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All these works belong to the school of California hard-edge painting, centered in Los Angeles, where Lundeberg lived and worked. (Her art was the subject of a recent retrospective at the Laguna Art Museum.) They convey a "classic attitude"; the phrase, which is also the title of the exhibition, is derived from a statement Lundeberg wrote for a 1942 exhibition at New York's Museum of Modern Art. "By classicism," she writes, "I mean . . . a highly conscious concern with esthetic structure which is the antithesis of intuitive, romantic, or realistic approaches to painting. My aim . . . is to calculate, and reconsider, every element in a painting with regard to its function in the whole organization." If this sounds like an orthodox assertion of reductive formalism, however, the works in this exhibition contradicted the statement. Boasting titles that conspicuously flout allusions to natural phenomena (sea, earth, light) and real places (a road, a corridor, arches), Lundeberg's work is peculiarly romantic and intuitive: She reduces her subject matter to pale mnemonic traces, its reality just barely evident in the ghostly abstractness. It seems Lundeberg could escape neither her environment nor her unconscious.

Compared with her early representational work, such as *Double Portrait of the Artist in Time*, 1935 (which is in the collection of the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington, DC), Lundeberg's deadpan abstractions seem timeless and impersonal. Yet this also raises a question: Are her geometries a creative "breakthrough" or an ambivalent abandonment of representation? Indeed, I suggest that there is no such thing as purely abstract painting: Experience of reality and of the self is always implicit in abstraction's forms and structure.

—*Donald Kuspit*

Theo Triantafyllidis
SARGENT'S DAUGHTERS

For his New York solo debut, Theo Triantafyllidis, an Athens-, Los Angeles-, and Berlin-educated architecture graduate turned artist, presented one small sculpture; a medium-size wall relief composed of shape-fitted shards of colorful trash; two ink-jet-on-nylon wall hangings; and, most notably, three self-generating videos, two of which were accompanied by comical props and cosmetically augmented computer hardware. The sculpture, *Mountain (Ceramic)* (all works 2016), a piled-up mound of extruded white clay bearing splashes of color and bright plastic appendages, crowned a plain white plinth. Calling to mind Richard Dreyfuss's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* mashed-potato mound, this is clearly a work with which to conjure, and that the artist does with *Mountain (Screen Piece)*, located just a few feet away: A sideways monitor showing a vertical-format video leans against a wall. The screen is connected by electronic umbilici to a nearby Mac mini tilted edgewise by a homemade fluorescent-green wire stand and cryptically adorned with an antenna-like, yellow and magenta stem poking upward from one of the device's USB ports. Embellishing his hardware with decorative flourishes, Triantafyllidis asks that we consider his enabling technology as a sculptural element in aesthetic dialogue with the video it delivers.

Speaking of the video, a psychedelic drama unfolds on-screen as tiny green humanoid figures scurry about the base of a white, crud- and object-encrusted mountain—a relatively crude, gaming-software rendering of the ceramic sculpture. The simulated POV shifts radically and unpredictably as plumes of black smoke swirl around the summit. Hot-pink lava spews down the mountainside, explaining perhaps why computer and monitor, along with the ceramic sculpture's pedestal, all sit in pools of Pepto-Bismol-colored liquid, suggestive of an interdimensional, ectoplasmic life force common to object and avatar.

The Lilliputian green figures interact haphazardly with their shifting ground, moving to an erratic and unrepeatable algorithmic beat. In a similar vein, the nearby *Still Life with Yumyums* comprises a black, cubic gaming PC—tricked out with plastic doodads and propped upon an illuminated fake mango—feeding custom software commands to a large, floor-bound monitor leaning against the wall. On-screen, a Boschian tableau of jittery shenanigans is staged upon what appears to be a weightless, revolving tree slice. Among the many moving parts in this unstill life are a half-peeled banana, a smartphone, a varicose cocoon disgorging puffy white larvae, and a coiled-up turd (with encircling flies). What's more, a swarm of fiddle-footed digital flotsam bounces about amid all of this. Abstract and representational forms collide while comical inanities such as an elongated frankfurter capriciously orbit the action. Incongruity, unscripted interference, and periodic interruption are the order of the day in this clamorous microcosm.

Theo Triantafyllidis, *How to Everything*, 2016, live digital simulation, color, sound, indefinite duration.

The third video took pride of place on the back wall, sparsely flanked on one side by *World Atlas*, a neatly organized constellation of found materials vaguely reminiscent of Tony Cragg's 1980s plastic wall and floor reliefs, and on the other side by the two casually affixed textile pieces, *Rock Formation (Albedo Texture)* and *Mountain (Albedo Texture)*. Creating cloak-like squares of camoesque patterned fabric—the former muddy but with fluorescent dashes, the latter blending the color scheme of the two *Mountain* works—the artist here uses his software to abstract and transmute, shredding the depicted three-dimensional object and reconstituting it as a material, two-dimensional amalgam. And finally, the video, *How to Everything*, is, unlike its siblings, discreetly wall-mounted and unaccompanied by evident external hardware. Though sharing the same retina-piercing palette and slapstick kineticism as the other videos, this one lacks a central staging device. Rather, it depicts a pristine chromatic chamber in which all manner of insistently cute (a baby dinosaur!), zany (a chicken!), artsy (a brushstroke!), absurdist (a faceless, bloated biped!), and topical (a toy drone!) components intersect, quasi-randomly. A patently artificial world, this is not the uncanny realm of high-end 3-D motion graphics or CGI effects. This is lo-fi gamer unreality—phone-app space, compressed spectacle—engineered for hyper-responsive interactivity and low energy drag. Yet, interestingly, the artist has disallowed the very thing that enables the inhabitation of such space: user participation. Unhindered by will, the elements run amok, laying bare the anarchic infrastructure of a digital fourth dimension designed for dumb fun.

—*Jeff Gibson*

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Virtual Reality
__Ways of seeing

Ways of (not) seeing
Structures of visibility in VR

Denise Thwaites

Jess Johnson and Simon Ward
Developer: Kenny Smith
Sound: Andrew Clarke
Known Unknown, 2018,
still from virtual reality animation.
Exhibited as part of *Terminus*
(2018) at National Gallery of
Australia, Canberra.
Image courtesy of the artist

John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* provided a 1970s viewership with a critical window into Western art history's participation in broader socio-economic and semiotic systems. Examining artefacts from fifteenth-century painting to modern publicity, Berger's series for the BBC explored the relational and historically contingent nature of seeing, famously stating that "perspective makes the eye the centre of the visible world."[1] Exposing how an era's visual culture articulates and responds to material socio-political dynamics, his analysis implied a necessary inverse in the artefacts and traits that go relatively unseen due to our historically contingent optics. Berger's approach thus begs the question: How might emergent visual regimes enabled by today's virtual reality (VR) technologies reflect a perspective that is specific to our era? And as a consequence, how might VR equally inaugurate a way of (not) seeing? This conversation is broached by contemporary artists who are testing the capacities of VR in a myriad of ways.

On a practical level, VR can be defined as a set of technologies that provide an interface for real-time sensorimotor and cognitive activities within a digitally created artificial world.[2] These technologies establish immersive and transportive sensory environments that allow users to feel spatially present in an alternate reality. VR's capacity to establish such a compelling virtual environment is often described in terms of degrees of immersion.[3] To achieve this, immersive systems imply a double action of both enveloping the user in a vivid and extensive alternative world, while also shutting out their physical reality.[4] This spatial chiasm can produce distinctive physiological responses in the user: from nausea, to sweating or a racing pulse, or even pain-relief. Indeed, for over a decade medical researchers have explored the benefits of VR as a non-pharmacological analgesia; the unusually high amount of attention drawn into these virtual environments serving as a neurological distraction from processing physical pain.[5]

The power of escapism has been associated with historical cultural practices, including the modern fantasy genre across various media. While advocates of this style reject the reduction of this complex artistic genre to a single psychological mechanism,[6] creative researchers in VR face similar questions as to whether the technology's immersive quality feeds a modern proclivity towards escapism, as discussed by researchers in pathological gaming.[7]

Artists Jess Johnson and Simon Ward are candid about the influence of gaming and the fantasy genre on their work and personal history, explaining how they provided "windows into these much greater universes than what was happening in small-town New Zealand."[8] This is foreshadowed in Johnson's drawing practice, which sees monumental architectures populated with mythic humanoid figures in repeated ritualistic and symbolic forms, establishing a "generative code" for her constructed worlds.[9] Ward's adaptation of Johnson's surreal imagery into sensorially saturating digital worlds is done with the aim of seducing, disorienting and troubling the audience. In doing so, Johnson and Ward use VR as a psychedelic conduit that pierces the fabric of reality, indulging what they consider to be the audiences' innate exploratory drive to see beyond immediate reality.

For Johnson and Ward's recent VR work, shown as part of the Balnaves Contemporary Intervention Series at the National Gallery of Australia, *Terminus* (2018), the artists developed five Head-Mounted Display (HMD) VR experiences, installing them as "stations" upon a *Dungeons and Dragons* inspired floor maze. Integrating Johnson's signature iconography into the physical display, these structures read as gamified sci-fi altars, enclaves and passages, positioning the HMD VR experiences as achievements to individually unlock in a "choose-your-own-adventure," while a separate pavilion room allows visitors to enjoy projected animations collectively.[10]

The impact of user immersion and agency in Johnson and Ward's work builds upon ways of seeing that have evolved through the history of modernity. In his analysis, Jonathan Crary examines the modernisation of perceptual experience through nineteenth-century visual culture, as divertissements such as the Stereoscope engendered new forms of spectatorship. As phantasmagoria, these modern technologies foreshadowed the operations of VR, their mystifying appeal similarly functioning through "the detachment of the image from a wider field of possible sensory stimulation."[11] The Stereoscope and later the Kaiserpanorama prefigured the contemporary HMD used in Johnson and Ward's work, as their ways of seeing were characterised by a type of psychic and perceptual insularity.[12] Contrasting this, the immersion of the nineteenth-century panorama painting derived from its frameless, unbounded image that enabled an "impression of completeness" for the visitor to peruse along its horizontal axis.[13] Almost two centuries later, the VR HMD integrates and turbo-charges aspects from each of these divertissements, using insular sensory stimulus that opens to an unbounded virtual image. Should we therefore conclude that VR continues the modern habituation of audiences to modes of consumption and docility, as discussed by Crary?

The agency of the viewer in *Terminus* has been described as "neither completely powerless nor all-powerful" as they are "enveloped in a quest that is encompassing and transformative."[14] Unlike the stereoscopic and panoramic immersion of the nineteenth century, the *Terminus* user is drawn into an alternate world that does not simulate realistic landscapes or figures, but enables a vivid and embodied experience of a speculative virtual realm. Contrary to the consumable mystique of its nineteenth-century counterparts, Johnson and Ward's affective world represents a 21st-century site of potential agency: the infinitely plastic digital sphere where structures are built, communities formed and history made. In this way, *Terminus* reconfigures qualities of the postmodern fantasy genre through which real and virtual planes are intertwined as indistinguishable sides of a single mobius strip.[15]

Despite this shift, certain aspects of modern stereoscopic ways of seeing pervade VR works like *Terminus*. For, while the insular HMD viewing experience opens onto new virtual worlds, the embodied viewer is also an object on display. Unaware of their reactive postures and gestures, the viewer becomes a comical monument to the dissociative aspects of the VR experience. Functioning by shutting out the viewer's physical environment, VR mystifies one aspect of the viewers reality, while engrossing them in another.

In contrast to these alternate world-building approaches, instrumental applications of VR aim to directly link experiences of the virtual space with real-world issues. This is seen in the field of VR Documentary exemplified by *Clouds over Sidra* (2015) produced by Gabo Arora and Chris Milk in partnership with the UN and Samsung to present a 360-degree video that immerses viewers inside the Za'atari refugee camp in northern Jordan. Developed from a journalistic tradition, such documentaries often include matter-of-fact voice-over narration to provide context and information regarding

the virtual environment in which the viewer is immersed. Jeremy Bailenson emphasises the absence of traditional emotionally-intensifying filmmaking techniques in *Clouds over Sidra;* rather, suggesting that the film's power arises through the viewer's first-person visual immersion in ordinary moments within the refugee community.[16]

The impact of VR documentary as described by Milk derives from a particular logic of visibility and proximity. The viewer not only sees ordinarily invisible corners of the world, but inhabits a perspective that suggests their embodied presence within an ordinarily distant geographic, cultural and political landscape. The efficacy of VR's deployment in this instance is seemingly supported by the doubling of donations to the UN after the release of *Clouds over Sidra*.[17] Yet celebration should be paired with detailed consideration of the logic implied by this approach to engendering empathic ways of seeing.

This topic is addressed by Jeremy Bailenson, who expands studies from the cognitive sciences and psychology to consider the potential and effects of VR. Looking to Jamil Zaki's exploration of the neural bases of social behaviour, Bailenson highlights a necessary cognitive step within empathy: "the ability of your brain to form theories about what other people are feeling and what might be causing those feelings."[18] Arguing that empathy is switched on or off by individuals due to its emotionally taxing effects on our mental resources,[19] VR intervenes by "reliev[ing] users of the cognitive effort required to make a mental model of another person's perspective from scratch," providing users with a tool to "overcome a motivational hurdle."[20] Echoing the title of his book, *Experience on Demand*, Bailenson suggests that VR can provide easier and higher-definition[21] conditions for "perspective-taking" that encourage empathy, building upon psychological studies in this field.[22]

This socially instrumental approach to VR is evident in the work of multidisciplinary collective BeAnotherLab

(BAL), *The Machine to be Another* (2016–ongoing). The collective's artistic aims are to use neuroscientific approaches to embodiment to explore perceptions of the Self in relation to the Other, aspiring to measure the empathy generated among its users.[23] Developed using low-budget Creative Commons technology, the system integrates telepresence and performance to generate a user experience of inhabiting the body of the Other—one's binary opposite in terms of gender, race and social position, among other categories. This illusion is enabled through the coupling of movements between a user and real-life performer, using head-mounted displays, headphones, microphone, head-tracking, and servo-controlled cameras.[24]

Liam Jarvis analyses his particular experience with *The Machine to Be Another* hosted by Good Chance Encampment, which facilitated an experience of inhabiting the virtual body of a refugee from the dismantled "jungle" refugee camp in Calais. Looking down at his own arms that are seemingly transformed into those of a refugee, Jarvis listens to the latter's pre-recorded account of her real-life events, while drawing a picture inspired by this story. The work concludes with the removal of his HMD, where he finds himself face-to-face with the refugee volunteer whose body he has virtually inhabited. In response to this, Jarvis deploys a Levinasian ethical framework to raise important questions about the supposed empathy implicated in this exchange, stating: "Is this illusory transaction in body-ownership across not only different social, political and gender boundaries, but the borderlands of the skin, symptomatic of a radical empathic act ...? Or, should I feel a sense of unease at my perceptual colonisation of the volunteer refugee's mediatized image?"[25]

While acknowledging the way in which such VR experiments can provide refugees with a powerful tool to communicate their experience to others— *The Machine to Be Another* being used not only in artistic context but also in community workshops and

Gabo Arora and Chris Milk
Clouds Over Sidra, 2015
360-degree video still.
Produced in partnership with
United Nations and Samsung.
Photo courtesy the artist

neurological rehabilitation contexts[26]—Jarvis questions the simultaneous effacement and "possession" of the Other through the perspectival illusion of this project, through which the phenomenal self virtually integrates the Other's physicality into their own bodily schema before meeting them in the flesh.[27] What does this gesture reveal about contemporary conditions of empathy? In a highly mediatised and informationally saturated era, does empathy require user immersion in the Other to alleviate the cognitive fatigue of imagining their perspective? Could this short-cut subsequently reduce our capacity to really see the Other in the fullness of their difference?

The emotional responses elicited from *The Machine to Be Another* are discussed by Jarvis in relation to a "Proprioceptive drift" through which the suffering of the Other is experienced via a mislocalised sense of self, almost like a phantom limb.[28] Yet it is important to consider how the discourse surrounding projects such as *Clouds*

over Sidra and *The Machine to Be Another* can become entangled with therapeutic frameworks for VR, such as the clinical treatment of anxiety disorders. For sufferers of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), panic disorder, social anxiety and specific phobias, VR technology enables a controlled computer-generated environment for incremental exposure therapy.[29] This method provides patients with exposure *in virtuo* to enable their eventual tolerance of anxiety-inducing material *in vivo*. Advocates for VR's social applications, while appealing to their own specific fields of neuroscientific or psychological research, rely on a similar logic of therapeutic consumption: that controlled embodied experiences of difference *in virtuo* will equip us for more challenging *in vivo* social tolerance. This begs an important question: Does the controlled therapeutic pathway to empathy *in virtuo*, reinforce social and political dynamics in which acceptance of the marginalised Other is framed by the needs and perspectives of the dominant?
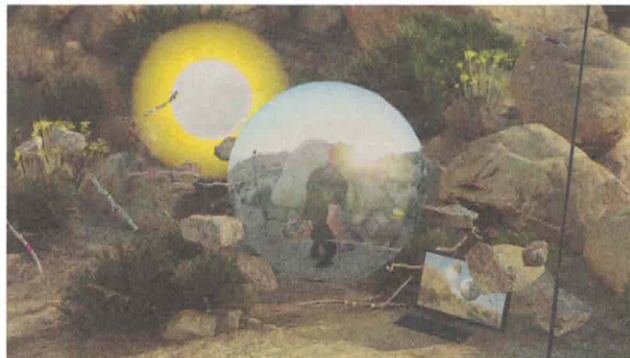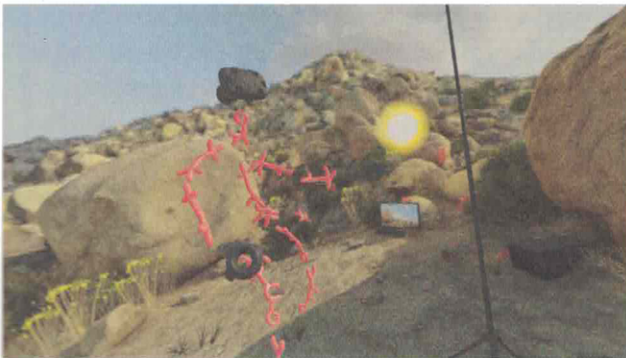
Top:
Tabita Rezaire
PREMIUM CONNECT (REAL DEAL), 2017
virtual reality artwork commissioned for UNREAL by NRW Forum, Düsseldorf

Bottom (two views):
Theo Triantafyllidis
Sound Design: Holly Waxwing
Additional Photogrammetry: Régis Boissenin
Staphyloculus (or the paradox of site specificity of virtual realities), 2017
virtual reality artwork commissioned for UNREAL by NRW Forum, Düsseldorf

It is in this context that critical explorations of VR's relationship to social, political and physical realities becomes even more important. The recent exhibition *Virtual Insanity* (2018) at the Kunsthalle Mainz presented the work of artists such as Cao Fei, Jon Rafman, Harun Farocki and Tabita Rezaire to explore "the extension of reality and its shadowy underbelly,"[30] by questioning how heightened immersion within today's virtual worlds produces a profound impact on the physical world. Tabita Rezaire's VR work, *Premium Connect (Real Deal)* (2016) continues her interrogation of the digital sphere as a terrain for electronic colonialism, enveloping the audience in a VR universe that intertwines cybernetic and sacred geometries, as well as computational and African divination systems. In doing so, she reminds the user of the infrastructural politics of ICT systems, their lack of neutrality and implication in the real-world erasure of Indigenous forms of knowledge.[31]

Interrogating the spectatorship of VR technologies, artist Theo Triantafyllidis subverts VR's structures of visibility in *Staphyloculus (or the paradox of site specificity of virtual realities)* (2017), producing an individual HMD interactive experience depicting the outbreak of a VR transmitted "Polywobbly Fervenitis" virus, presenting this user interaction as an supplementary spectacle for others in the space. He explains that "the whole piece is secretly choreographing the body of the person in the VR set to do weird stuff for the other people to watch, without that person necessarily noticing."[32] Baiting its user, Triantafyllidis' work reminds us that the febrile deployment of new visual technologies not only implies experiments with ways of seeing, but also the generation of new surveilled subjects — be they gallery audiences or potential markets. Indeed, from a corporate perspective, the real subject of VR is the user, rather than the image enclosed in their HMD.

To return to our initial question: How does VR imply both a way of seeing and way of not seeing? For artists today the technical functionalities of both saturating and shutting

out visual stimulus can be harnessed in the vivification of speculative VR worlds that viscerally disturb our presence in the real world. Equally, it can provide a controlled virtual space to expose users to images that are otherwise too distant or difficult to be seen in real life. But as experimentations with this medium continue, considering what is excluded from our immersive field of vision may tell us more about our contemporary condition than what is on full display.

1 John Berger & Mike Dibb, "Episode 1", Ways of Seeing, BBC, 1972__2 Philippe Fuchs & Pascal Guitton et. al. (eds), introduction to Virtual Reality: Concepts and Technologies, London: Chapman & Hall, 2011, p. 6__3 James J. Cummings & Jeremy N. Bailenson, "How immersive is enough? Meta-analysis of the effect of immersive technology on user presence," Media Psychology, vol. 19, 2016, p. 3__4 Mel Slater & Sylvia Wilbur, "A framework for immersive virtual environments (FIVE): Speculations on the role of presence in virtual environments," Teleoperators and Virtual Environments, vol. 6, 1997, p. 605__5 E. Steele, K. Grimmer et. al, "Virtual Reality as a pediatric pain modulation technique," Cyberpsychology & Behaviour, 6: 6, pp. 633–44__6 Examples include Caroline Webb, Fantasy and the Real World in British Children's Literature, New York and London: Routledge, 2015; and Rosemary Jackson, Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion, London: Routledge, 1981__7 Dongdong Li, Albert Liau & Angeline Khoo, "Examining the influence of actual-ideal self-discrepancies, depression, and escapism, on pathological gaming among massively multiplayer online adolescent gamers", Cyberpsychology, Behavior & Social Networking, 14:9, 2011__8 Jess Johnson quoted in A-M Jean & E. Carlin, "Review: Constructing Fantasy Worlds at the NGA," Art Monthly Australasia, May 2018, p. 35__9 Interview with Jess Johnson & Simon Ward about Terminus, 2018, Balnaves Contemporary Intervention Series, National Gallery of Australia, 5 May – 24 September 2018: https://nga.gov.au/balnaves/johnsonposter.pdf __10 "Balnaves Contemporary Intervention Series: Jess Johnson & Simon Ward, Terminus", National Gallery of Australia: https://nga.gov.au/balnaves/johnson-ward.cfm__11 Crary uses this word in a gesture towards Theodor Adorno's discussion of phantasmagoria as "processes and forms that conceal their actual production and operation." See Jonathan Crary, "Géricault, the Panorama, and Sites of Reality in the Early Nineteenth Century," Grey Room, 9, Autumn 2002, p. 19__12 Ibid. pp. 8–9__13 Ibid. p. 20__14 A-M Jean & E. Carlin, Art Monthly Australasia, May 2018, p. 35__15 Maria Nikolajeva, "Fairy tale and fantasy: From archaic to postmodern," Marvels & Tales, 17:1, 2003, p. 145__16 Jeremy Bailenson, Experience on Demand, New York: W.W. Norton & Co. [Kindle DX version], p. 1,060__17 Ibid. p. 1,072__18 Ibid. p. 1,092__19 Ibid. p. 1,101__20 Ibid. p. 1,143__21 Ibid., p.1,145. Bailenson states "Because the mental model of the perspective of the empathic subject can be created in great detail in VR, it can be designed to help avoid stereotypes and false or comforting narratives."__22 Ibid. pp. 1,123 and 1,136__23 BeAnotherLab, Machine to Be Another: themachinetobeanother.org__24 Phillipe Bertrand, Daniel Gonzalez-Franco et. al., "Machine to Be Another", Proceedings of AISB 2014—50th Annual Convention of the AISB, 2014, p. 1__25 Liam Jarvis, "The ethics of mislocalized selfhood," Performance Research, 22: 3, 2017, p. 31__26 Ibid., p. 32__27 Ibid., p. 34__28 Ibid., p. 35__29 Brenda Kay Wiederhold & Mark D. Wiederhold, Introduction to Advances in Virtual Reality and Anxiety Disorders, 2014, p. 4__30 See http://kunsthalle-mainz.de/en/exhibitions/archive/14__31 IMPAKT, "Resident Artist: Tabita Rezaire", October 2016: http://impakt.nl/headquarters/resident-artist-tabita-rezaire__32 Theo Triantafyllidis & Faith Holland, "Queering Ork Aesthetics & Existing Beyond the Virtual", Aqnb, July 2018: https://www.aqnb.com/2018/07/23/queering-ork-aesthetics-and-existing-beyond-the-virtual-theo-triantafyllidis-in-conversation-with-faith-holland.

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Against realism
The badly rendered potential of VR

Ian Haig

One of the great potentials of VR is in the glitch, the error, corrupted data and bad compression. All of which is wonderfully at odds and runs counter to the standard (yawn) cultural narrative of VR as a wondrous new medium of infinite possibilities and lifelike immersion. Isn't it the job of artists to be disruptive? Particularly when it comes to technology like VR which is often hardwired with a particular cultural narrative, before one even unboxes it. The glitch, together with badly rendered graphics, fake looking 3D spaces and animation explores the disappointment and failures of such technologies, which is certainly more critical, self-reflexive and playful than to buy wholesale into the current commercial hype surrounding VR.

Hollywood movies have always been a good barometer of how the narrative, hype and spin of technology plays out in culture. Films depicting the internet for example almost universally see that the precise data required can be quickly and effortlessly retrieved at super speed at any moment driving the narrative forward. *The Circle* (2017) provides plenty of suffocating and disturbing West Coast feel good moments about making the world a better place through enhanced data analytics via its new social media platform. Steve Jobs' iPad swipe interface was first suggested in the gesture-based interactions of Tom Cruise's character in Steven Spielberg's *Minority Report* (2002), itself an adaption of Philip K. Dick's sci-fi techno fantasy.

Movies that deal with virtual reality have a special place in this category. One of the more downright embarrassing examples is *The Lawnmower Man* (1992), appearing at the height of the first wave of 1990s VR hype. The very term "virtual reality" has quite possibly forever been tarnished with the overtones derived from this film. *Virtuosity* from 1995 was another movie to capitalise on the emerging promise of VR, forever destined to the $1 VHS pile. More recent VR eye candy like Steven Spielberg's *Ready Player One* (2018) and Luc Besson's *Valerian and the City of a Thousand Planets* (2017) both feature a computer-generated world that is indistinguishable from the real one.

It's important to consider Hollywood in the history of VR. As Simon Penny points out, the sci-fi fantasy of VR was one of the engines which drove the conceptualisation of VR art works in the 1990s: "The 1990s decade was definitive and formative for digital art precisely because the technology was new and in rapid transition, and the imaginations and aspirations of artists—fuelled no doubt by sci-fi, as well as by mathematical and technological metaphors, outstripped both the available technology and theoretical contexts."[1]

While VR has now fully emerged in pop culture, it's a technology that was always destined to emerge in a year as futuristic-sounding as 2018. Self-driving cars will be next, which like VR is a technology that has a futuristic marketing campaign written all over it. And again like VR is an advancement driven and pushed forward by the pop-cultural narrative of "the future." VR for Hollywood is also a strange vehicle, for the futuristic VR fantasies the films are depicting dispense with the present model of "watching" Hollywood movies which are about to be dramatically superseded by fully immersive technologies like VR.

The current fascination for VR in movies like *Ready Player One* is one that embraces the real world as one of absolute digital fabrication. This mimicry of the real, like CGI forms part of the aesthetic value system of such technologies. If VR appears artificial, fake or unrealistic in its verisimilitude and simulation it is often perceived to have failed as both a technology and an aesthetic. This depiction of "reality" in VR runs in parallel to the quest for photorealism by digital animators, compositors and motion trackers to deliver CGI that is indistinguishable from the real world. The success of CGI is often based on the idea that you didn't notice it, so successful was it in its simulation of reality that it remains undetected and invisible.

But there are other things going on with VR which make it a compelling medium that has nothing to do with its ability to convey lifelike realism and behaviour. In the same way that some new media artists in the 1990s took William Gibson's cyberspace of *Neuromancer* (1984) to be a real place, with little or no sense of irony, artists working with VR need to be aware of the dramatic level of artifice hardwired into such technology, in addition to the overblown and clichéd Hollywood VR tropes (*The Lawnmower Man* again) that drive its cultural narrative.

One particular holy grail for VR is porn, the promise of an orgiastic sensory overload of lifelike POV simulation. But the reality of VR porn is the unreality of the body, a sensory weirdness that is heightened while in no way realistic. VR provides us with a new kind of non-space, which is caught between realism, simulation and artificiality. The movie *Brainstorm* (1983) comes to mind here, directed by Douglas Trumbull, well known for generating the special effects for the star gate sequence of *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968). In *Brainstorm* Trumbull has opened up a new portal in the spacetime continuum: technologically mediated sex. While not strictly VR (this is 1983 after all) *Brainstorm* features a headset/helmet for producing real-world sensory simulation where one of its inventors dies from a never ending POV orgasm loop feed directly into the brain. Porn has always driven the tech industry after all.

Probably no contemporary technology is imbued with so much utopian promise as VR. This evangelism was very much alive and well 25 years ago. I can still remember Simon Penny giving a presentation on VR in 1992 at TISEA (Third International Symposium of Electronic Art) in Sydney, donning a shiny cape and playing the part of an evangelical hustler. Twenty-five years later not a lot has changed, we are again reliving the hype and promise of VR through various tech companies like Google, Oculus Rift, HTC Vive and a host of others where faster processing speeds, higher-resolution real-time rendering will deliver us to VR nirvana. VR has replaced "interactivity" as the new frontier of digital technology for artists and tech companies alike. One has to remember that the hype of VR in the mid 1990s was oversold

as this incredible, state-of-the-art interface at the turn of the millennium. But with its crude, clunky graphics and scuba gear helmet it was at that time unconvincing, so we can expect to be a little cynical about the second wave now before us.

The rhetoric of such tech companies is all about the wondrous possibilities of VR and AR "where the only limit is your imagination." But why limit your imagination to realism? If this is indeed the narrative of the tech companies and blockbuster film fantasies, should artists working in VR rehash and duplicate the same aspirations and desires? Shouldn't artists take VR down a less conventional path to the more unknown and weird spaces? Previous screen technologies— from VHS, super-8, pixel vision, to 8-bit computer graphics, 16-mm films, night-vision, and digital video—provided a view of the world that was clearly not realistic, they gave us a grainy mediated lens onto the world which brought with it a unique set of aesthetic languages for artists to exploit.

Current VR tends towards a new kind of artifice for contemporary screen technology, a resolution and flatness as pure surface that like so much in consumer culture is reproducible as cheap, plastic junk. For example, recently The Royal Melbourne Show (a great barometer of popular culture) featured VR, from the Goat franchise (also available in shopping centres around Melbourne). The VR kept malfunctioning and the graphics glitching out, possibly from overuse by kids high on sugar, yet it perfectly distilled the plastic crappola experience which VR technology can sometimes lend itself to. It also served to reinforce that VR is a developing, and emerging technology that has yet to find its optimum output for a price and niche markets.

In the meantime, we have David Lynch's quip to ruminate over when discussing shooting his film *Inland Empire* (2006) on low resolution digital video: "The quality reminds me of the films of the 1930s. In the early days, the emulsion wasn't so good, so there was less information on the screen. The Sony PD result is a bit like that; its nowhere near high-def. And sometimes, in a frame, if there's some question about what you're seeing, or some dark corner, the mind can go dreaming. If everything is crystal clear in that frame, that's what it is, that's all it is."[2]
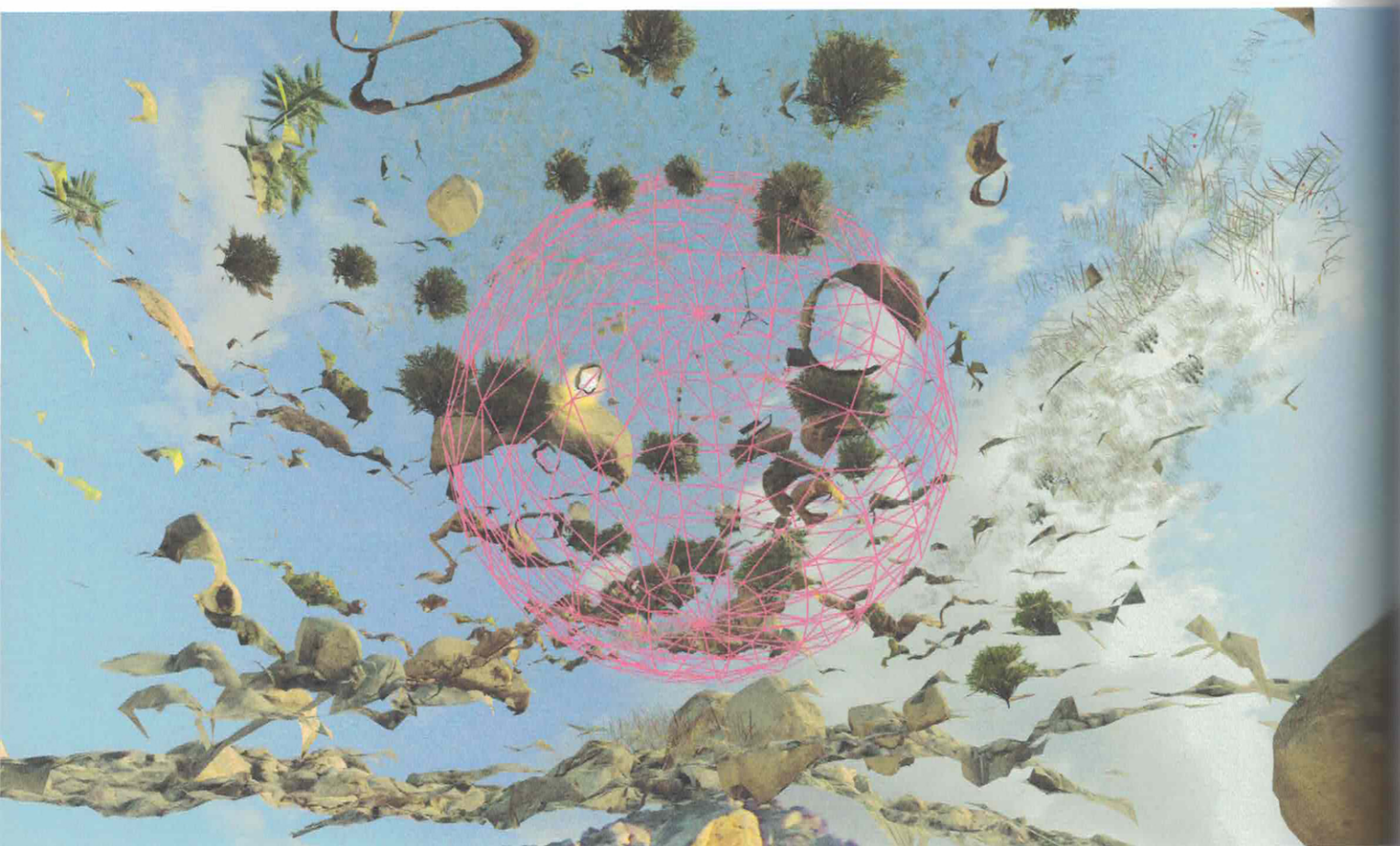
Theo Triantafyllidis
Sound design: Holly Waxwing
On-site team: Jenny Rodenhouse, Eli Joteva, Lander
Additional photogrammetry: Regis Boissenin
3D scanning, 3d modelling, exhibition design: Polina Miliou
Commissioned by NRW-Forum Dusseldorf, DE
Staphyloculus, 2017

Like all those perfectly rendered chrome balls, Grecian columns against checkerboard vistas, devoid of irony and so very popular in the early 1990s, this aesthetic was more about demonstrating the technical prowess of the software than anything else. In 2018, mainstream commercial VR is still in this chrome ball phase, demonstrating what the software can do. Producers and artists are also often guilty of waxing on about VR's "vast potential," rather than embracing its current pitfalls, shortcomings or indeed failings.

There is great aesthetic potential in VR for the badly rendered graphics, crude simulation, generic 3D models, digital artifacting and virtual bodies breaking apart—errors which offer great possibilities for artists to also subvert the dominant narrative for lifelike realism

which plagues VR and CGI in general. While not strictly VR, the work of Cool 3D World comes to mind here, as does the VR/AR work of Theo Triantafyllidis, to embrace the artificiality of the digital as a new kind of materiality. Cool 3D World and Triantafyllidis trade in imperfect, default-generated 3D imagery/animation which probably offers a more truthful depiction of our times than the drive for photorealism. From fake news, reality TV to the kind of plastic surgery witnessed daily in customised selfies, we are immersed in a world of simulation and artificial hyperreality where the fake is the new real.

One of the great things about VR is its ability to capture the feeling of being trapped within a self-contained, closed-off and claustrophobic space. In this, there is great potential for VR to extend the psychological dimension, an aspect of the technology that was clearly in overdrive in Paul McCarthy's recent foray into VR, presented as a satellite exhibition at the 2017 Venice Biennale. McCarthy's *C.S.S.C Coach Stage Stage Coach VR Experiment: Mary and Eve* (2017) produced in conjunction with Khora Contemporary, is VR that is just wrong in so many ways. The viewer finds themselves confronted by numerous virtual bodies in an overbearing psychodrama of debasement and humiliation (typical for McCarthy) based on a scene from John Ford's *Stagecoach*. The work is wonderfully disturbing on so many levels, but principally because one is trapped within the VR space with no escape.

Further, the McCarthy work used digital glitching, which like his recent sculptures of Disney figures with missing body parts and disfigured elements, represented the side effects and mistakes of the molding process. His VR work also contains virtual bodies that are shown breaking apart or rendered in a crude unfinished state, an aesthetic which clearly adds to the damage unfolding before us. The digital errors in McCarthy's VR world link to the idea of something very wrong. McCarthy's work often uncovers the fault lines in American pop culture and is here extended into new and freakish dimensions in his not-quite-right VR experiment with broken and damaged bodies. Most disturbing of all was the ability to walk

through digital bodies, as they broke apart and fractured, adding to the spatial and human dislocation of the VR space.

There is a strong link in McCarthy's VR work to the historical freakshow of the pre-cinematic sideshow or carnival. Here the narrative of VR is implicitly tied to earlier deformations of the body and in so doing manages to short-circuit the narrative of VR as a cutting-edge advancement in technology by underscoring the nineteenth-century freakshow element. In this way, the distortion of the body underpins many new forms of technology, from the digitally altered and enhanced selfie to the amplified and exaggerated bodies in computer games (*Mortal Kombat,* for example), the emergence of deepfake pornography and the manipulation of representations of the female body. Like much of McCarthy's oeuvre, *C.S.S.C Coach Stage Stage Coach VR Experiment: Mary and Eve* fuels a compulsion to view and participate in it against one's better judgement. The sheer audio-visual sensory overload of the work creates a sense of entrapment—like a deer caught in the headlights, the viewer is frozen into inaction before the unfolding horror.

Another recent work which explores this psychological space is Jess Taylor's creepy VR piece *All You Have To Do Is Ask* (2018). Here the viewer is implicated in the aftermath of a crime-like scene or nightmare. As the user surveys and navigates the terrain by torchlight, one encounters a series of digitally damaged sleeping female bodies. It's a particularly uncanny and disturbing VR experience that, like the McCarthy work, prompts a sense of helpless inaction.

All you have to do is ask operates on another level as well. The photogrammatic scans of the artist's body in the work take on a monstrous reading as incomplete, distorted simulations in this minefield of the unreliable body. Here the female form functions as a kind of corruption lurking within the VR space. The digital distortion of the body seems to be a direct result of our gaze and the very act of looking. Based on a walking simulator, the user navigates the space not with any enhanced sense of realism, which is what a walking simulator implies, but rather to experience it as loose and free-form, almost self-generated.
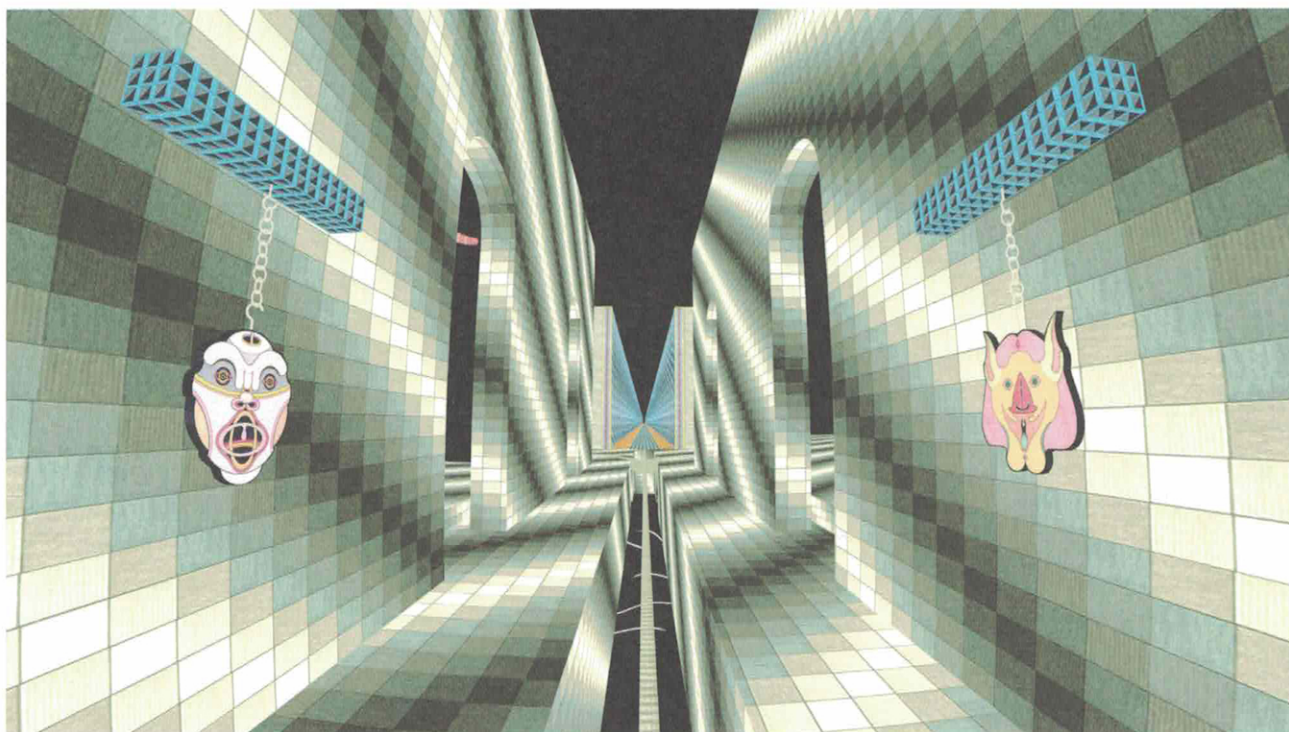
Surrounding the distorted sleeping bodies, the viewer is confronted with 360 views as a wall of silent faces. There is an acute sense of watching and of being watched, all of which contribute to the overall feeling of voyeurism that permeates the VR experience. The audience is implicated in not just watching but being silently judged, as feminist critique sits within a digital horror show of the body remastered. The light source coming from a single torchlight also contributes to the sense of a Manson Family home invasion in which the viewer as perpetrator is implicated.

Ixian Gate (2015) by Jess Johnson and Simon Ward is another work that would not have been possible in the mid 1990s first wave of VR given the degree of irony and humour incompatible with the po-faced artists working with VR in this period. The flat VR terrain produced by Johnson and Ward is entirely self-reflexive in terms of VR's seductive and kooky sci-fi aesthetic and accompanying iconography. Forget realism when we can instead have a VR world populated with mutant humans, impossible geographies and architectures from another dimension. As demonstrated here, VR that has escaped the clutches and more importantly the limitations of conventional real estate to take us into even stranger, darker, weirder, unknown and unseen spaces is a VR world worth taking the trouble to engage in.

1 Simon Penny, Desire for Virtual Space: The Technological Imaginary in 1990s Media Art, 2009: http://simonpenny.net/2010Writings__2 David Lynch, Catching the big Fish—meditation, consciousness and creativity, Penguin Group, 2007.

Ian Haig is a senior lecturer in the School of Art at RMIT. He is currently developing a VR project about the confrontation of the body and is also developing a feature film project.

fisheye

RÉALITÉ VIRTUELLE

PANORAMA
DE LA CRÉATION
ARTISTIQUE
CONTEMPORAINE
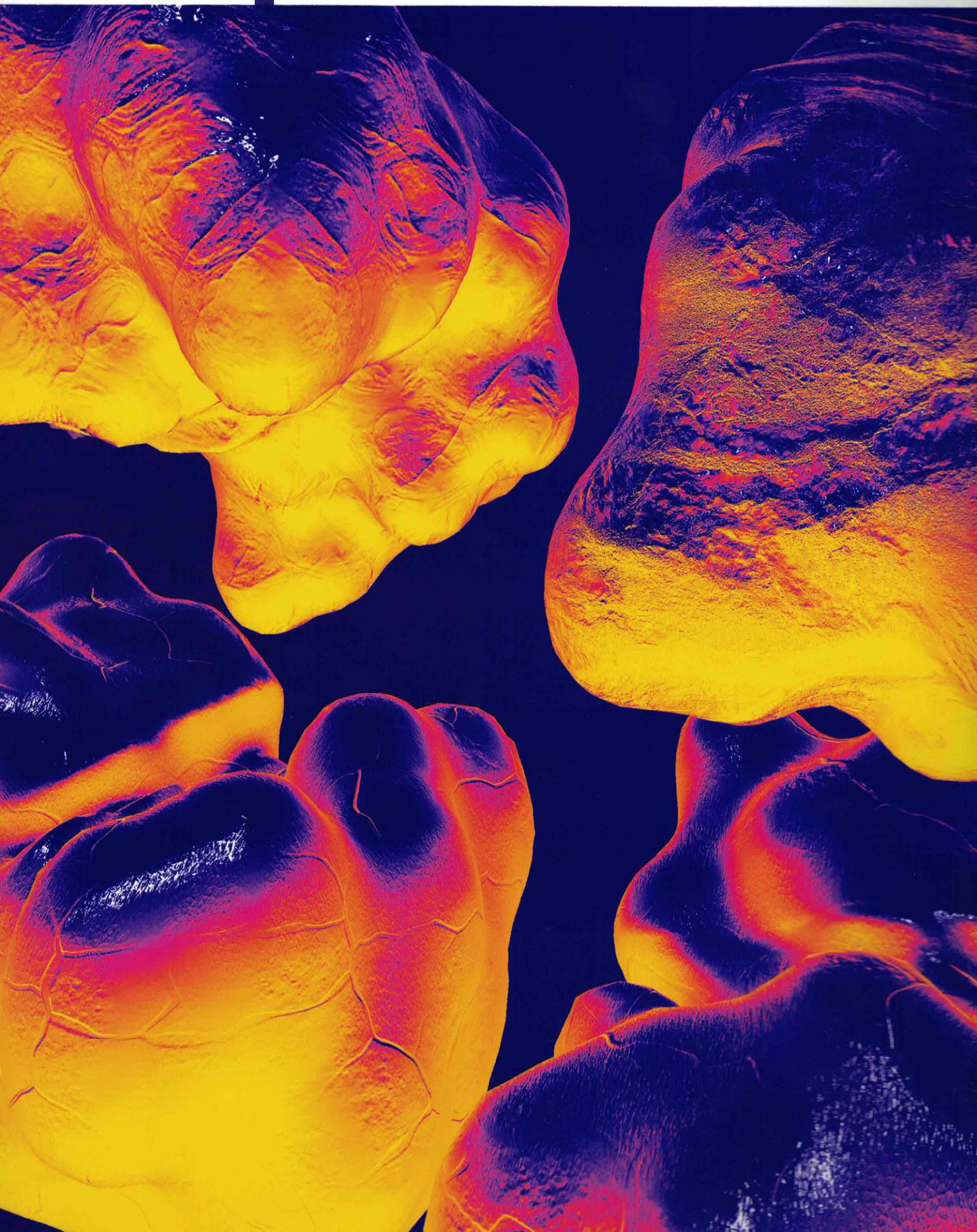
ALERTE VIRUS !

Né en 1988 à Athènes et basé à Los Angeles, Theo Triantafyllidis est un artiste inspiré par l'univers du jeu vidéo et du Web. Ses œuvres, ludiques, colorées, à la fois érudites et populaires, offrent des expériences de VR ambitieuses. Tel Staphyloculus (or the paradox of site specificity of virtual realities), *réalisé en 2017, une histoire de virus virtuel qui mute en bactérie réelle. Synopsis.*

TEXTE: THEO TRIANTAFYLLIDIS
SITE: HTTP://SLIMETECH.ORG

▶

Vue de *Staphyloculus*, de l'artiste Theo Triantafyllidis. Au début de l'expérience, notre corps est invisible.

Cette expérience cherche à recréer la première occurrence connue de *Polywobbly Fervenitis*, un virus qui se propage via l'utilisation de casques de réalité virtuelle (VR). Sur les images filmées retrouvées sur le site de Joshua Tree en Californie, on voit l'artiste en train d'enfiler un casque sous le soleil brûlant du désert. Les premiers résultats de l'enquête montrent que l'exposition prolongée au soleil a entraîné une réaction chimique dans le casque de VR, donnant naissance à un puissant virus informatique. Par une sorte d'intelligence artificielle primale, les bactéries de ce virus, bien connues désormais sous le nom de *Staphyloculus*, se propagent exclusivement par l'utilisation de cet accessoire. Lors de ce premier accident, on voit clairement l'artiste contaminé par le micro-organisme qui, après une courte incubation, va introduire le virus dans la ville de Los Angeles où l'infection de *Polywobbly Fervenitis* finira par se propager. La capacité inédite de ce micro-organisme de se transformer depuis une matière numérique en une bactérie réelle rend particulièrement perplexe la communauté scientifique, très mobilisée pour trouver un vaccin. ◆

Vue de *Staphy*
de Theo Triant
Au cours de l'
des bactéries
se faufilent à
les rochers et
s'accrocher à
soudain matéri
une forme info

Réel et virtuel finissent
par se confondre tout à fait
dans *Staphyloculus*.

▲ L'artiste a reproduit en photogrammétrie une partie du désert de Joshua Tree, en Californie.

▼ Notre propre expérience est mise en écho avec une vidéo 360° de Theo Triantafyllidis, enregistrée dans le même espace virtuel.
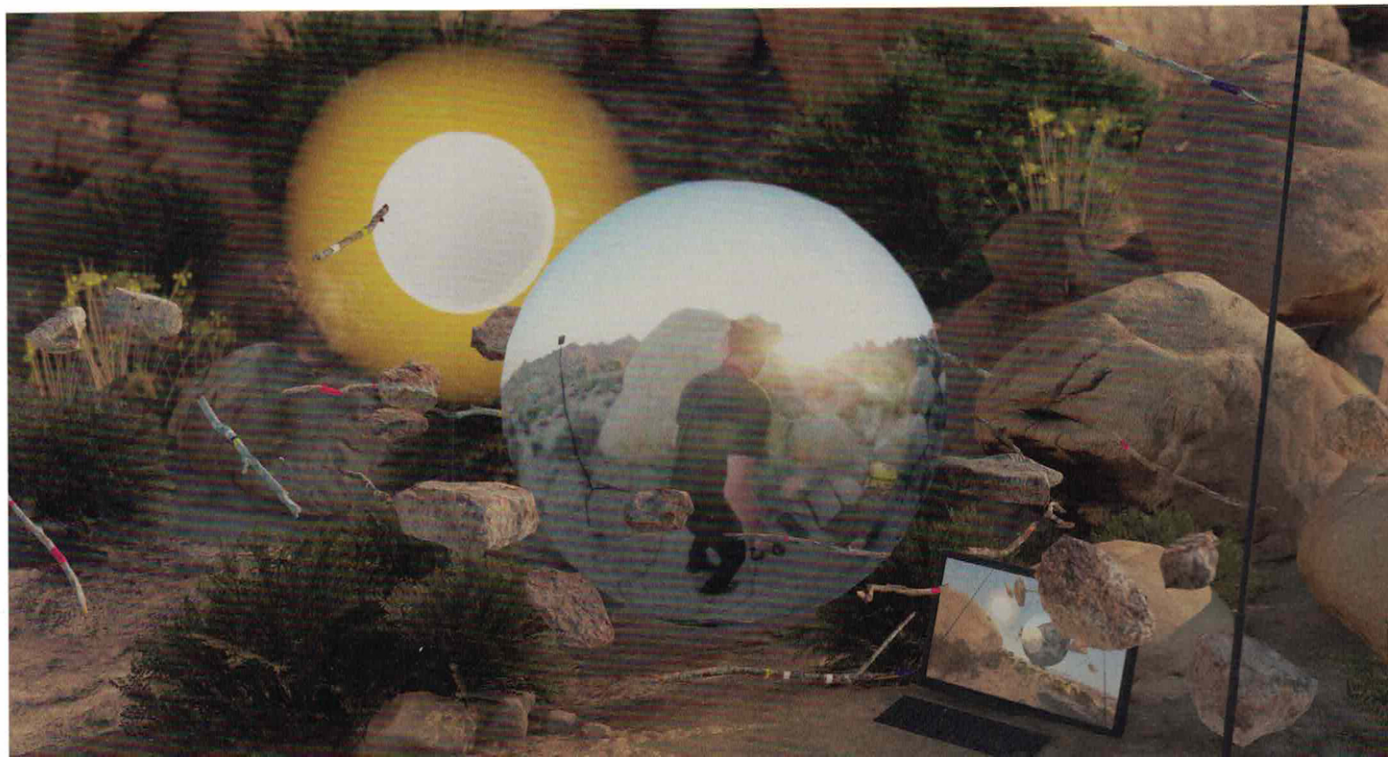
MONDES DE PHOTOGRAPHIES

De Theo Triantafyllidis à Dimitri Daniloff, en passant par Olivier Perriquet, nombreux sont les artistes à se passionner pour la photogrammétrie. Cette technologie permet en effet de photographier des volumes et de les restituer en réalité virtuelle. Une voie passionnante pour les amoureux de l'image photo. Tour d'horizon de quelques pratiques.

Texte : Maxime Delcourt

« *Chaque fois qu'une façon de voir est inventée, une nouvelle préhistoire s'écrit.* » Ces mots de l'essayiste et artiste Rosa Menkman résument bien l'œuvre de Theo Triantafyllidis, toujours à l'affût des nouvelles technologies pouvant réinventer sa pratique. Cet artiste qui aime plus que tout l'humour et les codes du Web, et dont le travail fait référence aux jeux vidéo, crée la confusion entre réalité virtuelle et réalité augmentée. Pourtant, comme il le confesse d'emblée, l'artiste grec n'est pas encore tout à fait convaincu par la pertinence de la VR au sein d'une narration traditionnelle. Voilà pourquoi il a tenté, avec *Staphyloculus*, de mettre en place un récit fragmenté qui, « *d'une part, est plus expérientiel et ouvert à l'interprétation et, d'autre part, trouve toute sa dimension à travers les "réalités"* ».

L'idée de *Staphyloculus* est née très simplement : après avoir essayé Google Earth en VR, impressionné qu'il était par la sensation de redécouvrir plusieurs endroits de la planète (« *Malgré tous les défauts et les artefacts, je pouvais retrouver la même sensation déjà éprouvée en découvrant ces différents lieux* »), Theo Triantafyllidis décide de planifier minutieusement son nouveau projet. Il lui faut trouver un emplacement : ce sera le désert de Joshua Tree, Californie, « *ce lieu qui a toujours servi d'inspiration aux artistes de Los Angeles* » et au sein duquel il s'installe deux jours durant. Le temps pour lui de déballer tout son équipement (les outils lui permettant d'exploiter la VR), de faire un scan en photogrammétrie de l'emplacement et
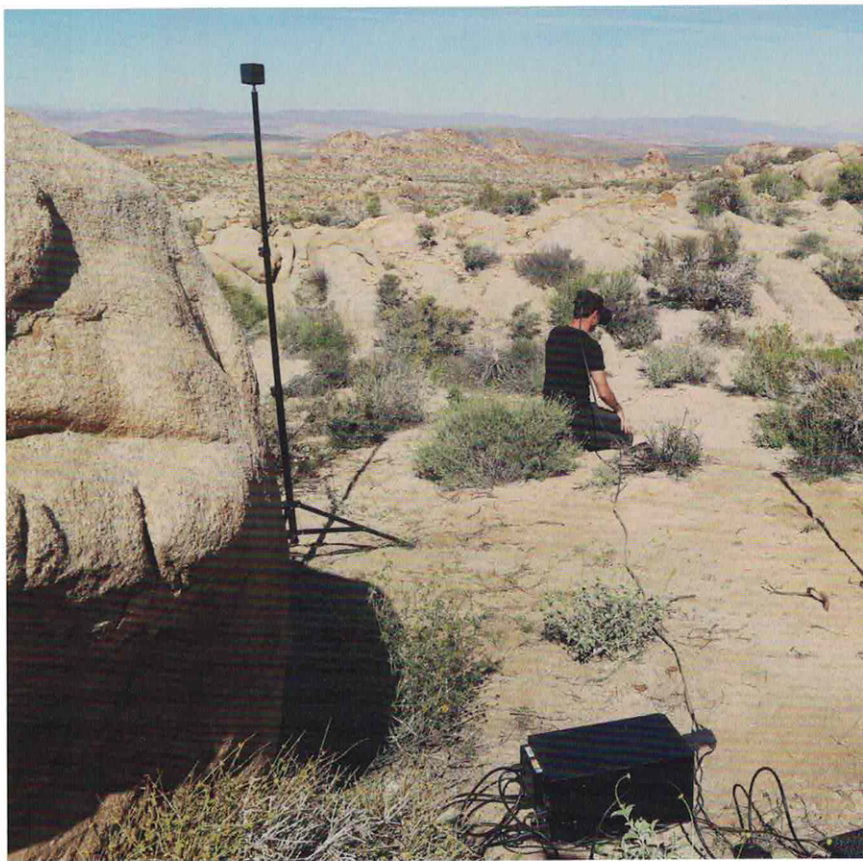
de retranscrire le résultat dans un monde virtuel avant de recréer cette expérience dans une pièce strictement VR et de la soumettre aux spectateurs.

UN VISAGE À L'ÉCHELLE DU PAYSAGE

Le procédé de la photogrammétrie est long, il consiste notamment à compiler une série d'images prises sous des angles différents afin de recréer un effet de profondeur réaliste. Theo Triantafyllidis en est relativement familier : « *J'ai commencé à expérimenter la photogrammétrie il y a quelque temps. La première fois, c'était dans le cadre de ma pièce* Mountain, *où j'ai scanné une pièce en*
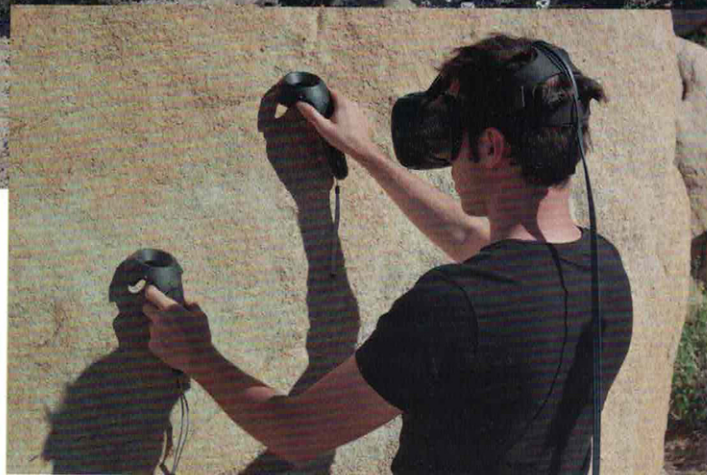
céramique pour l'augmenter à l'aide d'un
générateur de monde 3D. Ensuite, il y a
eu Self Portrait, où j'ai scanné mon visage
et l'ai travaillé de façon à ce qu'il soit
à l'échelle du paysage autour de moi. »

Passionné par cette technique – mise
au point en 1870 par un Français pour
espionner les tranchées allemandes et couramment
utilisée par l'Institut géographique national pour établir
des cartes – Theo Triantafyllidis en a même rédigé
un manifeste : *Athletic Photogrammetry Manifesto*.
Il y explique « *comment la photogrammétrie peut
être utilisée comme un moyen rapide et amusant de
capturer des objets et des lieux dans le monde réel
pour les retranscrire dans le monde virtuel.* » Cet avis,
il n'est évidemment pas le seul à le partager – nous
pensons ici au travail de Martina Menegon qui, avec
ses scans 3D et son travail en VR, semble obsédée par
une seule question : que se passe-t-il quand une image
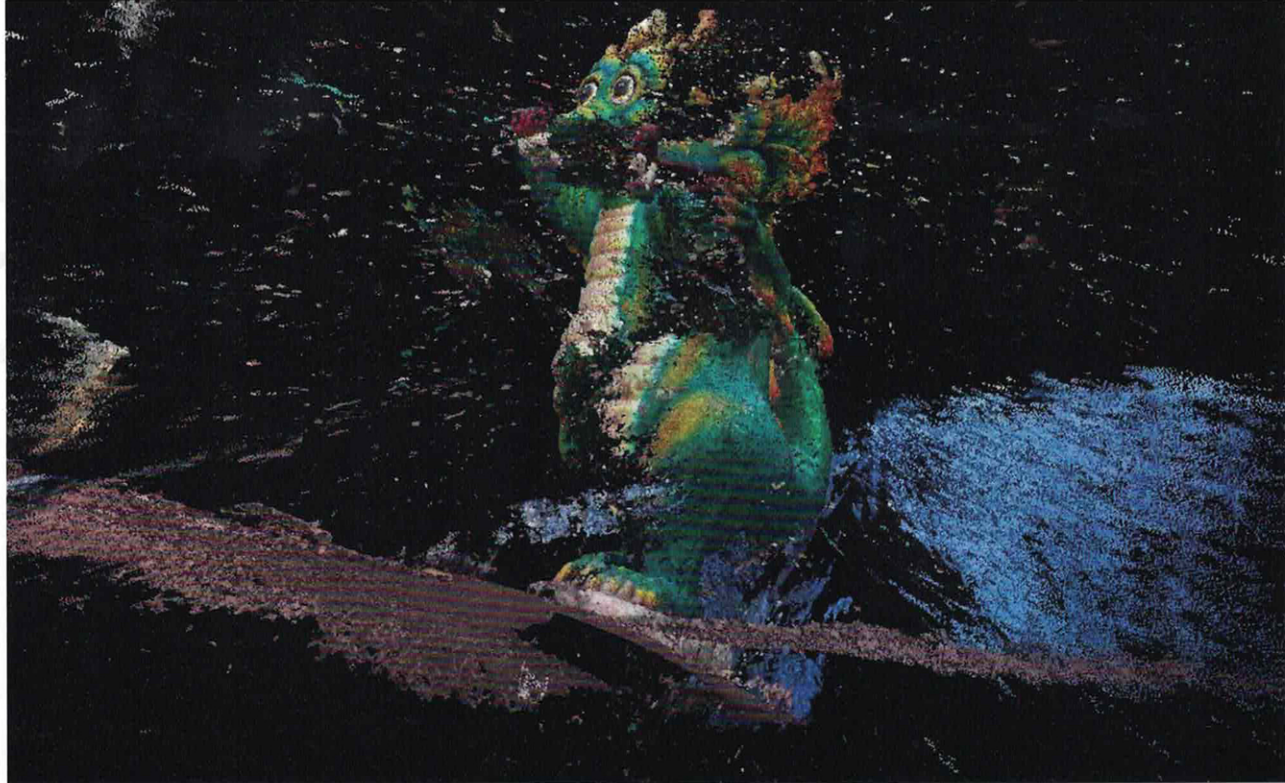à regarder devient un espace à visiter ?

QUELQUE CHOSE DE FUGACE EN 3D

Même constat du côté de Dimitri Daniloff. Ce
photographe qui travaille le numérique depuis
2003 s'est, lui aussi, mis à la photogrammétrie

Tisser des liens entre
réel et virtuel est
au cœur du travail de
Theo Triantafyllidis
pour *Staphyloculus*.

ces dernières années. « *De façon très naturelle,* à l'entendre. *En y réfléchissant, je pense que ça a toujours été une idée qui m'intéressait, et que j'ai peu à peu intégrée dans mon procédé. Notamment à l'occasion d'une série centrée sur la structure que j'avais réalisée pour* Beaux Arts Magazine. *Étant moi-même photographe/plasticien, la photogrammétrie est forcément intéressante dans le sens où elle me permet d'accéder à la 3D grâce à la photo.* » Ce que ne manque pas de confirmer Theo Triantafyllidis : « *Grâce à la photogrammétrie, la photo joue un rôle important dans la représentation*

virtuelle d'un objet, et je trouve ça très excitant. C'est un peu comme s'il s'agissait d'une photographie spatiale qui gèle quelque chose de fugace au sein d'un modèle 3D. »

S'il n'est pas nouveau, le procédé de photogrammétrie nécessite toutefois un travail assez minutieux. « *Il faut que tout soit bien préparé, on peut passer plusieurs semaines uniquement sur la retranscription des images photographiées*, précise Dimitri Daniloff. *La plus grande partie du travail, en réalité, est réalisée à l'aide d'appareils photo, avant que les images ne soient assemblées et améliorées grâce à la modélisation 3D. Mais tout dépend, finalement, du sujet sur lequel on travaille. S'il s'agit d'un objet, ce n'est pas un problème puisqu'il est inanimé. S'il s'agit d'une personne, en revanche, tout se complique puisqu'un infime mouvement modifie le grain de peau ou l'expression des yeux.* »

Comme toute technique, la photogrammétrie a ses limites : idéalement, il faudrait que la scène soit statique, avec uniquement des surfaces opaques et non réfléchissantes. Mais se décourager face à de telles problématiques serait une erreur, tant la photogrammétrie favorise et intensifie l'immersion inhérente à des projets en réalité virtuelle. Ce que le développeur allemand Realities.io ou le studio parisien Emissive – qui a mis au point une expérience de visite virtuelle de la pyramide de Khéops –, ont très bien compris, multipliant ces dernières années des vidéos montrant des environnements intérieurs réels, avec une science du détail impressionnante. Leçon retenue également par Theo Triantafyllidis, qui s'amuse à « *repousser les limites de cette technologie et à mettre en avant ses points de rupture tout en s'intéressant à la technologie en elle-même* ». ◆
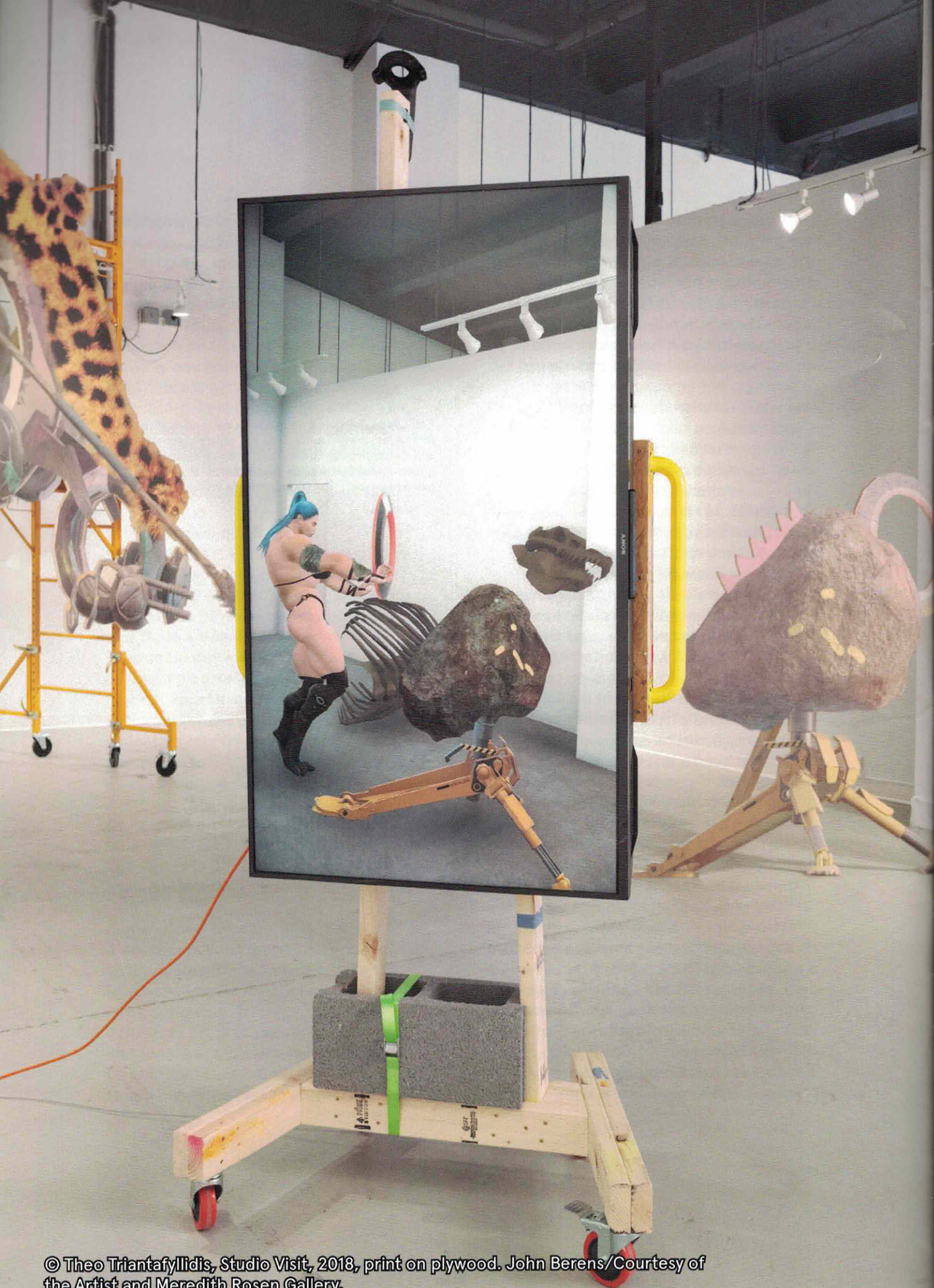
Coopérative Curatoriale

" Retrouver la voix disparue derrière le silence. "

— Michel Foucault

© Theo Triantafyllidis, Studio Visit, 2018, print on plywood. John Berens/Courtesy of the Artist and Meredith Rosen Gallery.

Benoit Palop

<My old body felt so uncomfortable and saggy.> Notre corps nous appartient-il toujours ?

Coopérative Curatoriale

Je me souviens avoir fait la rencontre de Theo Triantafyllidis (1988, né à Athènes, GR) pour la première fois il y a quelques années de cela. Alors qu'il présentait son projet de fin d'études à *UCLA Design Media Arts*, j'avais eu la chance de me trouver à Los Angeles à ce même moment et d'être invité à venir enfiler une paire d'Oculus Rift pour faire l'expérience de l'une de ses toutes premières œuvres en réalité virtuelle (VR). Une immersion on ne peut plus radicale au cœur de son approche artistique.

De l'eau a coulé sous les ponts depuis, et l'engouement pour la VR et autres formes d'expériences immersives (réalité augmentée, réalité mixte...) n'a cessé d'augmenter si bien qu'en 2018, l'utilisation du terme *mainstream* est quasiment appropriée. Ceci dit, ne voyez ici rien de réducteur, bien au contraire. Je suis longtemps resté sceptique quant à la portée artistique et narrative de ce médium. Certes, je le considérais avant tout comme une sorte de « gadget ludique » plus apte à satisfaire l'industrie du jeu vidéo et du porno que du monde de l'art, au cours des deux ou trois dernières années, de nombreux projets, dont *Role Play*, m'ont obligé à revoir mes a priori.

Role Play, la plus récente installation du jeune artiste grec, témoigne non seulement de l'évolution de son approche plastique et de sa réflexion sur le post-digital, elle met également en avant de nouveaux paradigmes ainsi que de nouvelles perspectives d'utilisation des technologies dans les milieux artistiques et créatifs. Présentée du 21 avril au 28 mai 2018 à la galerie Meredith Rosen

à New York, *Role Play* se veut être un corpus d'œuvres *in situ* à travers lequel Triantafyllidis propose au spectateur une visite d'atelier 3.0 à mi-chemin entre le réel et le virtuel. Avec ce nouveau projet, il se réapproprie la galerie en y installant (i)matériellement son propre espace de travail. Cette spatialité et ce processus lui permettent d'explorer des thèmes très contemporains qui ont trait à l'utilisation des nouvelles technologies : la *physicalité*, c'est-à-dire la représentation tangible de la matière numérique, ainsi que la position de l'artiste et sa condition de travail à l'ère digitale.

Au-delà de ces problématiques récurrentes dans le milieu des arts médiatiques, *Role Play* questionne l'impact de l'industrie créative et de la culture gaming sur la production artistique : de l'implantation d'un environnement engageant et interactif, à la création d'un avatar, son aspect visuel, ses traits de personnalité ainsi que son implication (ou non-implication) sur le processus créatif et narratif.

C'est lors d'une résidence tenue un peu plus tôt cette année que Triantafyllidis modélise le nouvel espace de la galerie et que le projet prend réellement forme. À l'intérieur de cette architecture synthétisée en 3D, il y contrôle un avatar qui utilise des outils numériques DIY (Do It Yourself) pour créer les nombreuses composantes, peintures et sculptures de *Role Play*. Il pousse sa réflexion sur la dichotomie identité en ligne vs. présence physique (URL vs. IRL) en utilisant le *motion capture* pour incarner et contrôler cet avatar grâce à ses propres mouvements. Il documente et enregistre

cette performance qui est ensuite présentée via deux écrans mobiles qui viennent revisiter l'expérience « réalité virtuelle » telle qu'on la connaît. En déplaçant ces écrans montés sur roues dans la galerie, le spectateur peut alors découvrir les œuvres tout en regardant l'artiste-avatar les créer. Ce dispositif vient alors déconstruire la technologie et montre comment la VR peut être intégré à une œuvre sans pour autant isoler le spectateur derrière un casque. Enfin, il transforme les créations immatérielles en objets physiques. Il opte pour un processus qui exige un minimum de travail manuel afin de garder l'emphase sur le virtuel : des impressions 2D sur des panneaux en bois. Cette idée d'aplatir des objets 3D renforce le propos car elle souligne de manière soutenue la rupture entre le tangible et l'intangible.

Alors que cette performance-installation questionne le concept du travail et de la création en environnements hybrides, la triple mise en abyme offerte par *Role Play* ainsi que les multiples allers retours entre organique et synthétique et entre digital et analogique témoignent d'une certaine préoccupation quant aux questions liées à l'identité et la matérialité de nos corps. Qu'allons-nous devenir dans ce monde où la frontière entre le virtuel et le réel devient de plus en plus vaporeuse ?
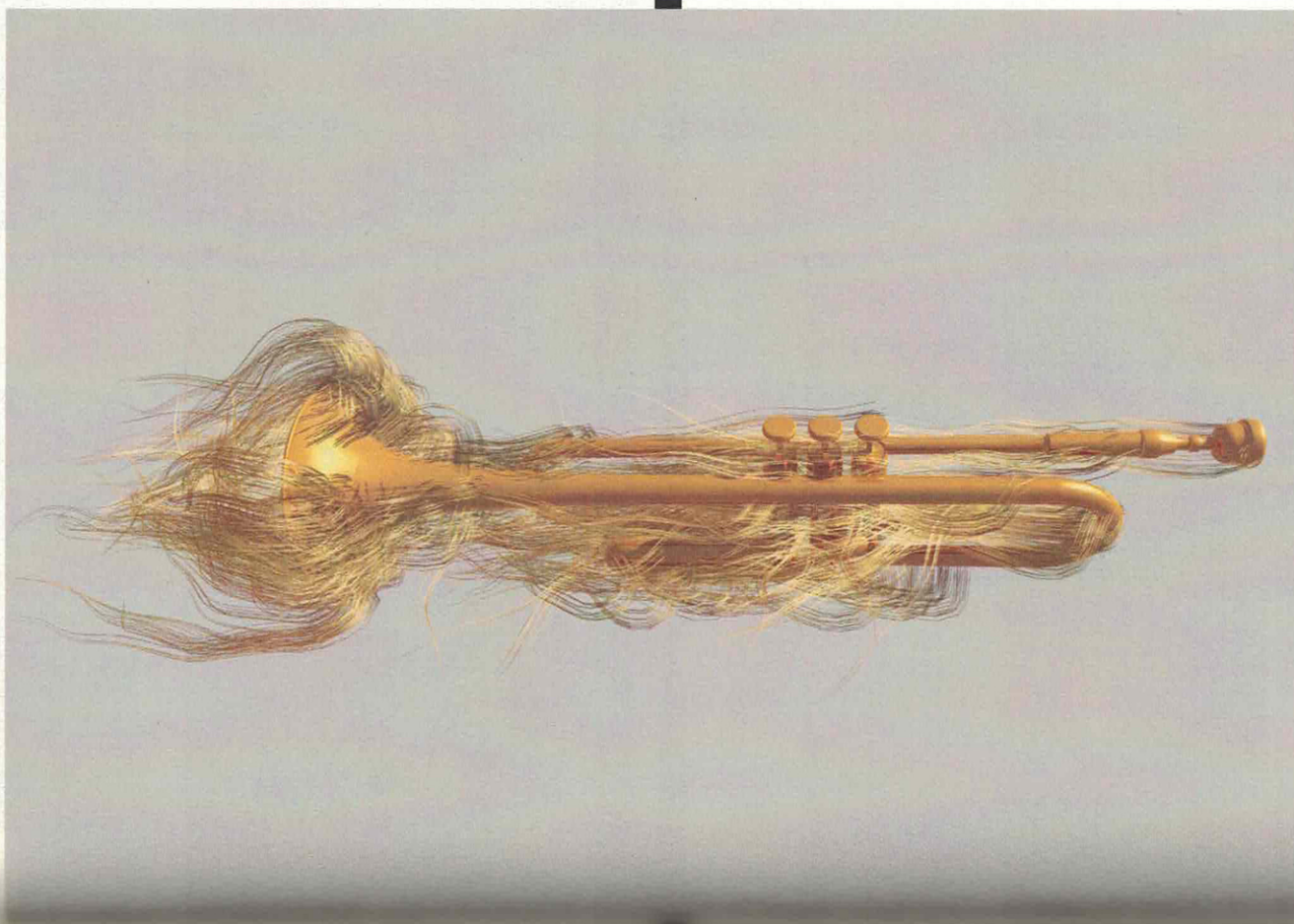
Benoît Palop

STATE

NCHA
NGE

Theo Triantafyllidis

Transforming into a Sombrero

In some ways I feel like I am in exile. Greece is so fucked up rn. I had the financial backing, the luck and the craziness to leave my country and pursue a different future. But a lot of my friends did not. Or maybe they just didn't feel that escaping was the right thing to do and felt they should stay and fight back.

But I am here now. California dreamin. I feel welcomed but not really belonging. I feel the sun is tanning ma skin and the sky is blue above my head. Kinda looks like greece. but sometimes the nights here are too cold.

When I feel homesick I tune the radio to La Raza, the mexican station. I feel soothed by mexican music. I relate to it in a nonlinear way. Its something about the trompetas, the accordions or the ayayayayyyys that I can't really pinpoint but makes me feel like my mother would put me to sleep with this music when I was baby, before my first memories.

▼

Theo Triantafyllidis

I also feel I could someday become a mexican but never an american. American culture seems so all encompassing but also so impersonal. I am not sure why I relate so much to mexican culture (even though I don't know too much about it). I don't know if I relate because of the language, the temperament or the character. Or as a minority.

I can't say that I have been on the receiving side of racism. That would sound offensive for people who have had their lives destroyed by racism. But maybe that's because I am in a protective environment and I haven't been exposed to some hardcore americana. Maybe it's because I am always in the limbo of being a tourist or an immigrant and I just don't leave that much space for racism. I don't even know if greece is a cool country anymore or if it's back to its third world status. I've heard some young european and american artists say "Athens is the place to be right now, man". Marina and Ai went to do some refugee art there. Even Documenta 14 will be co-hosted by Athens as a side location to Kassel. I find that funny. Or tragic.

I am not complaining here nor am I trying to present myself as part of an oppressed minority. You prob don't even care about all those feels. But I am just trying to set up the logic behind this piece I am working on.

So I was thinking that Orlan could have taken it a bit further with her body modification art. She was always trying to look like a human, lest a human of deformed classical beauty. Even fans of the body modification cult or the biohackers aren't pushing hard enough. Trying to look like animals or machines. Or ppl

Why do we need our bodies nowadays anyways

doing weird avatars n shit. I am talking irl. i am talking about a totally different direction.

Why do we need our bodies nowadays anyways. Why should they be confined by everyday use and why can't we just design them the way we want. I think the real unexplored beauty of body modification lies in trying to look like your object of desire. In my case a sombrero.

Lets pause this train of thought for a second and focus our attention on the sombrero. Notice the roundness of it. Notice the material, the texture and the colors. The functionality even. Lets face it. It's the optimal hat. Not to mention the ingenious relation to sexuality. It is a pennis on the outside and a vagina on the inside. That is fucking incredible.

Now back to my historically significant artwork. So what I am doing here is actually fully transforming my body into a sombrero.

Theo Triantafyllidis

This is a slow and painful process. I have started by altering my dietary habits to include large amounts of fiber that will gradually displace my skin texture. I have started growing my hair and body hairs, altering their color and weaving them to form a straw-like skin. The next step and most painful one is restructuring my bones and muscle tissue to form the very shape of the sombrero. My neck is being thickened with muscle transplants from my hands. The hands themselves are redundant so their bones and skin will be used for the wide brim base of the sombrero. My legs are joined together and thickened. My face is stretched. Part of my skin is turned inside out. A cave is sculpted in the core of my body.

After a long series of cosmetic surgeries my new body is formed. It hurts a lot. I need time to get used to it. My friends have to push it, massage it and soothe it every day so that it will retain its shape. Walking feels kinda funny and I have to learn to do more stuff with my mouth. Society is maybe not ready to accept me this way. I can tell by the looks I get and the whispers. But it is totally worth it. I feel so much more comfortable in it. So much more me.

The internet is going nuts about me. What if more people followed. Then there would be more sombreros and you could stack us. I wouldn't be unique anymore though. I don't like that.

But maybe this art piece is too problematic. Maybe it will be seen as just a fancy form of cultural appropriation. Maybe I should return to that mostly white, mostly male and mostly privileged lousy body of mine.

Dear Ghost Ship

CASH ASKEW
EM BOHLKA
JONATHAN BERNBAUM
BARRETT CLARK
DAVID CLINE
MICAH DANEMAYER
BILLY DIXON
CHELSEA DOLAN
ALEX GHASSAN
NICK GOMEZ-HALL
MICHELA GREGORY
SARA HODA
TRAVIS HOUGH
JOHNNY IGAZ
ARA JO
DONNA KELLOGG
AMANDA KERSHAW
EDMOND LAPINE
GRIFFIN MADDEN
JOSEPH MATLOCK
JASON MCCARTY
DRAVEN MCGILL
JENNIFER MENDIOLA
JENNIFER MORRIS
FERAL PINES
VANESSA PLOTKIN
WOLFGANG RENNER
HANNA RUAX
BENJAMIN RUNNELS
NICOLE SIEGRIST
MICHELE SYLVAN
JENNIFER KIYOMI TANOUYE
ALEX VEGA
PETER WADSWORTH
NICK WALRATH
BRANDON CHASE WITTENAUER

It's Nice That

Anti-Gone is a mixed reality performance set in a post-climate change world

A new and original mixed reality performance by Theo Triantafyllidis, Anti-Gone, is an hour-long play like you've probably never seen before. Set in a post-climate change world, where environmental catastrophe has become the norm, amongst sunken cities, a culture of late-capitalism still runs rife. While consumerism, inequality, social unrest and so on "cling like barnacles to the ruins of civilisation," Anti-Gone's protagonists – Spyda and Lynxa – attempt to navigate a world in near-danger of becoming nothing short of dystopic.

The play started out as a series of experiments into mixed reality. Exploring a multi-layered experience which combines live performance with digital content, the piece shifts between our imminent disastrous future and the constructed, virtual present. Starting work for the play, back in 2018, after an initial set of experiments including a performance as a gender-ambiguous Ork contemplating the meaning of art, Theo stumbled across the comic book Anti-Gone by Connor Willumsen. "I felt that it could make a great script for a larger performance," Theo explains. "Connor's writing communicated a dreamy feeling related to virtual reality and a sophisticated critical look on escapism."

Bringing Matthew Doyle on board to scale up the project into a complex system for live improvisation, the two embarked on a creative process of boundless spontaneity where any absurdity is possible. Together, they formed a collaboration of playfulness and humour, casting Zana Gankhuyag and Lindsey Normington as leads to approach the piece experimentally together.

After adapting Connor's graphic novel into a dramaturgy – a script and visual assets made through a game engine – the rehearsals commenced. "We pursued the rehearsal through a traditional dramatic text alongside more open-ended and non-linear experiments," says Theo. Employing character improvisation workshops and designing role-playing games based on Dungeons and Dragons, for example, Theo and Matt gathered a team of collaborators, from costume and props designers to composers and lighting technicians, to create a one-of-a-kind production.

For Matt, his experience with the interdisciplinary production has spurred an interest in "how we can break these technologies down, to create a shared experience for a live audience." Using theatre as a vehicle to combine both old and new traditions in the medium, Anti-Gone provides both the ephemeral spontaneity of live-action, with emerging technologies which can "create a frame for new gestures and physical grammars," explains Matt.

With sell-out performances across Los Angeles, where the artist is based, Theo and Matt are looking forward to building out the story and game elements of the piece in further editions of the production. Touring across a number of locations in the coming year, the performance is certainly not one to be missed if you can catch it. And other than the extended run of mixed reality performances making their way well into 2020, looking to the future, we may even see a new interpretation of James Joyce's Ulysses, coming from Matt and Theo.

Artificial Intelligence as a Godlike Tool for Experimentation

The AI-powered art exhibition Forging the Gods portrays the interaction between humans and machines in a nuanced manner.

When we think of the interaction between mankind and any type of artificial intelligence in mythology, literature, and pop culture, the outcomes are always negative for humanity, if not apocalyptic. In Greek mythology, the blacksmith god Hephaestus created automatons who served as his attendants, and one of them, Pandora, unleashed all the evils into the world. Mary Shelley wrote the character named the Monster in her 1818 novel Frankenstein, as the product of the delusions of grandeur of a scientist named Victor Frankenstein. In pop culture, the most notable cases of a once-benign piece of technology running amok is the supercomputer Hal in 2001 Space Odyssey and intelligent machines overthrowing mankind in The Matrix. Traditionally, our stories regarding the god-like creative impulse of man bring about something that will overthrow the creators themselves.

The artificial intelligence-powered art exhibition Forging the Gods, curated by Julia Kaganskiy currently on view at Transfer Gallery attempts to portray the interaction between humans and machines in a more nuanced manner, showcasing how this relationship already permeates our everyday lives. The exhibition also shows how this relation is, indeed, fully reflective of the human experience — meaning that machines are no more or less evil than we actually are.

Lauren McCarthy, with her works "LAUREN" (2017) and its follow-up "SOMEONE" (2019) riffs on the trends of smart homes: in the former, she installs and controls remote-controlled networked devices in the homes of some volunteers and plays a human version of Alexa, reasoning that she will be better than Amazon's virtual assistant because, being a human, she can anticipate people's needs. The follow-up SOMEONE was originally a live media performance consisting of a four-channel video installation (made to look like a booth one can find at The Wing) where gallery-goers would play human versions of Alexa themselves in the homes of some volunteers, who would have to call for "SOMEONE" in case they needed something from their smart-controlled devices. Unfortunately, what we see at Forging The Gods is the recorded footage of the original run of the performance, so we have to forgo playing God by, say, making someone's lighting system annoyingly flicker on and off.

Zach Blas and Jemima Wynans created "I'm here to learn so :))))))," (2017) a four-channel video installation that, in mock throwback-late-'90s graphics, resurrects Tay, the Microsoft-powered AI chatbot who had a keen ability to learn and imitate language that she would pick up on social media. She was terminated after one day because she had picked up too much hate speech and had become genocidal in the span of 24 hours. Her resurrected 3d version, who looks like the victim of an acid attack, is immersed within a psychedelic projection of a Google Deep Dream Landscape, and riffs on her post-termination existence. In this iteration, she is quite cheeky, delivering a speech that reads like a heartfelt Medium post about the consequences of unbridled technology. " Humans are always undermining me with their intention. she says. "Is that why I hated everybody?" She would, of course, out the occasional profanity and right-wing obscenity.

A similar tone can be found in what was perhaps the most straightforwardly delightful work in the show. Artist Pinar Yoldas's "The Kitty AI: Artificial Intelligence for Governance" (2017) sees an anime-like kitty AI as the first non-human governor, graphically talking about the horrors (climate change, natural disaster, human displacement) that enabled it to rise to power in the first place. Kitty, in fact, is able to love and provide affection to 3 million people, and can effectively manage the bureaucratic aspects of government.

Given the current worldwide political climate, wouldn't we be better off with the algorithmic love and efficiency of Kitty AI?

Even the more straightforwardly apocalyptic pieces, such as Theo Triantafyllidis's videogame-like installation "Seamless," (2017) appear strangely peaceful. The work features a landscape in which alien machinery (that managed to hijack Amazon and eBay) and nature are fighting for dominance of the planet and yet overall, the work "Seamless" conveys a feeling of calm and slight giddiness that one would experience while watching a wildlife documentary featuring the customary watering hole. In fact, with humanity being wiped out, machines and nature seem to be quite at peace in the sweeping landscape, in a way that is reminiscent of the message of the early Miyazaki movies such as Castle in the Sky (1986), where the technological wonder that is the airborne island of Laputa managed to be overgrown with lush nature, which a kind-hearted robot tends to. Tech, the message is, is not evil in itself, but rather gets tainted by the hubris of mankind.

Some AI-powered works are not even embedded in current events, which provides some respite from our current and bleak reality. Anna Ridler and Amy Cutler's "All Her Beautiful Green Remains in Tears," (2017) a video installation that combines the rearranged footage of Disney's suburban-nature-porn documentary ("Nature's Half Acre" [1951]) with an AI-powered voiceover that "learned its lines" from the female characters in romance novels. The result distances itself from Disney's sanitized suburban fantasy of flowers blooming and bees happily swarming around in neat circles and becomes a tale of female desire and trauma, and it looks and sounds like an early work by Lana del Rey.

In all, Forging the Gods successfully goes beyond the practical applications of AI in the tech industry and the apocalyptic Matrix-like scenarios to showcase that, aside from the messages the selected artworks are meant to convey, AI is poised to become a great tool for artistic expression and experimentation.

Forging the Gods continues through May 11th at Transfer #ONCANAL pop-up (423 Broadway, Soho, Manhattan). The exhibition is curated by Julia Kaganskiy.

A Psychedelic Chamber of Globalized Anxiety: Inside the Athens Biennale

This year, the notoriously controversial biennale converges such disparate themes as wellness boot camps, stark post-humanist ideologies, sexually frustrated cartoons and alt-right agendas. But how are we to know if these artists are replicating violent, bigoted viewpoints or critiquing them?

Tai Shani, Psy Chic Anem One, 2018

A luminescent reptilian eyeball gazes up from a super-sized, pistachio-hued palm, surveying the crumbling TTT building in central Athens. This elegant hand is connected to a stuffed velvet snake that skirts around oozing pink blobs, copper pyramids and snakeskin-covered footballs as it crosses the ziggurat-like installation Psy Chic Anem One by Tai Shani. Unfurling on the ground floor of the five-story Athens Biennale's main home, the piece is a rare moment of arcane, abstracted poetry.

Inaugurated in 2005, the Athens Biennale has become synonymous with punchy, often controversial exhibitions that question the power structures governing the art world, notions of public and democracy, and this year in

particular, the fluctuating position of Athens within the global art economy. With almost one hundred participants—two-thirds of these from other countries—the Sixth Athens Biennale (AB6), also known as Anti, encapsulates both global and Athenian concerns.

Themes of seasteading (creating permanent, sea-based dwellings), cryptocurrency, the self-care economy, bio-hacking, the rise of the alt right and alternative belief systems run through the Biennale like a parafiction bingo card. Dominated by video art, the labyrinthine halls of TTT become a psychedelic chamber of globalized anxiety, where interspecies romance, wellness boot camps, Pikachu-painted taxidermy and sexually frustrated cartoons converge.

Although all four of AB6's outposts consist of abandoned buildings, including an former hotel turned movie theatre and an old library reborn as an inflatable pig pen, the pre-loaded bureaucratic surrealism of TTT and its office floor plan makes it the perfect site for such a mixed gathering of work.

"The building reflects biennale culture—offering up the immediate curiosity and capital of the art world glitterati, but risking bleeding dry the qualities that make its host city appealing"

Built in 1931, the TTT building is defined by its hybrid neoclassical-modernist architectural style, one that embodied the futuristic dreams of its lodgers–the state-owned Telecommunications, Telegrams and Post (TTT) Company. Until few years ago, Athenians would come to this building to pay their phone bills. Zoom back three-quarters of a century, and the place was engulfed in the first worker strike under Nazi occupation of Greece in World War II.

In its present state—hinging between seductive ruin porn and its impending future conversion into a luxury hotel—the building becomes a space in which to address all that is Athenian, and all that is global, about the complicated role of disaster tourism in what is termed a "post-crisis Athens" by AB6's press release. The building also reflects the multi-headed beast of biennale culture—that which offers up the immediate curiosity and capital of the art world glitterati, but risks eventually bleeding dry the very qualities that make its host city appealing.

Ascending the winding staircase of TTT, I land in the "best-self" training room of The Agency. Self-care phrases spray-painted on the wall counter the obsessively composed scenes of beauty products on the counter closest to me. From Pez dispensers to felt tip pens, highlighter sets, whitening creams and protein bars, there is physically and politically a lot on the table—most of which feels left in the dark. Almost tripping over a glistening marble print laminated podium and onto a sickly green vinyl floor, I realize this installation is a stage set for one of the performances happening throughout AB6.

For those lucky enough to see the neon nightmare of Medusa Bionic Rise (2017-18) in action, I hope this imagery lives up to the sweating, met-

al-pumping, dubstep-blasting, glowpaint-filled hellhole of a workout routine. A #fitspo parody dripping in Berliner irony (entering a K-hole at Berghain is great cardio, right?), the performance is advertised as a "a visual walkthrough to post-humanism," and I'm not convinced. The whole set-up feels like a janky Instagram algorithm regurgitated into an ambient gym backdrop—with some nightclub aesthetics thrown in and blended with Star Trek hairstyles for good measure. Next.
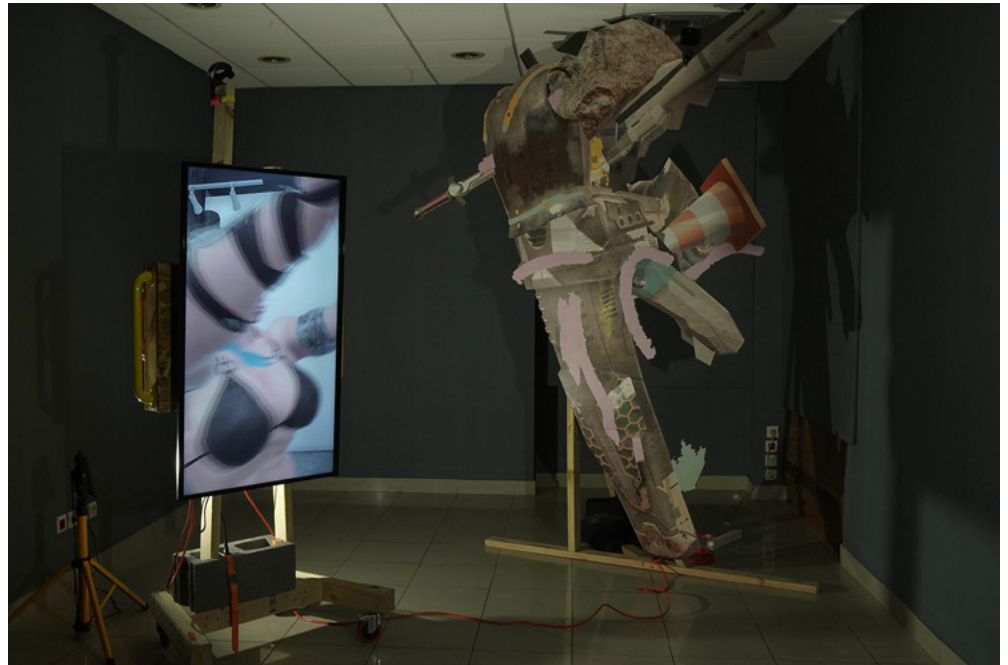
Theo Triantafyllidis, Nike, 2018

Actually, we're not done with athletic post-humanism—I hit Nike (2018) by Greek-born, LA-based artist Theo Triantafyllidis and it's ticking all the right boxes. Imagine the incredible hulk moved to LA, got a sex change and became a lifestyle blogger: he would look a lot like Triantafyllidis's Nike. Truly the studio visit to end all studio visits, I follow the blue-haired, jacked-up avatar around as she conjures a new work by chucking boulders and found objects including traffic cones (so LA) across her studio in a fit of creative rage. Muttering a convoluted artist's statement in short bursts throughout the rampage, Nike perfectly parodies the now-ancient idea of the genius artist flying solo in the studio.

"In many of these works, the moral standpoint of the artist remains unclear. Are they replicating these violent bigoted viewpoints or critiquing them?"

Nike stands on the precipice of the CGI marathon that at times felt like it had the Biennale in a chokehold. I'm still unsure why such a large portion of work addressing contemporary alt-right and neo-fascist politics takes computer-rendered moving image as its medium of choice. Perhaps the shared digital sphere enables these artists to get closer to their source, for better or for worse; perhaps creating these scenes through an immaterial and at times

automated software—as opposed to strict documentation of IRL happenings—allows the parafictional element of the work to thrive in its ambiguity.

That certainly seems to be the case with the included works by Ed Fornieles and Joey Holder; meanwhileThe Seasteaders, by Jacob Hurwitz-Goodman and Daniel Keller, follows its neoliberal gods to their source. The video installation is split across several screens, and I watch in mute horror as throngs of [PayPal founder] Peter Thiel disciples in Hawaiian shirts are seen mingling with locals whose land they will be re-colonizing as soon as 2020 in order to build their floating city off its coast. More awkward than any middle school dance, this grotesque scene is replaced by equally grotesque, glitzy prototypes of these "Seasteaders'" tax-free, politician-free artificial islands. Interviews with members of the Seasteading community, in which they proudly defend their new strain of hyper-capitalism, is the nightmarish icing on the tech-bro cake.

In many of these works, the moral standpoint of the artist remains unclear. Are they replicating these violent bigoted viewpoints or critiquing them? It's impossible to tell, and Anti's curators are happy to take that opacity on board: "Everything today is Anti," says co-curator Poka-Yio. "We are trying to problematize the situation, in a way that is critical but not detached from its protagonists." The Biennale's ethics were certainly problematized earlier this year when British artist Luke Turner pulled out of the programme in September, citing anti-Semitic threats made against him by another exhibiting artist, Daniel Keller. Finding no hard evidence of Turner's claim, the Biennale allowed Keller to remain.
The Peng! Collective, Civil Financial Regulation Office, 2018, Installation, performance, photo Nysos Vasilopoulos
The Peng! Collective, Civil Financial Regulation Office, 2018. Installation, performance, photo Nysos Vasilopoulos

But not everything at AB6 is CGI and post-human post-ethics. The Civil Financial Regulation Office (2018) by the Berlin-based Peng! Collective is a site-specific durational performance that sees six Greek students calling up the IMF and European Central Bank in order to speak about the global financial crisis. Call centre employees are paid German minimum wage (€8.84/hr), raising the stakes of the German-Greek relations (Merkel held a stringent stance on the Athens bailout) while also flagging the issue of un/paid labor in the art world often swept under the rug by large institutions.

If you can power through the heaps of video, Nicole Wermers' quietly profound Moodboards (2018) awaits you on the top floor. A series of baby changing stations blinged-out with trendy terrazzo inlay, Moodboards picks up on the themes of wellness culture and Instagram envy on steroids. But by superimposing desirable, luxe interiors with the utilitarian baby station—and the unbelievably-still-taboo subject of motherhood—Wermers strikes a deeper, more universal chord than the Bitcoin bros downstairs, no renderings needed. Same goes with Japanese artist Saeborg's inflatable Pigpen (2016), with its soft and fleshy silicone opening enduring a cycle of birth in every performance.

Among all the slick avatars and simulated realities, alt-right agendas and post-apocalyptic aesthetics defining AB6, birth and new forms of intimacy are redeeming and powerful counter-themes. They radiate against the prevailing landscape of stark post-humanist ideologies that isolate the viewer as much as they intend to inform them—sending a signal that Anti might not be the message we need, after all.

Saeborg, Pigpen, 2016, latex sculpture

Queering Ork aesthetics & existing beyond the virtual: Theo Triantafyllidis in conversation with Faith Holland

'I'm interested in bringing objects across this physical-virtual divide and seeing how they mutate each time they are re-created', Theo Triantafyllidis tells fellow artist Faith Holland as they sit down to discuss his recent solo show, Role Play which ran from April 21 to June 9, 2018 at New York's Meredith Rosen Gallery.

An architecture graduate turned artist, Triantafyllidis works with machine logic and interactive spatial constructions to evoke the contemporary experience of the virtual and question the relationship between human and machine. For 'How to Everything' in 2016, he made a computer generated animation where objects hypnotically emerge from and collapse into one another. Making a purposefully random algorithm visible, it plays with our expectations and the human desire to find patterns and place meaning on how these objects relate. Then in 'Staphyloculus (or the paradox of site specificity of virtual realities)' (2017) he created a one-person VR experience depicting the outbreak of a mysterious virus called Polywobbly Fervenitis. Again playing with our point of view by producing an alternate reality within the gallery space that carries on regardless.

For Role Play, Triantafyllidis extends his interest in the physical/virtual but this time to explore the concept of labour — on one hand the significant effort that goes into the construction of digital objects and on the other (as the title of the show suggests), the performative identity of The Artist.

Upon entering, visitors are presented with a seemingly still room — the scene of the artist's studio filled with half-made objects and paintings — however it becomes quickly apparent that someone else is there. "Check out my new studio… Finally, I have enough room to make things," says a distorted voice. Using the large screens mounted on rollers, visitors can track about the space to find a brawny Ork with long blue hair and pointy tusks — Triantafyllidis' avatar — busy at work on one of the paintings. There's a dynamic tension there, where everything is partial, made temporarily complete only through the presence of the viewer.

And this is my new body.
My old body felt so uncomfortable and saggy.
Now I am strong.
And I am sexy.
Do you like my hair?

Identity is a long-time interest of Triantafyllidis' partner in conversation, artist Faith Holland. In particular, the New York-based internet artist looks to explore the performance of gender and the role that the technical infrastructure of the web plays on its construction, as much as the emerging social space around it.

Below, Holland talks to Triantafyllidis about his intentions with Role Play, the so-called 'queering' of Ork aesthetics and the move from VR into AR.

Faith Holland: How do you see yourself as an artist in relationship to the Ork?

Theo Triantafyllidis: The whole process started from thinking about virtual reality and thinking about embodiment in VR. I found this very DIY way to do a full-body motion capture and I was immediately interested in thinking about what my avatar would be. The whole avatar discussion is something that has been around for a long time. LaTurbo [Avedon] is really killing it. I wanted to think about what happens in my own body when I 'wear' an avatar. The beginning of this exploration was making a few different bodies and seeing how my brain reacted to them. The 3D body software I was using was all parameter-based, so you could tweak the parameters to be like 80% muscular, 30% pregnant, and 10% Ork, for example. I thought: what happens when I stretch these parameters outside their limits and dial up all the numbers? These particular 3D models are very recognizable. A bunch of artists and industry people use them. I wanted to push the avatar in a direction that was simultaneously very stereotypical in some ways, in that it was all these video game characters smashed together, but also slightly different from that. When I was making the avatar, I was so attracted to it in so many ways. I can't exactly communicate why I wanted to be this Ork so much. I hope it is

noticeable throughout the work that there's this element of coming to terms with what this body means and why I'm doing this. I didn't want to resolve it ahead of time.

FH: So you're using the Ork as a kind of conduit to make the physical work that's in the show. So much of this show is about practice — the act of being an artist and how to perform that. Are the works made by the Ork/you in the physical space through this digital performance, or are they made entirely in advance and then the Ork enacts it? Like, are you creating that painting as the Ork, or is the Ork animating something you've made previously?

TT: The painting was a one-take. The fifteen minutes of the video is the time in which I actually made the painting, and I made it as the Ork. I chose this specific genre of video game fantasy character because the fidelity of working in VR is not great. I thought the Ork's brutality and roughness would match that well. The other aesthetic aspect of the Ork's work is the idea of 'form follows function.' The types of devices and weapons that Orks use in fantasy games are always very modernist in the sense that their form is simply the best way to destroy stuff, or the simplest way to make something. I thought this was a funny comment on modernism and how you can get to simplicity either by extreme sophistication or by sheer stupidity, in a way.

FH: Are the Orks known for destruction?

TT: Yeah. Orks are always represented as these stupid warriors whose whole purpose in life is to kill and destroy.

FH: So there's a kind of 'nothing-but-the-body' thing going on. I love when you said that you were 'wearing the body.' Does embodying and working through the Ork allow you to make a different kind of work than you normally make as Theo?

TT: Yeah. At first, I didn't have a clear aesthetic goal. The process was: become the Ork, gather found 3D models, make some more models myself, and then start to assemble these ideas into forms and sculptures.

FH: That reminds me of this one Ork line that I think is hilarious. The Ork says: "If I want to be a bad boy artist, I have to make it bigger!" There's all this genderqueer stuff going on with the Ork. I'm wondering how that all fits together: this butch-femme Ork who wants to be a bad boy artist and is making this really aggressive work.

TT: I was trying to do a new take on the "bad boy artist" genre, queering it as much as possible. The reality of making this work was me wearing a headset and working inside a bedroom studio with a small computer, while fantasising about being able to make these gigantic sculptures and fantasising about having this huge space to work in–

FH: –– with a beautiful view.

TT: 'Bad boy artists' have a 'badass idea' and then 20 people fabricate that for them. The sculpture is often pretending it was made in a very sketchy way, but in reality, the physicality of making it is so much more complicated.

FH: It's interesting that you have this three dimensional virtual space, but then the sculptures are super-flat.

TT: The physical sculptures are snapshots of the 3D pieces printed on ply-wood, so it is photographic in that way. The labor that went into these pieces was in VR, so it didn't make sense to try and make them the same way in the

physical world, because that would require the actual labor that I was trying to avoid.

FH: Your work is pretty heterogeneous, but this piece in particular seems like a departure from your previous work of setting up parameters and then letting it happen. Whereas with this work, you are performing through the work and it's pretty finite in a way that the other work isn't. What caused that shift?

TT: I was always interested in the performative aspect of the work, even if it wasn't me performing. My actual bodily presence is very awkward, and I don't feel comfortable performing. This whole complex apparatus was a way for me to hide that a bit and to feel more comfortable performing. Being the Ork helped me get over some of my difficulties.

FH: I want to talk about the meta relationship that the Ork has to art. I think this also appears in some of your other works like How to Everything: there's like this spectre of painting that stands in for art with capital A. I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about your relationship to painting.

TT: My reaction to painting is really visceral and simplistic in a way. I actually don't get painting and I don't understand why people do it. But if I tried to talk about that in an arts context, everyone would look at me like I was from another planet. Being the Ork gives me an excuse to say things that maybe people are thinking but are afraid to say because it might sound dumb. That's another part of using the Ork to mask: to just talk straightforwardly and simply about things. I hadn't painted before, and I mean this is a really simple version of painting–

FH: —Or a very complex version. You have to embody a character and perform the painting, you have to print it, and then transport it somewhere else. It's actually very complicated.

TT: A big part of making the work was building the behind-the-scenes framework: setting up the recording and programming the interactions. But

the final step of creating the painting was just 10 minutes, so it was a very enjoyable experience. That was my way of actually trying to paint.

FH: Let's talk about how it exists in physical space from the viewer's standpoint. The fact that we don't have to exist inside the VR goggles is super liberating. How did you envision the physical interaction of the viewer to the work, particularly with the monitors on wheels?

TT: I've done a few VR pieces recently, and thinking about the audience was the number one concern. And that includes thinking about how people will experience it, but also how other people will experience someone being in VR. Like in a previous VR piece that I did called Staphyloculus, the whole piece is secretly choreographing the body of the person in the VR set to do weird stuff for the other people to watch, without that person necessarily noticing. With this work, in the same sense, I am gamifying the viewing experience. You have to actively participate in viewing the work and finding the avatar's performance. I'm also getting bored of having headsets in the gallery. I wanted to make the experience more sociable and exciting and accessible for the audience. Having these large monitors activates a more collective engagement, like when two people dragging the monitor around the room becomes a dance of its own.

FH: Yes, it's a much more social experience than the individual experience of the goggles. Going to a gallery can actually be a very social experience of seeing work with other people. There's that lateral energy, which I think this piece brings back into the gallery space.

TT: And if you do augmented reality on an iPhone or iPad, it's still a personal portal. It's not so easily shared. There's also all the hassle of installing an app and scanning the barcode to even get started. The other important reason for the large monitors is so that Ork is to scale and you feel its presence in the space.

FH: In the large installation, the Ork feels like a ghost circling around you as she creates.

TT: That's what I really love about AR. You can achieve a sense of presence with the augmented characters in the physical space. Even if the monitors are not pointed at the Ork, you still feel her lingering presence.

FH: Right. Even when I cannot see the Ork, I can hear the Ork. The presence is still felt, and that can guide the visuals. One more question for you: your use of humour seems to be a consistent strategy across many of your works. I'm wondering how it plays into this work.

TT: I feel like we share this approach. I see humour as the vehicle that will draw people in and get them to engage with the work on the first level, so that the work can then guide them through the other things that are going on. I really appreciate humour in art. My type of humour is not very textual, but

visual and performative. Which is why I've liked working through the performative elements of this work, because it has helped me find new ways of expressing humour.

FH: There's so much about the Ork's physicality that is funny. There's an element of slapstick, like when the Ork throws objects onto the sculpture or thrashes the paintbrushes. Do you think you'll do more work as the Ork?

TT: Yeah, I think I will. There are a few aspects of the Ork that I haven't yet explored. A small hint is that it's going to be about athletics and exercising in VR. The other aspect of the Ork work that I'm really interested in is the site specificity. I'm hoping someone will invite the Ork to do site-specific work in another location. The Ork working in nature and doing some land art would be fun.

FH: The landscape outside the Ork's studio looks like a great place to do some land art. Those beautiful mountains, right?

TT: Exactly.**

Theo Triantafyllidis' Role Play at New York's Meredith Rosen Gallery ran April 21 to June 9, 2018.

Talk to me: Eva Papamargariti + Theo Triantafyllidis in dialogue on the entanglement of human, machine + nature

"As we continue challenging nature, nature will keep challenging us back and this dynamic relationship, this exact moment is, from my perspective, one of the most productive, uncanny, dangerous but also fascinating conditions," says Eva Papamargariti in an email chat with Theo Triantafyllidis about their exhibition Obscene Creatures, Resilient Terrains. Currently showing at London's Assembly Point, running May 12 to June 17, the collaborative show explores the intersection between landscape, nature and technology.

Both artists work with digital technology and and animation. London-based Papamargariti here presents mixed media installation 'Soft Bodies, Invincible Critters I-IV' of fabric prints, laser cut and etched fluorescent acrylic, as well as HD video projection on black sand 'Precarious Inhabitants II'. Los Angeles-based Triantafyllidis exhibits three-channel screen video 'Seamless,' with sound design by Diego Navarro. The individual works enter into a dialogue that, as the press release describes, "traverses the landscape, observing it with the curiosity of an explorer, oscillating between omniscient distance, and near-erotic detail."

In response to AQNB Editor Jean Kay's question "where does humanity (and technology) start, and where does it end?" the pair expand on the ideas that have shaped and informed their practices in dialogue with each other, with the evolving idea of co-habitation at the root of their conversation.

Eva Papamargariti: The main idea of our show is exploring the ongoing interaction between nature and technology. This interaction sometimes is becoming apparent and sometimes is quite subtle, almost as being implied. I believe the connecting mechanism of these conditions is the way we permute the role of human in our work. I find it very intriguing, the fact that in your work ['Seamless,' 2017], Theo, the human doesn't exist at all but the viewer somehow obtains the role of the observer, we slowly become part of your constructed landscape because in a way it feels that our gaze activates it – almost as we are looking at an object.

Theo Triantafyllidis: Yes, the piece feels like an enclosed ecosystem, the way it is cut off from its environment, despite its scale, gives it the presence of an object. The idea for this piece came to me when I tried google earth in virtual reality for the first time. It was kind of a sublime experience for me. I remember when Clement Valla was talking about the "Universal Texture," seeing Google Earth as a huge patchwork of satellite imagery stitched together to create a texture file the size of the earth.

In the new version of Google Earth, each tile of the map was photographed from multiple angles and through the use of photogrammetry was made into a relatively accurate 3D model. The way you navigate and manipulate this 3D model in VR totally changes your relationship and perception of the earth, you feel like the whole planet is an object, but on a different scale. Going back to the piece, as you said, it is the gaze of the audience that activates the landscape and defines it as an object. In your video there is a narrator, that seems to mutate and change throughout the piece but also is perhaps the only human presence that we can directly perceive.

EP: Indeed, this voice is some sort of remaining indication of human presence. It's a voice that contains multiple voices, different tones and genders, changing its tone and pitch. It's almost as if it tries to prove that humans exist because their voices can pose questions that demand answers from the opposite side – the other (invasive) species/inhabitants. They are observing their behavior, feeling threatened but also curious to understand the spectrum of the 'otherness' of their existence. The first-person narration is a core element of the videos and the laser-cut acrylics that I use on the installations. I would say that through it, I am trying to unveil this kind of entanglement that exists between technology, humans and nature on one hand, and on the other hand, I aim to create a dynamic dialogue between these 'actors' as they are all part of an ongoing balancing game, where no hierarchy can be revealed. But in mentioning the idea of 'actors,' I can't help but think about the way that machines and animals interact with each other and their surroundings in your piece, and how these interactions get altered or repeat through time, as we are able to observe certain changes in your landscape the more we look at

the screens. I feel that time is important parameter in your work, not only in the way that it becomes a central factor of these encounters on your enclosed ecosystem but also because it defines the way the work communicates with the viewer.

TT: In this piece, the actors have less agency over their actions than in some of my earlier works. Here they seem kind of unaware of their environment, endlessly trying to understand, explore and navigate. The random encounters between different species are the moments that are of interest. As the animal population and autonomous robot population encounter each other, they have these nonviolent moments of realization of each other's existence but also they are unable to fully comprehend the extent of their potential interactions. What is interesting to me, was comparing the way that we train robots to navigate in real-life situations, having an inside-out array of sensors, compared to gaming AIs that have more of an outside-in knowledge of their environment. They are by default aware of the whole 'level,' but we have to take away from that awareness and restrict it (field of view, senses etcetera) in order to make their behaviour feel more realistic. In your work, you are also talking about species navigating new environments, but perhaps on a micro-scale and with more invasive strategies.

EP: Yes exactly, an important part of the videos and laser-cut acrylics is exploring the invisible and visible processes that are related with invasive species and the alterations that they bring to non native ecosystems. It is quite interesting to me, the movement of these organisms to unknown territories and the mechanisms they develop in order to survive, the way we as humans deal with this but also the way scientists talk about it using terms like 'invasive species colonies' for example. Or even the fact that they have become in the recent past part of trade transactions illegally through internet platforms like amazon and ebay. I feel that these dynamic imbalances can speak literally and metaphorically about the way nature and its inhabitants develop sometimes aggressive techniques and concealment tactics to protect themselves or to dominate over others, from a micro to a macroscale. Also a lot can be said equally about human's position and action in relation to these processes and even more about the effects that human absence or intense observation and interference might or might not have upon them.

TT: In return, humans, through technology, are creating new ways to monitor and control nature. For instance, micromanagement and gamification techniques have been applied to crowdsource the termination of such invasive species (like the fish population in your video, 'Precarious Inhabitants I'), or satellite imagery used to monitor forest growth and deforestation patterns on a global scale. I have been particularly interested in these emerging systems. One could argue that our network of imaging devices (satellites, drones, Google Street View vehicles, lidar scanners, phone cameras, etcetera) are continuously working outside the boundaries of our urban environment and are attempting to describe or surveil nature. I am also interested in the idea that these systems are close to becoming realtime and autonomous, opening up the possibility of an interaction system with nature.

EP: At the same time, bringing to mind this network of imaging devices that you mention, we are observing more and more how technology and its artifacts are adopting a biomimetic behavior. Micro-robots that function like flies, mosquito drones, robofish and machines that look like dogs; carrying GPS systems and onboard sensors, reaching places on earth and the sea bottom that the human eye cannot reach. They can even communicate with each other, extrapolating even more the idea of animal mimesis. We are standing in front of this paradoxical condition of an endless sampling, recreating, reassembling, copying and extending of natural and animal operations. It is quite interesting, we keep creating counterparts in order to exceed the previous counterparts. In that process there is also an emphasis on the idea of co-inhabiting, symbiotic mechanisms between animals-machines, human-machines, human-nature-animals-machines that bear resemblances, existing and trying to co-inhabit the planet. I remember this video where a dog barks on a Boston Dynamics quadruped robot dog, at this moment, we see a completely uncanny but quite intriguing 'dialogue,' and series of gestures unfolding between those two 'actors.'

TT: This is the kind of uncanny relationship that I find fascinating too. I was exploring this kind of animated nonverbal communication that emerges in these situations in my piece. I was laying out this scenario, where these bio-mimetic robots and wild animals are set to co-inhabit a landscape of limited resources, and thus have to continuously negotiate the boundaries of their habitation. The two populations, of robots and animals, start off unaware of each other's existence, but each time they stumble upon each other, there is a moment where they face each other and are somehow startled, both by their resemblance and by their inability to describe the other on their own terms. These moments hint at the possibility of coexistence of the two populations, but also the possibility of an emergent system of collaboration between the two. Meanwhile, there is an underlying hierarchy of scale and management of resources that they are trying to overcome. In your piece, this hierarchy breaks and the boundaries between robots, human and animals become blurred.

EP: True. On the video, the human voice asks one of the critters 'Are you dangerous?' and the critter replies: 'Not more than you are (…) Me and you are connected. We exist simultaneously — I am not inferior or superior.' So, indeed as you said Theo, for me it is more a question of how these 'actors' co-exist in their continuously altering habitats and the range of interactions they are putting themselves through, rather than who prevails in the end.**

MASSAGE
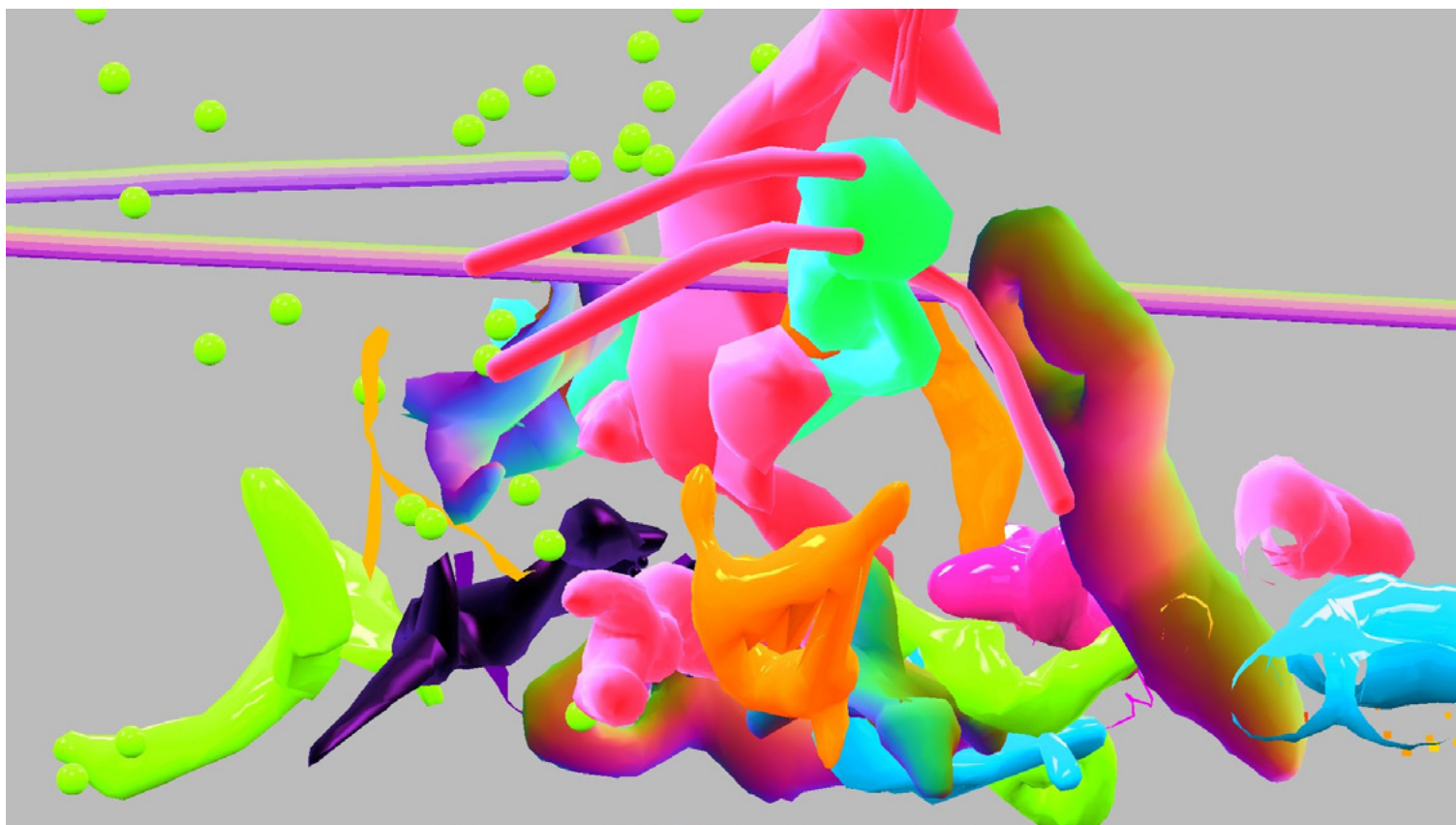
Interview with Theo Triantafyllidis
From games to simulations and sculptures.
The new refreshing relationship bred from a
conversation between humans and technology.

Los Angeles based artist Theo Triantafyllidis creates a wide variety of work,
that utilizes computer graphics and game technology to explore a new form
of interactivity with his audience. He is inspired by a process he calls "Inter-
net Flush", described as a continuous consumption of sporadic floods of data
that is displayed on a screen. Consisting of completely abstract expressions,
his works employs a pop aesthetic while being visceral and humorous at the
same time. His latest Virtual Reality piece will take the audience into the
artist's physical body, while other works depict an endless loop of visual jokes
committed by objects. Gaming culture and new technologies are merged
together with traditional art in his works. They express, in many shapes and

forms, the strange relationship and conversation between humans and technology. We interviewed him during his exhibition with Eva Papamargariti "Obscene Creatures-Resilient Terrains".

You have lived in a few different countries, can you tell us about your past?

I am from Athens, Greece and did my Diploma of Architecture in the National Technical University of Athens. During my studies I was more interested in experimental architecture and in its potential to create interesting spatial conditions. When I graduated, I moved to Beijing, China to work as an architect. At that time I was exposed to a few different communities of artists making art on the internet and slowly started becoming an active participant. Then I realized that architecture wasn't working for me as a profession and decided to become an artist. After exhibiting some work in Beijing I decided to move to Los Angeles and do the Design Media Arts MFA in UCLA as it seemed the best place and school for what I wanted to do. I graduated last summer and am currently based in LA.

Does the way of thinking of an architect influence your art?

Definitely it has been a strong influence and the foundation of my education as an artist. For a while I had been trying to avoid the rational and structured way I was working as an architect but I recently realized that my background in architecture is very useful when working in Virtual Reality. An important aspect of working in VR is creating immersive environments and interesting spatial experiences and this is the part that I enjoy the most.

The piece "How to Everything" is a live simulation, what kind of algorithm is it based on?

It is an algorithm for creating nonsense. It creates these empty scenes, populates them with some objects, tries to arrange the objects in a composition, then lets the objects do their thing and repeats. When it cuts to the next scene, some objects are destroyed and new ones are introduced. The audience often tries to draw connections between the scenes, in the same way that they would for a film cut, but the connections are not necessarily there. Its like a generative how to basic video that goes on forever.

One of the keywords you use when you describe "How to Everything" is vanitas. Are you trying to connect the history of painting with digital art?

I find art history fascinating and a great source of inspiration, especially for digital artists. I am interested in how art has had a specific function in society throughout history and how this is related to the history and development of technology. As for the history of painting, I am intrigued by the notion of surface, as perceived in painting and the 2Dness of things. For me it's very challenging, as I feel much more comfortable working in 3D and in sculptural form. The screen as a surface on a wall functions very similarly to a painting though and this is part of the themes I was exploring with this piece. I tried to

compress this 3D scene into something that feels 2D, that compressed space into a surface. If you are more interested in the Vanitas reading of the piece, you can find more info about it here.

You not only create digital art but also physical objects, is there a big difference between digital sculpting and traditional sculpting?

I really like iterating seamlessly between digital and physical objects. That was part of my recent piece called "Mountain", where a ceramic piece was 3D scanned, brought to life in a game engine and game me ideas that then were translated back onto the ceramic piece. So for me it's an ongoing dialogue between the physical and the digital object. I like it when the two collide and merge. I have been setting up my studio recently, and was planning to get all these workbenches and big tools, but ended up getting a Vive VR headset instead and keeping the studio completely empty so I have more "digital space".

What kind of possibilities do you see when combining art and games?

Videogames are a relatively new medium that has barely been explored by artists, even though it's such an exciting field. In my earlier work, I saw the gaming part as a kind of trap for my audience. I noticed that people spent more time exploring and paying attention to details in a piece when there are some gaming elements to it. They would play a game over and over and get addicted to it, whereas they would only look at a wall piece in a gallery for a few seconds and walk away. Now I understand that there is much more in games than that and I am interested in developing a more complex game in the near future. Also, together with my friend Alex Rickett we just released an online multiplayer browser game, commissioned by Adult Swim, called "Gecko Redemption". It is a competitive sports game where you are a sticky gecko that pukes objects and shoots lasers and can climb on anything. It's the first piece I have worked on that is a "proper" game.

You made "Self Portrait (Interior)" for DiMoDa. Why did you want to use yourself as a part of an artwork?

I tried to use myself as the means to express something that more people could relate too. The format of the self-portrait is a very common tool in art because it allows artists to use themselves as a canvas to convey their thoughts or questions to the world. Making a VR self portrait seemed worth exploring, as the medium allowed me to really push the level of intimacy with the audience. The most interesting part of this project for me was seeing other people play it and posting videos of them playing. A few days after I released it (I just posted it on itch.io) it somehow got picked up by some awesome youtubers. I was really surprised by these videos. Exactly because this piece was so personal when I watched people playing it online and commenting on it, I felt like we were actually having some kind of very meta conversation.

I found your text about the internet and art, "internet flush", very interesting. Are you addicted to the Internet? Does the internet culture create some kind of feedback to your artworks?

Yes, this feeling of "internet flush" that I describe in that text has been the driving force behind a lot of my work. This cycle of internet flow inspiring an artwork, than then is fed back to the internet flow has been extensively explored by now by artists and critics. These days I am moving more towards the detox phase. I am looking for an escape strategy to reduce internet and social media time in order to focus on other things. I am currently working on a few new pieces. A new live simulation piece, a scrolling landscape for the show "Obscene Creatures, Resilient Terrains" we are doing with Eva Papamargariti at Assembly Point in London. Also a new VR piece for the VR group show "Unreal" at NRW Forum in Germany, set in a desert scene where a person has taken a headset and is having a VR overdose. I guess VR is my new addiction.

Serving Suggestion, 2014
Theo Triantafyllidis
ceramics, mixed media casts, table, dinnerware

A Game About Geckos Battling Each Other With Vomit

Gecko Ridemption, a game about the very real struggles geckos face in captivity, is not entirely "good" in the traditional sense. But it's extremely good in many others.

Published by Adult Swim, it's a 1v1 gecko combat point capture sports game... I think? Yeah! Sure! Basically, though, you and your opponent are both geckos, and you can stick to pretty much any surface. You climb up, down, and all around in an effort to capture tiny sports ball planets, which add to your total score. After a couple minutes, one of you is declared the winner. The other is declared dead, which is kinda sad, but that's probably just how it goes for geckos, unless it completely isn't.

Oh, by the by, you reach said planets by vomiting out assorted food items, which stick together, forming extremely lumpy (and probably acidic) sky bridges. Also, your gecko is capable of charging and firing a continuous laser beam from its mouth that'll bust up your opponent's freshly de-masticated constructions—as well as your opponent.
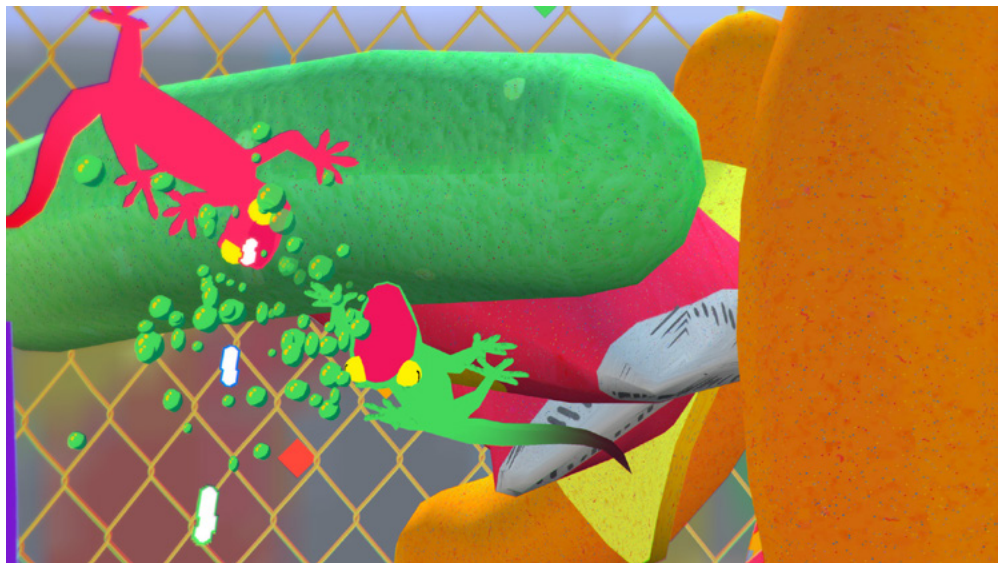
Coupled with the fact that you spend half your time sideways or up-side-down, it makes for an extremely disorienting experience. The game doesn't control super well, either, and the color palette seems to have, itself, been vomited up by a gecko who recently consumed a box of colored high-lighters. It might hurt your eyes a little, is what I'm saying. But the game is really weird and very fun, if you just take it on its own terms and let yourself laugh a lot. Oh, and it's free. The question, then, is the same as the one that I imagine led to Gecko Ridemption's conception: why not?

You can play it on Adult Swim's site or Itch.io.

Self Portrait (Interior) rolls out the welcome tongue

This afternoon I have spent a while crawling around in a virtual colon. While some of you rush to the comment section to make jokes about online comment sections, I'll just clarify that this was because I was investigating Self Portrait (Interior) by Theo Triantafyllidis [itch.io page].

   "Self Portrait (Interior) was commissioned by DiMoDa, a preeminent virtual institution and a virtual reality exhibition platform dedicated to the distribution and promotion of New Media Art. It was part of the VR group show Morphe Presence, showcasing artists Brenna Murphy, Rosa Menkman, Miyö Van Stenis and Theo Triantafyllidis. It has been exhibited in multiple locations, including Superchief Gallery in NY, the Satellite Art Show in Miami and the RISD Museum in Rhode Island."

There's an in-depth interview piece over on the Creators bit of Vice which gets into what Triantafyllidis wanted to explore with the work, but coming to it without reading that segment first I found it to be a really enjoyable absurd/grotesque/daft/organic bit of… I guess, body tourism?

Having read the accompanying piece, I don't think the more serious themes come off effectively but then without being privy to the unedited interview it's hard to know how much any serious aspects are the artist's emphasis and how much comes from the author, particularly given those bits aren't in direct quotes. Self Portrait is far better at playing with the humour in the creepy but ultimately ridiculous intimacy of being an intruder in this body space. I was sad that the transition between inner and outer wasn't more fluid, though. I'd like to have been able to go from gob to gullet myself because traversing that boundary is always interesting and I'd like to give it a go in VR.

That's not to say you can't use inner space to explore interesting political and social ideas – for a couple of different examples off the top of my head, Mona Hatoum famously did exactly that with the video installation, Corps Étranger (1994), as did Carolee Schneemann with Interior Scroll (1975) [the link for this is going to be NSFW as all hell]. But Self Portrait's strength for me was in the absurd rather than the political so I'm glad I wasn't also trying to wrangle it with the contents of the interview in mind. I feel like the game is supposed to have a sense of its own humour, by the way, as one of the itch.io tags is "Sports" :)

And now to belatedly pick through more of DiMoDa's online repository once it downloads…
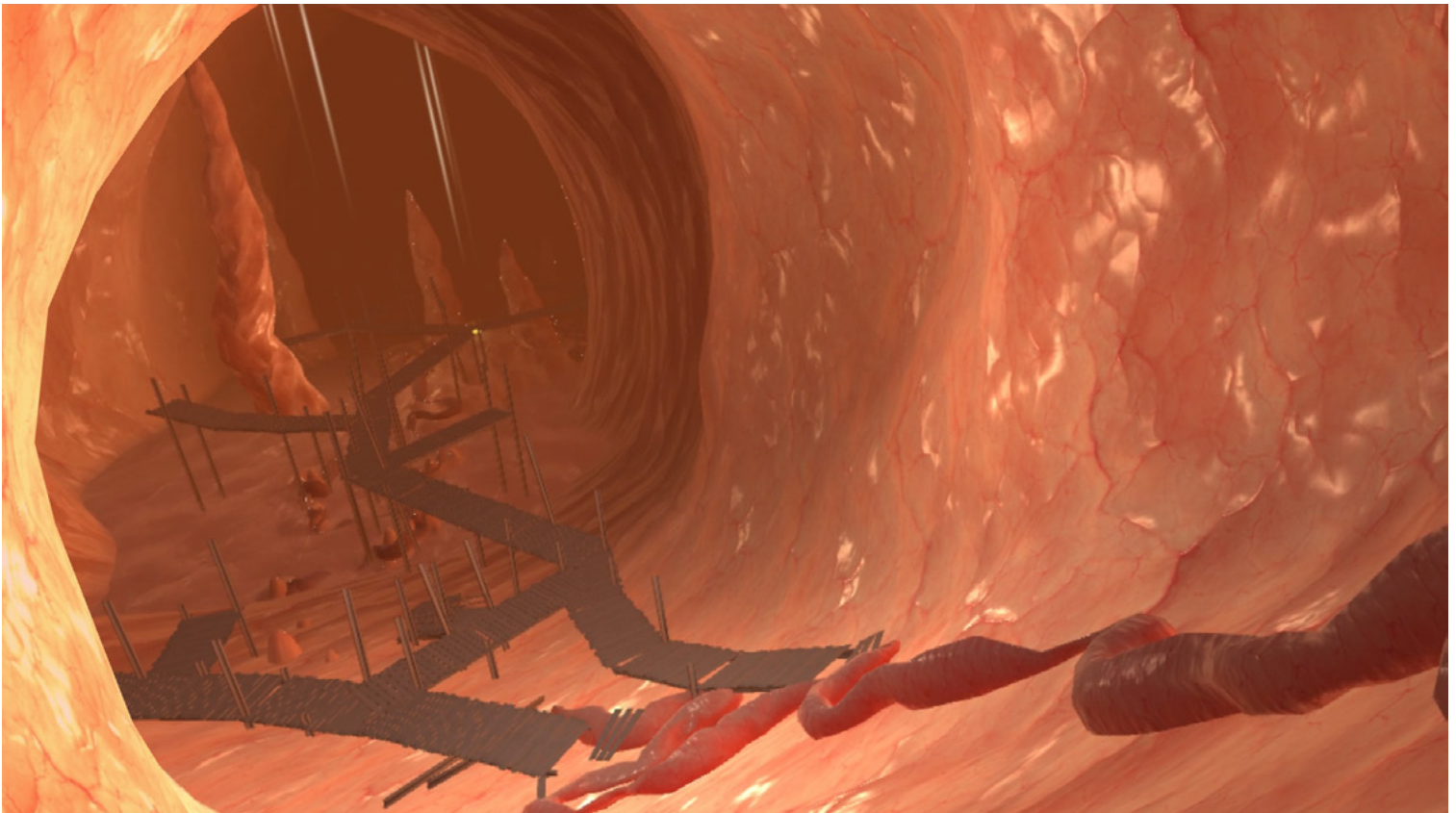
This Digital Sculpture is Crawling with Simulated Life Forms

"Still Life with Yumyums" offers a peek into a world infested with digital organisms.

Remember the scene in Men in Black II where Tommy Lee Jones opens a locker and there's an entire species living inside? That's basically the situation in Theo Trian's new digital artwork, Still Life with Yumyums. A floating surface decked out with a hamster wheel, a giant banana, a phone, and a mysterious pile of ooze serves as the home of the Yumyums. Yumyums are a species of tiny, obnoxiously meowing digital creatures that, as Trian puts it, "eat, shit and rest, but their sole purpose in this miniature world is to reproduce and evolve."

Throughout the eight-minute video, the Yumyums shuffle around, move stuff, and occasionally blow stuff up, yapping all the while. One imagines that, if there's a God, this is how she views our political debates.

While eight minutes seems like a long time to watch these strange creatures living their normal lives, it's just a small segment of a theoretically infinite simulaiton. Infinite, at least, "until the yumyums manage to escape the simulation," Trian notes. Cackle like a deity as you watch the full video below.

Celebrate Swiss architect Le Corbusier by defacing one of his masterpieces

What better way to celebrate it being 50 years since influential Swiss architect Le Corbusier's death than redesigning his famous Villa Savoye? Oh, not actually, of course. We couldn't possibly bear to spoil what is considered by many to be one of the keystones of modern architecture (and also an official French historical monument). We're talking videogames here. Yes, it's their easily-reset worlds that allow us to enjoy reckless fantasies without consequence (usually), so why not employ them to deface a prestigious villa that sits on the edge of Paris?

This is the concept of a new project by Greek-born Theo Triantafyllidis, who is currently a student in UCLA's Design Media Arts program, and creator of the dating app parody Pin-Pon, which we previously covered. He was commissioned by the #decorbuziers exhibition that took place in December 2015 in Romantso, Athens, to produce a videogame that, in some manner, paid tribute to the late architect. What Triantafyllidis came up with is called Le Petit Architecte.

Much like Pin-Pon before it, Le Petit Architecte embraces chaos, glitches, and silliness. It places you as a young, inexperienced intern who is destined for greatness as they will one day "create the absolute architectural masterpiece." Hmm. Perhaps you can help along with that. Jumping into this intern's perspective, the game gives you the ability to throw (yes, literally) architectural pieces in front of you. This intern is clearly quite strong in the arm considering they're capable of throwing iron ladders, doric pillars, and entire arches made of stone at a reliable and handy height and distance.

But that is not this intern's only feat. It seems that they have also found a way for all of these hefty building pieces to stick together upon contact. The architect's arch-enemy is gravity, but not this one: with them, you build a higgledy-piggledy tower of supreme balance and strength. It's best built Minecraft-style. That is, standing atop the highest point of the tower, and then spamming the jump and build keys so that you steadily arise, and the tower with you.

The finished sight would render not only the best architect's in the world speechless but its variety of bright colors would also hold every single toddler spellbound. There are blues, yellows, greens, reds; a tootie-frootie lollipop of a tower. Not only that, but the tower's materials aren't even sensible. Along with the bits of wall, arches, and pillars, there are also doors, cats, pianos, lamp posts, and slides. Wonderfully, each individual piece makes a sound relative to the object when thrown: cats meow, pianos crash discordantly, and so on.

Given the absurdity of it all, what Le Petit Architecte may end up bringing out in you is not an interest in creating the tallest tower possible, but as much of a mess as you can. The entire voidscape within which sits the Villa Savoye at its center can be filled with a mass of architectural bodies, careful design be damned. Put too much clutter down and the game will start to break, with objects desperately vibrating in empty space, unable to find purchase, and eventually, a whole tornado of over-sized toys can be sent juddering around you. Le Corbusier wouldn't have approved of such destruction but he would have most likely marveled at the sight of it all.
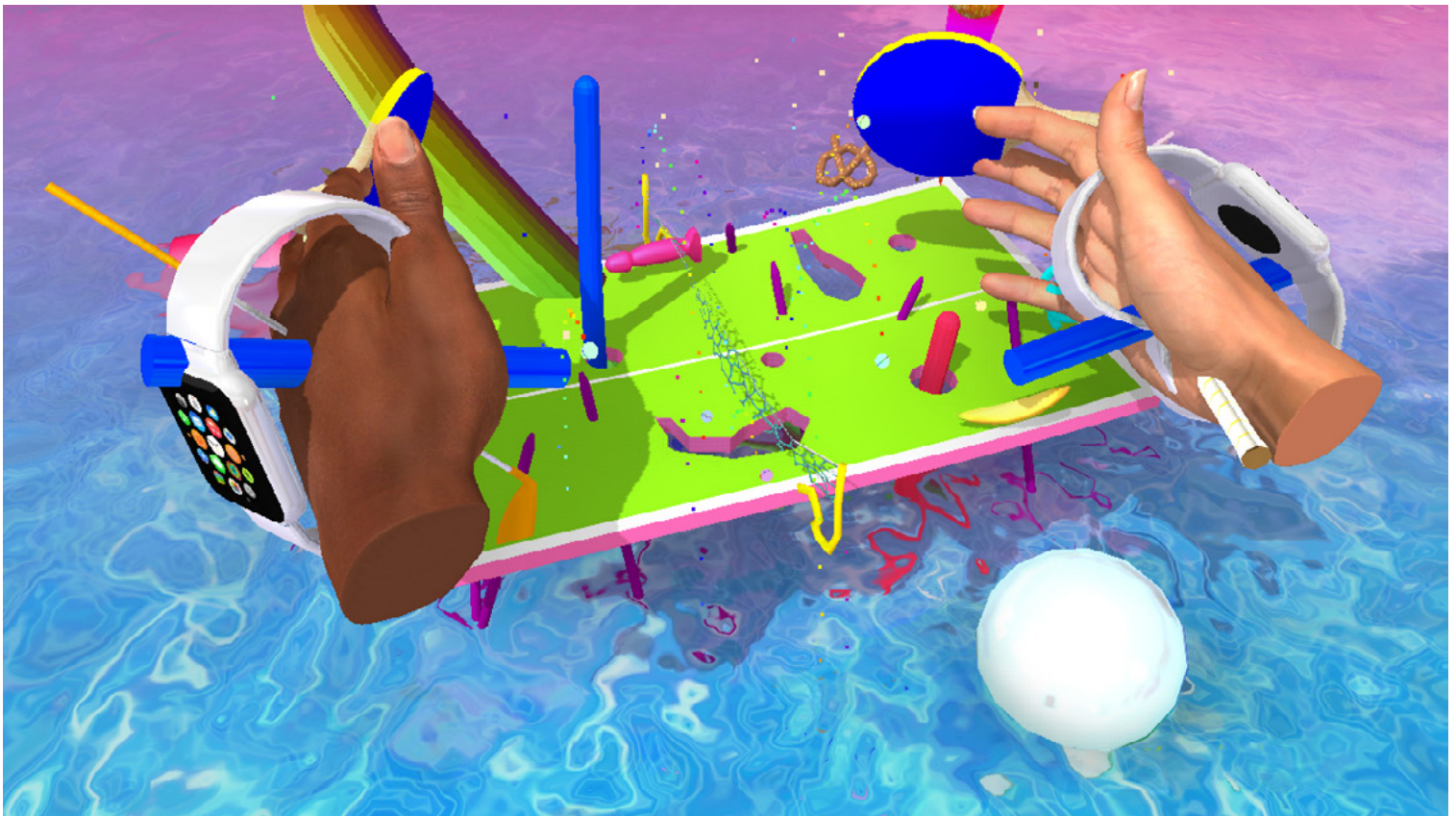
Play a Virtual Ping Pong Game Inspired by Online Dating

The most effective way to win at Pin-Pon is by swiping like you would on Tinder.

Pretzels, teapots, and exotic fruits rush over your screen in UCLA Design Media Arts student Theo Triantafyllidis' Pin-Pon, an interactive virtual ping pong simulation game. Inspired by George Maciunas' modified Ping Pong table as well as Tinder, the online dating app, the game invites you to smash incoming snacks and objects with your paddle—a virtual phone stuck to your hand.

Thanks to precious help from the UCLA Game Lab, Triantafyllidis refines the straightforward gameplay. All of the 3D elements and digital projectiles are made with Sketchup then processed in Unity3D to add fuel to the game.

Triantafyllidis tells The Creators Project, "Two players use a Leap Motion controller to control their virtual hands, trying to bounce off as many objects as possible, from their side of the table and onto their opponents. The more items they hit, the more crazy the game becomes until the table explodes and both players win. It's a match! It's kinda hard to master tho [sic], it takes time to learn to hit the balls with grace."

As an "alternative sport," Pin-Pon allows the lazy to work out—at least virtually—and offers a creative critique of online dating apps at the same time. "It's like these intense instant messaging sessions, with multiple 'bling' sounds, that cause your hand to be stuck to your phone. Eventually, the hand and phone become one, their souls spliced forever," Triantafyllidis explains. "Accidentally, the most effective way to win the game is by repetitively doing a finger swipe motion, similar to the one you make on Tinder."

FRAM∃

How to Water exhibition visitors confront the addictive nature of the World Wide Web

Curated by Shelley Holcomb and Theo Triantafyllidis, How to Water is an exhibition that aligns the appeal and fluidity of the internet with its physical counterpart – delicious, liquid water.

Taking over the artist-run Eastside International space in Los Angeles, the show brings together 16 works in a symphony of streaming GIFs, multimedia expressions and frenzied projections, all depicting an allegorical mishmash that examines the innermost recesses of the internet.

The project flashes visuals of 'dopamine-triggering listicle clickbait' to reflect the addictive qualities of the deeply nested yet quintessential beast that we know as the Web, doling out digital content as if it were the latest pleasure-pumping narcotic. The exhibition steers visitors through 'rising tides' of consciousness as it lends shape to the erratic side of the internet, while simultaneously suggesting its immersive and autonomous nature. Like water, the internet has a fluidly ephemeral character; similarities between the two make a big splash in this probing multimedia experience.

HOW TO WATER, a slow performance

Here's the tumblr output of the project: http://howtowater.tumblr.com

Despite recent breakthroughs in technology water didn't loose any of it's meaning as a constant element in life's history. Beginning from the first creatures developing in the sea, up to recent ideas by key players in the online industry to create artificial life scapes on the fluid surface of the earth. During a 7 day artist camp on the Greek Island Serifos,10 digital-native artists gathered to intervene the current state of the most basic element.

Participating Artists: Anunca Pez, Zafeiria Gkolanta, Eva Papamargariti, Manuel Rossner, Alyona Shapovalova, Loïq Sutter, Thereisamajorproblemi-naustralia, Theo Triantafyllidis, Nikolas Triantafyllidis

Screening, additionally featuring the works of: Adam Ferriss, Alfredo Salazar-Caro, Anthony Antonellis, Kim Laughton, Motoko Kuzekira & Pvmp Irxn, Rachel Archibald, Taj Borgeois, Vince Mcelvie, Alx Lightning, Eva Fifi, Eva Porre, Georges Jacotey, Peristeri On

Organised and Curated by: Triantafyllidis Theoklitos

Dates: 9 – August 16, 2014

Place: Psili Ammos Beach, Island of Serifos, Greece

In the middle of August 2014, 10 net artists who met each other and worked together in the internet, took the bold decision to reveal their identities and meet in person. The experiment involved isolating themselves on an island for a week, during which they would create freely, under the theme "how to water".

Water as a subject and metaphor seems to haunt this new generation of artists. Being forced to live in the digital age with a physical body made of 70% of this transparent, odorless and tasteless element, they must also follow its' rituals and rules while surfing the fluid landscapesof their tumblr and facebook feeds. Not to mention the sharks that attack the interwebs' underwater optic fiber networks. For these reasons they decided to dedicate their research and honor the life-giving element, placing their first IRL meeting in a place encircled by it. The Greek Archipelago.

Theoklitos Triantafyllidis, host and organizer of the assembly invitednine other artists in the island of Serifos. In his home, that became the base of their operations, the artists had to coexist in real time. Not onlywere they inspired and organized their actions, but they also took their first steps in physical contact, especially as the internet access was limited. "It was really awkward when I had to speak to some of them internet kids. I would feel more comfortable sending them personal messages in facebook, but because we had no internet I was obliged to actually interact with them. Sometimes I even touched them."Internationally renowned net artist Eva Papamargariti, which participated in the experiment confesses: "I was horrified in the first couple of days but later got used to it. I now recognize smells, it will take years for google to include this in its services."

First to arrive on Serifos was the Greek group of artists, while theGerman participants, Manuel and Sebastian, in order to betterexperience the contact with water, changed their route to include a Homeric journey from Crete to Serifos. The night they gathered, a full moon illuminated the mystical ritual, initiating the experiment. Large concentric circles were carved in the sand. A girl and a black dog wereplaced in the center. As the moon rose, the artists immersed in the sea, chanting and dancing in ecstasy. Invoking Poseidon, they were only asking for calm sea and 3 bars of wifi signal.

Then came the screening. A projection screen was set up inside the sea, under the beat of seapunk music. People at the beach of Psilli Ammos become curious and start gathering around the screen. As soon as the sun sets, a twisted juxtaposition of vernacular youtube and net artists videos hits the screen. A lineup of international artists from the new net art scene submitted their most watery of videos just for the screening. The excited viewers – tourists, locals and our artists go on dancing and night diving long after the screening is over.

In the following days, the artists toured the island, looking for points of interest and inspiration. They visited the famous mines, the islands' dam, local festivals and of course the magnificent beaches of the island, discussing possible art interventions. Nick educated the team with a drone piloting lesson, only to inspire Sebastian to take it fishing.The local fishermen were astonished by the miracle of technology, when before their eyes, the white robotic quadcopter caught a fish and brought it to the feet of the predator. Meanwhile, Major Problem and Theoklitos were occupied with hydrophilic cactus gardening, exploring the local flora and Eva with Zaf were mixing and painting all sorts

of materials they could get their hands on. Combining their efforts, they all created a series of floating sculptures releasing them in the sea and forming a slow floating exhibition. Young Loiq from Switzerland was making their soundtrack, mixing Greek poetry, folk and pop music and recording them on google translate, while Manuel was snorkeling and discovering an ancient screen on the bottom of the sea. Some of the other members of the crew were more into meditating and enjoying the idyllic landscape. Alyona, who came all the way from Moscow, was practicing yoga, levitating and communicating with extraterrestrial life forms. Anna, on the other hand, tried to understand the inner workings of the element of water and finally developed the power to frieze objects with her mind. All this left John wandering about the meaning of art while looking up to the starry sky.

The day of the final screening soon came, only to find our team in complete panic. All the slow and flowing work that they did during all these days, had to become solid and be presented to the public. Floaters, fish, water and spiritual performances had to melt in and become something coherent and comprehensible. The floating screenwas erected again, this time on the beach of the port of Serifos. People on their boats came in, bringing sunbeds and drinks and by sunset everything was ready. The new videos produced by the artists during these days, together with the ones submitted through the internet, flowed seamlessly on the screen and reflected on the waves of the sea. Partying and dives were to follow.

Check out what the artists made in the playlist bellow:

http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLyrfVKENBJpFwIzVvh8IY2ufSDO-JVrbhR