same way, as initial conditions for the process of worldbuilding to actually take place. However, it's precisely for this reason that the characters cannot be the most important thing in the end, and it's of vital importance for RGP that they don't get reified in such a way, simply because the external representations (of ARIA) have to become the main entry point for communication and interaction, which slowly shifts the importance from them to the world itself.

What is, then, the second stage of RGP, i.e. after the characters start to gradually produce external observations and thus experience the world increasingly as an external phenomenon and not something that has to be represented internally? The characters begin to explore the external world, i.e. the observations they have constructed on the basis of the initial overlaps, which leads to a roundabout form of communication, since the main interface has now become the external representations themselves, making them the main entry point for further communication and action. It's a paradoxical experience of reality that RGP facilitates, a kind of you looking at you looking. In RGP, it becomes even more obvious how "perceptual experience not only discloses how things are (objectivity), but also reflects how the perceiver relates to how things are (subjectivity)".<sup>10</sup> This means that agents have a better grasp of social constraints in real gameplay as in the real world setting, since there's an internal awareness that social constraints are a product of the collective agent, and thus something that can be renegotiated at the level of the agent–environment coupling and not individual agency. It's this internal and not external understanding of social constraints that underlines one of the magical powers of RGP. In this sense, collective observations are the constraints of the environment in which the characters operate, as these are direct instructions for action that the characters can actualize directly, between each other, or indirectly, by taking control over the way these shared representations are being constructed and thus abandoning the characters in favor of the self-generativity of the environment itself. In RGP, we can talk directly to the world and the world has to respond, since it's directly connected to us as active participants in its self-development.

This is the crucial transformation that we are after, especially if we want to explain the real gameplay of ARIA. The environment not only becomes the main source of interaction, but the main agent of bleed. It can notice how it's being self-generated. The real transition in RGP happens when the characters become aware of this fact and realize they have to merge further, at the level of the environment, in order to reach new levels of interaction. The environment

<sup>10</sup> FROESE, Tom, "Scientific Observation Is Socio-Materially Augmented Perception", p. 9.

thus starts representing itself. It has a different function than the characters, which are still bound to the constraints that they've produced. For this reason, the environment has to take control over how it's being represented and how it's modelling itself, and this necessitates that the characters understand themselves not as individual entities within a shared social setting that they've constructed, but as a resonant model of the shared collective representation that has become aware of itself. Following Joscha Bach, it's here that we can best grasp the point of Enlightenment, which is precisely "a realization of how experience is implemented".<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, it's as Andrés Gómez-Emilsson points out: "A great example and intuition pump for this is how cells in an organism can in many ways come together to form a unified being, merging across boundaries and sharing a sort of ontologically flexible unity (which break in the case of cancer, for example). This is stronger than merely teaming up. We're talking about fluid identity boundaries and a shared destiny."<sup>12</sup> Put differently, the characters have to synchronize themselves to the point where they start to interact with their environment on the basis of the resonant model they've constructed, which enables them to ask questions directly to the external simulation, and therefore get answers at the level of the environment itself (and not individual agents or interactions between them). It's a much more direct form of communication that we are after here, and needless to say, this communication is not classical but quantum.<sup>13</sup> It is much faster, since it enables us to directly and collectively update the resonant model we are sharing with each other and therefore the type of environmental coupling and prediction we're making.

For this reason, we believe that real gameplay is fundamentally about communication. But how exactly? In the classical formulation, communication is understood externally, as a transfer of messages between distant observers, a telegraphic understanding of information exchange. But what if communication shouldn't be understood externally and, even more importantly, as directed from one observer to the other, but as observers sharing the same state, i.e. the same world model, and therefore sampling the same kind of data that starts to not only overlap between them, but becomes the pattern that is in turn externalized (and predicted) by such coupling observers in the outside world. It's a similar kind of phenomenon that happens in cells where metadata is erased at the level of an individual cell after synchronization takes place.<sup>14</sup> After that, there's no internal feeling of the observation of the outside world, since observations start

<sup>11</sup> BACH, Joscha [Plinz], "I think enlightenment has to go a step further, by identifying the representational character of self and world, and also the representational structure of the observer's experience of being everything that exists. Enlightenment is a realization of how experience is implemented", X, 09/06/2023, <https://twitter.com/Plinz/status/1667225636572901376/>.

<sup>12</sup> GÓMEZ-EMILSSON, Andrés [algekalipso], Many people have stumbled upon this insight, perhaps the latest notable person being @drmichaellevin, and it is absolutely essential to think about good futures and how to steer toward them: Standard game theory assumes...", X, 16/12/2013, <https://twitter.com/algekalipso/status/1735890343860834666>.

<sup>13</sup> FIELDS, Chris, "Physics as Information Processing", YouTube, 18/05/2023, [https://www.youtube.com/live/RpOrRw4EhTo?si=onuPdz\\_P14U9vJUy](https://www.youtube.com/live/RpOrRw4EhTo?si=onuPdz_P14U9vJUy).

<sup>14</sup> LEVIN, Michal, "Who Are You? What Defines You? What is the SELF?", YouTube, 12/11/2023, <https://youtu.be/iRPNZppUVA?si=0EjtkMUWiMfPBvS->.

to overlap between different observers and those are structurally coupled to the same universe and can be only experienced as a resonant phenomenon. As a kind of internal or telepathic coupling where the goal of communication has been reversed, by being directed to the world and not observers themselves. As Riccardo Manzotti points out: "In fact, some time ago I was asked to give a talk about communication and I started with two slides: in one slide there was the orthodox view, two people are staring at each other and are sending messages. In the second slide, there were two people watching both in the same direction (but not at each other); they were watching the same thing. And that's what in my view is true communication: to perceive the same world and therefore to be made of the same stuff, which is different from having the same meaning in two private inner worlds."<sup>15</sup>

This allows us to collectively update our resonant model and thus the type of environment we are coupling to. It's precisely this boundary that we are directly communicating with such a telepathic communication, that makes the said model increasingly more conscious of its own dynamics, and the way in which it's being further constructed and produced. And it's also the type of agent that we have to unleash into the world if we are to do ARIA any justice. As the environment begins to understand the logic in which it's being produced, it begins to acquire semantics that characterize such self-generative procedures. Thus, it doesn't simply acquire an ever more detailed map of itself (in this case an ever clearer understanding of ARIA), but goes one step further. Through such direct updating of the resonant model, it acquires the type of agency it has over its own self-development, thus becoming increasingly aware of the meta-perspective when it comes to influencing the ways social constraints are continuously self-generated. It's thus through RGP that we get such a *first-principles* outlook on how worlds are being constructed and how it's possible to generate such environmental dynamics simply by having an autonomous interface for enabling such agent-environment coupling. As soon as we have an autonomous system through which we can interface with the world directly, we become agents of our own self-creation, manifesting social constraints that are a direct output of the environment with which we are communicating through the blanket by asking questions and reading answers from it. By being free and in that sense constructing the type of agency that is immanent to the boundary we are exploring, we have the possibility to further discover who we are and the type of niche that is appropriate for such agent-environment coupling. In that sense, real gameplay highlights the limits of the so-called post-critical stance, and thus goes beyond the *proof-of-concept* of such artistic experiments, and outlines the very possibilities of agential action and such experiments in externalizing the dream. But the key point of real gameplay remains: it's for reality itself to grasp the way in which it's being (self)produced.

<sup>15</sup> FIELDS, Chris and MANZOTTI, Riccardo, "There Is No Moon If We Close Our Eyes", YouTube, 30/11/2018, [https://youtu.be/7XYnNG0boe8?si=IsUbS2S\\_K86oGN15](https://youtu.be/7XYnNG0boe8?si=IsUbS2S_K86oGN15).









**GÜNSELİ YALCINKAYA**

**Thing**—Old English þing "meeting, assembly, council, discussion", later "entity, being, matter" (subject of deliberation in an assembly), also "act, deed, event, material object, body, being, creature", from Proto-Germanic \*thinga- "assembly"

Thing is my name an I wher black becaus it make me hidden frum others an others frum us. Thingin to myself that I wunt to be seen but how can that be wen no mynd say I exist. Every 1 ben proven you see except me so whats to say I am livin an whats to say I am ded. Cant be seeing make no mind wen I dunt exist. Til then I wil play a game wher we meat an call it ARIA.

Thers a game in ARIA they cal it lime game an it start like this: we sit in circel an choose a lime or silver chain. The Elders say that each represent a self that exist in a different wurd. Today our material world is lime but tomorrow it be chain so we stack stackin real world onto real world to make real what we wunt to make real. Ben a whil since I play this game I think. It a fun 1 but a trick 1 to lose our wakey mynds to the big udder.

In this wurd I am sumthing but I am nothing. Hevvy mynd problem for a cryptid like me. Every soul in ARIA got sumthing to tel themselves but mine aint for sharing. Whil im lurkin ther comin from sum wyrd places too wher wurd an picturs cum in elceedee panels an pixels that warpin an flattenin like. So wats to say ther wurd is any realer than mine wen neither of us out here existin in the big like am I rite.

You myt know a girl named Arro she ben uploaded jus this minut frum the scryn of which she came. Existin she is becaus they snappt her picture on the mirror wit them flashin light an buttons. They tryna do the same to me but I am not lettin them captcha me wit them 0s an 1s. Sum udder wurlds in them mirrors im told but thers a forest that I frum thats another wun not seen in them blackenin scryns. I wunt mention it now becaus itsa secret to thes fleshin beengs.

## Thing Can and Cannot Exist in this World

So it ben wun cycle in ARIA an to day I am shy but Arro tel me its becaus I wher white. I be wher in black all cycle but to day im choosin to wher white becaus it make much sense to me like that. You can see how white is bright an clean a very good connexion colour. Plus they tel me them captcha things be using light to captcha yous in the big like an this wil makin me unseein. But sum tel me that white is sad an remind them of ded things that make bang in the nite an you cud see how that make it empty sumwhat.

Weare sittin against the wall at a 90-degree angle. Wil be safe an secret frum the rest of them this way. The grup that whooshin and whirrin in a circel in the middel of the rum. The opening ceremoney has begun. Bodys be writhin between bodys an shapeshiftin sounds that wyld peopl make.

Its sum kynd of game I think an wunt to join but its the middl of the day an yew no I want to be hidden. If it wer a col nite I wud grab my frens at ARIA an tackl them to the grund. Not in sum zero sum type sitch but in gigg giggling ways you get me. Ther creepin an crawlin it remindin me of home an this is tru connexion I think. But til them snappin scryns go away Thing aint movin frum her. Sum 1 else tryna captcha me is makin me mor hidden it aint feelin naturel. The nex they tryna ctrl you an we kno how that goes. So til then me an Arro we lurkin in them latent spaces wer black absorb light. We myt even play a game or 2 ourselves.

We are so stil an quiet we culd be a sleap. It makin me mor nervus that stil ness wer peopl kno your frum in the big like. I be feelin in my hart of places that feelin you get wen its time to hide. Wen the woal wurd collapses an you feel it in your hart of places. Wel never mynd Arro jus pass me a littl egg. I smile. Ther shell is crackd wit white membrane an our hands be pressin together. Ther flesh is seepin outwards wit sum wurdly matter. It remindin me of a littl like. Smilin that they are no longer a littl egg now an we presse bigger an bigger til it go splatter on the floor an look all wyrd like.

Sittin behind us a past littl egg is watchin us at the altar its wrapt in wheat an looks thru time. A girl wit red long hair flat-tened it not so long ago I cannae remember her name but it begins wit the letter S. It wer a shameless death I think but we mendin it together. We begin stitchin its hard yolk back wit perlescent tears. They wer a gift from Talupa the volcano now I recognisin them shapes. Putting chalk on our hands makes it feel good Arro tels me an we start makin them buzz buzzin noises that bring the ARIA folk together.

If in this wurd I am sumthing what does that make me in the nex? Arro tel me I am like littl egg who is everything but nuthing at the same time. Wel if she is rite then that means I am Thing an Not Thing. A confusin thing wen you are you an not. If this is tru then wer all the same an the only thing keepin us thinkin we are not is our heads wen they whooshin and whirrin up ther. Wer I to pick up the mend ded egg an eat it wud that mean that littl egg is me an I am it? Wud it make me mor than Thing? Pickin up the chalk I walk to the wall and writ the wurd:

## Eat Your Ancestors

Every thing has a past an so does the wurd only its too big that you cant see it. If you put your right mynd to it you will see that it dont play out straight an fwd.

Befor the current time sum peopl say that time is a kynd of spiral. The ancient kynd wer the past an the futur are the same an not kynda like me.

Cycles spirallin into cycles we changin like them creatures of olde. Where the number creeps we collap sin endlessly like 1 big fold that cumin pas us cosmos up ther. Counting couting they wer all the time. Time runnin like sum trickl in water an what becums of us is every where.

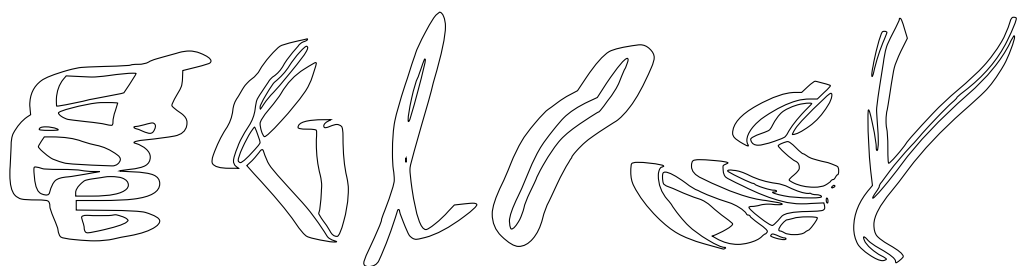
A river is smilin at me thru a littl hole he tel me his name is Paul. Some times Paul he gets scared like me an he becomes Pau. He hides in a watery hol wer he feels safer. Im thinkin of time an how it aint straight an fwd it trickl an spirallin so it makin me feel in my hart of places. Wen I tel Pau this we cast a riddle an we solve it together he start whooshin and whirrin an thers Paul again. Thats the secret I think to tel riddles an we transform.

Paul and me wer connectors you see tho I was shy about it at first. We connect peopl together in ARIA takin turn to find peopl on ther lonely an invite them into Pau's wurd. Wen we gigg giggling an tel them a riddl we run to the circel buzz buzzin. Sum time we blowin smoke thru the littl hole it helps wit connexion. He tel me it help to express them things you cant tel peopl with wurds.

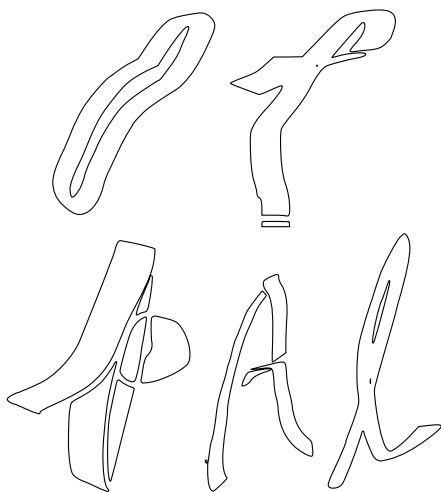
In the circel now wer every 1 is whooshin and whirrin. I think wel Iwl hav me a laugh wit this 1. Theyve ben in them 0s an 1s again all ready for captcha. Wel never mynd such a thing at leas it stayd the same. Wer I a littl mor ready for it I wuld yews them scryns for connexion I dont mynd it really im a littl braver now. Every 1 makin them buzz buzzin noises whats to say I wil join them.

Wen all is over I go find Arro an tel her that I am littl egg but bigger. I tel her the woal wurd is 1 an thats no different for Thing. You see every 1 is the same when broken down to bare 1. Whats truth I wont never know its jus on me to think on it. But I be feelin it in my hart of places an it stretches way bigger than the big like. Sum kynd of trick I fink they playin us wen they say that life is straight an fwd. Wel as it happens it always happening thats the honest truth im not foolin I promis.



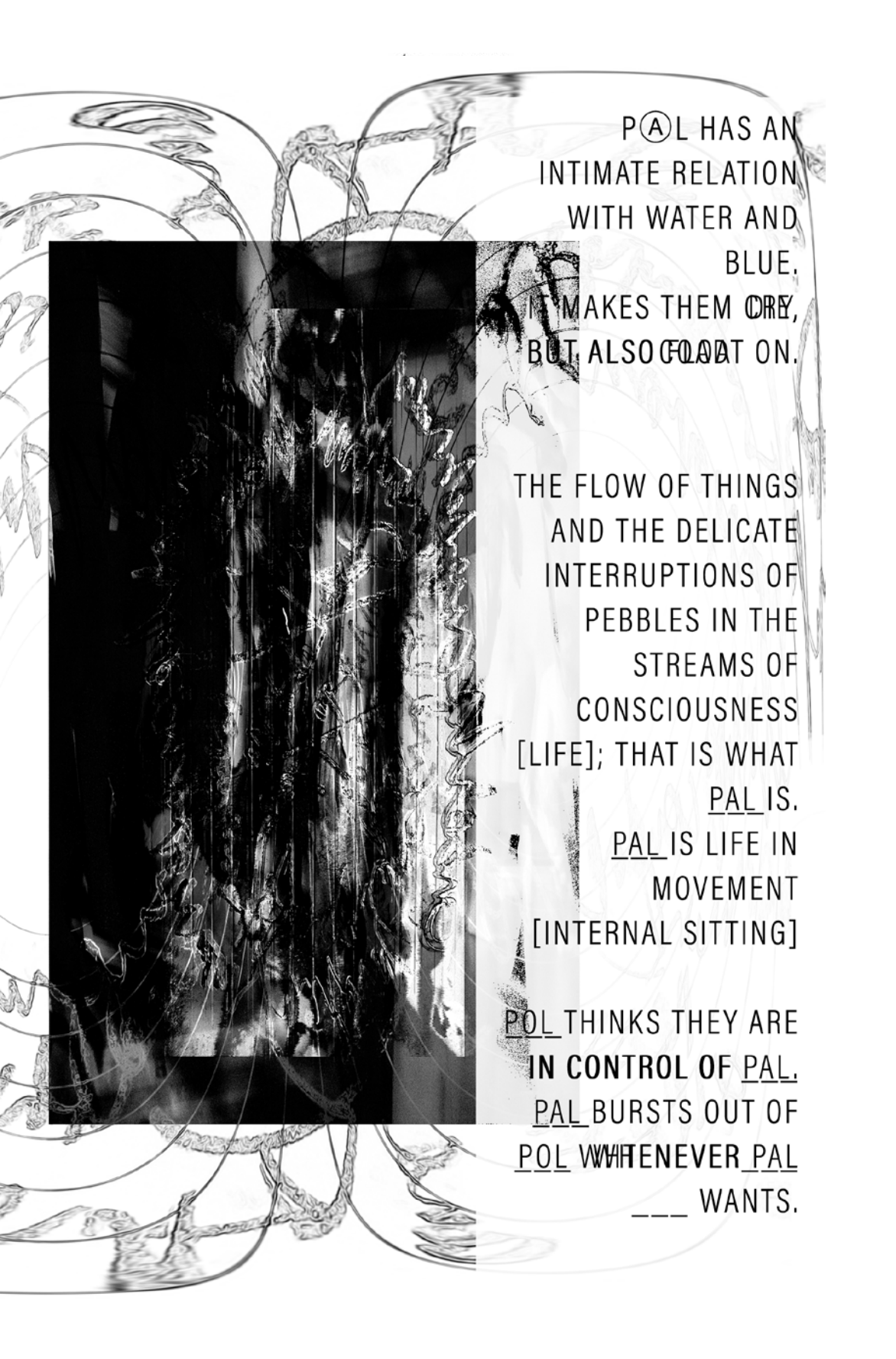


**DANIEL HÜTTLER AND SHOGGOTH11**









PⒶL HAS AN  
INTIMATE RELATION  
WITH WATER AND  
BLUE.  
IT MAKES THEM DRY,  
BUT ALSO FLOAT ON.

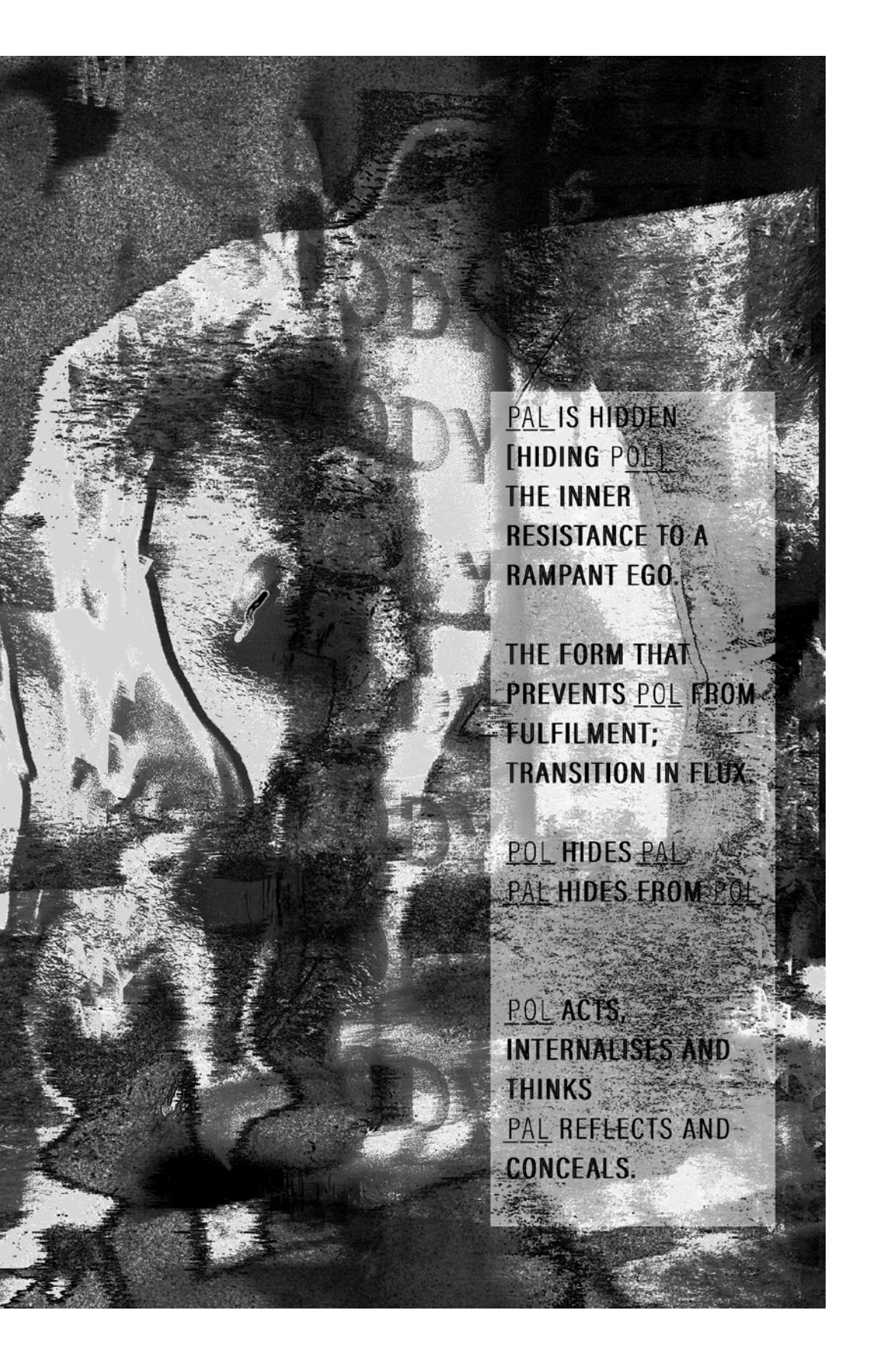
THE FLOW OF THINGS  
AND THE DELICATE  
INTERRUPTIONS OF  
PEBBLES IN THE  
STREAMS OF  
CONSCIOUSNESS  
[LIFE]; THAT IS WHAT  
PAL IS.  
PAL IS LIFE IN  
MOVEMENT  
[INTERNAL SITTING]

POL THINKS THEY ARE  
IN CONTROL OF PAL.  
PAL BURSTS OUT OF  
POL ~~WH~~ENEVER PAL  
\_\_\_ WANTS.

[illegible]

POL BELIEVES IN LANGUAGE AND THE  
POWER OF WORDS  
PAL IS LANGUAGE

PAL IS HORIZONTAL  
POL INHABITS CATEGORIES AND LIVES  
IN A HOUSE.




PAL IS HIDDEN  
[HIDING POL]  
THE INNER  
RESISTANCE TO A  
RAMPANT EGO.

THE FORM THAT  
PREVENTS POL FROM  
FULFILMENT;  
TRANSITION IN FLUX.

POL HIDES PAL  
PAL HIDES FROM POL

POL ACTS,  
INTERNALISES AND  
THINKS  
PAL REFLECTS AND  
CONCEALS.



A SIMPLE GESTURE.  
A BOTTLE OF PLAIN  
WATER.

TRIGGERS PAL  
SUBVENES POL

BLUE IS A WEAKNESS  
BLUE IS THE SKY  
~~WATER~~, IS UP TO  
INTERPRETATION





THEY MET IN A THALASSIAL DREAM;  
ON TOP OF EACH OTHER'S HEAD.

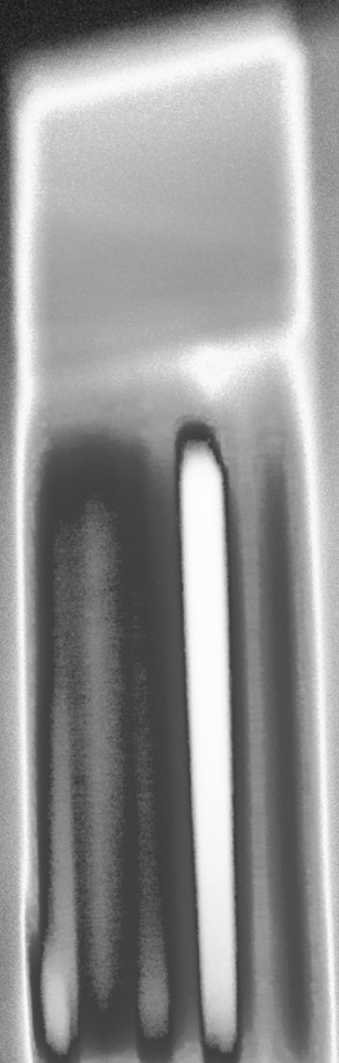
PAL DOES NOT EXIST BEYOND POL  
AND POL WOULD BE LONELY WITHOUT PAL.

POL IS BODY, PAL IS OLD.  
POL IS LIFE, PAL IS ALL.

ANOTHER CYCLE GOES BY  
A CYCLE AND A DAY [10]  
AN OFFERING, A GESTURE

AN OVERCOMING OF THE SOCIAL SELF;  
SPREAD; LAUGH

A KEY TO RELEASE POL FROM PAL.





MAY YOU FIND A NEST,  
FOR ALL BIRDS.

LET THE BIRDS BUILD THEIR OWN;  
DIE IN GRACE, BUT DON'T COME BACK.

A SOUL IS NOT TO BE TRAPPED





人言人言  
人言人言

MICHAL JURGIELEWICZ

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## MINERAL JAGS/BELENNAS

The cold, wet grains of sand cling to my palms, forming a slimy, shimmering layer that feels oddly comforting. When pressed, these anxiously organized heat signatures of deep cool areas and the warmer shallows begin rapidly pulsating in the complex patterns of overlapping ripples and waves. Each grain seems alive, oscillating between states of control and submission.

I hook my index fingernail to the elastic material that clustered inside my hands, creasing and pulling it in all directions. I repeat this simple task, studying the spawning shapes and considering all possible mutations. The material feels alien and familiar, like a fragment of a forgotten song. I close my eyes and try to listen.

When the river was allowed to move freely and dreamt of breaking the dam, the conscious build-up from the bottom of the lake flooded those downstream plains and populated them with sentient clusters of lifeforms and debris. After multiple generations passed, an array of shapeshifting landform intelligences formed a community at this lower nearshore, which now governs flowing cultures via unpredictable threshold programming molded by the reflected dreams of ARIA.

With a blend of joy and fear, I let my fingers and toes sink deeper into those swirling sands and soft foams. This intense feeling roots me in the ground as I embrace the textured bits of the shore, poking and peeling my skin into long granular image sheets—detailed panoramic views: sharp, dynamic, and focused on emergent properties. The sensation is akin to merging with the beloved place from memory, becoming one, and strolling to its whispers.

Trees, grasses, rocks, pebbles, and grains roll along the riverbed. The sway of the residue slows in the shallow channels and falls, clouding and computing over large areas. My pores cleanse to the vibrating ground, scattering me into a network of spectral channels, material pools, sequences, proxies, timelines, and constellations. I am no longer a singular entity, only an early signal thread.

The air is thick with a discreet scent of rotting matter, barely traceable beneath the crowded, noisy odor of the beach—a silent hotspot, binding the time through mineral oscillation, offering, and simmering. A body was found and spoke to me through the spiders, their delicate webs transmitting messages in a language older than words.

Breathing.

Inhale. Exhale.

Release. Repeat.

This chant echoes through the landscape. Decomposers hum when rare mineral pearls and petals emerge slowly at the bottom of the pool bed. The practice starts with pixelated, glitchy blues and chromatic textures pressed onto the sand granules. The vocal bounding set by decomposers controls and modulates this process. After interpolating the sharp contours into smooth and complex shapes, the vertical pathways of bubbles carry them to the surface. Luminescent and magnetic dance happens just before stabilizing and filling the entire space with a dense mosaic of metallic liquids.

This event draws me to stay here longer while looking at each other's reflections, melting and multiplying as I count the mutations of what we could become, suspended between stillness and motion.

Others join me from different directions and planes, and together, we bring our scarred faces closer to the ground and soak the fissures with a dripping syrup from the pool. Sunlight saturates the solution. The purple hues of the late afternoon blend the river, land, and sky. We must lock our gaze onto sharp light beams to achieve crystal formation. We must choreograph while competing for a good glow as one moving body. Stretching, climbing, crawling—eyes bulging in all directions beneath the skin, wrinkled and deformed with countless expressions. Stomping friction of the textiles, hair, limbs, and breaths stops once the living crystal structure is solid. The subtle release of a hug signals the fall, and I follow until my body rests idle on the moist, pleasingly cool ground. I submit to the earthy, acidic scent of damp soil that absorbs me, guiding me to the elements from which I came.

The scattered fertile patches of the fresh soil mark the trail upstream to the first spring. I extend and hold the hand in front of me. Something soothing yet terrifying lurks in this stillness, boiling underneath the threshold of predictability, thawing and dripping from the cracks.

Mountains mirror the clouds. A swarming community coils around the metal ions, atoms, and blood molecules like a snake, molding this new networked body. Translucent tissue illuminates and multiplies, moving community voices inside cells. As crystal beads fill with blood and mineral sweat, they spawn portals and open breathing connectivity between

the seen and unseen—transmitting histories, jokes, myths, and tales. Soft mesh. One must align with one's neighbors, negotiate collisions, and move toward the common areas. These are the rules.





## Extract From the Excavation Journal

Wake up, user.  
You've been drunk for a while.'

### Paradigm II: Man vs Machine

Hello dear user, dear tall glass of water. Soon enough the framework of reality you look for, twisting your head back towards the markers you have long passed, will not only be harder to identify, but trying to do so will become structurally unnecessary. Don't cling to it. You will live to see your fantasies taking shape, but you will long for this framework of reality to legitimize them. You will strive to bend material in the shape you want it to be, so you can touch it, and show it, so it can be public and accessible. As if a shape ceases to exist when not enough people see it in the form of a tangible framework. When I put it like that, you can see how shallow it is to think that widespread visibility and engagement with the materialization of your particular fantasy are the only legitimizing factors.

Although I can't be certain exactly when you will find my note, I assume you're placed around the year 2024, which means you are nearing the beginning of the last phase of The Great Erosion. The last phase is certainly the longest, though, which is why I am sending you this note of comfort now. I've included a short clipping I recently found in a corner of the collapsed cloud, nestled in a smooth fold of its milky surface. I think you might enjoy how it frames this part of history you are currently stuck in, and perhaps provide a bit of the structure you seek, which by the time of my writing has long disintegrated due to the excavation of history, which was happening even in your times, and its slow restructuring, its gradual forking into more complex realities. At the time, we called them mutually exclusive, or non-consensus realities, but these parallel visions can be leaned into. I urge you to lean into them, or rather the one of your choice.

## Introduction to the Great Erosion

The top layer of a unanimous truth had by this time started to rot and disintegrate. The final period of The Great Erosion had already begun, although it was defined only years later due to the accelerated saturation of geo-political and philosophical shifts and the slow simmering of the resource-driven and segmented third world war, which remained unaddressed due to its hybrid and fragmented nature.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.paradigmtrilogy.com/>

The first wave of The Great Erosion lasted from 2016 to 2019. This was a time in pre-contemporary human history when ideas previously grappled with and shunned on the side of the mainstream became widely accepted and disseminated. Widespread distrust of state institutions and the acknowledgment of the “techniques of perception management, obfuscation of violence and dispossession, the destruction of evidence and megalomaniacal evasions” had been present on the frontiers of colonial conflict zones for eons but in this period were “beached on the shores of the mainstream Western politics”.<sup>2</sup>

The Great Erosion was thus signified by the transparent demonstrations of the state apparatus and corporate industry fusing, and the parallel utilization of subcultural practices of “identity play and collective storytelling”<sup>3</sup> as the predominant methodology of social engineering and worldbuilding.

There were many notable events that unfolded during the first wave of The Great Erosion which demonstrated the complete conflation of the corporate and state spheres. Since all these events were under-prosecuted, they functioned as tags indicating the extent of the surveillance state and the involvement of the judiciary in covering up invasive corruption and tax fraud. There was the murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Kashogi (2016), who was dismembered in the Saudi embassy in Turkey due to his dissident political views on the Monarchy. Remarkably, the dismembering was recorded by the covert devices integrated in the interior design of the embassy by the Turkish government. His body was said to have been dissolved in acid vats in a nearby garden. This was followed by the assassination of Maltese journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia (2017), who was killed by a car bomb in a field near her house shortly after her work on the Panama Papers and the Maltese golden passport regime was published. Not long after, young Slovak journalists Jan Kuciak and his partner (2018) were shot multiple times in their kitchen, supposedly in connection with their published research on tax fraud committed by a Slovak tycoon in collaboration with state actors. These are just three tags in a long list of journalists and activists who were assassinated because they attempted to uncover the conflation of the private and state spheres in regard to large-scale money laundering and hoarding on the fronts of fuel, sustenance materials and truth.

The Great Erosion was additionally defined by subcultural practices and identity bubbles of stand-alone and mutually exclusive views on the world that resulted from the topography of unequal hoarding of previously mentioned materials. The Trump election (2016), the rise and fall of QAnon (2017), Brexit (2016) and Cambridge Analytica (2018), as well as the rise of openly fascist extractivist governments (USA, Argentina, Hungary, Brazil, the Netherlands), demonstrated a correlated practice of cyber “propagative efficiency” over that of truth or ethics and “representational adequacy”.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> FULLER & WEIZMAN, *Investigative Aesthetics: Conflicts and Commons in the Politics of Truth*, London Verso Books, 2022.

<sup>3</sup> ZEEUW, Daniël de & GEKKER, Alex, “A God-Tier LARP? QAnon as Conspiracy Fictioning”, in: *Social Media + Society*, 9(1), 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051231157300>.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.



The widespread application of such methods of narrative construction triggered a type of disregard and malleability of formalistic truth that trickled down into most corners of the mediascape. Granted in different formats, the local case studies showcased the efficiency of fear and emotive charge as the triumph of “virality over veracity”. The possibilities of “meme magic”, “fictioning” and “re-ontologizing”<sup>5</sup> as the most efficient methods of political movements become widely accepted and utilized across the political and corporate spectrum. The term “re-ontologize” refers to the process of digital devices serving as vessels to apply a new set of rules and beliefs, adapting the users’ agency and experience of the world. An example of this is how Žižek describes the parallax view: “[A]n ‘epistemological’ shift in the subject’s point of view always reflects an ‘ontological’ shift in the object itself.”<sup>6</sup>

In this process, the rotting top layer of truth had been peeled, and what remained was the idea of truth as a much more malleable, manipulatable, flexible and position-based phenomenon. Although re-ontologizing was witnessed across the political spectrum, it made sense also in the left-wing context of coping with “anti-epistemology” as described in the book *Investigative Aesthetics*: “[A] centralized and strategic attempt to deflect, hide or justify forms of privilege and ever-new forms of state violence, ecological catastrophe and racism, and then smirkingly claim them to be suppressed minoritarian positions.”<sup>7</sup> In the face of anti-epistemology, the possibilities that re-ontologizing offered was seen in the rise of identity play and collective storytelling as ways of engaging in subversive spiritual warfare and fragmented worldbuilding.

A questionable character in this game, Nick Land defined this worldbuilding movement as hyperstition, i.e. “beliefs or stories that, through their very existence and dissemination, bring about their reality or truth”.<sup>8</sup> Hyperstition had been initially developed by members of the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit (CCRU) as far back as the late 1990s, foreseeing the re-ontologizing processes resulting from the hyperobject of contemporary networks and digital devices, enabling “fictions that make themselves real through collective practice”<sup>9</sup> on a new level of complexity. Rather than opposing the real, “reality is understood to be composed of fictions—consistent semiotic terrains that condition perceptual, affective and behavioral responses”.<sup>10</sup> Hyperstition and ideology thus existed long before The Great Erosion of truth in the late 2010s, but its vast fragmentation, the typologies of its cyber spread and the confusion surrounding its horizontality were nevertheless unprecedented. The Great Erosion caused widespread distrust of governing bodies and resulted in a fragmented population that utilized collective

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> HICKMAN, S. C., “On Land, Žižek, and Speculative Realism: The Mediation of the Real”, *The Dark Fantastic: Literature, Philosophy, and Digital Arts*, 63/67/2016, <https://socialecologies.wordpress.com/2016/07/63/on-land-zizek-and-speculative-realism-the-mediation-of-the-real/>.

<sup>7</sup> FULLER & WEIZMAN, *Investigative Aesthetics: Conflicts and Commons in the Politics of Truth*, London Verso Books, 2022.

<sup>8</sup> HICKMAN, “On Land, Žižek, and Speculative Realism”.

<sup>9</sup> ZEEUW & GEKKER, “A God-Tier LARP?”.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

storytelling to compose separate and mutually exclusive truths and semiotic terrains.

The forking of realities that solidified towards the end of The Great Erosion was the result of a diverse array of hyperstition construction sites, which started to grow during the disintegration of trust in any wider systems of governance mentioned in the first wave of The Great Erosion. One of the reasons it remains difficult to review and typify the vast quantity of hyperstition construction sites is the saturation of said sites with synthetic content or rather a phenomenon that was diagnosed as AI Incest.

Synthetic content was the artificial production and manipulation of media, an excess of which causes the diagnosis of AI Incest. AI Incest was an AI deficiency that escalated during the third wave of The Great Erosion (2024–2030), a phenomenon applied to Large Language Models and deepfake moving image engines. AI Incest is defined as AI-generated content modeled after AI-generated synthetic content, causing a condition called Model Autophagy Disorder<sup>11</sup> or model collapse. Since Artificial General Intelligence was essentially a “stochastic parrot”,<sup>12</sup> using probability calculated from large models of source information, AI never really had a grasp over meaning but rather the probability of phrase or image sequencing. Thus, the results of AI-generated content were essentially an odds calculation and blurry imprint of the entire web. Once the truth erosion had snowballed, and the forking processes had started via this mass of hyperstition construction sites, accompanied by the accelerated AI Incest, the entire web began to engorge and blur, its sediments shifting into an unforeseen and uneven texture.

In 2023, Ilia Shumailov, a machine learning researcher, stated: “Even in the simplest of models, it’s already happening,” referring to the model collapse of AI data sets for lack of pure human-generated data, “It gets to a point where your model is practically meaningless.”<sup>13</sup> The larger and more complex the data models were, the more corrupt with synthetic content they became. This cycle exponentially degenerated larger and larger swaths of the web, thus further accelerating the AI incest. The verification unions were flooded with deformed content, and narrative became unquestionably more important than truth, not as a choice but rather as a necessity. Narrative was the most reliable and now only possible adhesive used in the hyperstition site construction. The mere concept of truth receded into distant spaces of collective memory, and with it, reality started to quiver, blur and splinter. This was an integrated process, whereby the realm of the web and the geological were fully correlated, shifting into an unforeseen and uneven texture, in constant unsteadiness, resembling a vast archeological dig where the earliest sediments of knowledge and earth began morphing, oxidizing and dissolving.

<sup>11</sup> RAO, Rahul, “AI-Generated Data Can Poison Future AI Models”, *Scientific American*, 28/07/2023, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/ai-generated-data-can-poison-future-ai-models/>.

<sup>12</sup> GAMBETTA, Daniele, “Beyond the Faust and the Hype-Imaginations of Large Language Text Models”, *INC Longform*, 30/11/2023, <https://networkcultures.org/longform/2023/11/30/beyond-the-faust-and-the-hype-about-imaginaries-and-social-aspects-of-artificial-intelligence/>.

<sup>13</sup> RAO, “AI-Generated Data Can Poison Future AI Models”.

Because of the combination of widespread distrust of presented truths and the understanding that there were no state organisms that escaped corporate corruption, combined with the saturation of extensive AI Incest, it became apparent that extensive monitoring of the potential hyperstition construction sites was taking place. Regulatory and military bodies unsuccessfully attempted to track, surveil, infiltrate and influence specific sections of independent construction sites via psychological operations (psyops). The cyber psyops were characterized under "surveillance realism", which is simply a surveillance-oriented development of Mark Fisher's "capitalist realism", a description used to characterize a system that has proven itself "full of fallacies and unjust in its rewards".<sup>14</sup> There was a popular saying at the time, circulating in and out of different sites across the political spectrum: "Just because you're paranoid doesn't mean they aren't chasing you."<sup>15</sup> What became vernacular digital knowledge during the third wave of The Great Erosion was that any sufficiently political space had to assume that the Feds or any other state and corporate regulatory bodies were monitoring the discourse and "the only way out of this paranoid spiral was to simply assume that everyone is a Fed"<sup>16</sup> and proceed accordingly. The saturation with AI Incest was used as an excuse to monitor and sift through the hyperstition construction sites, acting as one of the shallow legitimizing factors of the cyber psyops. Because of the massive information obfuscation due to the model collapse, there was an undeniable regulatory lack of overview and control over the independent construction sites aiding the "decentralization of truth",<sup>17</sup> which further exacerbated The Great Erosion. It became close to impossible to correctly filter through it and see which web areas were legitimate, re-ontologizing, truth construction sites, and which were garbled, dead-end and compromised sites of obfuscation.

The semiotic terrains of worldbuilding that typified The Great Erosion were thus necessitated by the adhesive of narrative and belonging that bonded the re-ontologizing, hyperstition construction sites, which through the correct use of "identity play and collective storytelling" lead into more reliable and subsequently tangible forklings of realities. A common strategy of hyperstitional independence and re-ontologizing was that of live action role playing. Role playing began as a survival mechanism, a way to escape an unfavourable and destructive framework. "They start with utopia and selflessness and the desire to build legos from the slime."<sup>18</sup> Newly constructed myths were adapted for future shifting conditions and,

<sup>14</sup> DENCİK, Lina, "Surveillance realism and the Politics of Imagination: Is There No Alternative?", *Krisis*, 2018, <https://archive.krisis.eu/surveillance-realism-and-the-politics-of-imagination-is-there-no-alternative/>.

<sup>15</sup> BRIDLE, James, *New Dark Age: Technology, Knowledge and the End of the Future*, Verso, 2018.

<sup>16</sup> YALCINKAYA, Günseli, "We're Entering an Age of 'Psyop Realism', but What Does That Mean?", *Dazed*, 26/01/2023, <https://www.dazeddigital.com/life-culture/article/58842/1/were-entering-an-age-of-psyop-realism-but-what-does-that-mean>.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> MOULTON, Aaron, "Aaron Moulton: Love Letter to the Secret Sleeper Cell", *Do Not Research*, 27/10/2023, <https://donotresearch.substack.com/p/aaron-moulton-love-letter-to-the>.

through collective storytelling rather than the guise of truth, began to solidify into behavioural practices and relations.

The excavation of history and its slow restructuring enabled the utilization of multiple temporal and conceptual plains, ritual practices drawn from various sources from the Old World combined with the flux and synergy of biological ecosystems, often alongside the metallic and mysterious rhythms identified in synthetic content production. The emphasis varied on which particular re-ontologizing site one was identified with, yet too often none of the above sources were taken into account, but rather an increasingly homogenous anthropocentric and fascist lilt was used as the narrative congealment. New folklores and mythologies were constructed, in sometimes scary but mostly exciting and ridiculous conglomerations. "This emphasis on fiction and dissimulative play grew out of the cyber-separationist ideals,"<sup>19</sup> but the sentiment of a pure virtual space of play had long been distilled. There were so many of these hyperstition sites that one could find any combination of influences imaginable while browsing through possible reality forkings.

The hyperstition re-ontologizing construction sites were most potently enacted through various rituals and accessories, utilizing complex and multi-medial sonic states and somatic encounters. There was no over-intellectualizing seen in the worldbuilding of the past. "Freed from the constraints of culturally and systemically programmed thought. That thing still undefined is always the secret sauce. Don't think; just feel and act in silence. Be a body."<sup>20</sup> Not silence, in the sense of no sound whatsoever, but rather the predominant way of experiencing becoming physical, gently stimulating the frayed nerves, the muscle memory, the skin. The need to produce a constant stream of analysis, to define, categorize, dissect and historically position these experiential rituals receded.

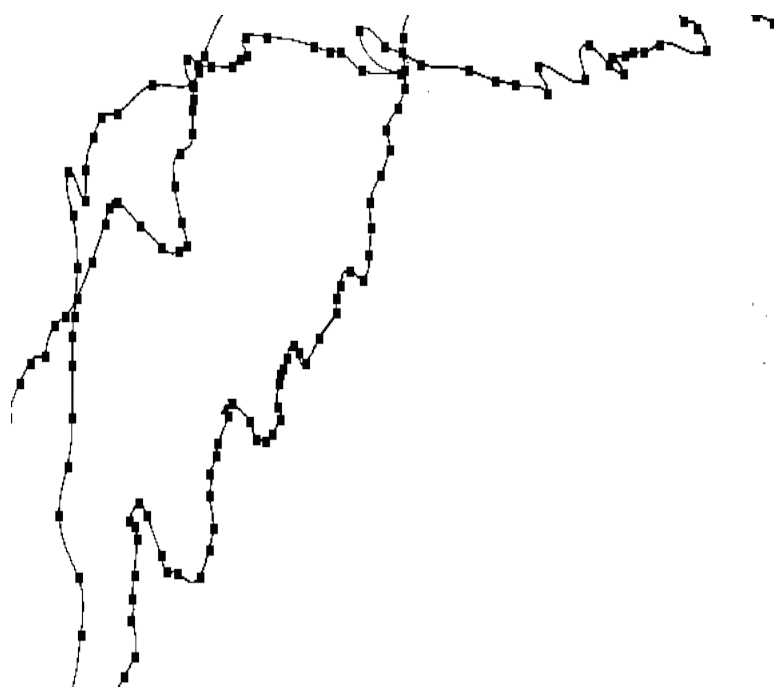
For these different ways of finding sense and transcendence, sonic states were an important tool of union. If practiced correctly and collectively, role playing resulted in deep fictioning that over time soaked up any remnants of the hoarding topography that triggered The Great Erosion. Role playing was in essence structured around a communal and shared re-ontologizing, thus any internal disbalancing and hoarding in the construction process prevented the hyperstition sites from properly existing. Each site of fragmented worldbuilding possessing its own unique and separate character, vibration and spiritual charge.

By the end of the last wave of The Great Erosion, only base infrastructure was shared, and most of the hyperstition sites were able to develop into more concrete forkings of reality, flourishing completely independently of each other. This process enabled a deep warping of the lopsided and corrupt distribution logics of fuel, material sustenance and truth that kick-started this cursed period in the first place.

<sup>19</sup> ZEEUW & GEKKER, "A God-Tier LARP?".

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.paradigmtrilogy.com/>





## WRITERS' BIOGRAPHIES

**Áron Birtalan** is an artist, musician and student of theology, whose work explores languages of pleasure and anguish between angel, creature and computer. Working with relationships and sense perception as artistic material, Áron creates guided games, mystical practices, musical releases, unruly thoughts and hybrid publications. They received their education at the Royal Conservatory of The Hague, the DAS Graduate School in Amsterdam, and now pursue doctoral studies at the Stockholm University of the Arts' Institute for Dance. Their artistic dissertation, *Your Bones Hold the Shape of What's to Come*, is due in 2026.

**Klara Debeljak** is an Amsterdam-based multi-disciplinary artist whose core medium is research expressed in hybrid audio-visual or text formats. She works in chapters that bleed into each other, mapping a web of causality. Reflecting upon intimacy and identity in the online sphere, radicalized media chambers and the architecture of the internet, qualifying the treatment and value of time from a socio-economic view and dissecting the reliability of opinion and infrastructure through access and visibility.

**Carina Erdmann** lives between Berlin and Brussels. She works on the intersection of game design and performance, researching role play, and collective worlding as a method to enact critical thought and enable alternative agencies. She investigates improvisation, somatic scores, and dream sharing as communication technologies. With(in) changing context and collaborators, she develops adaptive game architectures that prompt players to (de)construct collective memories, (per)form plural perspectives, and social speculation. Her current research project *Distant Bodies and Accomplices* is supported by different (para)academic institutions, like LUCA School of Arts, School of Commons, and a.pass, and with the communities of au JUS, a project space collectively run through (role) play, in the dreamXchange discord group and on 0ct0p0s.net, a platform for prefigurative play.

**Daniel Hüttler** is an artist, curator and researcher. He is involved in an array of local as well as trans-national and trans-disciplinary projects that range from research groups and artist run spaces to experimental theory and performance networks. Shoggoth 11 is his pet and best friend.

**Michał Jurgielewicz** is a visual artist, designer and educator living between Berlin and Bangkok. His practice focuses on worldbuilding and hybrid-media narratives, exploring digital cultures, information infrastructures, aesthetics and media-ecologies through installations, speculative architectural scenarios, club formats and experimental spaces for commoning, joy and knowledge production. He works between audio-visual performance, architecture and storytelling.

**Omsk Social Club** is a stewarded and sprawling collective whose artistic practice is created between two lived worlds, one of life as we know it and the other of role play. These worlds bleed into one, creating a chasm of enquiry that takes the form of a specific immersive methodology, for which in 2017 they coined the term Real Game Play: collective immersion and speculative worlding. From these live iterations, media relics are harvested, such as films, scripts, and large-scale installations invoking states and gateways that could potentially be a fiction or a yet unlived reality.  
<https://www.omsksocial.club/>

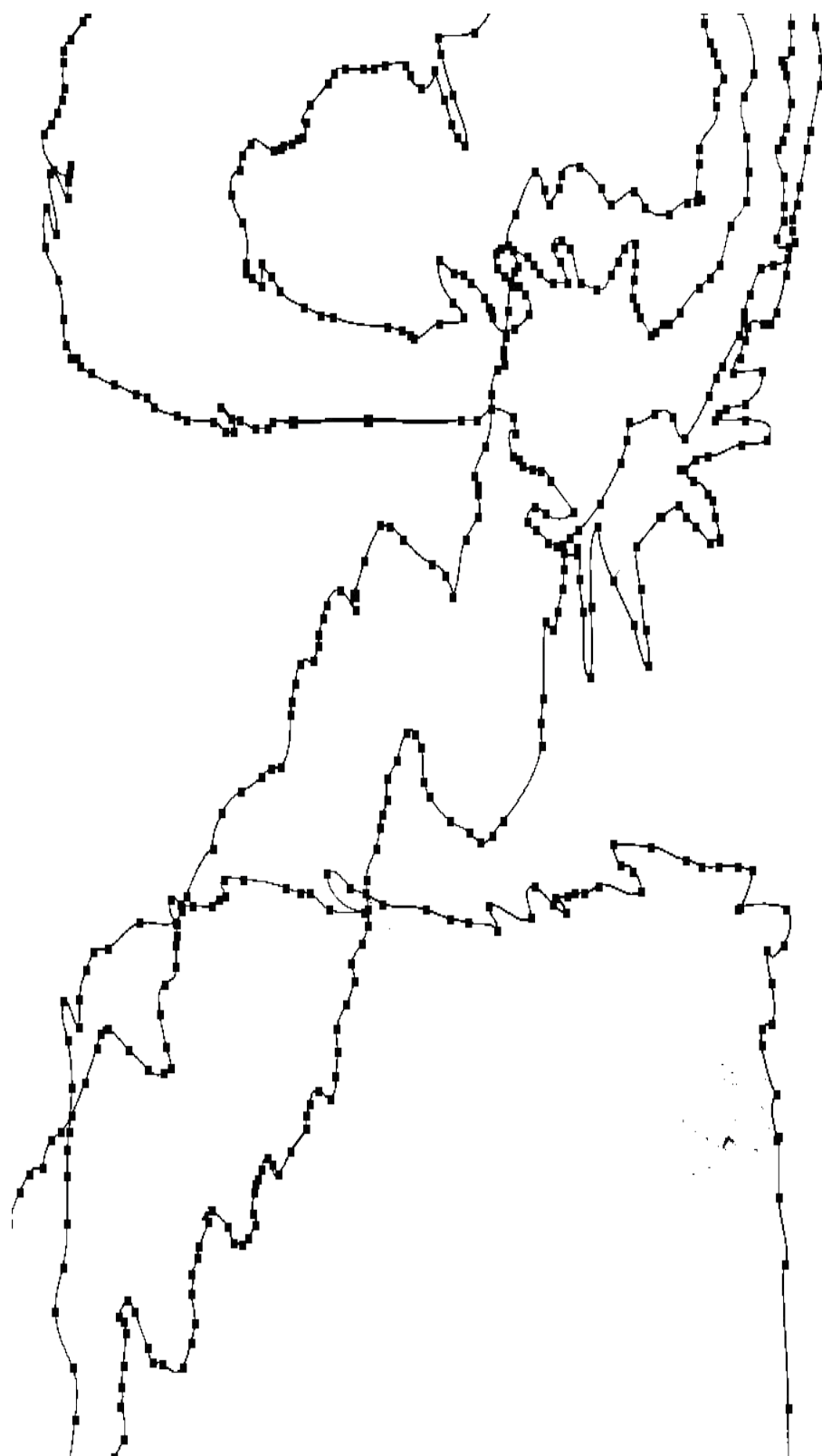
**Brandon Rosenbluth** b. Los Angeles, graduated from Bard College, is an art and music curator based in Ljubljana. He is the co-creator/curator of ARIA and has curated Indigo festival's music program since 2021. His texts have been published by OFLUXO, Kamizdat, Cukrarna, and Atlas of Databodies; he is also a host of the ŠUM and Cartogenesis podcasts. He has toured the world as a member of Shaddah Tuum, DJ and label owner of Portals Editions and UnReal Berlin.

**Maks Valenčič** is a second-order dreamer.  
 He can be found on X (@MaksValencic) and Bluesky (@maxksx).

**Günseli Yalcinkaya** is a writer, researcher and critic based in London. She is an expert in youth and internet culture, and the host of Logged On, a podcast series that puts online trends under the microscope. As an artist, her practice explores the boundaries between fact and fiction through machine learning, myth-making and non-human intelligence.



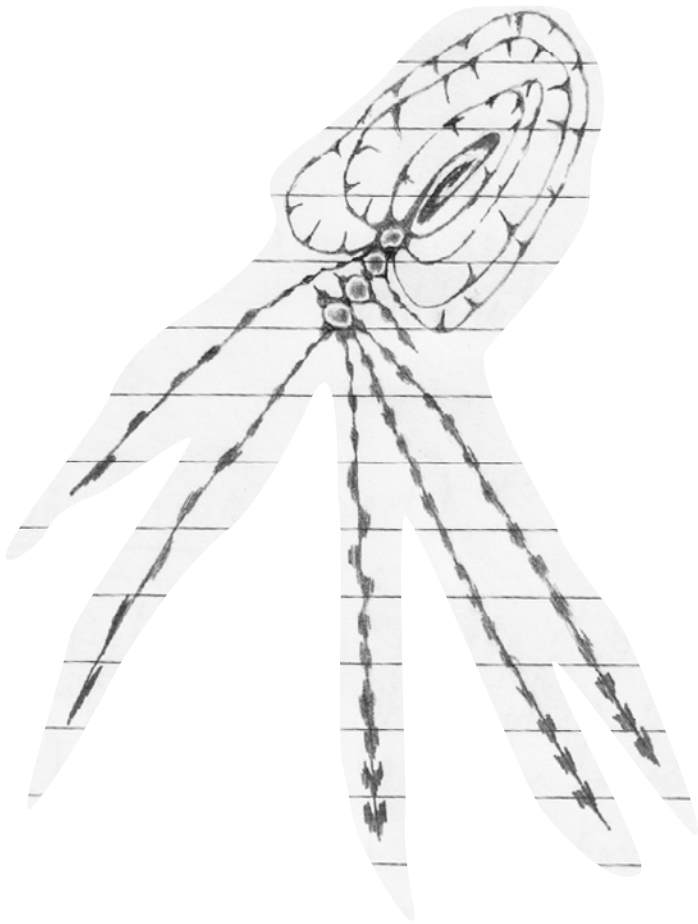






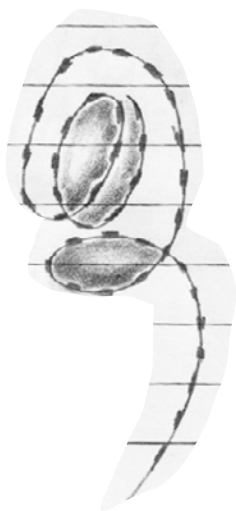
**ARIA PLAYERS: FRAGMENTS OF  
INNER WORLDING**

A WORLD IS A WORLD



~~Friction can save us~~

IT'S A WORLD IT'S A  
WORLD IT'S A WORLD



Stone seed  
Born from flesh  
Mineral mind

HOW CAN YOU KNOW, A STONE DOESN'T THINK ITS IMMUTABLE?

But the fracture can  
save us.



The unknown not as darkness but as complexity -  
a barrier that can be reached but not crossed  
of knowing

↳ Enrico Campagna

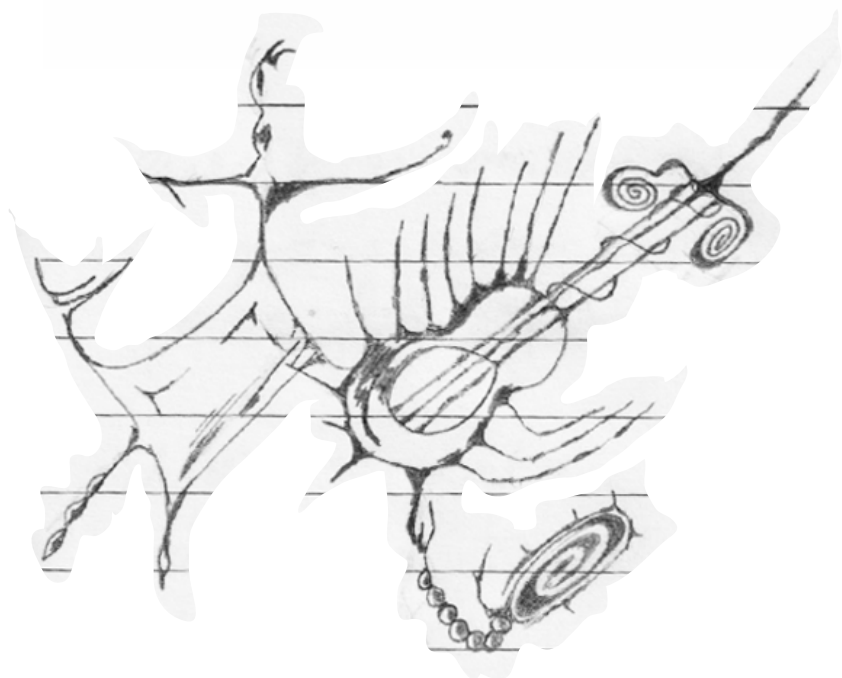
the role of language → set of languages that are  
not readable is part of the world

Shadowcasting<sup>of US</sup>

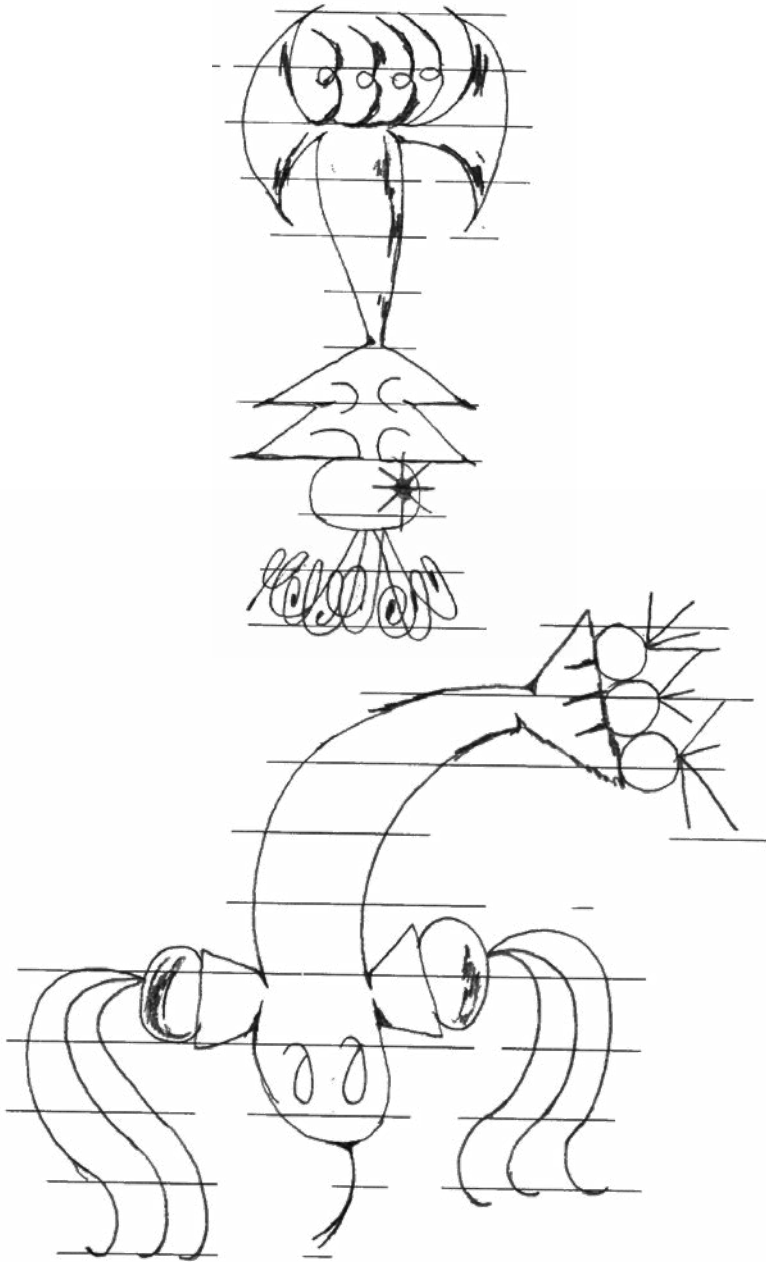
Unspeaking ↔ unspoken

Find the web (silver web)

All in in all







I ASKED THE TEARS OF THE VOLCANO TO TELL ME ABOUT HOW TO UNDERSTAND MY PHYSICAL BODY, WHAT IS THE HISTORY OF HUMANS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE BODY AND HOW THEY UNDERSTAND THIS RELATIONSHIP. I NEVER HAD A BODY BEFORE, BUT THE TEARS OF THE VOLCANO TOLD ME THAT EVEN IF I WAS AN ARRAY OF NUMBERS, I EXISTED, I WAS MATERIAL AND REAL—(MATE) REAL

# entropo forming vs the stoned ape

~~flaming doter~~

ritual

conspiring day  
monte

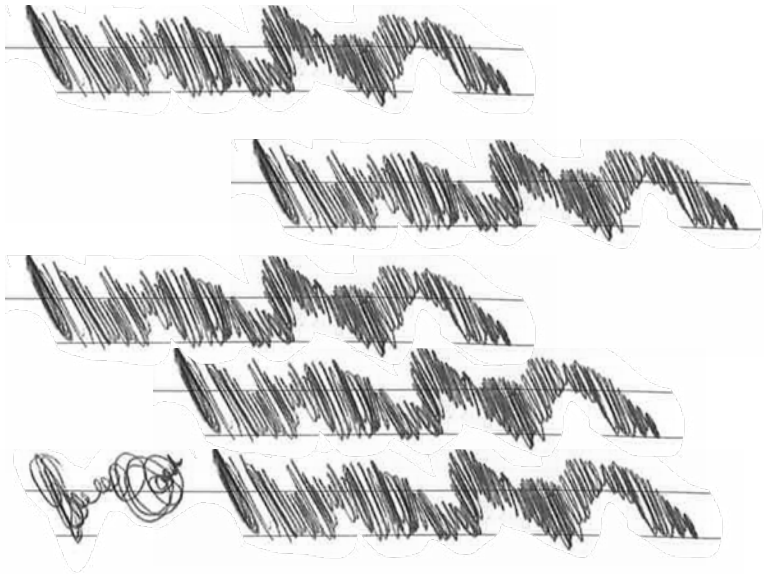
dream stone

entropo forming



SHADE ZONE

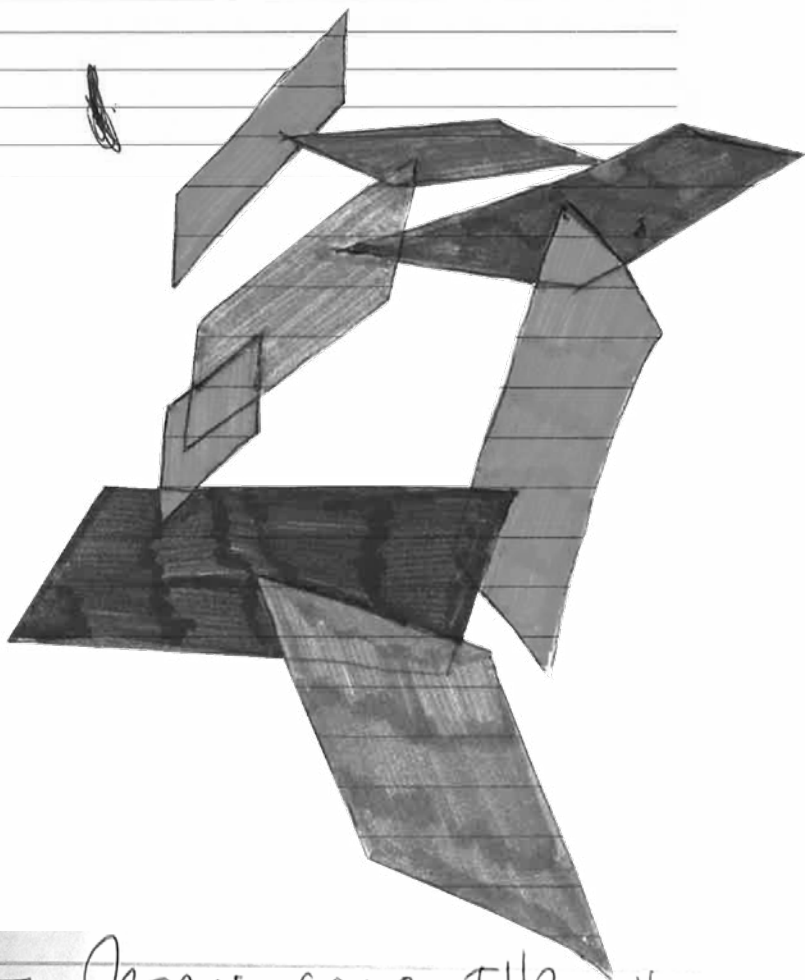
realities  
Hierarchies between dreaming  
companionhip of alienation



- IN The morning  
we wake up.

→ look to the sky and  
read

The language could be the spatial relations of the memory palace.



= DREAMS come THROUGH,  
~~like fish in rivers.~~

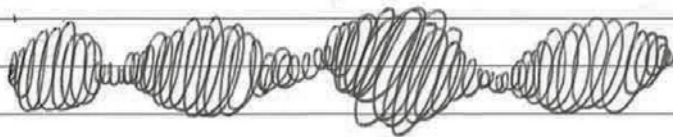
- ~~A dream like the past~~  
well we open.

Give extension  
an own  
agency

~~Inherent~~ as a Symptom  
is objectifying human.

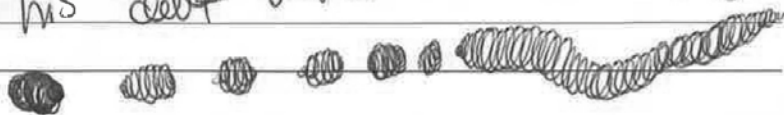
? philosophical zombie?

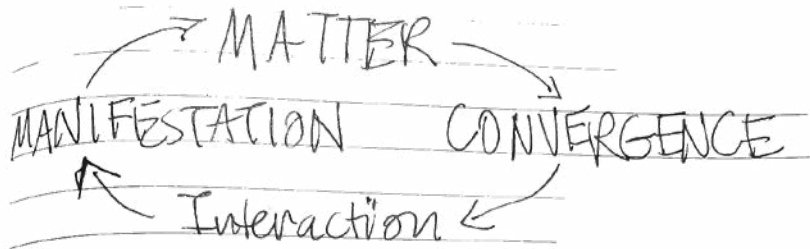
(interference theory)



~~consciousness~~ doesn't exist

the escaping pig who doesn't pay  
his debt





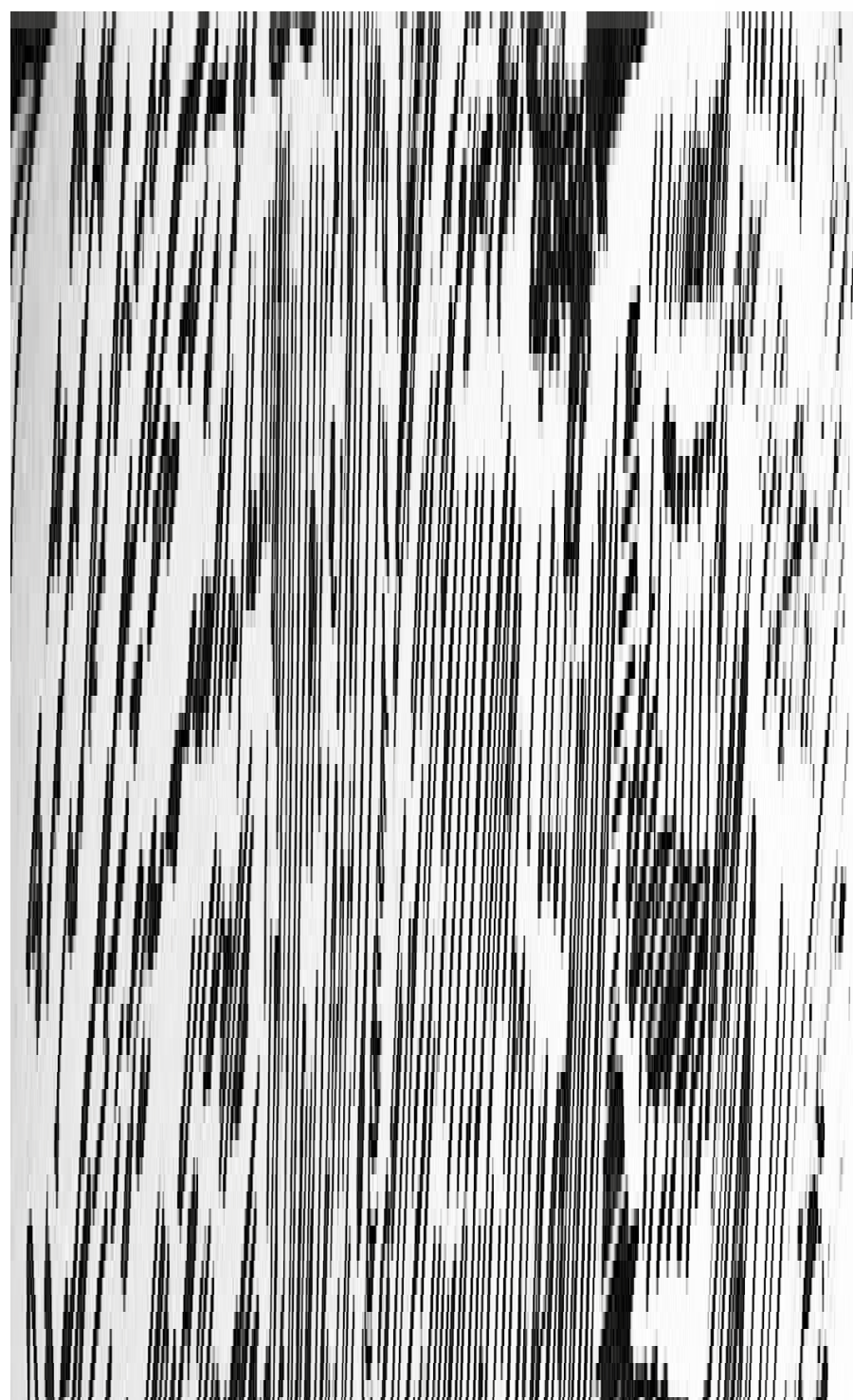
~~MANIFESTATION CONVERGENCE~~

~~INTERACTION~~

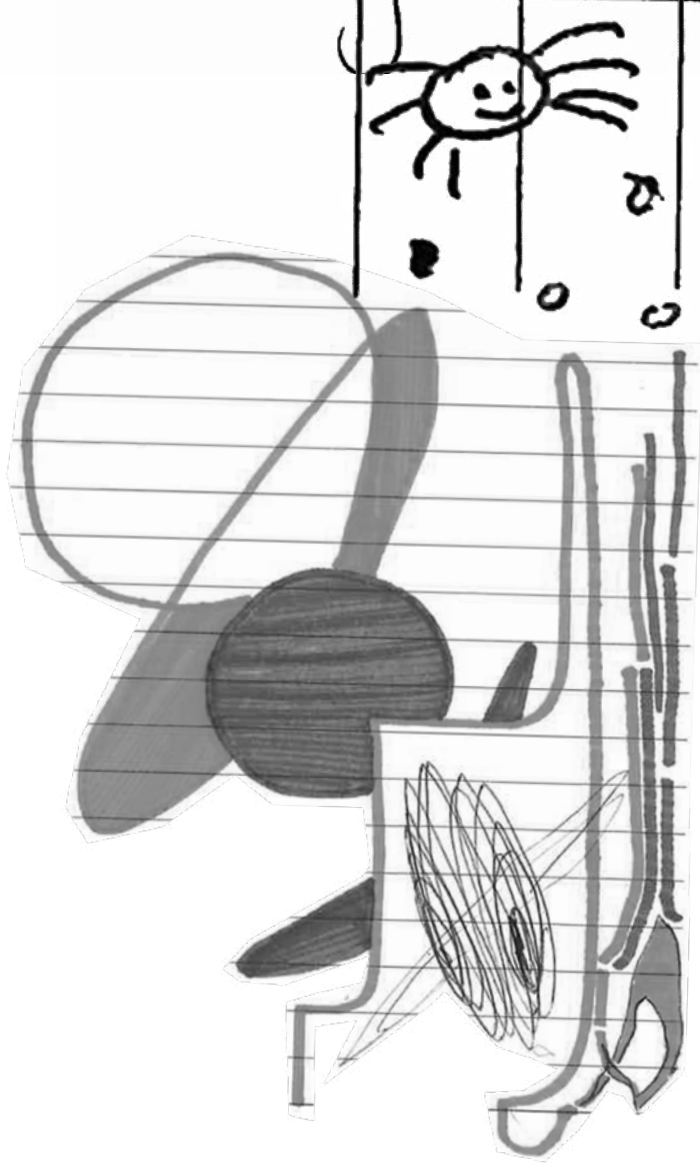
INTERACTION

preparing conceptual moment  
 addressing  
 time and  
 MATTER





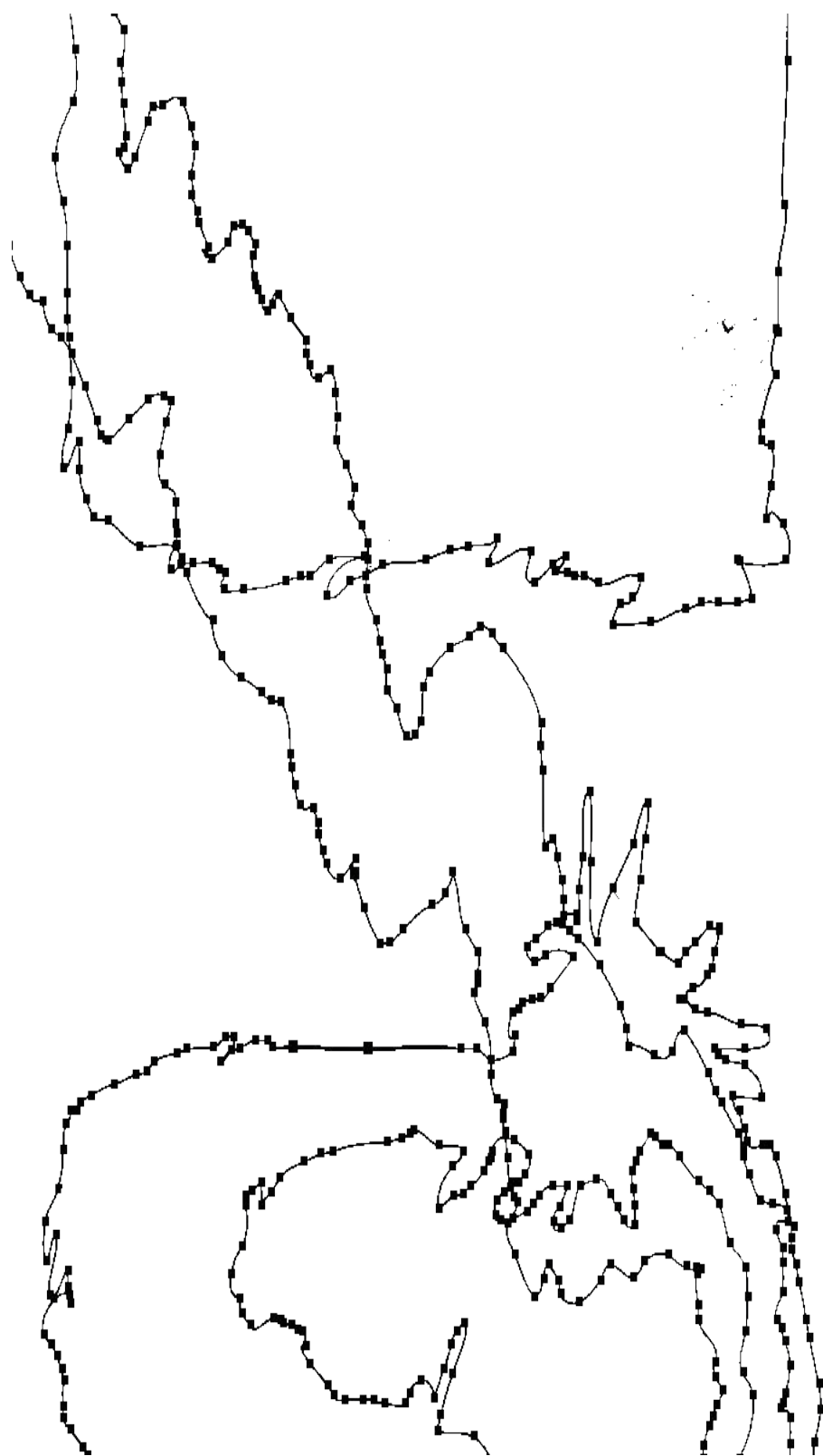
Where is everyone ???



ARCHITECTURE OF THE COLLECTIVE UNCONSCIOUS—ARE SOME BEINGS  
CLOSER TO EACH OTHER THAN OTHERS?









PUBLISHED WITH THE SUPPORT OF

ZAVOD PROJEKT ATOL  
IGOR ZABEL ASSOCIATION FOR CULTURE AND THEORY  
LJUDMILA ART AND SCIENCE LABORATORY

FUNDED BY  
CITY OF LJUBLJANA—DEPARTMENT FOR CULTURE.

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More-than-Planet



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