Theo Triantafyllidis

Selected Publications
2016 - 2022

Forbes

Author: Jonathon Keats
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Link: https://www.forbes.com/sites/jonathonkeats/2022/06/08/are-buddhist-sutras-best-experienced-as-video-games-these-audacious-artists-are-gaming-alternative-realities/

Are Buddhist Sutras Best Experienced As Video Games? These Audacious Artists Are Gaming Alternative Realities

When the Diamond Sutra was published in the year 868 CE, bringing Mahāyāna Buddhism to Chinese readers, the printer anticipated modern open-source software by explicitly specifying that the book be available for "universal free distribution". What the publisher could not have imagined was the license LuYang would take with the sutra 1151 years later, reconstituting it as a video game titled The Great Adventure of Material World.

Structured as a multi-level quest undertaken by a superhero in a cartoon space suit, the game is designed to be intuitive to any teenager, yet gameplay systematically undermines permanence and selfhood in keeping with the Buddha's teachings. At the climax, after discovering that the game is an illusion, the protagonist faces a rival more formidable than any ordinary opponent. The rival turns out to be the protagonist.

The Great Adventure of Material World exemplifies the potential of video games to immerse people in systems of thought manifestly unlike the dominant Western viewpoint. This remarkable capacity is the subject of Worldbuilding, a new exhibition at the Julia Stoschek Collection in Düsseldorf.

As the curator Hans Ulrich Obrist explains in the show's brochure, worldbuilding entails "the agency to create new worlds, not just inherit and live within existing ones.… Rules can be set up, surroundings, systems, and dynamics can be built and altered, new realms can emerge." Although novels and plays also often involve worldbuilding – and the jargon has been in use since the early 19th century – games introduce a degree of interactivity that can be the difference between witnessing and experiencing an alternative reality.

[...]

LaTurbo Avedon, Permanent Sunset, 2020–ongoing. Video still.

Theo Triantafyllidis is also interested inaction, taking stasis as the premise for a game of his own creation. Presented in virtual reality, Pastoral sets the player in endless acres of countryside. This uneventful landscape can be explored by controlling an enormous Orc, a creature strong enough to defeat practically any rival but lacking opponents and threats. (The only other character is a lute-plating goat.) It's theater of the absurd in a surrealist setting: a dream-world built to question the hypercompetitive technosphere broadly accepted as reality.

[...]

15 YEARS JULIA STOSCHEK COLLECTION

worldbuilding

gaming and art in the digital age

Text von/by MARY FLANAGAN

theo triantafyllidis

Theo Triantafyllidis (geb. 1988 in Athen; lebt und arbeitet in Los Angeles) macht sich in seiner künstlerischen Praxis die Ästhetik von Simulationen, Video- und Computerspielen und NFTs (Non-Fungible Token) zu eigen. Nach seinem Architekturstudium in Athen begann er mit Künstler*innengemeinschaften der Digitalen Kunst zu arbeiten, während er in Peking als Architekt tätig war. Der starke Einfluss seiner beruflichen Wahl ist in den von ihm konstruierten immersiven Umgebungen klar erkennbar – sein ausgesprochener Sinn für räumliches Denken prägt die Szenarien, die er mit virtuellen Werkzeugen erschafft.

In Triantafyllidis' Virtual-Reality-Arbeit *Pastoral* (2019) finden sich die Spieler*innen in ein weites virtuelles Getreidefeld versetzt, ein videospielähnliches Setting. Die Spielenden können die zentrale Figur – einen mit einem Hyperkörper und hybrider Genderidentität ausgestatteten Ork, der einen Bikini trägt – mit einem Controller oder der Computertastatur steuern. Die extrem muskulöse Figur, die Triantafyllidis auch in anderen Arbeiten als Avatar benutzt, entspricht den Orks, wie sie in der Populärkultur dargestellt werden, in keiner Weise. In anderen fiktiven Szenarien tendieren Orks zum Monströsen und zur Gewalt: Sie sind robuste Jäger mit einem ausgeprägten Geruchssinn und stets aufs Töten aus. So spielen sie eine wichtige Rolle in vielen Online-Fantasyspielen, etwa *World of Warcraft*, einem Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game [Massen-Mehrspieler*innen-Online-Rollenspiel]. Triantafyllidis' Ork jedoch ist nahezu nackt. Nur mit einem Bikini bekleidet bahnt sich die zentrale Figur ihren Weg durch das raschelnde, hüfthohe Kornfeld. Sie ist nur an diesem Ort, um das idyllische, üppige Feld zu erkunden und zu durchstöbern.

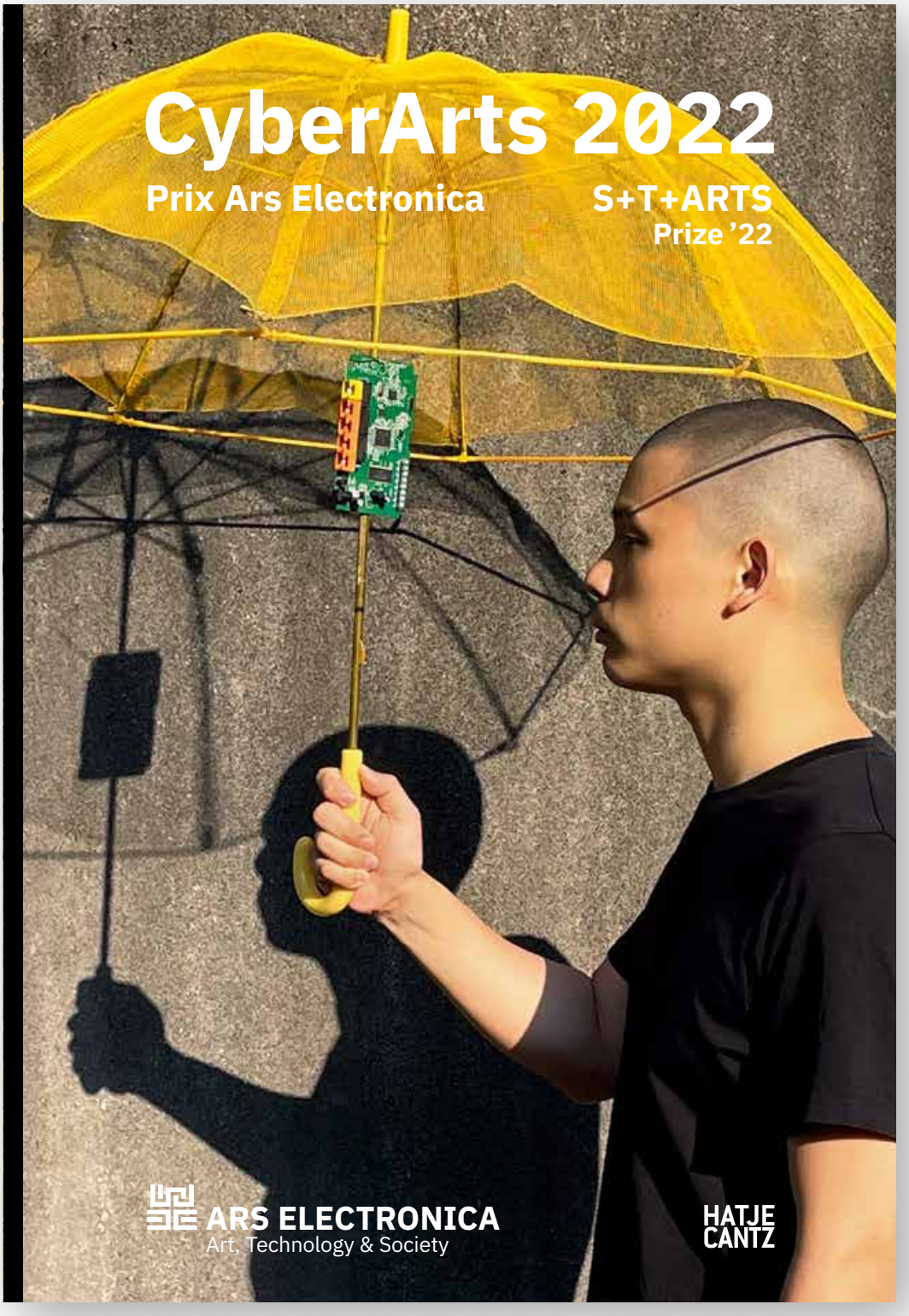
Theo Triantafyllidis, *Pastoral*, 2019, Videospiel/video game, unbegrenzte Dauer/infinite duration, Farbe/color, Ton/sound

Davon abgesehen gibt es nur eine andere Kreatur, der die Spielenden auf ihrer Erkundungstour durch die Gegend begegnen können: ein massiges ziegenähnliches Tier, das unter einem Baum sitzt und die Laute spielt. Während der Ork näher kommt, verfolgt ihn die Ziege mit ihren Augen – es gibt nur wenig anderes zu tun. Gelegentlich tauchen große Steine in der virtuellen Landschaft auf, die stellenweise von Ruinen verunstaltet oder mit ausgedienten Kriegsfahnen übersät ist. Es liegt der Gedanke nahe, es könnte sich ein von einer längst vergessenen Schlacht stammendes Massengrab unter dem Feld verbergen: So schön und beschaulich dieser Ort auch sein mag, so scheint unter der Oberfläche eine Geschichte der Gewalt zu schlummern. In Triantafyllidis' Welt passiert dennoch nicht viel. Die Spieler*innen registrieren die Sanftmut des Geschöpfes und erkennen die Isolation der im Dazwischen verhafteten Figur – wobei letzteres ebenso dieses besondere Universum beschreibt wie die tatsächliche physische Situation des Orks. Der mit einer gigantischen Statur ausgerüstete Superheldenkörper fühlt sich beim Navigieren durch die ununterbrochen fortlaufende Simulation steif und unnachgiebig an. Spieler*innen sind aufgefordert, die Landschaft zu erkunden, nur ist da wenig, das zu finden wäre, abgesehen von raschelnder Vegetation. Wenn man durch das Kornfeld auf die Spitze eines Hügels zueilt, machen die Spielenden vielleicht an einem Felsbrocken halt und gönnen sich eine Pause. In *Pastoral* ist das Ziel des Videospieles beseitigt, Hintergrundgeschichten sind nicht mehr vorhanden. Das gesamte Gaming-Genre ist somit entleert, sodass sich Spieler*innen nunmehr die Gelegenheit bietet, es mit den eigenen Vorstellungen zu füllen.

Theo Triantafyllidis (b. 1988 in Athens; lives and works in Los Angeles) creates a range of works that reference simulation, gaming, and NFT (non-fungible token) aesthetics in his studio practice. Trained as an architect in Athens, Triantafyllidis began working with digital art communities while practicing architecture in Beijing. The pervasive influence of his training is evident in the immersive environments he creates, and the strong sense of spatial awareness is connected to the scenes he generates with virtual tools.

In Triantafyllidis's *Pastoral* (2019), a three-dimensional work for VR (virtual reality) and installation, players find themselves situated in the middle of an expansive virtual hayfield in a video game–like environment. Using a game controller or common game navigation keys on the keyboard, the players control the body of the central character, a hyper-bodied, hybrid-gendered Orc character wearing a bikini. The excessively muscular figure, which also serves as Triantafyllidis's avatar in other works, is unlike Orcs depicted in popular culture. In other fictional scenarios, Orcs tend toward the monstrous and violent—tough hunters with a keen sense of smell, out to kill. They are featured prominently in online fantasy games such as the massively multiplayer online role-playing game *World of Warcraft*. But Triantafyllidis's Orc is nearly nude, brushing its way through the rustling waist-high hayfield in a bikini, positioned to explore and search the bucolic and bountiful field.

In exploring, the player can find only one other character, a hulking goat-like animal who sits under a tree playing a lute. As the central character approaches, the goat's eyes fixate on the central character; there is little else to do. The virtual countryside is occasionally interrupted by large stones, scarred with ruins, and peppered with worn-out battle flags. In this way, it is likely that this hayfield hides a mass grave from a forgotten battle. Beautiful and placid as the location may seem, underneath may lie hidden stories of violence. Yet in Triantafyllidis's world *Pastoral*, not much happens. Yet players/viewers witness the gentle side of the hyper- and hybrid-gendered character and also experience their isolation and in-betweenness that is an aspect of this universe as well as a literal physical reality of the character. Endowed with a giant physique, the superhero-body feels stiff and unyielding to navigate in the ever-running simulation. Players are encouraged to explore the landscape, but there is little to be found except more rustling vegetation. Whooshing through the hayfield to the top of a hill, one might stop at a boulder and relax. *Pastoral* removes purpose, battles, and backstory, emptying out the game genre so that players themselves might fill it with their imaginations.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Radicalization Pipeline

Theo Triantafyllidis

Two seemingly endless hordes clash into a violent free-for-all, swinging large melee weapons and shouting with distorted voices. A wide range of characters—from citizen militias to fantastical creatures—enter the screen only to kill each other, wave after wave, sinking their virtual bodies slowly into a muddy landscape. The mood occasionally lightens up by the medieval covers of familiar pop songs that complete the soundscape conceived by the composer and sound designer Diego Navarro. Looking at phenomena such as the rise of QAnon, the artist suggests connections between gamification, fantasy, and political radicalization.

Radicalization Pipeline, 2021 by Theo Triantafyllidis
Sound: Diego Navarro
Courtesy: The Breeder Gallery, Athens, GR

https://u.aec.at/A1A64F41

Computer Animation
Honorary Mention

Theo Triantafyllidis (GR) (b. 1988, Athens), based in Los Angeles, works with digital and physical media to explore the experience of space and the mechanics of embodiment in hybrid realities. Utilizing algorithms and gaming tech, virtual reality headsets and experimental performance processes, he creates interactions within immersive environments. In Triantafyllidis's worlds awkward interactions and precarious physics mingle with uncanny, absurd, and poetic situations, inviting the viewer to engage with new realities. He holds an MFA from UCLA, Design Media Arts and a Diploma of Architecture from the National Technical University of Athens. He has exhibited internationally, including House of Electronic Arts in Basel, Hammer Museum in Los Angeles, NRW Forum in Dusseldorf, Meredith Rosen Gallery, the Breeder, Eduardo Secci, and Transfer. He took part in the 2021 Athens Biennale with *ECLIPSE,* Sundance New Frontier 2020 with *Anti-Gone,* and *Hyper Pavilion* in the 2017 Venice Biennale.

Author: Henry Bruce-Jones
Date: 11 Apr 2022
Link: https://www.factmag.com/2022/04/09/fact-residency-theo-triantafyllidis/

Fact Residency: Theo Triantafyllidis

In his exploration of social technologies and the communities they enable us to create, Theo Triantafyllidis rarely seeks to provide any answers. Instead, his work allows him to constantly consider exactly what questions he can ask.

Despite it not existing yet, Theo Triantafyllidis has been working in the metaverse for years. However, far from considering himself a pioneer, the artist is the first to point out that there are many, many others, across a multitude of online communities, that have been exploring the possibilities of three-dimensional, virtual spaces for close to two decades. "I've been looking at the example of VR Chat, how this exists in the legacy of Second Life, as well as more generally all these precursors to whatever insane vision of the metaverse Mark Zuckerberg has," he explains. "These are things that have been developing for such a long time. There are communities that have been so deeply invested in these worlds for decades now and have been discovering all these things from inside." For Triantafyllidis, these are the true pioneers of

the metaverse and it is the novel forms of interaction and connectivity enabled by socially-focused game worlds, which range from the joyful and the horrendous all the way through to the chilling and the deranged, that inform and drive his work. "VR Chat was quite interesting because it gave almost total freedom for people to modify it," he continues. "The actual game was completely open to people messing with its code. It had a tool for people to create their own character, not just a 3D model, but including all the interactions and things that the character can do, and upload it as an avatar. People started hacking that and piling up scripts and interactions and entire scenes within their character avatars as a way of Trojan horsing larger things into the world."

"This was unfortunately hijacked by people who wanted to troll everything and they just started making horrible pop-up videos and harassing the community. It became a very toxic, strange space for a long time, which was quite an unexpected turn of events. For me, it's interesting to see how, when given maximum freedom, the online tendency is to go for maximum trolling." Clearly this kind of subversion, by which the very notion of representation and communications is hacked apart and retooled into something unpredictable and potentially dangerous, was not demonstrated during Zuckerberg's Meta keynote, but this kind of mentality will become a fundamental quality to consider as the politics of the metaverse are developed over the coming years. It's a preoccupation of Triantafyllidis's, too, who in an upcoming project will seek to address the ways in which VR Chat's premise was inherently corruptible, as well as ways it might be possible to incentivize kindness, as opposed to trolling. It's also demonstrative of the interrogative mode of much of the artist's work, "in my work I very rarely try to give any answers," he admits. "It's more about opening up new questions."

This can be attributed, in part, to how important teaching has become to his art practice, something that's clear from the layout of his website, which offers a wellspring of syllabi, lecture notes and resources to anyone that wants them. "It gives me an incentive to keep digging around and starting new lines of personal research," he says. "A lot of these classes are things that I personally pitched and constructed the syllabus from scratch, mostly in UCLA. I was very lucky that UCLA was open to me coming up with new classes and that they have the infrastructure for these special seminars that are different every quarter." Faced with the "never-ending orgy" of the increasingly online can be an overwhelming experience at the best of times, so for Triantafyllidis, the necessity to parse through the disparate cloud of references he draws from has helped him figure out what questions he wants to ask. "Having to do all the primary research and present that to a student group, opening this up to all the wealth of information and feedback that the students have and seeing where they take these ideas, is a very interesting conversation," he says. "I am not trying to give any sense of authority or direct knowledge, but just trying to push them in directions that they might find interesting. It's also helped me structure what I'm trying to say with my work by having to communicate these things more clearly."

Theo Triantafyllidis Presents: Radicalization Pipeline

Using surreal humour and an absurdist aesthetic sensibility inspired by high fantasy, classic science fiction, MMORPGs and niche online communities, Theo Triantafyllidis carries out a sustained critique of the tech industry and the wrestling of new technologies away from the benefit of the user and user-generated communities in the interests of corporate expansion, financial growth and the commodification of information. The way he achieves this can be understood in the interplay between two central aspects of his art practice, computational humour and AI improvisation. “I like computational humor as a concept because it is a very niche research objective within computer science that’s analyzing how the human brain responds to humor,” he says, “trying to create a mathematical formula for what is funny. In my work I generally like to have a humorous aspect because I think it’s something that has the capacity to break the audience’s defenses and be a first line of approachability in the work.” This comedic drive can be traced all the way back to one of his earliest simulation works, How To Everything, in which the artist attempted to create an algorithm that could, in theory, generate an infinite number of visually funny scenarios. In a gesture that bears contemporary resonance with the conspicuous barbecue sauce bottle placed in the background of Mark Zuckerberg’s Meta keynote, these scenarios throw together precarious physics and random objects within different environments with what the artist describes as “empathy, effort and failure.”

Triantafyllidis’s work with live simulations comes to its most complete expression with Radicalization Pipeline, a RPG-inspired battle royale which renders online social platforms as literal zones of conflict whilst demonstrating the artist’s improvisational approach to A.I. “I feel the most interesting aspect of these live simulation works is the connection to theater and live performance, how you have these very simplistic AIs, that are usually used in games for enemies or player interactions, that can be directed in the same way a theater director would direct actors,” he explains. “By giving them simple instructions

you can create a performance score that is producing an infinite variation of some specific situations and you are able to produce humorous results out of that." Across a flat expanse of concrete, Triantafyllidis whips between different perspectives, flitting between a top down, god's eye view reminiscent of table top strategy games and the shaky, NPC-locked perspective of a first-person action game. Under a sky burning orange, MAGA cap wearers brandishing claw hammers fight alongside hulking orks dragging battle clubs and flails. Special Ops teams in riot gear wield sci-fi swords and shields, sprinting into the fray while dodging Antifa super soldiers and independent militia members holding fascist presenting flags high above their heads. Furries batter Proud Boys, cyberpunk elves band together with crypto anarchists, each with their own intricately rendered weapons and armour.

Theo Triantafyllidis Presents: Ork Haus

"Imagine if you could be at the office without the commute," enthused Mark Zuckerberg in the 2021 keynote announcing his company's leap into the metaverse. "You would still have that sense of presence, shared physical space, those chance interactions that make your day, all accessible from anywhere." In this vision of the future, virtual reality has been transformed into a fresh vector for data commodification and online shopping, a means of transcending the pesky limitations of physical objects and our corporeal forms from Meta's infinite expansion into every facet of our lives. "The metaverse will remove many of the physical constraints we see on commerce today and make entirely new businesses possible," he promises. Ork Haus is artist Theo Triantafyllidis's response to this promise, a nightmarish vision of the metaverse in which the truly monstrous aspects of working from home and the technology that continues to enable us to do so are the subject of a work that is part live simulation, part experimental theatre, drawing as much from The Sims as it does Lars Von Trier's Dogville. "Whether we like it or not, being in the new media art scene you are very, very close to Silicon Valley culture," asserts Triantafyllidis. "In some ways we are doomed as artists to be running behind whatever new platform Facebook decides to roll out. I'm trying to be critical

of these technologies and expose both the nonsensicality and complete impracticality of some of these ideas. Being familiar with this technology for a few years now it was very transparent to me that a lot of the things that Mark Zuckerberg was presenting in the Meta presentation were very, very far from being realized, even with their resources."

In Ork Haus, the titular ork family struggle through a Web3-enabled purgatory of their own making, driving each other mad in an eternal work-from-home nightmare that evokes all the pandemic neuroses and anxieties of the last two years. "The whole simulation is based on the logic of a Sims game," explains Triantafyllidis. "Each of the characters has their own needs, like hunger, fun and bladder, that they have to respond to over time, but depending on which of the characters are next to them when they are doing these actions, the actions will be affected and they have to interact with the other characters. At the same time, conceptually this whole thing is a very horrifying version of the metaverse, where this entire family is working from home, in a forever locked-down situation. The dad is dabbling in some crypto investments and trying to run a small crypto rig in their bedroom, that's also used for heating. They're caught up in this hustler, entrepreneur, Web3 family life." Randomly generated vignettes convey the comic tragedy of the ork family's precarious situation, resulting in chance encounters from which it is possible to piece together a rough narrative. The Y-front sporting patriarch delivers brutal corporal punishment to an orkling as we see familiar weapons from Radicalization Pipeline hanging on a wall of the family home, a sly nod to the multi-platform gaming applications many cite as the primary use case for NFTs. The ork father warms himself by the flames of his overheating crypto rig as one of his orklings teaches themselves to code; the ork matriarch desperately attempts to meditate as her husband snores beside her; daddy ork gets lost in his VR headset as another orkling tries on a dress in the bathroom where, moments later, daddy ork sits weeping as the tap drips next to him.

Theo Triantafyllidis Presents: Anti-Gone

A playful strain of theatricality runs through all of Theo Triantafyllidis's work. Even his earliest works have the quality of carefully directed vignettes or sketches, turns of phrase, jokes and metaphors manifested visually within the design aesthetic of his complex interplay of objects and systems. As part of his 2018 series Role Play, he assumed the virtual costume of a gender bending, blue haired ork avatar to highlight the inherent performativity of his work both in and for digital spaces. In Radicalization Pipeline and Ork Haus, Triantafyllidis casts himself as both actor and dramaturge, using machine learning to enable an improvisational approach to live simulation while at the same time painstakingly designing and implementing intricate virtual stages upon which his simulations can run. Anti-Gone is the result of the artist bringing together all these aspects of his art practice on a physical, IRL stage. "I was already thinking a lot about performativity in VR and the relationship to avatars in my ork avatar series," he explains. "All of that project was based on recording, rather than real time performance. I was starting to understand that there is so much potential in doing this in real time and having a game

engine that allows for a world that is performing in real time and having performers that are interacting with it." Based on Connor Willumsen's graphic novel of the same name, Anti-Gone is a hybrid theatrical performance in which one actor wearing a motion capture suit faces out into the physical world, while the other stays in VR for the entire duration. A technicolor, post climate collapse, video game engine-generated world is projected on the stage behind and beneath them, a living, breathing ecosystem, brimming with apathetic people and toxic, tropical plant life which reacts and changes in response to Triantafyllidis's prompts.

"I'm fascinated with theatre as a medium and the theatrical language," says the artist. "In theatre there is this magical thing where a performer can say, 'here's a pen,' and you don't need to see the pen, you just know it's there. It's all based on make believe, theoretically you can create entire worlds with an empty stage and a few performers, asking the audience to imagine everything. There's a big paradox in this entire project, whereby working with the game engine is this tedious process of planting every single tree and every single object in a very precise place in space, constructing this illusion in the exact opposite way, being very literal and very precise and having to construct everything from scratch." Working live alongside a musician, a third performer, who performs and controls a host of secondary characters, both physically and with a controller and microphone, Triantafyllidis has complete control of the environment of the play using a game engine, with the ability to change the weather, the time of day, the traffic of the boats that navigate the flooded city where the play takes place, as well as behaviour of the NPCs that populate the world. "All together we are performing the world in real time," he describes poetically. "I was very optimistic at the beginning of the project," he continues. "The comic book has two characters and a few scenes so it seemed pretty manageable to make this game engine with the tools I had at the time, but this slowly snowballed into an entire long term theatrical production with a full video game production team working alongside and trying to have the two constantly in dialogue, making huge changes in one another. I felt like we were trying to discover a new language for performing and a new way of building a game world that is able to accommodate this type of situation." [...]

Author: Eddy Frankel
Date: 25 March 2022
Link: https://www.timeout.com/london/art/among-the-machines

Among The Machines

Installation views of Among the Machines at Zabludowicz Collection

Time Out says

★★★★☆

The funny thing about human fear of future machines is that it's at its most acute when the machines are at their most human. Big hulking metal robots? No problem. But robots that are almost human? Terrifying, incomprehensible, the subject of millions of sci-fi books and movies.

That fear bubbles throughout this group show of tech-focused art. It starts with the incredible Joey Holder and her installation of twisted metal and plastic creatures, each one part-ancient trilobyte, part-future sex toy. They hang from the walls, ready to hatch and slither up you. They're brilliant, menacing things.

Anicka Yi's sheets of living kombucha material hang in the middle of the space, like skin sheared off the creatures she set flying around the Turbine Hall last year, all gooey and gross, like machines becoming slowly organic. Jake Elwes' AI-porn film comes next, based on forcing a machine learning tool to create its own erotic imagery. It's vile, uncanny and totally discomfiting. Then you get Keiken's spa-like installation, where you can wear a glowing haptic womb and feel some creature kicking against your belly and gurgling in your ear. The machines are alive, and they're now growing inside you.

Upstairs, Theo Triantafyllidis's generative film is an infinite simulation of endless hordes of video game characters fighting to the death; cops and anarchists and ancient warriors and zombies destroying themselves for eternity. It's an awesome work of art that leaves you more worried about what us humans do with technology than what technology will ever do with us.

There are three artificial reality elements to the show which you download an app for, but they're too fiddly, gimmicky and disappointing to really work. And the older works here – an early video game piece by Rebeccal Allen, cyborg women by Lynn Hershman Leeson – are interesting, but feel full of hope for the future, which doesn't quite sit right with the rest of the show.

Maybe it's a generational divide. The older artists are all full of optimism, and the younger ones see the truth of our technological present and imminent future. Theirs are works filled with anxiety, fear, violence, control and uncertainty. Let's just hope they're wrong

Author: Mark Westall
Date: 2 March 2022
Link: https://fadmagazine.com/2022/03/02/among-the-machines-a-show-examining-how-humans-interact-with-machines-and-non-human-entities/

AMONG THE MACHINES a show examining how humans interact with machines and non-human entities.

Theo Triantafyllidis, Genius Loci, 2021. Augmented reality experience. Visualisation of version at Zabludowicz Collection, London 2022.

This spring the Zabludowicz Collection presents Among the Machines, an exhibition of notable works from the Collection examining how humans interact with machines and non-human entities, alongside new augmented reality artworks created in direct response to the gallery space. As artificial intelligence (AI) develops to envelop and potentially surpass us, this exhibition asks: how will we respond to a stage of evolution beyond the human?

Among the Machines reflects on how close machines really are to exceeding human capabilities, and shines a light on just how mysterious the workings of human intelligence and human consciousness still remain. The exhibition echoes a clear shift of focus in the art world in recent years towards the intersection of art and technology, but roots this noticeable trend in longstanding questions around evolution and human adaptation, explored over the course of several decades by the exhibiting artists.

Taking its title from the prescient late-19thcentury writing of Samuel Butler – in particular, the novel Erewhon (1872) in which a civilisation destroys their machines for fear of being controlled by them – Among the Machines will showcase artists engaging with various technologies to critically reflect on our current moment of change. Thirteen international artists from different generations will investigate the impact of technology on our sense of individual and collective identity and our relationship to the planet. From disrupting the biases of data sets, to exploring new types of consciousness and alternative evolutionary branches of the non-human, the artists in this exhibition imagine and materialise new possibilities for co-existence with other lifeforms.

Alongside installations of video, sculpture and interactive computer works, visitors will be able to access a virtual enhancement of the physical exhibition through their smartphones. Augmented reality (AR) technology creates a portal through which audiences can view gravity-defying characters animated in their physical surroundings. Created by Joey Holder, Lauren Moffatt and Theo Triantafyllidis, the new AR artworks respond directly to the unique chapel architecture of the gallery. The works, some new commissions, others being shown for the first time in the UK, are produced in partnership with Daata, an online platform that commissions artists and supports artists in utilising technology to realise ambitious projects in the physical and digital realms. As a commissioning body, sales platform and iPhone App, Daata brings these new AR works to life via the new Daata AR app.

[...]

Artists: Rebecca Allen, Ian Cheng, Simon Denny, Aleksandra Domanovic, Jake Elwes, Lynn Hershman Leeson, Joey Holder, Marguerite Humeau, Keiken, Lauren Moffatt, Tabita Rezaire, Theo Triantafyllidis, Anicka Yi

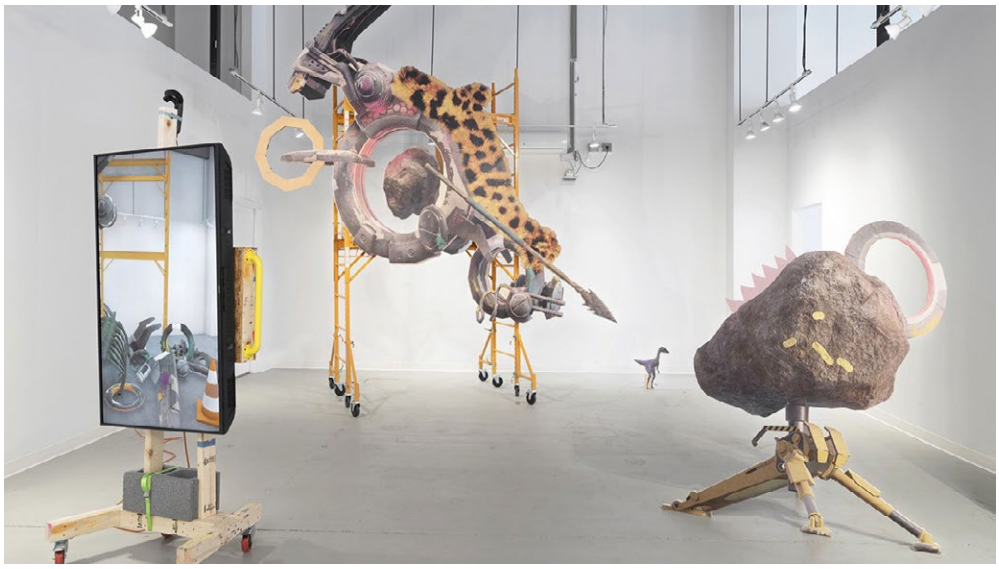
Author: Domenico Quaranta
Date: March 24, 2022
Link: https://fabbula.com/observatory/

Theo Triantafyllidis: Live Simulations
an essay by Domenico Quaranta

In the context of the exhibition Among the Machines, Fabbula commissioned a series of essays in collaboration with the Zabludowicz Collection, exploring worldbuilding practices, new virtual ecologies and alternative metaverses. For the first chapter, we invited contemporary art critic and curator Domenico Quaranta to delve into the practice of artist Theo Triantafyllidis.

"Ok, I'm gonna be honest with you: I don't get painting", the brawny, blue-haired Ork says to the camera. He is wandering around a conventional studio space, with a prepared plywood board on the wall behind him. I'm using the male pronoun, but the fantasy character is in fact wearing a bikini, and sporting both male and female attributes. "Like, why would people wanna paint today? […] you know, this medium has such a great history but, you know, why do it… right now?" To get to grips with painting, the Ork starts making gestural brushstrokes and dripping color onto the board, before adding objects and, "as I'm supposed to be a media artist", a plasma screen to it. Ork Formalism: brutal yet accommodating at the same time.

Theo Triantafyllidis developed the Ork character in 2018 as his own avatar for the exhibition Role Play at Meredith Rosen Gallery in New York. In the virtual space of the studio, the Ork is controlled by his body (via motion capture), speaks in his voice (slightly altered), and creates the works on show (the aforementioned painting, as well as sculptural assemblages of 3D objects printed on plywood cut-outs and installed in the physical venue); the exhibition thus becomes a mixed reality experience, in which the real space awkwardly doubles the virtual space of the studio inhabited by the Ork, which is "performed" on a few large screens on wheels.



Triantafyllidis' ironic commentary is not so much on painting in general, being more specifically targeted at Modernism and the survival of Modernist painting in the post-digital age. Yet I feel this piece works not only as a joke on "how you can get to simplicity either by extreme sophistication or by sheer stupidity", as he put it in an interview, but also as an introduction to what appears to be one of his favorite media so far: the live simulation.
At the very beginning of Modernism, Edgar Degas reportedly wrote: "The frame of a painting by Mantegna contains the world, whereas the moderns are only capable of rendering a tiny corner of it, a mere moment, a fragment." In a world accelerated by industrialization and fragmented by the advent of photography, and witnessing the crisis of painting as the main mode of representation, Modernist painters focused on the instant and increasingly, as Clement Greenberg pointed out, on the very medium of painting and its material qualities: the shape of the canvas, its flatness, the pigment, the brushstroke.

The live simulation not only enables images to "contain (a) world" once more, but also replicates the ability of pre-Modernist painting to imprison the infinite within a finite surface, and to generate timelessness using an object that exists in time. In paintings, this happens because, as John Berger noted, "there is no unfolding time". All elements are present simultaneously, still and silent: it's up to the viewer to navigate the surface, home in on the details and connect them into a story, in an act of contemplation that has a beginning, but no intended end. Live simulations achieve a similar result by bringing to

life complex systems that can basically go on forever. While the movements of the camera can be programmed in a way that recalls the cinematic experience, guiding the viewer's eye and not permitting them the free, autonomous exploration possible on a painted surface, the generative behavior of the environment and the creatures inhabiting it, as well as the infinite duration of the simulation, makes it closer to the experience of a still image than of any time-based medium. In live simulations, infinite duration equals stillness.

If we accept this parallel between pre-Modernist painting and computer-generated live simulations, it comes as no surprise that most live simulations effectively re-enact and build on the classical genres of Western tradition: the still life, the landscape painting, and the historical, religious, mythological or allegorical painting. Still Life with Yumyums (2016), one of Triantafyllidis' first simulations, explicitly addresses the still life. On a rotating wooden surface, a vibrant, teeming micro-world develops autonomously, inhabited by both inanimate objects – a banana skin, a melted candle, a smartphone, a hamster wheel, some toy weapons – as well as various colorful, meowing, semi-abstract living creatures. Inspired by a 1994 paper and research by Karl Sims, "Evolving Virtual Creatures", Triantafyllidis designed a number of creatures by joining 3D primitive shapes like cubes and spheres with artificial muscles, and equipping them with DNA that defines their behavior and leads them to mate and evolve, adapting to their environment. This developing ecosystem is watched over by a flying, sausage-like red worm that attempts to keep the creatures' behavior under control, preventing orgies and mating that could result in excessive population growth. Cruel yet playful, childish and obnoxious at the same time, Still Life with Yumyums is a memento mori that takes the form of a fish tank; it places the viewer in God view mode, eliciting both wonder and amusement, and indifference, or even horror, and prompting an inevitable analogy with our life on earth.

While the world the Yumyums live in has some order and rules, that constructed in How To Everything (2016) borders on chaos. Various 3D animated objects, each with its own behavior pattern, appear and disappear in an abstract, otherwise empty environment that changes color at every cut: falling

stones, flying drones, a knife that slices into whatever it finds, a hovering hand that points, waves, glides around, strokes things; a clucking chicken that runs around flapping, trying in vain to take flight.

How To Everything introduces a practice that has become customary in Triantafyllidis' work: the use of Modernist devices and tropes to reveal the artificial nature of the simulation, challenge the viewer's expectations, and make the generated environment more chaotic and hybrid. Here, the Modernist device of cinematic montage fails to generate a consistent narrative by connecting each scene with the former. The background is flat and monochrome, inhabited not just by animated 3D objects and creatures, but also by brushstrokes of paint, moving lines and bi-dimensional user interface icons.

Rejected as sterile conventions in Painting, Modernist tools return here and in Triantafyllidis' subsequent simulations as instruments that say: the world you are looking at is not a representation, it's a construction; it doesn't follow reality, it lives by its own rules. Triantafyllidis' computer-generated worlds are never a reconstruction or a representation of the so-called "real" world, not even when they get closer to the kind of photo-realism used in mainstream video games, as happens in Prometheus (2017): the live simulation of a pigeon endlessly and aggressively pursuing a pretzel. Here, everything is realistically emulated, except the pretzel, which moves around autonomously as if a living being, seems to have the rubbery consistency of liver and never crumbles. While Prometheus is set in an urban environment, which we experience from the limited point of view of the pigeon, Seamless (2017) is a large landscape simulation that recreates a post-apocalyptic natural environment, inhabited only by animals (such as bears and deer), giant robots, flying spaceships and the debris of a dead civilization. No human life is present, but though the work is usually displayed horizontally on three synchronized screens, the viewer's gaze is somehow included in the environment as an activating element, as happens in virtual reality. In an interview, Triantafyllidis recalls the experience of navigating Google Earth in VR as an inspiration, and explains: "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." This perception is strengthened by the fact that the landscape is actually unfinished, meaning that the blank background emerges here and there, brushstrokes sweep slowly among deer and palms, and transparent mountains with a visible wireframe lie peacefully behind more realistic ones.

Three years later, Ritual (2020) picks up the same line of research, but instead of allowing us to lurk and observe the landscape as if a painted panorama, it guides the viewer inside the environment, at floor level. Again, the 3D space and the objects and characters that inhabit it are realistic, but the sky is flat and monochrome, and painted interventions are visible in almost every scene and on almost every surface. There's no human presence, but the micro-events of this indefinable ritual are set in a decaying suburban setting that seems to have been recently abandoned, as traces of human activity can still be found: columns of smoke signal the presence of working factories; the

batteries are charged, and the machines are still running; two mean hyenas are dancing to the music from a car radio; crows race by on Bird™ scooters, and a colony of ants is picking up and carrying everything from microchips to bottle caps to flowers, and occasionally writing mysterious words on the ground.

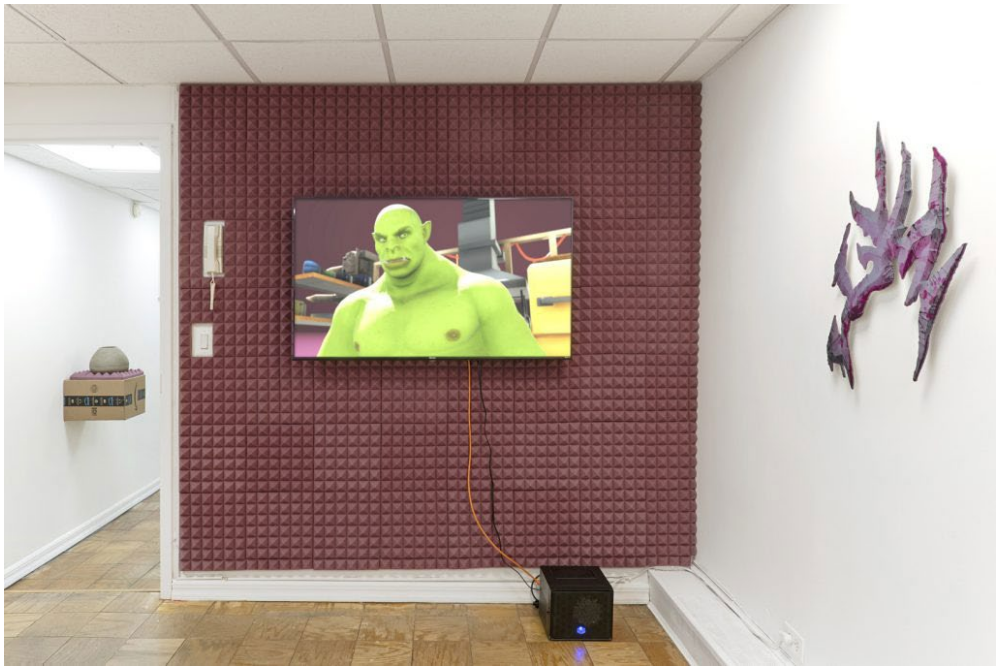
Both the far future of Seamless and the near future of Ritual – which, like the virtual reality of Staphyloculus (2017), is inspired by an actual physical location, 3D-scanned and used to generate the live simulation – preserve the memory of an undisclosed dramatic event, in which human life disappeared from Planet Earth. So what happened? One possible answer is offered by Radicalization Pipeline (2021), to date Triantafyllidis' most direct engagement with current affairs. The title, borrowed from Joshua Citarella's artistic research and political theory, refers to "the algorithmic bias towards extreme content that threw a large number of people down a rabbit hole of political radicalization on YouTube and various social media platforms", the most visible and dramatic consequence of which was the storming of the US Capitol on January 6, 2021. Watching the footage captured by those who took part in the event, the artist was shocked by the "otherworldly trance" that these people seemed to be in, and this was a key source of inspiration for Radicalization Pipeline. In the simulation, hordes of dumb NPCs (non-player characters) are engaged in a mass riot: aliens, furries, medieval knights, orks, protesters, elves, bikers, cops, soldiers, fantasy and futuristic characters, as well as regular Joes holding a range of flags, are running around killing each other with melee weapons; when they die, they sink into the ground and respawn, endlessly. The events unfold in slow motion, set to a soundtrack by the composer and sound designer Diego Navarro that mingles medieval versions of familiar pop songs with the sounds of explosions, gunshots, clashing swords and samples of conversations taken from social media stories. The images inevitably call to mind battle scene paintings, as well as the various triumphs of death and the teeming paintings of Bruegel the Elder, not to mention war video games. Gaming culture is explicitly addressed as one of the cultural influences thought to affect the process of radicalization.

Although unusually depicting humans, Radicalization Pipeline has a lot in common with Triantafyllidis' previous simulations. Driven by algorithms – just as we are on social media, both individually and as a group – the mob behavior of his rioters recalls the simple life of the Yumyums, or the repetitive tasks performed by the ant colony in Ritual. In the worlds constructed by Triantafyllidis, artificial intelligence is always dumb, instinctual, linear, responding to a single imperative: eat, shit, breed, accumulate, fight, kill, survive. His lone heroes are no different: the blind red worm, the chicken, the pigeons, the pretzel, the spaceships, the crowds all do what they are programmed to do, endlessly. Some of them have the task of surveillance, which is also carried out by the viewer: they are the gods of their worlds, sometimes indifferent, sometimes proactive. The best example of this can be seen in Triantafyllidis' recent AR application, Genius Loci. Conceived as a site specific application that can be adapted to various environments, Genius Loci allows us to watch a giant pink creature flying around. Like the Artemis of Ephesus, the creature has many breasts (a symbol of fertility) that can be milked by the viewer; but rather than following a classical ideal of beauty, its body looks more like a giant worm, sausage or penis. In the artist's description, it's "arrogant, sexy, snarky, sometimes obnoxious but also cute and lovable". As it floats around the venue, it shows us the people inhabiting the space – ourselves included – as Yumyums: dumb creatures busy surviving and evolving, unaware of the laws governing the world they live in.

artnet

Author: Taylor Dafoe
Date: February 4, 2022
Link: https://news.artnet.com/art-world/simulated-orks-metaverse-theo-triantafyllidiss-exhibition-2068298

What Can a Family of Simulated Orks in an Art Gallery Teach Us About Life in Mark Zuckerberg's Metaverse? A Lot, Actually



An installation view of Theo Triantafyllidis's exhibition "The Metaverse and How We'll Build It Together," 2022 at Meredith Rosen Gallery, New York. Photo: Adam Reich.

"The feeling of presence: this is the defining quality of the metaverse."

So begins an audio composition in Theo Triantafyllidis's new exhibition "The Metaverse and How We'll Build it Together" at Meredith Rosen Gallery. That paradoxical line as well as others in the recording—which was co-designed by musician Holly Waxwing and blasts from inside ceramic pots installed on old Amazon boxes—were culled from the video Facebook released upon rebranding itself to Meta, an eerie piece of technocratic propaganda that was, somewhat ironically, lampooned to death on social media last fall.

Like many, Triantafyllidis—an artist who builds virtual worlds to interrogate our lived-in, physical one—found the video unsettling.

“There is this very bizarre conflict between reality and fiction—between this totally utopian, almost completely tone-deaf, representation of our own lives that Mark Zuckerberg seems to have in his mind versus the banal reality of our online experience,” the artist said over video chat recently, Zooming in from Athens, Greece, where he was born and raised. (He’s primarily based in LA.)

“Banal” is a funny word for the artist to use, given the way he illustrates that disjunction between fiction and reality in the second half of the exhibition. Two live simulations—that is, video games controlled by AI rather than human button-pressing—play out on a pair of screens.

The first is populated by a family of tech-obsessed orks. Operating by a code similar to that which drives The Sims, the creatures mindlessly perform a series of repetitive tasks in their virtual home as various catastrophes slowly destroy the world around them.

One ork sprawls before the TV, for instance, while another texts atop a toilet or surfs the web. A tortoise with a camera strapped to its back rides a Roomba, or at least tries to, as his weight keeps the robotic vacuum in place—a clever metaphor, perhaps, for how technology both speeds up our lives and keeps them in place. A fire in the kitchen blazes the whole time.

The orks look more like Shrek than those of the Lord of the Rings trilogy, but that’s not to say they’re all cute and cuddly. Triantafyllidis’s creatures are crude and vulgar; that’s why he chose them as his avatars. Within gaming communities, the artist explained, there’s a debate about orks, with some saying they’ve been villainized in popular culture through the coded racial attributes we’ve chosen to assign to them. For Triantafyllidis, the idea relates to the radicalization pipeline, or the theory that the algorithms driving social media platforms inherently push people to extremist views.

Radicalization Pipeline is also the name of the second simulation in the show. Whereas the first plays out a domestic simulation, the second is all-out war. Humans and monsters alike fight, die, decompose, and respawn in an endless, self-perpetuating loop of violence on a blank battlefield.

“The more you look at the work the more you realize how stuck these characters are in the simulation,” Triantafyllidis said.

The game-like war scene may look like it exists in a different world than the Zuckerberg-themed sound installation found in the room opposite, but for the artist, there’s a line to be drawn between the cycle metaphorized in the simulation and Facebook/Meta’s vision.

“I think there’s a direct link between the radicalization pipeline and this utopian aura that this new video tried to present, offering up this new dream to look for during the hellscape situation that we’re in right now,” Triantafyllidis concluded.

HYPERALLERGIC

Author: Cassie Packard
Date: January 31, 2022
Link: https://hyperallergic.com/707526/your-concise-new-york-art-guide-for-february-2022/

Your Concise New York Art Guide for February 2022

Your list of must-see, fun, insightful, and very New York art events this month, including Sadie Barnette, Faith Ringgold, and more.

Still from Theo Triantafyllidis, Ork Haus, 2022, video (courtesy of the artist and Meredith Rosen Gallery, New York)

Theo Triantafyllidis: The Metaverse and How We'll Build It Together

When: through February 26
Where: Meredith Rosen Gallery (11 East 80th Street, Upper East Side, Manhattan)

"The feeling of presence: this is the defining quality of the metaverse," a voice flatly tells us, borrowing some of Mark Zuckerberg's vacant techno-utopic utterances. Among the highlights of Athens-born, Los Angeles-based artist Theo Triantafyllidis's solo show are two video installations that connect contemporary feelings of alienation with the radicalization pipeline: one simulation depicts bored Orks on their electronic devices amid storms and kitchen fires, while the other features a violent clash of figures, some of whom carry white nationalist flags.

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New Levels, New Devils

"Radical Gaming: Immersion, Simulation, Subversion"
House of Electronic Arts
2 Sep – 14 Nov 2021

Gaming is what you do when you should be doing something else. How such behaviour and its interfaces can be "radical" today is the challenge that House of Electronic Arts' (HEK) Boris Magrini set for himself with a group show consisting of works by fifteen different artists that run the gamut from VR goggles to live Instagram feeds, virtual sex clubs to non-binary superheroes. Some artists highlight the always strange nature of putting gaming into the exhibition environment, while others choose to ignore the contextual constraints altogether, for better or worse. Programmers have definitely become the new studio assistants, realising with their expertise technological feats that their customers (artists) are only capable of imagining. This labouring class, if you're partial to the language of political economy, is rife with contradiction and still mired (like their industrial predecessors) in work that operates beneath or between the means of production. I mention this only to point out that under the banner of putative radicality, this is never addressed in the show. In other words, how to reimagine the category of both gaming and the radical in the era of the infinitely programmable?

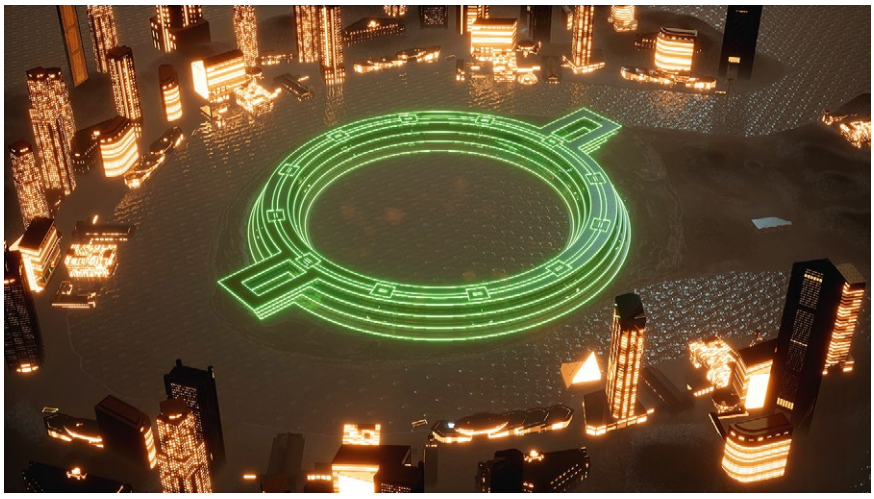
Many approaches emerge throughout the exhibition, some of which tickle our inner geek, while others are as alienating as labour itself. Two lines in particular stand out as possible ways through and forward, moving both with and against the strictures imposed by screens and code. The first was epitomised by Shanghai-based Lu Yang's (*1984) prodigious and infinitely confounding video game installation, *The Great Adventure of Material World* (2019), where the virtual is proposed as the ground of nature and not a constant de-settling of it. We only get to the material world by watching classic anime characters pontificate about the reality of experience. The game is not an escape from offline life, but an intensification of its contradictions, never anchoring one foot on terra firma. I laughed out loud at the pithy observations of Lu's dramatis personae, imagining that there is no genuine moment of reflection that has not been pre-programmed, taking quasi-philosophical investigation into spaces usually devoted to play. The quick cuts and multiple layers reinforced this bewilderment, and I could not help but share a feeling of empathy or commiseration at these poor superbeings striving for profundity.

Something similar took place, albeit with a completely different set of provocations, in Leo Castañeda's

Photo: Franz Wamhof

Keiken x obso1337 in collaboration with Ryan Vautier, Sakeema Crook, Khidja, Crypto Keeper, *Wisdoms for Love 3.0*, 2021
Installation view, House of Electronic Arts, 2021

Lawrence Lek, *Nøtel*, 2016–
Video game (screenshot)



Courtesy: the artist and Sadie Coles HQ, London

Courtesy: the artist and The Breeder Gallery, Athens

Theo Triantafyllidis, *Pastoral*, 2019
Video game (screenshot)

(*1988) *Levels and Bosses* (2017–21), in which the Miami-based artist brought the environment of the gamer into the exhibition space, complete with custom- made chairs, controllers, wallpaper, lamps, and even a painting, all in the scheme of the black and white of the attendant video. Like Lu, Castañeda built out from the architecture of the game, designing an IRL experience adapted from the non-IRL. There was enough to look at, but the scene was notably missing mom's basement and the endless supply of Doritos and Red Bull. The second line (alienation emerging from viewer queries) was articulated with pitch-perfect irony and subtle jabs by the Berlin/London collective Keiken's *Wisdoms for Love 3.0* (2021), produced in collaboration with obso1337, Ryan Vautier, Sakeema Crook, and Khidja. There, a giant rectangular pool was installed, all in black, picking up reflections from the environment around as well as the interactive game projected on a screen behind it. Prompts and questions were given on an iPad, which participants had to kneel in front of in order to get the results of their queries. The scene was a scopophilic wonderland, in which those of us fond of watching could effectively join in on someone else's discovery of these supposed "love wisdoms". What made this approach stand out was the impossible circular logic of the piece – watching, being watched, participating, not-participating. I thought better of using the old chestnut of the Klein group from Rosalind Krauss, but could one transpose it onto *Wisdoms for Love 3.0*: "Gaming in the Expanded Field"?

It is hard to know if this is radical in any prior sense of the word, but I felt comfortable in my discomfort, an unhappy consciousness. You can game without gaming, and this is perhaps the most radical gesture of all.

Colin Lang

Lu Yang, *The Great Adventure of Material World,* 2019
Video game (screenshot)

THE ART NEWSPAPER

Author: Kabir Jhala
Date: 17 September 2021
Link: https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2021/09/17/must-see-institutional-shows-during-art-basel

Must-see institutional shows during Art Basel

Every year as the art world descends on Basel for its flagship fair, the city's numerous museums and other non-commercial art spaces put on their biggest and boldest shows. Here are five exhibitions for art lovers wishing to escape the throngs of the Messeplatz.

Theo Triantafyllidis, Pastoral (Video Game), 2019 , screenshot.

Radical Gaming

Interactivity is a key component to all of the show's works, which include Lawrence Lek's Nøtel (2018), a fully automated virtual luxury hotel infused with layers of encrypted securities, and Pastoral (2019) by the Greek artist Theo Triantafyllidis, in which the viewer is invited to embody the avatar of a muscular orc strolling through the idyllic landscape of cornfields glowing in the sun. A running thread throughout the show is how younger contemporary artists have diverted from the traditions of game art, a genre of art that has existed for several decades and which closely mimics the aesthetics of popular video games. The role of identity politics in video games is probed too, with several artists examining how fantasy spaces unbound from real world structures can be liberating environments for oppressed people and communities. In Resurrection Lands (2020), the British artist Danielle Brathwaite-Shirley creates video games that are also manifestos of empowerment for Black trans communities. And Jacolby Satterwhite depicts the virtual world of a post-pandemic environment where Black female CGI characters, modelled and transcribed through digital bodysuits, use ritual and movement as a means of resistance.
[...]

Author: Matteo Bittanti
Date: July 23, 2021
Link: https://milanmachinimafestival.org/vral-screening

Theo Triantafyllidis, Radicalizaton Pipeline
Introduced by Matteo Bittanti

You may disagree about the root causes, but the diagnosis is clear: reality has imploded. The symptoms are everywhere. Video game fantasies, themes, characters, and narratives – which used to be confined to the imaginary – now shape our everyday life. In a world where meme presidents plan insurrections, global corporations are actively destroying the planet, social media are a toxic cesspool, a new kind of superstition – conspiracy theories, lore, false narratives – has become the dominant epistemological currency. In this uncertain, hyper violent, and chaotic scenario – complicated by metacrises, climate catastrophe, and ongoing pandemics – artists have been among the few to clearly identify the culprits and to imagine possible alternatives. In his latest work, Radicalization Pipeline, Greek artist Theo Triantafyllidis simulates the perpetual clash of two endless hordes fighting to death with large melee weapons. A wide range of characters – from citizen militias to fantastical creatures, from street protesters to hooligans – kill each other tirelessly. There's no resolution. There's no closure. Just mutual destruction. This is the Game over age. We now live in the world that video games made.

Matteo Bittanti: Like Miltos Manetas — another artist fascinated with gaming culture and its aesthetics — you were born in Greece and subsequently lived in several countries, including China and now, the United States. How did your upbringing – being exposed to such diverse social and cultural landscapes – influence your evolution as an artist? Also, you originally studied Architecture and then you joined the Design Media Arts MFA at UCLA. How pivotal was that decision? And what was working with Eddo Stern at the UCLA Gamelab like? I remember being floored by your 2015 project that simulates life as a banana, Bananoculus...

Theo Triantafyllidis: Studying architecture in Greece gave me some valuable foundations in critical theory and art history. Political discourse was interwoven into the social life of the school and intensified as the financial crisis hit in 2009. When I moved to Los Angeles I needed some distance from that. So for my two years at UCLA I pretended I never read books and knew nothing about politics.

I was very lucky to work with Eddo and be introduced to using game engines as an artistic medium. Something really clicked for me when I realized you could have entire worlds come to life and interactions that affect them in real-time. The Gamelab was a very nurturing community with a culture of skill and knowledge sharing between peers and a very lively discourse around games. But perhaps the most valuable takeaway I got from the Gamelab and UCLA was a certain ethic towards working with technology as an artist, that I still aspire to. That of being deeply involved with technology, understanding it by taking it apart and reassembling all the parts in order to expose its inner workings, its human biases and social implications.

Matteo Bittanti: In your work, the digital and the organic are interwoven. After all, your home on the internet is called "slimetech.org", which is playfully oxymoronic. Slime is a moist, soft, and slippery substance, typically regarded as repulsive, while tech, short for technology, is generally perceived as instrumental, inorganic, and hard. When did you realize that tech is slimy and slippery?

Theo Triantafyllidis: Haha, I can't help but picture it that way. There is something in that contrast that I really enjoy. Tech aesthetics are getting sleeker and refined but humans are still these primitive beings that try to interact with it. I just started working on a new series of "ceramic devices" and experimenting with 3D printing clay and that is very much the vibe. A machine maniacally trying to follow a predetermined path while oozing sticky clay, moving, dripping, drying, being pretty much alive. And the results are often these gorgeous failures.

Matteo Bittanti: This dualism - the intangible and the material - informs your latest exhibition at Eduardo Secci in Milan, which juxtaposes ceramic works and software with remarkable effects. On the one hand, the viewer's attention is captured by self-generating scenes of relentless violence and destruction on the screen, on the other, the stunningly beautiful arsenal hanging on the walls evokes a completely different tradition. To me it was like visiting the Sforza

Castle, which has an extensive collection of weaponry. Your artifacts allude to a historical tradition, but they are also entirely fictional. It seems to me that the common denominator of your work is the creation of alternative chronologies, counter-narratives that are both familiar and uncanny, through a variety of media, both hard and soft. Where does your interest for uchronia come from?

Theo Triantafyllidis: The forms of these ceramic weapons are inspired by game design principles. I have always been fascinated by objects in video games and the sort of rules that they need to obey, that are very different from real world constraints. They are often designed with screen visibility and readability in mind but also made to be desirable by players, for example in the whole DLC Weapon Skins craze. Once these objects are made physically, all the paradoxical decisions in their design are exposed. There is an entire genre of youtube videos where medieval weapon experts make practical tests and critique game swords or try to fight with them. This fluid boundary between fiction and reality is exciting. I would love to see these fragile ceramic weapons next to their historical counterparts in an armory one day.

Matteo Bittanti: Hyper-polarization in the United States of America has reached unprecedented levels, culminating with the storm of the Capitol Building on January 6 2021. However, many fear that the failed attempt at kidnapping and executing lawmakers may be just the beginning of a broader and wider phase of civil disorder and domestic terrorism. Your latest work, Radicalization Pipeline makes explicit the connection between gaming culture, the imaginary, social media, and violence. Along with fellow artists like Ed Fornieles and Simon Denny, you specifically address the weaponization of play. In Kill All Normies, Angela Nagle describes the so-called Alt-Right, one of the key catalysts of this permanent insurrection, as "a strange vanguard of teenage gamers, pseudonymous swastika-posting anime lovers, ironic South Park conservatives, anti-feminist pranksters, nerdish harassers, and meme-making trolls." If anybody would have told you that, back in 2014, Gamergame could eventually trigger an armed insurrection in the United States of America, what would you have said? Can you describe the origins of Radicalization Pipeline?

Theo Triantafyllidis: This is exactly the framework of ideas that I have been trying to process through making this work. My experience in the States has coincided with Trump's election campaign and four year presidency. Arriving in the US in late 2014, I was very confused by the political climate. Internet and gaming communities were already showing signs of this growing tension that later snowballed. The 2016 elections came as a huge shock, as for many people, and I became more aware of how the Trump campaign was based on further polarizing a deep political chasm. And in an unprecedented move, how that campaign co-opted the irony, humor and nihilism of internet culture and weaponized memes to flip the script. The role of algorithms in this course of events has been thoroughly researched since. This is where this idea of the "Radicalization Pipeline" comes from. I was introduced to it through the artistic research of Joshua Citarella. It is essentially the algorithmic bias towards extreme content that threw a large number of people down a rabbit hole of political radicalization on YouTube and various social platforms.

The storming of the Capitol was the season finale of all this, and watching it from a distance was such a bizarre dissociative experience. There were clear signs that something like this was going to happen, but that was way beyond the wildest imagination. After the events unfolded, I spent a lot of time watching the videos that participants had posted on their social media, collected in Faces of The Riot. Of course there were the highlights that were broadcasted in the news, the carnivalesque outfits, viral content and iconic moments. But I was more interested in the people that just decided to be there. I wanted to understand where this otherworldly trance, that these people seemed to be in, was coming from. It seemed to me like a newly discovered mental state that I didn't know humans were capable of. This turned out to be overwhelming and this new work was my only way to process it.

Matteo Bittanti: Although extremism is not a side effect of the internet, the general consensus is that social media have accelerated and exacerbated the phenomenon. Tribalism and hooliganism have replaced previous forms of political activism. Big Tech edgelords de facto control all forms of communications that matter - they decide who speaks and who is silenced - and mainstream media have generally lost their gatekeeping privileges although still exert significant influence in normieland. Are conspiracy theories a new kind of folklore - or, to use a video game term - the true lore of the 21c? If so, how can an artist compete with such a rich narrative, one that encompasses text, images, symbols, game mechanics, and more? Readiness - The LARP (2020) is a complex multimedia project comprising a performance element, maps, a strategy guide and more. In a world in which memes become presidents and gamification has become the OS of society, are artists necessarily turning into game designers to stay relevant?

Theo Triantafyllidis: Indeed, as an artist it is very hard to compete with the depths of the lore of QAnon for example, which has been described as an Alternate Reality Game. Conspiracy theories seem to function as an escapist way to cope with the complexity and contradictions of the world around us and are similar to games in that sense. The premise of the Qdrops needing to be interpreted was particularly effective in getting people to do "their own research". That was totally gamified as a process and very open to new believers. They collectively weaved a deep and complex web that by the end of it was encompassing nearly every niche pre-existing conspiracy theory, plus a ton of new ideas like the mole children. A lot to learn from that, in terms of game design. And yes, game theory seems more relevant than ever and an important tool for artists.

The problem is that it can often feel overwhelming for an artist or small team to create such expansive lore, worlds, characters, rules etc. But that's where it's been really fun to work with a bigger team and open up the process of creating the work. In Readiness - The LARP, together with my collaborator Kostis Stafylakis, we thought about the format of the Live Action Role Playing game as a simulation tool. Like a social experiment that allows a group of players to temporarily align with different ideologies and play out different scenarios of political conflict. After the events on Jan 6 we started describing it as a pre-enactment. I think LARPing has a lot of potential as a medium for playtesting possible futures but also re-defining our relationship to the past, like in Dread Scott's recent re-enactment of the 1811 Louisiana Slave Uprising.

Matteo Bittanti: Sometimes I feel that the most deranged and violent video games cannot approximate the sheer madness of the so-called reality. Such a theme is central in your oeuvre, which is, in many ways, an elaborate premediation of social collapse. In 1969, Marshall McLuhan predicted that the US would eventually break apart. McLuhan also famously suggested that artists are the first to sense imminent seismic societal changes, while the so-called experts are de facto blind. What role does the artist play in a society whose citizens do not share the same reality, as Whitney Phillips suggested when discussing the impact of QAnon on the political discourse? Is the artist a tragic figure like Cassandra?

Theo Triantafyllidis: I do agree with McLuhan's suggestion on the artist's potentially tragic role in society. With conflicting realities and the political divide this role becomes even tougher. I always think about it as a non verbal response to things around us, like communicating something that is too early or too elusive to put into words. In this case it's interesting to take a step back and try to look at the big picture, to reveal patterns and tendencies of human behaviour and how these are affected by systems that we created but are at this point larger than us.

On the other hand, with this work, I was simultaneously role playing the historical painter that was commissioned to paint a vivid portrait of the events that took place. But trying to portray the emotional impact of the moment rather than the specifics of it. In the beginning of the pandemic I started researching the Black Death and Bruegel's paintings. So I guess Radicalization

Pipeline can also be read as a 21st century Hellscape painting. Like a snapshot of the nightmarish mental state that we talked about earlier.

Matteo Bittanti: So, we have established that the video game imaginary has fully penetrated into the so-called lived reality and the consequences are dire. Radicalization Pipeline is a live simulation running on a PC showing hordes of violent characters — both realistic and fantastic — fighting each other with swinging large melee weapons. This work seems to suggest that lived reality has turned into a video game. As I watched your installation at Eduardo Secci, I felt like it is becoming increasingly hard to discern the two. Angela Nagle, via Antonio Gramsci, famously argued that the political descends from the cultural, meaning that our movies, games, memes, and comics shape our understanding of the world much more than we realize. Why did you choose the medium of live simulation to address this process? How does a viewer "consume" an artwork that, by definition, is not only endless, but constantly regenerates itself?

Theo Triantafyllidis: I do think a lot about this merging of our online lives, the cultural and political sphere and our sense of reality. That was perhaps the reason that Capitolians are thrown into that battlefield to fight with LARPers and High Fantasy characters; these boundaries are hard to discern nowadays. The medium of the Live Simulation I think brings a certain weight to this battle. The infinite duration makes the viewing experience of these dumb NPCs suddenly become heavier and more "real" as you see their struggle and realize how trapped they are in that world. They fight until they die, sink into the ground, as is typical in video games, and then respawn and repeat again and again. For the audience there isn't this looping moment when they can take a breath and say: oh it's just starting again.

I was also thinking a lot about this as a large choreography. I am using the logic of a crowd simulation but tweaking the parameters to a point where the crowd can stay dynamic and surprise you constantly. There are a lot of weird realizations about how the human mind works when trying to script these behaviors. As for the audience interpretation, I want it to be as open as possible. There are recognizable characters and references we mentioned but I hope that from a certain distance it becomes more universal.

Matteo Bittanti: Live simulation recurs in a previous work of yours, How to Everything. In that case, you created an algorithm that visualizes objects and actions, over and over again. That work reminded me of the opaque logic of doom scrolling and algorithm-based recommendation, where connections are inscrutable, if not inintelligible, and meaning is largely absent. In the best case scenario, one can only recognize patterns. Is live simulation the most effective metaphor of the contemporary moment? The algorithm as a black box, the deferral of cause and effect, the general sense of randomness, unpredictability, and endlessness but also utter boredom... Also — and here I'm thinking like a curator —, how do you archive and preserve a live simulation for posterity?

Theo Triantafyllidis: Yes, the algorithm as a black box was at the heart of that work. I was again thinking of YouTube's recommendation algorithm and a

specific style of video editing (saturated shots, fast cuts, dialectical montage) that seemed to have won the algorithm. With How To Everything, I wanted to make a work that would do that in perpetuity. And see if that would also game the viewers' attention or feed our urge for dopamine microdosing. I ended up hand picking objects and behaviours and drawing connections between them that would require the viewer to constantly try to assert meaning where there is none.

The preservation of these works, like with all software, is tricky. Between the source code, the build/executable and long screen recordings, there are some preservation possibilities. But I am also curious about future iterations of the work. I am often thinking of these simulations in theatrical terms or as performance scores that could potentially be reinterpreted in other mediums or formats in the future.

Matteo Bittanti: The extreme violence depicted in Radicalization Pipeline is accompanied by ironic covers of familiar pop songs. This contrast creates a powerful cognitive dissonance, but also reminds the viewer that we are indeed living in the new dark ages, or in a "new dark age", as James Bridle suggests: the bastard child of neoliberalism is neofeudalism. Can you describe your collaboration with composer and sound designer Diego Navarro in creating the soundtrack of the 21c?

Theo Triantafyllidis: Bridle's New Dark Age has been a great read and an important reference. But this year has felt extra medieval. This pandemic has mentally connected us to people that went through similar situations in human history. The Bubonic Plague seems to somehow be deeply scarred into the collective memory and these memories resurfaced. Diego introduced

me to the Medieval Covers genre that peaked in popularity during the pandemic for this reason. We had a lot of discussions about setting the tone of the work's soundscape and Diego did an amazing job with it. There's a very eclectic mix of musical references in there, from LOTR to Taylor Swift and some original tracks that Diego composed. Then there is the ambient layer where we went for a mix of LARP field recordings and some phrases and primal screams from the Capitol videos. They have that deranged, funny and scary energy that is impossible to reproduce. Then Diego picked some audio for a Pokimane's stream and Pewdiepie's infamous cancel moment that can be heard sometimes. These are placed spatially and triggered from the simulation so that the soundscape is constantly in flux.

Matteo Bittanti: The online cultural wars introduced a brand new language peppered with now commonplace expressions like cuck, snowflake, social justice warrior, fake news, alternative facts, and many more. But in Radicalization Pipeline, any semblance of "conversation" has been completely replaced by fighting. The characters' distorted voices make their messages unintelligible. This situation seems to be an effect of our own choices. We deliberately designed media that suppress any kind of meaningful conversation - think about the function of the #hashtag or the vacuity of emojis. As Jia Tolentino argues in Trick Mirror, online communication sucks because it was specifically designed to suck. She writes:

> *What's amazing is that things like hashtag design—these essentially ad hoc experiments in digital architecture—have shaped so much of our political discourse. Our world would be different if Anonymous hadn't been the default username on 4chan, or if every social media platform didn't center on the personal profile, or if YouTube algorithms didn't show viewers increasingly extreme content to retain their attention, or if hashtags and retweets simply didn't exist. It's because of the hashtag, the retweet, and the profile that solidarity on the internet gets inextricably tangled up with visibility, identity, and self-promotion. It's telling that the most mainstream gestures of solidarity are pure representation, like viral reposts or avatar photos with cause-related filters, and meanwhile the actual mechanisms through which political solidarity is enacted, like strikes and boycotts, still exist on the fringe.*

In short, according to Tolentino, the very architecture of social media, with its rewarding system and monetization schemes, de facto excludes worthwhile interactions. In many ways, your artist practice is a comment on this intrinsic paradox. In your previous life, you were an architect. What is your take on the architecture of the web in 2021?

Theo Triantafyllidis: The Web 2.0 era is coming to an end. Certain platforms have monopolized huge territories of the internet but now feel stiff. With policies being formed against extremist content there is also a witch hunt against other types of edgy content that is making these platforms feel sterile and empty. I think there is a potential for new online communities that can combine the freedom of the early internet wilderness with the conveniences of social media and a touch of intimacy. This discussion is actively happening on New Models. Patreon and Discord are used to host paywalled artist-run online spaces, which seem to be a required intermediate step towards Web 3.0

Matteo Bittanti: Finally, what is your relationship to digital gaming? Peter Krapp famously argued that gamers play games, while artists play with (or against) games. Do you consider yourself an artist who loves video games, a gamer who makes art, or an artist, period?

Theo Triantafyllidis: That was one of the in-jokes of the UCLA GameLab: "The community space for people who hate games". I think that's probably my category ;)

Author: Sasha Bogojev
Date: April 20, 2021
Link: https://www.juxtapoz.com/news/technology/the-artist-is-online-painting-and-sculpture-in-the-postdigital-age/

The Artist is Online: Painting and Sculpture in the Postdigital Age

The Artist is Online, Installation View at KÖNIG, Berlin.

We were a tad late covering this one, but we loved the show enought to give it a bit of a postscript. KÖNIG in Berlin just showed THE ARTIST IS ONLINE. PAINTING AND SCULPTURE IN THE POSTDIGITAL AGE curated by Anika Meier and Johann König, celebrating the interconnectivity of art and technology. Featuring around 70 works by 50 artists who are at home on social media and many of which were featured on Juxtapoz in the past, the exhibition presented ways of digitizing painting, visualizing data sets, and reflecting the mobility of images.From the exhibition press release: “For the generation of artists born around 1990, painting in the post-digital age has become a mashup of art-historical references, most evidently, when the styles of the Old Masters, Surrealism, Pop Art, and Post-Internet Art are sampled. The result is portraits of people, bodies, and animals that lose themselves in pathetic poses. Femininity is deconstructed (Sarah Slappey, Rosie Gibbens) and masculinity is over-performed (Pascal Möhlmann, Evgen Copi Gorisek). The cult of self-expression is celebrated (Chris Drange) and consumerism is exhibited (Oli Epp, Travis Fish).

While content-related access to painting in the post-digital age is one possibility, formal access via the integration of technology is another. Augmented Reality, Virtual Reality, and Artificial Intelligence can all be used to digitize painting. Ai-Da is a humanoid robot and an artist who arguably proves that artificial intelligence can produce a creative achievement. According to her creator, the gallery owner, and art dealer Aidan Meller, that means creating works that are new, surprising, and have value. She has cameras in her eyes and paints and draws what she sees. Is Ai-Da creative? Is her art good? And is the question of whether her art is good even relevant? The French artist Ben Elliot meanwhile creates PERFECT PAINTINGS generated by the software based on data about the most popular contemporary works, while American Gretchen Andrew hacks Google to fulfill her wishes and dreams: a cover story in Artforum, winning the Turner Prize, participating in Art Basel Miami Beach and now an auction record."

The full artist lineup includes: Trey Abdella, Ai-Da, Gretchen Andrew, Daniel Arsham, Banz & Bowinkel, Aram Bartholl, Arno Beck, Lydia Blakeley, Ry David Bradley, Arvida Byström, Damjanski, Stine Deja, Rachel de Joode, Maja Djordjevic, Chris Drange, Johanna Dumet, Hannah Sophie Dunkelberg, Ben Elliot, Oli Epp, Liam Fallon, Travis Fish, Rosie Gibbens, Evgen Copi Gorišek, Cathrin Hoffmann, Andy Kassier, Nik Kosmas, Brandon Lipchik, Jonas Lund, Miao Ying, Pascal Möhlmann, Rose Nestler, Hunter Potter, Grit Richter, Rachel Rossin, Manuel Rossner, David Roth, Aaron Scheer, Pascal Sender, Sarah Slappey, Fabian Treiber, Theo Triantafyllidis, Anne Vieux, Amanda Wall, Fabian Warnsing, Thomas Webb, Jessica Westhafer, Anthony White, Chloe Wise, Hiejin Yoo and Janka Zöller.

Art in America

Author: Nicholas O'Brien
Date: July 29, 2020
Link: https://www.artnews.com/art-in-america/aia-reviews/theo-triantafyllidis-ritual-rethinks-land-art-1202695661/

A Dance of Death in the Realm of Land Art

Theo Triantafyllidis's exhibition "Ritual" is presented by Meredith Rosen Gallery as a website, though one could also say it takes place in two other locales as well. One is a remote abandoned mining town in the California desert, where the artist installed and documented his sculptures, made of found and 3D-printed components. The other is a game engine, where digitized forms and environments based on this desert milieu meet in a simulation, a self-playing game where elements interact with each other according to programmed rules rather than human volition. The cameras in the simulation follow various vignettes; perspective changes at random. Triantafyllidis's photo and video documentation of his sculptures and looped excerpts from his simulation alternate in the downward scroll of the "Ritual" website. The two kinds of media play off each other, generating a complex system that engages and builds on the traditions of Land art by not only intervening in a place but representing the site's openness to change.

Triantafyllidis enhances the rugged, ruined quality of his chosen desert site with post-apocalyptic imagery. Digital animals run amok in a place forsaken by humans. Mounds of scrap metal and hard-to-identify dilapidated machinery are littered throughout a derelict building's concrete boxy frame. What look like overturned satellite dishes, helicopter rotors, and rusted I-beams jut from the ground haphazardly. Plumes of smoke rise up from far-off trash heaps. A drone's-eye-view shows scattered activity in a cluttered area.

Triantafyllidis frequently documents his sculptures through brief video loops rather than still photographs, to evoke the effects of weather and light. In some birds are meant to be caged (2019), taxidermied crows perch on a salvaged Bird electric scooter, one clutching a cigarette butt in its beak. On the "Ritual" website, the crows' feathers and the hair extensions dangling from the handlebars move gently in the wind. The simulation brings to life the pun on nature and tech, as the crows take the Bird for a joyride around the blown-out landscape. A cackling pair of animated hyenas watch the crows from a broken-down sedan, blasting club music from the car's speakers. These beasts also appear in Frens I and Frens II (2020), tapestries ordered from the kind of weave-on-demand service that turns JPEGs into textiles. In the documentation they lie on a rock, baking under the sun and rippling in the breeze.

At one moment, the simulation's camera hovers over marching ants, each carrying a bit of detritus—a plastic flower, a pill, an obsolete tape cartridge—as they circle a precarious sculpture reminiscent of the balanced objects in Fischli & Weiss's photo series "Equilibres" (1984-86). There's no analogue to this structure among Triantafyllidis's physical sculptures, though the virtual work might be seen as a sly reference to the garbage-picking process behind Decoy II (for that fucken oil squirting drone), 2020, a bird's nest woven from dry palm fronds, feathers, and construction fencing, with a pair of bright yellow ping-pong balls as eggs in the center. Triantafyllidis digitally manipulates some photos and videos to make them resemble simulated space. Images of mountains and ruins appear against monochromatic backgrounds: pale gray, muted pink, or construction-fence orange.

Land art has had a complex relationship with media and technology. Interventions at remote sites were—and are still—experienced primarily through documentation. Michael Heizer addressed this problem by producing photographs representing his earthworks at a one-to-one scale. The actual-size prints gave the artist a control over the work in the gallery that he couldn't exert on the site. In his 1968 essay "The Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects," Robert Smithson champions Heizer for his use of "dumb tools" like picks and shovels, arguing that these achieve a deep connection to the land that is impossible when it's shaped by the developer's bulldozer, which "turns the terrain into unfinished cities of organized wreckage." Though both artists opted for excavators to realize large scale projects, especially after 1968, they continued to ground their interventions in simple gestures. The wild space that surrounds the legible, geometric interventions of Land art, and the post-industrial ruins left by unartistic uses of heavy machinery, constitute Triantafyllidis's chosen site. His statement casts the inscrutable ritual shown in the work as an example of how "Nature is healing." This may be a cynical evocation of COVID-19 memes for promotional purposes, but it might also be an assertion of the simulation's sensitivity to flux. Triantafyllidis's approach to Land art isn't an attempt to establish control, as Heizer did with his one-to-one scale photographs; it honors the spontaneity of conditions at the site.

Triantafyllidis has used computer simulation to create controlled chaos in works like Seamless (2017) and How to Everything (2016), where menageries of animals, robots, vegetation, and squiggly patterns interact with each other as they carry out seemingly random tasks. Over time, the absurd logic of these relationships becomes legible as the viewer begins to discern the program's rules. In Ritual the randomness is hemmed in. The work is more cohesive than the artist's earlier simulations. But Triantafyllidis showed those earlier works in galleries, where simulations ran in real-time on computers installed in the space. The online exhibition "Ritual" has to face the technical limitations of running software in a browser, where inconsistent internet connectivity could make the work unviewable. This accounts for the decision to present Ritual on the website as prerecorded clips rather than a live simulation. (At the bottom of the "Ritual" page, there's a link to a YouTube video preserving the stream from the exhibition's opening, when the software did run live.)

As a result, the online exhibition seems like excessive mediation. With its shifts between simulations, documentations, and eye-tricking digital manipulations, "Ritual" is a more engaging scroll than the online viewing rooms that have become the standard exhibition format during the pandemic. Triantafyllidis is making the best of a tough situation. But in the end, the site brackets his work into framed images, limited perspectives, and prerecorded loops. Perhaps it's best to think of this as a gesture toward the potential of simulation as a direction for Land art: a sketch or a proposal for how we might rethink ideas of site and mediation.

artnet

Author: Tim Schneider
Date: June 2, 2020
Link: https://news.artnet.com/art-world/editors-picks-june-1-2020-1869882

Editors' Picks: 9 Events For Your Virtual Art Calendar This Week, From a Thesis Show on 'Mars' to a Talk With a Hand-Sanitizer Artist

Virtual art events from New York and beyond.

"Artist Commentary and Public Chat for Theo Triantafyllidis: Ritual" at Meredith Rosen Gallery

The innovative media artist Theo Triantafyllidis returns with another project that smears the border between the physical and digital worlds in captivating ways. "Ritual" encompasses multiple components: a "live" simulation of an ever-mutating landscape, run on a video-game engine and populated by a host of creatures each imbued with its own artificial intelligence; a series of objects created by the sentient creatures inside the digital world (such as a VR headset partially eaten by a hyena), then translated into physical sculpture by Triantafyllidis; and documentation of those same physical sculptures integrated into an IRL landscape that corresponds to the digital one in which they were each fashioned. For the virtual opening, the artist will live-stream the simulation while providing running commentary on his complex world's development, as well as take questions from viewers in a public chat.

IndieWire

Author: Samuel R. Mendez
Date: 3 February 2020
Link: https://www.indiewire.com/2020/02/sundance-2020-vr-climate-change-1202208386/

Sundance VR Tackled Climate Change With Groundbreaking New Projects

Several of this year's highlights sought to educate through an emotional journey rather than lectures or diagrams.

Theo Triantafyllidis, Anti-Gone 2020 - Performance Still

Each year, IndieWire partners with MIT's Open Documentary Lab to offer a deeper look at Sundance's New Frontier section. Here, Samuel Mendez explores several projects that tackled climate change.

You can be a mushroom carrying out bioremediation. You can be a bug sliding down an esophagus. You can even be yourself, watching your breath leave your body. The New Frontier lineup at Sundance 2020 shows the power of virtual reality to create playful experiences of agency in the face of climate change.

[...]

The impact of agency in VR is clear in comparison to the climate-related New Frontier performances. “Infinitely Yours” is a 25-minute stage performance by Miwa Matreyek encompassing dance, shadow puppetry, animation, and live music. Matreyek said that this piece helped her process her climate grief and confront her role own responsibilities, going so far as to incorporate her own garbage into the performance. “Anti-Gone” is a 75-minute theater piece in which live actors perform simultaneously onstage and in a digital world via motion capture suits. The piece centers its main characters’ detachment and apathy towards the state of their sunken city.

Lead artist Theo Triantafyllidis said that climate change is “always sort of in the background of what is going on,” with main characters so detached from their ruined city that they’re content to just “[continue] this life of looking for experiences, drugs, things to do and things to buy.” These two impressive performances left me tired, upset, and sympathetic because I could see my own flaws in them. I connected with Matreyek examining her own plastic trash under the bright light of a projector, as well as with main characters of “Anti-Gone” chasing distractions when it feels like nothing can save their city.

By contrast, at the end of “Hypha,” “Breathe,” and “Animalia Sum,” I felt peace, happiness, and a connection with others. These immersive media projects let me feel what I could be, and it was empowering. I could participate in the industrial farming of bugs and then reject it. I could use fungal magic to keep soil healthy. I could take a moment to breathe. This year’s New Frontier selection was filled with moving moments around issues of climate change and the environment. The creative VR projects highlight the new opportunities of playful, immersive environmental media to reach new audiences and inspire new emotions around the future of our planet.

KILL SCREEN

Author: Jamin Warren
Date: January 15, 2020
Link: https://killscreen.com/theo-triantafyllidis/

Theo Triantafyllidis : Multimedia Artist Interview

Architect turned multimedia artist Theo Triantyfillidis doesn't just push boundaries, he collapses them. In the mixed reality experience Anti-Gone, actors' VR avatars are at once fabricated shadows and genuine embodiments of human drama; in Role Play, his augmented sculpture series, seeming polarities such as the virtual and the physical dissolve into one another; and in Twister, a site-specific VR experience, audience members' interactions with the exhibit become part of the exhibit itself, inviting them to graduate from passive viewer to active participant.

The breadth of ideas and materials Triantafyllidis employs in his art is only matched by the reach of his creations, which have been exhibited in Beijing, Paris, Tangier, and Santa Fe, to name a few places. We spoke with Theo about 3D-modeling, the desert, sports, and how a given environment impacts the way we make and perceive art.

JW: All sports, by definition, are nonsensical. People playing basketball doesn't make any sense. It all feels kind of random at some level, even though it's not.

TT: Also, just seeing in the history of videogames how many games exist that are great interpretations of physical sports… it's quite a big production and a long lineage.

JW: That's a good point.

TT: So, The Shape of the Internet (Orgy) was more like a really funny interactive installation. I started thinking a lot about game controllers and what this connection is that we draw between the player's body and the game world, and how this is the intermediate we're connected through and, also, trying to obstruct interaction in its lowest or purest form where it's just motion one-to-one.

For Still Life With Yumyums, it's important that this is happening right now and it's a real-time thing. The piece is evolving over time.

In this simulated environment, there is a population of these creatures generated randomly when the piece starts and each one is given a randomized DNA. This DNA includes information on how the creature behaves and its overall characteristics. It's kind of like typical videogames—stats, basically: strength, agility, perception, intelligence. Then these are translated into their way of understanding the world around them, the way that they can move. The DNA also includes information on how they look and what kind of mini-objects they are composed of.

Their sole purpose in this environment is to reproduce, so they're going to look for an ideal mate and reproduce and create children that are a combination of their DNAs. So, over time, the most effective ones at surviving in this environment are going to reproduce more.

I didn't want to have a hard cap on how many creatures are going to be there. There is this red worm that's flying around that's trying to prevent gigantic orgies and overpopulation, but I didn't want to make it deterministic. Sometimes it will manage to control the population. Sometimes, if a specific overactive string of DNA achieves a certain number of a certain population, then it will get out of control and the whole space will get filled out and the computer will gradually slow down and crash.

JW: It's interesting, given a lot of the conversations about the limitations of our planet, and very Malthusian. Are you creating these objects from scratch?

TT: Some of them are sculpted from scratch and some of them are found from different online 3D libraries.

A big part of my practice is looking through this library the whole time. At this point, I feel like I know everything that's in it by heart and I've looked up every single creator and what's their background. I try to see why this person made it this way and why this person made it that way.

With my personal way of working, I'm not going to sit and 3D-model something unless it doesn't exist out there. I think it's also a good way to push me to not spend time making something that's very cliché or exists hundreds of times out there. It's more like, "Let's try to make something that is really strange."

Here, everything is happening procedurally right now. There is a library of fifty or sixty objects. Some of them are more static and some of them have behaviors attached to them. The hand is looking for things to caress and poke and slap. The knife is looking for things to cut. The small animals are trying to avoid danger and stay out of the way of whatever is happening.
Triantyfillidis's "Studio Visit," a site-specific mixed reality installation (above) and "Nike," an augmented sculpture (below).

JW: Is this similar to the previous piece where the machine is creating the environments?

TT: Yes. There is the first part that is trying to make visually interesting compositions with the randomly picked objects. Then, the static composition is left to do its thing because some of the objects are alive. Some of them are going to stay where they are, so it's a completely dynamic composition.

Also, I think there is a very specific way that people edit videos on YouTube for maximum attention-grabbing, so I try to decode some of these editing techniques and use them here. Originally, I decided to use YouTube as a platform for sharing all this work, sort of like having an extended preview of all these works online because I like the idea of people randomly stumbling on them.

JW: On the one hand, the beauty of digital art is that it can be shared widely, in a way that physical art cannot, but you're also working in a context where scarcity has a value. This puts artists like you in a very tricky spot, where the promotional value of availability is still very high.

TT: The nice thing about this kind of simulation work is that, on the one hand, you can have a ten-minute preview on YouTube, but, on the other hand, that's not the actual work. It's good enough for someone to understand what the piece is about, but also good for a collector to be like, "Oh, I have the software that can produce endless hours of this."

I think the nice thing about this kind of simulation work is that, on the one hand, you can have a ten-minute preview on YouTube, but, on the other hand, that's not the actual work.
Images from Triantyfillidis's "Anti-Gone," a performance in mixed reality.

The way I like to think about it, and the way I've tried to structure my practice, is that I have some work that is meant to be shown in a gallery and it's protected by scarcity, in a way, because it's a physical installation and I can't practically make too many of them. On the other hand, I like to have at least one or two interactive experiences that are available for free online and where people can experience the whole thing.

JW: Fundamentally, that's the difference between game design and what you're doing as an artist. There are game designers that are like, "I want to sell this thing and, if I want to use Twitch as a marketing vehicle, I have to create something to support it."

TT: Yeah. You never get that kind of engagement from an art audience. Nobody is ever going to actually talk about the work in that very elaborate way.

The piece that you saw earlier with my self-portrait was also for VR, originally. Staphyloculus is another VR piece for which I went out to Joshua Tree and took the whole VR setup, headset, trackers, computer, and power generator. Then I did a quick 3D scan of the area using a DSLR and a drone, and finally placed myself in the same exact position in the reconstructed scene. It was more like a mind experiment to see what happens when you are in this simulated world, but you still get the physical sensory input.
Triantyfillidis with his sculpture "Mountain" (made from ceramic and laser-cut acrylic).

So much of immersion is obviously visual, but we also have all these other senses that can be powerful for creating a sense of realism. So, feel the crunch beneath your feet.

And the sunlight burning your skin… that kind of stuff. Then there are a few other things going on in there. There are these creatures that will start attacking you.

This began as an experiment of me doing that, and then I tried to recreate the sensations that I felt as a stand-alone VR experience that someone can see somewhere else, but then a lot of the experience itself is informed by this original experiment. Another important aspect of the project was these pink creatures and thinking about embodiment in VR and how, by default, you don't have a body and are this floating camera in the world.

JW: It's like a form of dysmorphia.

TT: In the beginning of the experience, you don't have a body and you are just standing there not knowing what to do, and these creatures will have pretty elaborate behavior, where they are shy in the beginning. They will look at you and, when you try to look at them, they will hide and will keep doing this for a little bit. Then they'll start attacking you and attaching to your body.

After a while, you become this amorphous person and then, after a bit of playing with them, they are fully, physically interactable, so you can play with them. Then they will start popping off and disappearing. And then you're left without the body again.

Recently, in 2018, I did this whole series of works as this Ork avatar. I designed this avatar for myself and set up a virtual studio in VR, kind of influenced a little bit by a particular paint brush and these kind of VR experiences.

Basically, I made my own tools for working in VR and for six months I worked inside VR, in this virtual studio building a bunch of sculptures. The sculptures are also made from found 3D objects and new objects that I made, which were then physically printed on plywood as these 2D cutouts.

I designed it in a way so that when you would first enter the gallery, you would maybe for a second think that they are three-dimensional.

Then I made this portable display unit, which is for looking at AR on your phone. This whole monitor is tracked with a VIVE controller, and people can drive it around in the space.

I have done a lot of shows with VR headsets, but I kind of hate how they operate in the gallery, how people have to wait in lines to see them.

JW: So this gives you a sense of it not being as "immersive" as everybody wearing a headset, but it's a great way to show the work?

TT: Yeah. In the virtual scene, there is a motion capture recording of me creating this sculpture, as in my avatar.

JW: It's like a behind-the-scenes.

TT: Basically. It's a little bit of hide-and-seek because I am moving a lot in the space, so you have to constantly be looking around to find the character and then you also see the process. There's a whole narrative that I am talking through.

So it's like an interview with your avatar?

Yeah, and then I make a painting.

There is a little bit of art theory in there, and then the painting is recreated to scale, one-to-one, and printed on plywood with some layered things. Then there's the video of it playing.

I always like to consider how the work operates inside a gallery or inside a popular viewing space. None of my other VR works have that physical installation component to them, but are more about choreographing the player to do something interesting for the others to watch. For the one in the desert, people will do really crazy stuff with their bodies when they're trying to play the experience.

Anti-Gone is what I am currently working on. Its a Mixed Reality Performance. I see it as a mishmashing of the ideas that we talked about, but presented live in front of an audience. There is something super interesting about game engines and real-time graphics clashing with a live performance.

It's an hour-long performance and it's based on the comic book by Connor Willumsen. It's a complex story very related to virtual reality and this idea of constructed environments. It's set in a post-climate change world, where a city is halfway submerged into the ocean and tropical vegetation is overgrowing the city because of the extreme heat. It is premiering soon at Sundance New Frontier.

Forbes

Author: Seth Porges
Date: Dec 16, 2019
Link: https://www.forbes.com/sites/sethporges/2019/12/16/4-trends-that-could-define-immersive-entertainment-in-2020/amp/

4 Trends That Could Define Immersive Entertainment In 2020

Top-tier film festivals aren't just about showing movies—they've become the absolute top spots for peeking at the future of immersive entertainment. And I'm not just talking about Virtual and Augmented Reality. With these technologies increasingly available in our living rooms, festivals such as Sundance and Tribeca now need to do more than just throw you in an Oculus for a few minutes to get that coveted "Wow".

Enter the current state of bleeding-edge immersive entertainment, where live actors, multi-person social experiences, biometric sensors, and underwater VR conspire to inspire—and tear down the wall between "observer" and "participant."

To see where the future immersive entertainment could be going, I spoke to Shari Frilot, senior programmer at the Sundance Film Festival, and chief curator of the festival's New Frontier category about the just-announced slate of immersive offerings at January's festival. Here are some of the major trends in immersive entertainment coming to Sundance—and beyond.

MULTI-USER IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCES

There's something innately isolating about wearing a face-covering headset and stepping into VR. One big trend at this year's New Frontier: Creative ways of turning a digital experience into a shared one that can be enjoyed by—maybe not a full theater full of filmgoers—but at least a handful of people at once.

"We have works with eight people at a time, 20 people at a time going into the headset and doing something together," says Frilot. "And they're not only going to have an electronic experience. Part of the experience is working together."

To this end, the 2020 festival will feature a new exhibition space called the "Biodigital Theater," where programmed, multi-person immersive and virtual reality works will operate on a continuous schedule.

Featured experiences in this venue include:

All Kinds of Limbo (Lead Artists: Toby Coffey, Raffy Bushman, Nubiya Brandom), a "communal musical journey" (courtesy the National Theatre of Great Britain that promises 20 people a shared experience about the influence of West Indians culture on British music.

Anti-Gone (Lead Artists: Theo Triantafyllidis, Key Collaborators: Connor Willumsen, Matthew Doyle), which uses VR, a custom game engine and live actors to produce something that Frilot describes as "one part theater, one part Twitch live stream" for roughly 50 people at a time.

VISUALIZING HOW WE INTERACT WITH THE ENVIRONMENT

According to Frilot, a large number of submissions to this year's New Frontier reflected a focus on environmental stories and challenges. A common thread seems to be the use of VR and AR to visualize the hidden ways different organisms interact with and influence each other.

In Breathe (Lead Artists: Diego Galafassi, Key Collaborators: Jess Engel, Myriam Achard, Stephen Mangiat), attendees enter a space with four or five others—each wearing a Magic Leap ML1 augmented reality headset and a biometric chest strap.

Every time somebody breathes, the AR headset brings their breath to life. "It shows how your breathe becomes a part of a living biosphere around you and that breathe is a conserved quality, like water," Frilot says. "Every time we breathe out, those particles will be breathed in by a future human who is yet to be alive yet."

In Hypha (Lead Artist: Natalia Cabrera, Key Collaborators: Sebastian Gonzalez, Juan Ferrer), VR transforms you into a fungal spore that floats into the Earth before growing into a mushroom. The idea here is to show how important fungi are to the greater environment.

[...]

CACTUS SS 20

Artist Theo Triantafyllidis

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Theo Triantafyllidis creates expansive worlds and complex systems where the virtual and the physical merge in a disturbing, absurd and poetic way. At the center of the synergy of visual texts here displayed, we find an Ork avatar, which performs in the different scenarios in which it is inserted, whether it is an artist's studio (as in *Role Play*, a solo show at the Meredith Rosen Gallery in New York in 2018, or a bucolic setting (as in *Pastoral*, at Eduardo Secci, Florence, in 2019-20). Both of these site-specific mixed reality installations host an Ork whose aesthetic is inspired by medieval devices, engineering tools, brutalism, and game culture. While in one the avatar takes on the role of the artist, experiencing the frustrations and difficulties that an artist faces in him/her/their studio, in the other the Ork enters an idyllicpast, drawing a comparison between the labyrinthine Greek mythology and the internet of things.

These 3D animations often manifest themselves as performances, virtual and augmented reality experiences, games and interactive installations. After digital creation, Triantafyllidis works are rendered physically flat in a purposeful misuse of 3D modeling, coming to occupy an alternative mass and materiality in this augmented and mixed world. He uses embarrassing interactions and precarious physics to invite the audience to embody, engage and challenge these other realities. Crosswise, Triantafyllidis investigates the themes of isolation, sexuality and violence in their visceral extremities, offering computational humor and AI improvisation as a response to the technology industry's agenda.

Self Portrait (Reclining Ork), 2019. Photo: Hamouda. Courtesy of the artist and Eduardo Secci, Florence

Art Viewer

Author: Luca Pozzi
Date: November 11, 2019
Link: https://artviewer.org/theo-triantafyllidis-at-eduardo-secci-contemporary/

Theo Triantafyllidis
at Eduardo Secci Contemporary

Artist: Theo Triantafyllidis
Exhibition title: Pastoral
Curated by: THE SWAN STATION
Venue: Eduardo Secci Contemporary, Florence, Italy
Date: September 13 – November 16, 2019

The Eduardo Secci Contemporary Gallery is pleased to present "Pastoral", a solo show by Theo Triantafyllidis, curated by THE SWAN STATION.

162 years have passed since Jean François Millet painted "The Angelus" and "The Gleaners", 169 from the realization of the "Sower", nevertheless Theo Triantafyllidis, for this new show, annihilate the passage of time to draw

inspiration from idyllic representation of nature and converting it into the parallel world of online video games and augmented reality immersive experiences. He extends the classical perception of space and time overlapping, with irony and romantic awareness, the labyrinthine Greek mythology with the internet of things. He accesses to the primordial connective core that relates "man" with the merciless rhythms of sowing and harvesting to then teleport the viewer (as a player) into a subjective scene of apparently meaningless escape. The fantasy of the pastoral lifestyle has long been a seductive escape from technology and life in the city. This fantasy has found new forms in games like Farming Simulator where the player has to adjust to the slower rhythms of the seasons and Witcher 3 where horseback rides in vast and beautiful landscapes are abruptly interrupted by monstrous encounters.

In Pastoral, 2019 (video game), Triantafyllidis constructs a hybrid virtual expanding landscape, a field of hay brushed by golden sunlight. The player finds himself as a muscular Ork character in the middle of the field together with an antagonist presence that relentlessly follows his every step as a contemporary version of an ancient minotaur. The character feels strangely out of place in this setting, seemingly musing or enjoying a short break before yet another battle. Using a standard gamepad, the player can explore the landscape to find idyllic moments under the sound of a melodic lute. An anti-game of shorts it denies the player of any dramatic moments or interactions, but rather has them contemplate the bucolic calmness. But a sense of underlying violence remains, perhaps embedded within the very medium of the video game.
In Self Portrait (Reclining Ork), 2019, a tapestry woven from a screenshot of the same character, represents the Ork flirtatiously staring at the viewer. Caught in a moment of reflection, the artist is intimidating and tender at the same time. The gender-ambiguous avatar has been the virtual manifestation of Theo on his previous series of works titled "Role Play", a year-long performance in Virtual Reality where him as Ork produced a series of augmented sculptures and paintings. The Ork character now exits the artist's studio, for a moment freed from the burden of labor, an idealized being in conflict-free coexistence with nature, representing through the tapestry one of the possible proofs of its analog materialization. Materialization that continues, through a site-specific installation, that includes a physical hay sandbox and a simulated sunset, in order to allows a synesthetic and layered experience of the work.

The same approach is implemented by Triantafyllidis by inhabiting a personal fantasy, like Marie Antoinette playing milkmaid in her private rustic retreat, the Queen's Hamlet, and opening it and sharing it with an IRL and an online audience. Theo decides to make his personal avatar, and one that he very viscerally relates to, available to a wider public, by making the game available as a free download. This gesture is not taken lightly. The artist maintains control over how the avatar behaves and by programming the freedom and constraint of the player interactions. A game of redundant seduction is played in layers, between avatar-player and between player-game designer.

It's Nice That

Author: Jyni Ong
Date: 18 September 2019
Link: https://www.itsnicethat.com/articles/theo-triantafyllid-is-matthew-doyle-anti-gone-digital-180919

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.

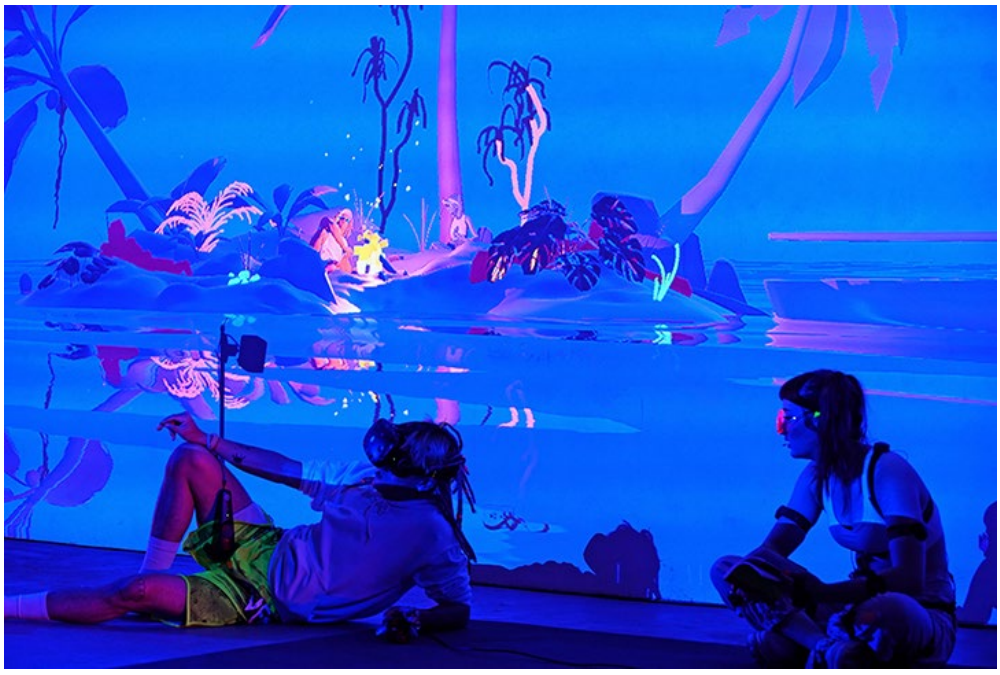
The play started out as a series of experiments into mixed reality. Exploring a multi-layered experience which combines live performance with digital content, the piece shifts between our imminent disastrous future and the constructed, virtual present. Starting work for the play, back in 2018, after 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.



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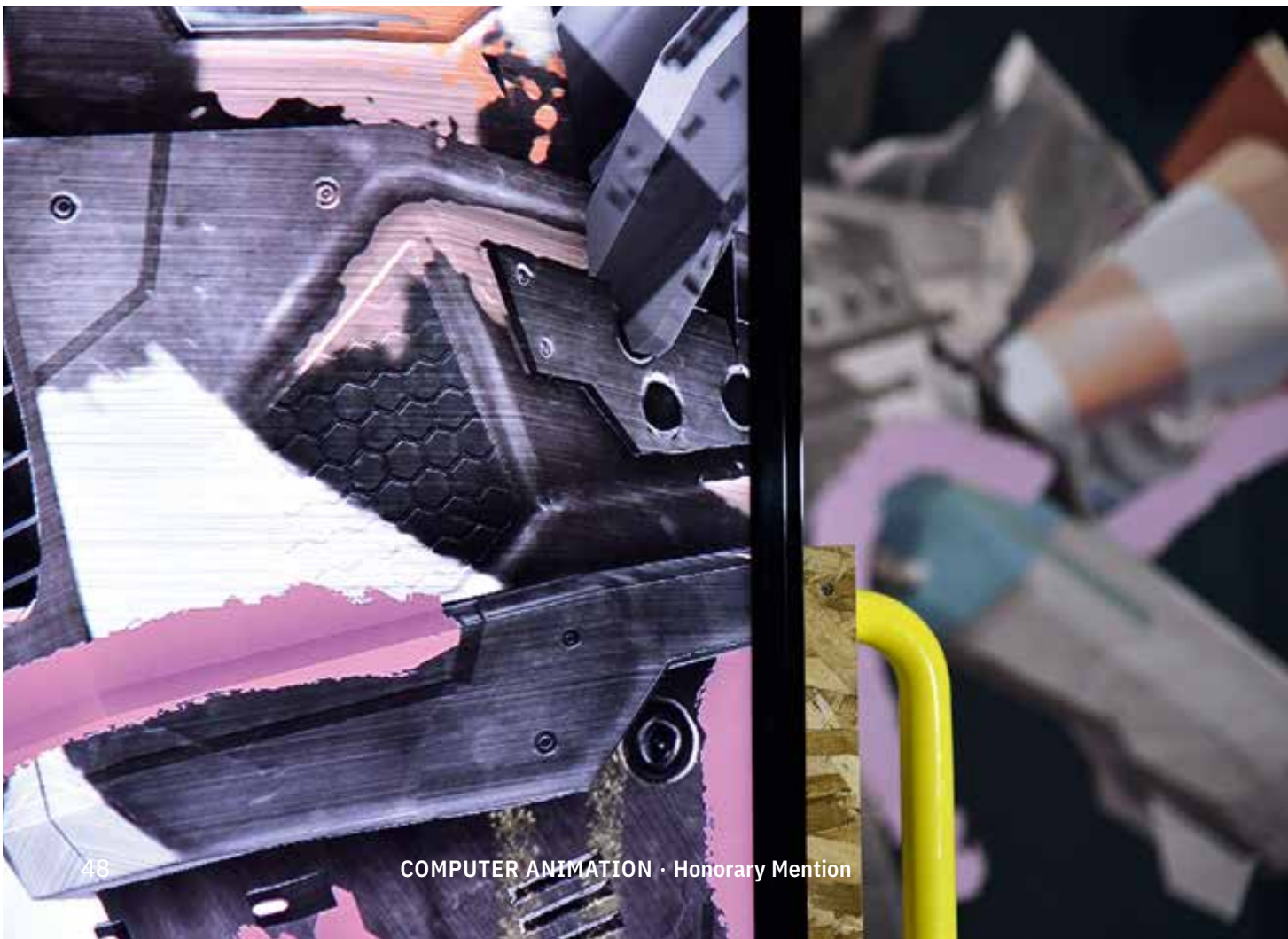


Nike

Theo Triantafyllidis

In this body of work, the *Ork Series,* Theo Triantafyllidis re-imagines the exhibition space as his own virtual studio. He embodies an Ork avatar, who uses digital tools to create 3D forms, which are then manifested physically as large-scale wood sculptures. This process is recorded through DIY Motion Capture and displayed on a mobile screen in the exhibition space. By moving the screen structure throughout the space, the audience is able to view the sculpture while simultaneously experiencing the artist's digital performance of creating it. *Nike* can be seen as a re-interpretation of the *Winged Victory of Samothrace,* prominently displayed at the Louvre. Using scrap material available at the studio, the muscular character tries to recreate the sculpture from memory. The sense of awe, struggle, destiny, and divine grace of the Hellenistic sculpture are playfully misunderstood and intertwined with the synonymous sports company's ad campaigns. The original's interplay between the statue and the space around it is expanded to the virtual space. In creating the Ork character, Triantafyllidis pairs prevalent video game tropes with the performative persona of The Artist. Ork Aesthetics are inspired by medieval contraptions, engineering tools, brutalism, and gaming culture. The artist's performance considers the concept of virtual labor and production in today's hybrid-reality work environments, as the Ork experiences the frustrations and complications of artistic labor in his virtual studio. After digital creation, his works are rendered physically flat in a purposeful misuse of 3D modeling, coming to occupy an alternative mass and materiality in this augmented and mixed world. Like chasing Pokemon on their phones, viewers are invited to enter the process and performance that created these odd objects.

Special Thanks to Meredith Rosen Gallery, NY and the Breeder Gallery, Athens GR

Theo Triantafyllidis (GR), born in 1988, Athens, is an artist who builds virtual spaces and the interfaces for the human body to inhabit them. He creates complex worlds and systems where the virtual and the physical merge in uncanny, absurd, and poetic ways. These are manifested as performances, mixed reality experiences, games, and interactive installations. He holds an MFA from UCLA, Design Media Arts, and a Diploma of Architecture from the National Technical University of Athens. He is based in LA.

http://slimetech.org

HYPERALLERGIC

Author: Angelica Frey
Date: May 8, 2019
Link: https://hyperallergic.com/499177/artificial-intelligence-as-a-godlike-tool-for-experimentation/

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.

ELEPHANT

Author: Alice Bucknell
Date: 11 Dec 2018
Link: https://elephant.art/athens/

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"

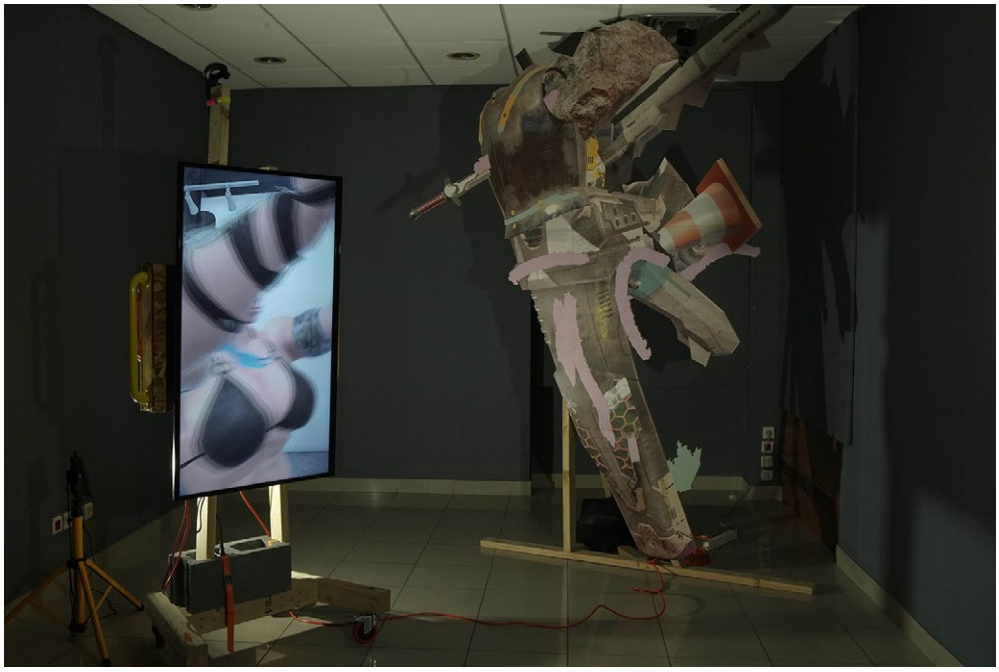
Built in 1931, the TTT building is defined by its hybrid neoclassical-modernist architectural style, one that embodied the futuristic dreams of its lodgers–the state-owned Telecommunications, Telegrams and Post (TTT) Company. Until few years ago, Athenians would come to this building to pay their phone 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

Author: Faith Holland
Date: 23 July 2018
Link: https://www.aqnb.com/2018/07/23/queering-ork-aesthetics-and-existing-beyond-the-virtual-theo-triantafyllidis-in-conversation-with-faith-holland/

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 plywood, 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.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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]

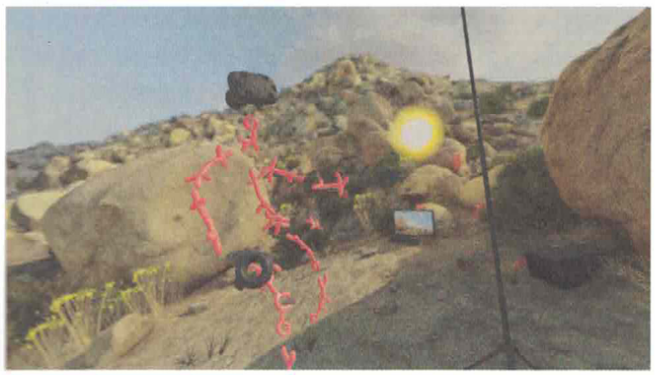
Liam Jarvis analyses his particular experience with *The Machine to Be Another* hosted by Good Chance Encampment, which facilitated an experience of inhabiting the virtual body of a refugee from the dismantled "jungle" refugee camp in Calais. Looking down at his own arms that are seemingly transformed 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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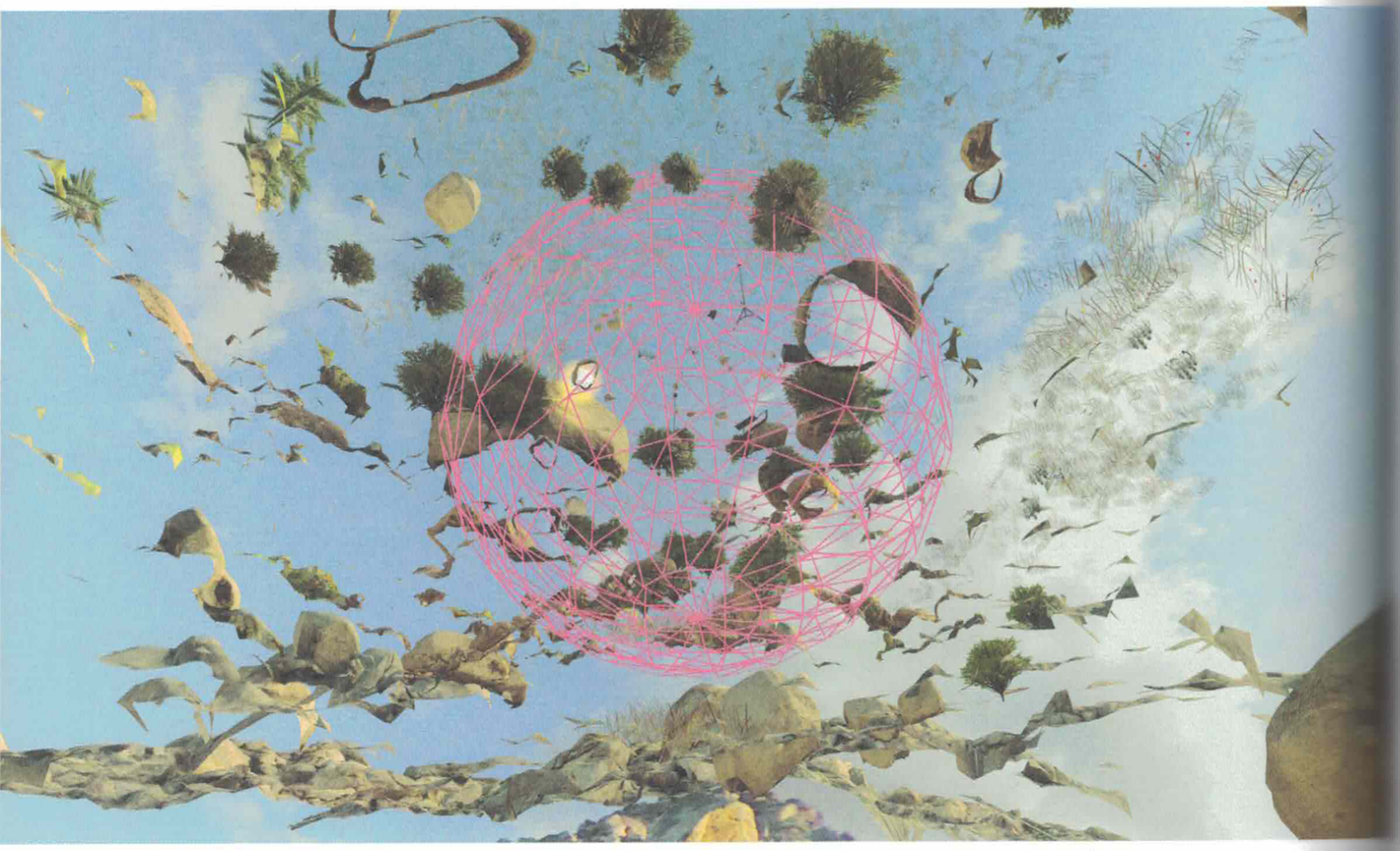


Theo Triantafyllidis
Sound design: Holly Waxwing
On-site team: Jenny Rodenhouse, Eli Joteva, Lander
Additional photogrammetry: Regis Boissenin
3D scanning, 3d modelling, exhibition design: Polina Miliou
Commissioned by NRW-Forum Dusseldorf, DE
Staphyloculus, 2017

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

Author: Jean Kay
Date: 31 May 2017
Link: https://www.aqnb.com/2017/05/31/talk-to-me-eva-papa-margarititi-theo-triantafyllidis-in-dialogue-on-the-entanglement-of-human-machine-nature/

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.'

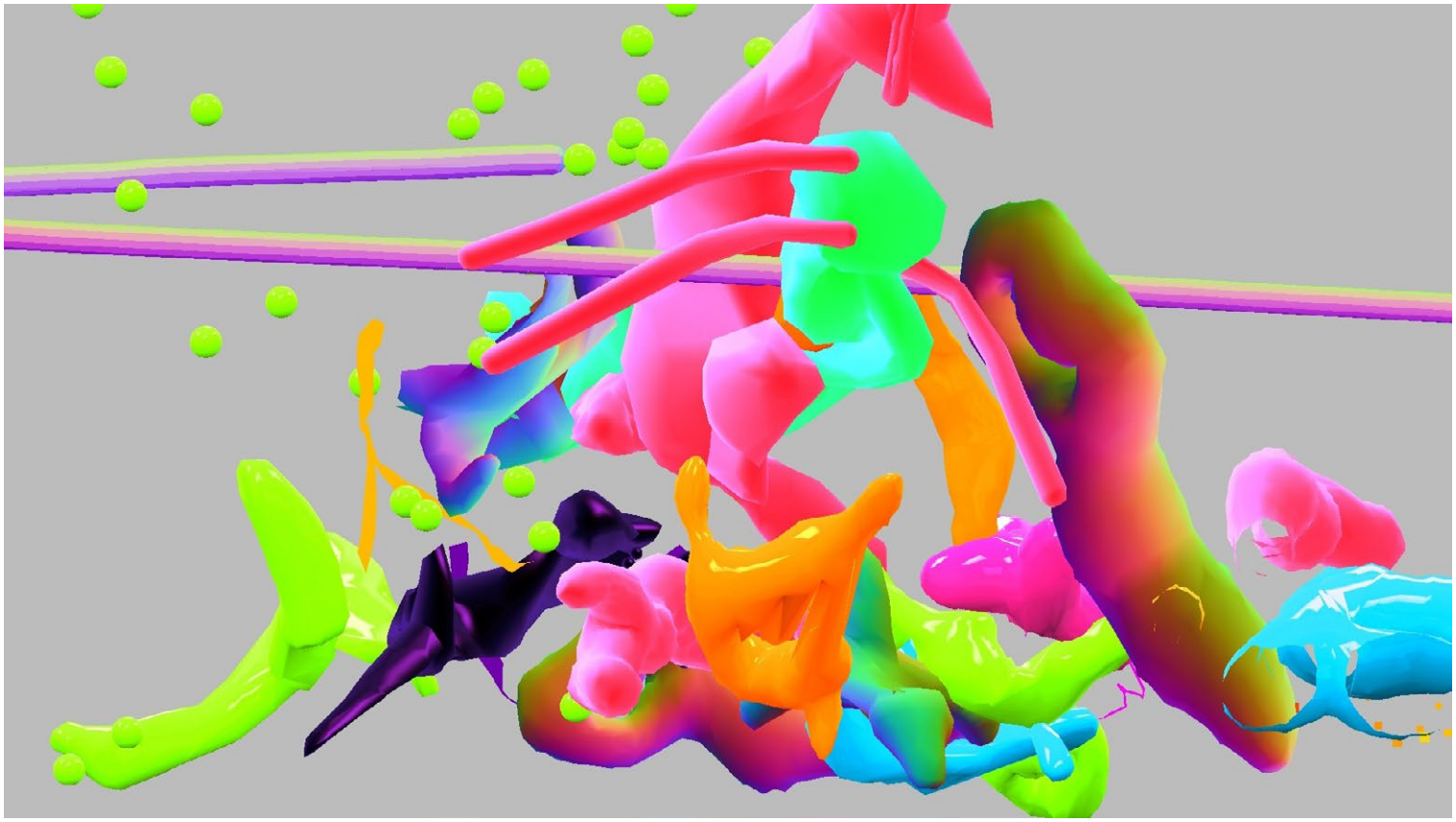
TT: This is the kind of uncanny relationship that I find fascinating too. I was exploring this kind of animated nonverbal communication that emerges in these situations in my piece. I was laying out this scenario, where these bio-mimetic robots and wild animals are set to co-inhabit a landscape of limited 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

Author: Yusuke Shono
Date: May 2017
Link: https://themassage.jp/en/interview-with-theo-triantafyllidis/

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 “Internet 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.

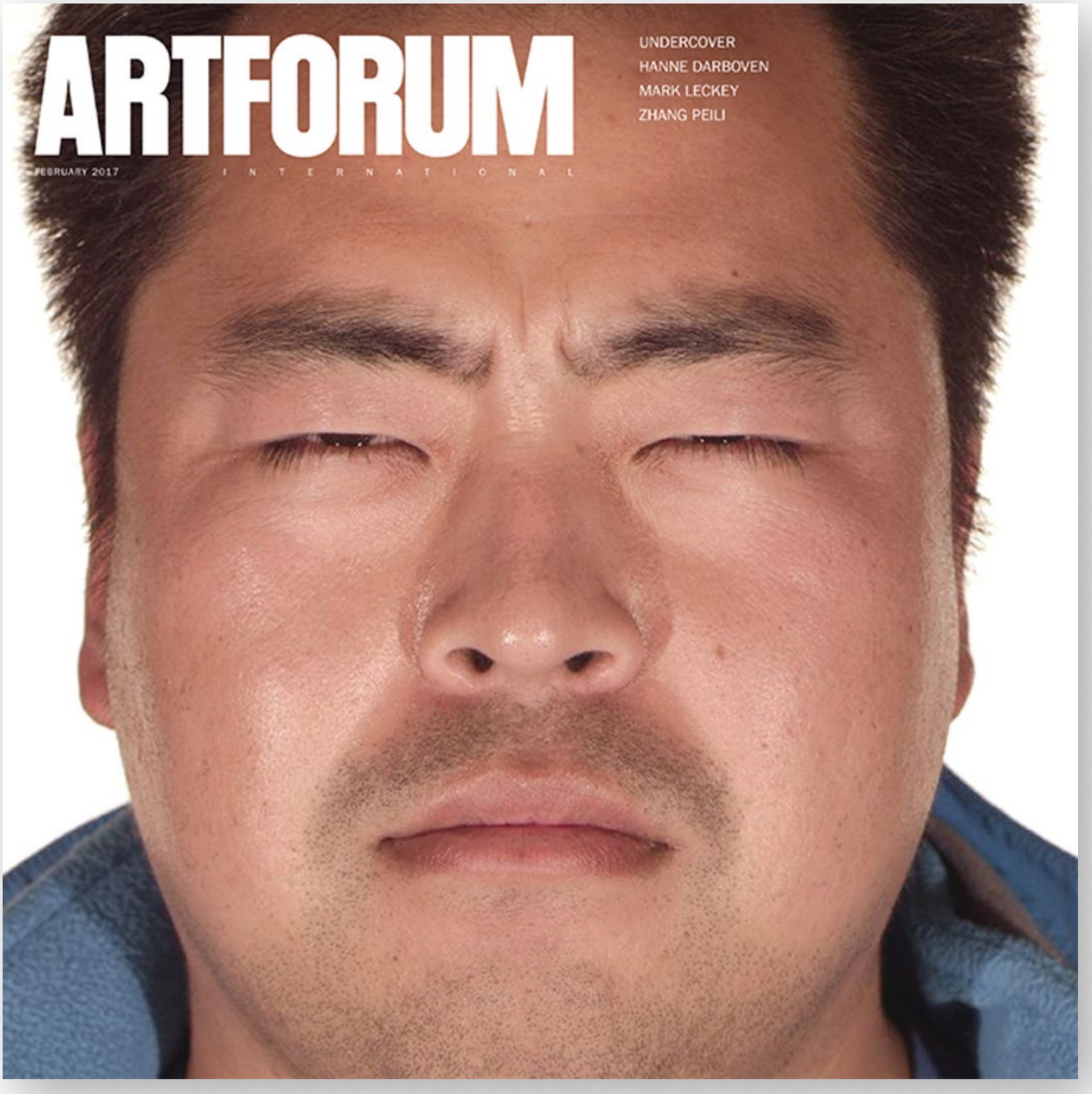
You made "Self Portrait (Interior)" for DiMoDa. Why did you want to use yourself as a part of an artwork?

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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INTERNATIONAL
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UNDERCOVER
HANNE DARBOVEN
MARK LECKEY
ZHANG PEILI

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.

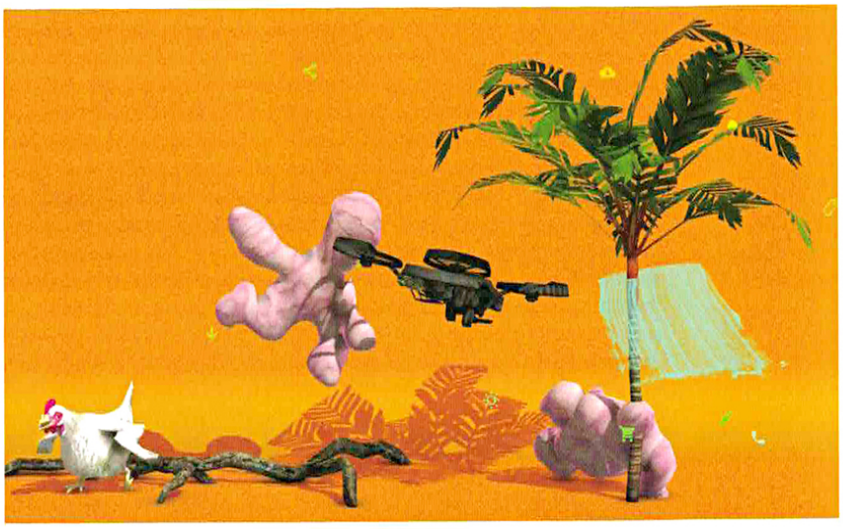
—Donald Kuspit

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 inter-dimensional, 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

Author: Beckett Mufson
Date: Feb 3 2016
Link: https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/3d5yyj/this-digital-sculpture-is-crawling-with-simulated-life-forms

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.