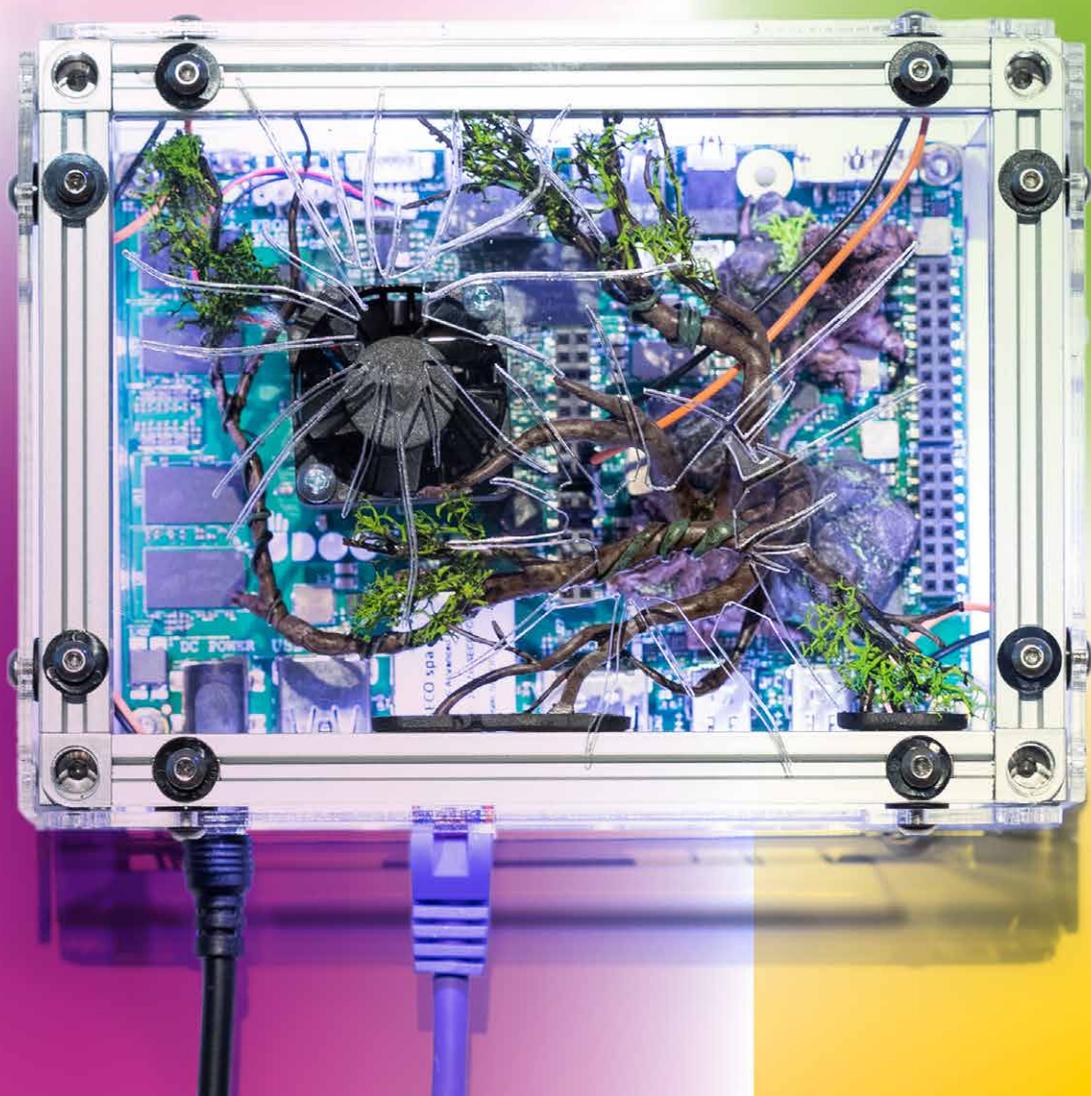


Control, Refusal, Trust and Care:

A toolkit for making change
in the cultural field



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Introduction

A toolkit for thinking, making, relating and doing in the digital age

About the toolkit

This is a toolkit for artists and institutions. It details methods and strategies for changing and altering the conditions of cultural work through an exploration of projects that demonstrate how playful interventions reveal algorithmic control, how techno-solutionism and greenwashing can be refused, how to implement feminist design principles that resist harmful biases, how trust is performed to reimagine governance, and how considerations of care and self-organisation can allow greater accessibility to the arts through new forms of assembly. In their own ways, each project strives towards a practice of care. They seek to harness the opportunities of the digital transformation of society for more ethical, equitable, sustainable and inclusive ways of working, which are more considerate of others, both human and more-than-human. The toolkit brings together perspectives from four organisations working with technology and art, and that work with an emerging set of critical values and responsibilities that are core to their operations. These values are a reflection of the work of cultural organisations working within Artsformation.

Artsformation is a Horizon Europe project that investigates how the arts provide resources for tackling social inequalities, social injustice, unequally distributed digital literacies, and threats to democracy and democratic processes as a consequence of the digital transformation.

The project has embraced a transdisciplinary approach to mobilise artistic knowledge and academic research to understand our entanglements with the digital transformation of society. Within Artsformation, which took place from 2020 to 2023, Waag Futurelab, FACT Liverpool, and transmediale focused on arts-based methods and productions tackling the digital transformation. This research was dedicated to the overall aim of promoting sustainability, fairness, and inclusivity via critical art, social practice arts, and digital culture. This work package explored the possibilities of thinking and acting beyond control, surveillance, and current modus operandi regarding institutions, AI, environment, and economics in relation to digital transformation. The three principal partners generated spaces for debates, interventions, experiences, and knowledge production via the arts, focusing on four themes: control, refusal, trust and care.

Inside this toolkit are a set of learnings and makeshift methods that bring together approaches that attempt new types of collaborations and inter-relational practices between institutions, artists, the public, and stakeholders.

These case studies emerged from the research, public programmes, and exhibitions of cultural organisations in the context of Artsformation. Operating across different geographical and social locations and times, the case studies here are not meant as a complete, tried and tested approach but instead represent an assembly of ideas, templates, considerations, examples and methodologies that attend to the themes of **control, refusal, trust and care**. They are meant as illustrations of close listening, careful engagement and critical reflection on the new types of responsibilities and perspectives that institutions can adopt and make central to ways of working with external collaborators. They are also some examples of how artists and collectives can instigate critical reflection and/or reworking of digital tools and infrastructures with different societal actors such as policymakers. They come in the form of interviews, articles, conversations, and reports.

Who is this toolkit meant for?

This toolkit is meant for:

Institutions and organisations that want to collaborate with artists ethically and carefully.

Artists/collectives who want to self-organise to navigate collectively through digital and social-financial infrastructures.

Policymakers, funders, institutions, and organisations who want to create more accessibility to funding for artists/collectives.

Institutions, organisations, and artists/collectives

- Who want to question the status quo and challenge the ethics and the social, cultural, economic and political contexts that determine it.
- Who want to experiment with governance structures within an institution, and how the development and use of technologies influence environmental conditions.

How to use this toolkit?

This toolkit has been designed to operate on two levels. The first focuses on developing programmes that offer cultural organisations ways to shape and undertake transformational projects with artists, curators, or other creative stakeholders, thereby transforming how they approach and deliver projects.

The second offers ways to think about structural and systemic change at an institutional and sectoral level. This level addresses how institutional behaviours, funding body behaviours, governmental behaviours, or policy behaviours can be changed as a result of the practices and methods developed through the work discussed in this toolkit.

The toolkit is structured around four inter-relations between different cultural and social actors. Case studies outline questions and approaches to working within them. Each case study has taken place in a certain context; therefore, it is recommended to first identify your matters of concern and inter-relations you want to engage with to select an appropriate case study. You can then read the study it with curiosity and recontextualise it to your practice as you see fit.

Overview of the chapters:

The case studies included in each chapter emerge from projects by the three lead organisations. They are structured around four interrelations and offer a distillation of the learnings and reflections from these projects to showcase methodologies.

Chapter 1: REFUSAL

For who: institutions | communities

A Strategy of Withdrawal from Facebook: Aligning and Moving in Solidarity with Communities

The article discusses how cultural organisations such as transmediale can demand better and more diverse platforms by refusing or withdrawing from networks that contradict their values. The decision to withdraw from Facebook and Instagram was based on concerns about the platforms' lack of transparency around company policy and user privacy issues. This decision demonstrates how institutions can align themselves with their values and community, strengthening demands for societal transformation. Overall, this article highlights the importance of cultural organisations taking a stand to promote positive societal change.

Chapter 2: CONTROL

For who: artists | collectives | policymakers

Questioning ethics of science and technology in art:

Trust me, I am an artist - A conversation between Nicola Triscott (FACT) and Lucas Evers (Waag Futurelab)

In this conversation, Nicola Triscott and Lucas Evers analyse the process of creating "Trust me I am an Artist", a project that aims to develop ethical frameworks for artists, cultural institutions, and audiences involved in creating and experiencing new art forms using biotechnology. They take the idea further, proposing possible follow-up projects with artists sharing ethical perspectives, this time about algorithms. Triscott and Evers also highlight the need to learn

from arts and trust artists' practices, processes, and voices to raise issues.

Entangled Data - Civic Infrastructures and their Impact

For who: artists | collectives | policymakers | communities

Annex is a collective of Irish artists, architects, and urban researchers who explore the material and cultural implications of large technical systems for the built environment. During transmediale 2022, new discourse around data centres and green energy emerged. The work successfully generated public awareness and provided knowledge that allowed for a new understanding of the issues that the construction of data centres represents economically, socially, and environmentally.

Chapter 3: METHODS

For who: artists | collectives | public

How to implement feminist design principles as a collective

An interview with Charlotte Webb from Feminist Internet

In an interview with Charlotte Webb from the Feminist Internet collective, she discusses her experience on how to work as a feminist collective. She explains the feminist design principles that have guided the creation of F'xa, a chatbot that helps people think about harmful biases in AI. Making the principles operational involves reflective practice throughout the design process. The collective's main stakeholders are young people who are interested in technology, and they often work with universities and public sector organisations to reach them. Feminist design principles have become increasingly important in today's tech-driven world. As a collective, the Feminist Internet is leading the way in incorporating these principles into their work.

“Fish discover water last” – becoming aware of machine-curated contents bubbles on social media. A conversation with Tomo Kihara

This article discusses the importance of artists and designers in providing critical perspectives on using social media and digital

technologies. Tomo's work, "TheirTok," commissioned for the Digital Shadows exhibition in Amsterdam by Waag Futurelab, explores the methods and audience experience of using social media. Tomo believes the role of artists is to play around with these technologies to create accidents safely while also addressing the question of how to balance privacy and data regulations with the need for creativity and innovation. Ultimately, projects incorporating both design and art aim to create positive change and develop nuanced critical perspectives.

Chapter 4: TRUST

For who: artists | collectives | institutions | publics

Towards a culture of trust

In 2021, FACT invited artist Jack Tan (UK) to join their Board of Trustees as artist-in-residence. By inviting an artist to participate in governance as an artist rather than in service of the organisation, FACT sought to open the board up to artistic processes and thinking while also being able to pay an artist for their time and work in what is ordinarily a voluntary context. Could an artistic practice, such as Tan's, offer new ways of performing governance, transforming this oversight role into a more creative and inclusive enactment of trust between staff, trustees, funders, artists and audiences? How might an artistic practice that approaches governance as a medium itself bring about a different understanding of these roles and responsibilities and how to perform them?

This project explores institutional responsibility and how individuals and organisations might bring about change to the environment they are in and in the very processes used to manage and govern them. How might performative learning as an artwork enable changes in other kinds of performative practices, such as governance?

Chapter 5: CARE

For who: artists | collectives

Cloudsquatting – The politics and practices of making and being your own server

Cloudsquatting's vision is to make self-hosting accessible to the general public and beginners while still being a useful resource to more advanced readers. The commissioned project included the collective development of a manual for setting up local servers, from picking hardware to setting up web and file servers, while also giving context to the political dimensions of such a practice. This article includes key fragments from the self-hosting manual such as the "Incomplete and Unordered List of Reasons to Refuse The Cloud" and an interview with the artist Lukas Engelhardt.

Assembly by, with and for artists in making funding opportunities more accessible. Learning from the residency in Lesbos. An interview with Aris Papadopoulos

Maitreyi Maheshwari (FACT) and Maro Pebo (Waag Futurelab) interviewed Aris Papadopoulos (LATRA) about the organisation and hosting of the ARTSFORMERS residencies in Lesbos-Greece. 28 arts professionals and activists gathered in the summer of 2022 to ideate and co-create unconventional training tools for peers, policymakers, businesses, and the public to tackle digital and social inequalities arising from the digital transformation. They aim to encourage others to adapt and utilise their learnings. This interview sheds light on the learnings from the residencies.

Speaker: Everly Wan

Dr. Wan discussed temporal governance and how it has always been part of algorithmic governance. Contemporary algorithmic biopower is asynchronous.

How time has been remediated through digital technologies into new forms of control?

Speaker: Andrius Arutunian

Arutunian presented his research-based project "The Irresistible Powers of Silent Talking", a critical look into the European border patrol surveillance programme. He argues that the programme is based on bad science and is built upon colonial and racial bias.

The data training sets and the logic behind the algorithm for the programme were both flawed.

To move towards explainable, fair and trustworthy AI, build intermediary steps between grassroots efforts and policy making.

What would community driven, equitable data collection look like?



Speaker: Caroline Sindors

Sindors discussed her project "Feminist Data set", a critical design and social justice art project responding to problems in technology and bias in machine learning.

Technology is not neutral because we have internal biases. We must, therefore, audit, update and maintain it.



Control



a guide to the Transform Summit

Digital technologies such as augmented or virtual reality can help build empathy.

Panelist: Rachel Higham

Transparency in organisations regarding their ethics, values, visions, and decision-making process is vital when establishing trust between people.

There must be protocols for whistleblowing, raising issues, and feedback in place.

Design thinking and methods (such as co-creation) can involve different stakeholders in the process of decision making.

Trust

Panelist: Jack Tan

Trust is fostered by opening up to differences and listening to the grievances of the underrepresented.

"Entropy of trust": Trust is in a constant change so we must keep building and performing trust to foster a fairer and more equal society.

Panelist: Jane Wentworth

Building trust requires accountability to people of the organisation, those they work with, and the public.

Panelist: Maitreyi Maheshwari

Organisations and institutions should be representative of the communities they are tending to.



Film: Forbidden City

In "Forbidden City", Ellen Pau, Joel Kwong, and Glacier Kwong reflected on their experiences of the Hong Kong protests. They examined tactics of surveillance deployed by the government such as online censorship and smart lamp poles with facial recognition cameras, and how protestors and citizens circumvented censorship such as using safer social platforms to organise themselves.

Forbidden City discusses coded language as a way to fight against online censorship and of-line detection, destroying smart lamp poles with facial recognition.

Citizens crowdsourced information about "yellow shops" that support the movement.

Refusal

Film: Distance from Stone

"Distance from Stone" is about the history of heritage, stone and the city. Dublin in 2018 is a living museum and one whose obedient citizens have little control over. Taking pebbledash as a symbolic worship of stone and aspiration entirely unique to Ireland, the film negotiates in what way the city has made citizens docile and compliant.

How has the city has made citizens obedient?

Privatisation of resources and of history further distances citizens.

Care

We must also care for the non-human other. We can create a technological-totem around which people can engender social imagination.

Panelist: Taeyoon Choi

We need different ways of talking about social practice and activist work. Some describe themselves as "stewards", people who take care and support each other

Panelist: Aris Papadopoulos

Papadopoulos talked about ways to empower vulnerable groups by producing zines, small scale personalised publications. Zine workshops serve as safe havens where opinions can be freely exchanged and as a sanctuary free from systemic violence.

In their zines, refugee communities questioned European values such as democracy, freedom and respect for human dignity amidst the pandemic and adverse human rights protection policies

All the Care Panelists

How do we progress from care to healing? Care can imply preserving an unhealthy condition. Healing entails a discontinuation of this unhealthy state. Art practices are fundamental in doing these transitions.

A vulnerable technology depends on relationships and requires care.

Panelists: Oriana Persico & Salvatore Iaconesi

Data should be used as a means for self-expression, a sort of autobiography by both humans and non-humans alike.

"Nuovo Abitare": generative models rather than extractive models.



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Background and context:

The four themes of control, refusal, trust and care emerged from Transformer Summit in 2021 - an international series of online conversations, interventions and in-person workshops that examined how art can explore the social, cultural, economic, and political benefits of digital transformation. Between 23-26 September 2021, the Transformer Summit explored how we can use art and technology to investigate control and surveillance, refuse previous systems of power, build trust and act with care and accountability, develop intersectional, inclusive, and ethical practices of Artificial Intelligence (AI), and imagine a more inclusive and equitable future with digital technology. It consisted of Transformer Sessions -online panels with interventions, and workshops and discussions at Waag Futurelab.

Most of the case studies detailed by Waag connect to the exhibition *Digital Shadows*, which was presented at the Central Public Library of Amsterdam (OBA) from December 2022 to February 2023. Curated by Zoénie Liwen Deng and Maro Pebo, the exhibition constructed a narrative that guided the audience from the apparently harmless and ludic spaces of social media into ever more critical and complex issues relating to gender, race, and power relations in the use and understanding of technologies. “Digital shadows” mean not only the traces that we leave behind, but also the algorithms and physical infrastructures that are hidden in shadows. This exhibition challenged us to question what materials, interfaces, assumptions, exploitative systems, and waste we encounter in the digital realm. It brought together various international artists, offering critical, playful, feminist, futuristic, and anti-commercial perspectives on the digital world.

The first case study of transmediale comes from their institutional practice regarding using digital technology - in this instance, social media. The second case focuses on an artwork at the exhibition in 2022. The exhibition built on the festival's theme of refusal, moving away from refusal as a generative space towards a pragmatic confrontation with its impossibilities. Conjuring artifice and dark humour in the face of extraction, financial fantasies, and the illusions of techno-solutionism, *abandon all hope ye who enter here* explored the limits of refusal in a computationally ordered and altered world. Bringing together nine artists and collectives, the works in the exhibition materialised the strange realities and cruel attachments that are often obscured beneath the veneers of shiny, seductive interfaces and inside algorithmic black boxes.

transmediale 2021–22

for refusal

Abandon
All Hope Ye Who
Enter Here

Exhibition

26 Jan–18 Feb 2022





我是在這裡，碧街十八號上出生的
I was born here at 18 Pitt street

FACT's work began with its series of 'Framework for...' programmes which began in 2021 with *Framework for Resilience*. The series focused on the topics urgent to FACT's current and future research and offered a space to examine institutional practice with artists, curators, critical thinkers, activists and other stakeholders that work with FACT. The second in this series, *Framework for Trust*, emerged from new processes of working with artists and participants that developed during 2020 and 2021, necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Central to this programme was an online discussion led by Jack Tan with the chair of FACT's Board on *Performing Trust*.

Tan's artist residency on FACT's Board of Trustees took place over the span of 18 months, largely online from May 2021 through September 2022. It overlapped with other projects, such as the exhibition *Future Ages Will Wonder*. This exhibition presented an "alternative museum" of artworks that use science and technology to question our past and offer new ways of understanding who we are and where we belong.



Having said this, the snake disappeared into the lake.

We hope that our experiences can illuminate and serve as a reference for future practices that centre care as value in enabling artists in particular to participate in discourse production and action around digital transformation and the inequalities it may aggravate.

Chapter 1

Refusal

A strategy of
withdrawal
from Facebook:
aligning and
moving in
solidarity with
communities

A strategy of withdrawal from Facebook: aligning and moving in solidarity with communities

Introduction

This is a reflection of transmediale's withdrawal from Facebook and Instagram in 2018. The article discusses how cultural organisations such as transmediale can demand better and more diverse platforms by refusing or withdrawing from networks that contradict their values. The decision to withdraw was based on concerns about the platforms' lack of transparency around company policy and user privacy issues. This decision demonstrates how institutions can align themselves with their values and community, strengthening demands for societal transformation. The article includes the withdrawal process that other organisations and cultural initiatives can refer to.

Overview & motivation

As a festival whose focus explores how technologies and their infrastructure can be designed and built along ethical values for user empowerment and privacy, transmediale is in a continuous process of reflecting and reviewing the computational infrastructures it uses and is embedded within. The festival's aim is to use technologies that reflect a commitment to our core values of sustainability, transparency and privacy. In developing the festival's communication strategy, and reflecting on the sociopolitical issues emerging from their use, transmediale decided to implement infrastructural reforms in its approach to audience communication.

In October 2018, transmediale ceased its active use of its Facebook and Instagram pages. Throughout that year, Facebook (now Meta)

had found itself at the centre of a wide range of issues ranging from data privacy to Russian election interference to fake news.

The decision leading up to this infrastructural reform was taken based on a series of interconnected events that publicly demonstrated the platform's lack of transparency around company policy and oversight of user privacy issues. For example, on March 16, 2018 Facebook made an announcement that it was suspending an obscure political consultancy, Strategic Communication Laboratories, and its data analytics firm, Cambridge Analytica, from its platform. The reason for the sudden announcement became apparent the following day when both The New York Times and the Guardian published two reports outlining the largest leak in Facebook history, and how Cambridge Analytica used data improperly obtained from Facebook to build voter profiles, influence the 2016 US elections, and violate American election law. The news put Cambridge Analytica under investigation and thrust Facebook into one of its biggest crises. The resulting investigation into Cambridge Analytica and the Facebook leak demonstrated how user data was instrumental in swinging election results across the US, EU and UK, thus undermining ideas of democracy and social justice. Facebook's lack of transparency over the leak, resulted in the CEO Mark Zuckerberg apologising calling it an "issue", a "mistake", and a "breach of trust". Apologising on CNN, he explained that he was responding to the Facebook community's concerns and that the company's initial focus on data portability had shifted to locking down data; he also reminded the platform's users of their right of access to personal data. Other Facebook officials argued against calling it a "data breach," arguing those who took the personality quiz originally consented to give away their information, and the company pledged to make changes and reforms in Facebook policy to prevent similar breaches.

This leak was one of many issues that demonstrated how Facebook's technological architecture and business model lacked a clear set of ethical values that supported user privacy. As a platform, Facebook

had become one of the the main and most effective communications and feedback platforms for organisations as well as a pervasive and centralised source of information for a high number of users. However as the values and ethical policy of the company became increasingly under scrutiny, it became clear that the use of “free” services provided by Facebook was increasingly paradoxical - especially by a cultural organisation such as transmediale.

Thus, the withdrawal of transmediale from Facebook and Instagram demonstrated how cultural organisations can be part of the demand for better and more diverse platforms. Actions and gestures such as refusal or withdrawal from platforms or networks with contradictory values show how institutions can go from being a subject of critique to a site for organising and action. It also demonstrates how institutions can share and act upon their key values, aligning themselves with a community, and strengthening community demands for societal transformation.

Challenges and approach

“Free” social media platforms have become one of the main and most effective communication platforms for cultural organisations to raise awareness about their cultural activities as well as a place for their audience to interact and exchange directly with the institution. These platforms provide a wide variety of tools for audience outreach and community development. As a software company Facebook/Meta retains a large monopoly for personal social networking service, which also includes a messaging, gaming and photo sharing platform and business services that allow it to track user data across a wide variety of websites, platforms and devices.

By 2018, Facebook had become the main and most effective communications and feedback platform for organisations as well as a pervasive and centralised source of information for a high number of users. Especially for non-profit projects and cultural initiatives like transmediale, the use of “free” services provided by Facebook paradoxically seemed inevitable, for several reasons:

- Alternatives to these services seemed either less effective, with a reduced outreach or less advanced tools, or much more expensive.
- Many audiences expect to find content about cultural events on Facebook and Instagram, which may be considered as the main source of cultural information for some people. Leaving these platforms would thus carry the risk of excluding certain types of audiences and presumably the younger generations.
- For cultural institutions receiving public or private funding, visibility on these social media platforms is often expected and even required by funders, partners and sponsors.

Yet these seemingly insurmountable barriers to leaving the networks can be easily challenged by several factors:

- The most efficient services for online communication provided by the platforms are no longer free, as they may have been in the early days of Facebook. This trend already existed in 2018, but it has grown stronger until today. In fact, to take proper advantage of Facebook and Instagram, considerable expenses are necessary, which can be effectively invested in more ethical communication measures.
- The complexity and lack of transparency of the algorithm makes it very difficult to effectively predict the impact of any communication measure on Facebook or Instagram, unless an institution decides to spend large amounts of money on advertising. But even in that case, the lack of transparency is highly problematic from an ethical point of view.
- Finally there is an obvious ethical problem related to the protection of user data and the active financial support to these capitalist companies. Beyond the moral implications, this can also have a major impact on the loyalty and trust of certain audiences.

In the light of these considerations and developments, how can a withdrawal of these social networks be done?

Process

If an institution's communication strategy relies heavily on these social media platforms, leaving them may be challenging. Here we try to give some advice, based on the experience of transmediale.

Step 1: Assess the impact of leaving the social media platforms to prepare and if necessary sequence the exit strategy.

A sudden withdrawal has a greater symbolic impact, but may not be possible for all institutions. transmediale follows a particular timeline, with a period of intense activity around the festival, and quieter work and communication phases for the rest of the year. It was therefore easy to prepare the departure and to plan it at an appropriate time. For organisations using Facebook all year round, it might be more complicated to leave abruptly and a more gradual withdrawal might be a better alternative, especially to ensure not to lose the audience.

Step 2: Prepare and implement alternative solutions

Without any full alternative, transmediale responded by intensifying our communication on other fronts, including updating its newsletter structure, exploring the possibilities of direct messaging and re-focusing on its website. The festival concentrated its communication efforts in its newsletter, Twitter account and website. The festival also established a channel and a community group on the messaging platform Telegram, which allows space for the festival audience to interact and engage directly with the festival team. To organise a digital withdrawal from the platform, the festival undertook a review of its then communication strategy, including a review of its email database, newsletters and website.

- Email Database Review: In order for the establishment of a community and press newsletter, the email database of the festival underwent a substantial rehaul. The database was not only reviewed for inactive or duplicate subscribers but was also raised to the new privacy standards of GDPR.

- Festival website: The festival's website acts as a central repository for information on the festival's programme activities. Year round, the festival also hosts the archive of previous festivals as well as an open-access journal. In order to encourage user engagement with the contents and to increase the visibility of the festival's two newsletters, we created a news section on the festival website. This enabled an increased awareness of the festival's new approach to communication and also allowed non-subscribers to review newsletter content from the main festival website.

- Community development: The festival conducted a review of other social media and messaging platforms including Telegram, Twitter, signal, and later on Mastodon. After this review, which examined each of the platforms from the perspective of privacy, user functionality and community building capacities, the festival decided to continue its presence on Twitter, and opened up a new Telegram group that could facilitate group conversations between its audience and direct communications between the festival and its audience. In addition the festival decided to continue to occupy both the Facebook and Instagram accounts of the festival to ensure that the account user-names remain connected to the festival. No new content was added, but the further communication platforms were linked to the inactive accounts. Later on, shortly before the festival 2023 and in light of the acquisition of Twitter Inc. by Elon Musk, transmediale started another review of social media platforms and opened up an account with the free and open-source software Mastodon.

Step 3: Communicate

An important step in the process, both in terms of communication strategy and advocacy, is to communicate clearly about the decision to leave social media platforms. This means informing the public, but also partners and funders, about the motivation behind the process, and of course by describing the alternatives that are being implemented to communicate about the organisation's activities. In 2018, transmediale published a statement on its website: "Outro", which was relayed on the festival's Facebook and Instagram accounts.

Those were not deactivated, but keep relaying this message of refusal. transmediale was still committed to using its platform to highlight how institutions can introduce new ways of engaging with its audience, and consequently, reducing the festival's entanglement with Facebook's technologies.

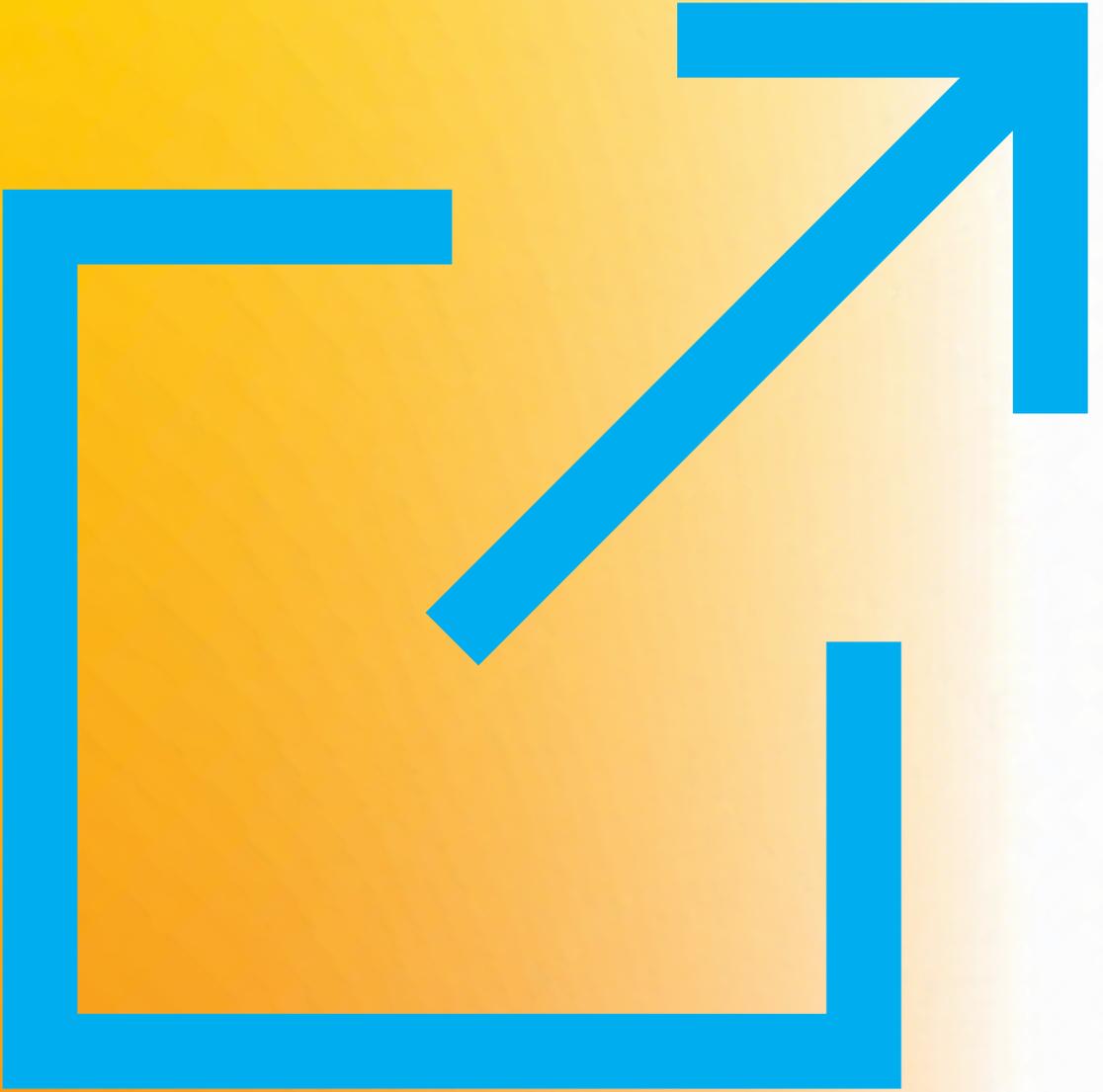
Conclusion

The process of leaving Facebook and Instagram was a success for transmediale and did not translate into a noticeable decrease in the visibility of the festival's contents and events. This change evoked discussions on how to resist the growing dependence on the services of platform capitalism as well as foster the development of alternative forms of communication.

However, this process is limited in reducing the company's capacity to track and surveil its users. transmediale still indirectly relies on its audience's activity on Facebook and Instagram: the festival's content keeps being relayed on the platforms by participants, visitors and partners.

Another limitation to the potential generalisation of this case study is the fact that the community of transmediale is very receptive to this kind of activism and keen to test and use alternative communication methods. This may not be the case for all institutions and target groups.

The festival's communication strategy and adoption of technologies is internally in continuous reflection and development. As the conditions of using technology and user privacy are continually changing, the festival has adopted a strategy whereby it regularly undergoes a review of the technologies it uses internally and externally. The recent example of the Twitter debate is a very good example of the need for regular inspection of basic communication practices that are considered as standard and therefore generally accepted, despite the ethical concerns they may raise. At the time of writing this case study, transmediale is exploring various options but has not yet found a suitable alternative to Twitter.



Chapter 2

Control

Questioning ethics of science and technology in art: *Trust me, I'm an Artist*

A conversation between Nicola Triscott
(CEO FACT Liverpool) and Lucas Evers
(Head of programme MAKE at Waag Futurelab)

Introduction

*Trust me, I'm an Artist*¹ (2014-2017) was a project that aimed to develop ethical frameworks for artists, cultural institutions, and audiences involved in creating and experiencing new art forms using biotechnology and biomedicine in Europe. At each event, an internationally known artist proposed an artwork to a specially formed ethics committee (following the rules and procedures typical for the host country). The ethics committee then debated the proposal, and came to a decision. The artist was then informed of the ethics committee's decision and, alongside the audience, entered into a discussion about the result. The proposals were selected as they raise interesting questions for science ethics committees and help reveal the mechanisms that drive this usually hidden process; this enables the wider public to understand the driving forces behind ethical decisions and the role of artists working in scientific settings more deeply. The project involved practical and discussion-based workshops, a series of performative events, a symposium, and a touring exhibition. *Trust me, I'm an Artist* also served to scrutinise the ethics of bioart and bioethics, life sciences research, and other societal issues. In this conversation, Nicola Triscott and Lucas Evers analyse the process of creating this project as well as possible follow-up activities that could further artistic questioning of ethics of science and technology. Triscott and Evers also highlight the need to learn from arts and trust artists' practices, processes, and voices to raise issues before they become out of control. [For more information and an archive of this project, see:](#)



Lucas Evers: Why do we need the arts for making digital transformation equitably land in our society? I thought that the format of *Trust Me, I'm an Artist* is interesting to discuss because it often resulted in an institutional critique. How do you work with ethics in such a context? It is, of course, oriented toward bioart, bioethics, and life sciences research. It was a successful programme in addressing these issues, but the format can be used for other sorts of arts and other sorts of societal issues, for example, artists working with digital technologies. Why was it meaningful to collaborate in the *Trust me, I'm an Artist* and where do you see the possibilities of using such a format in the future? Also, in other contexts of what you do at FACT, or in the arts?

Nicola Triscott: Answering this question will take some unpacking as I felt there were problems with the format. It worked well as a public event, but finding artists who were prepared for their work to be scrutinised ethically in that way, and also for their work to be scrutinised without them being in the room, was difficult. It took a lot of confidence from the artists who participated in that format - Anna Dumitriu, Adam Zaretsky, and Neal White. When we used the format with Larry Achiampong and David Blandy, I invited them to stay in the room, which I thought worked really well. It was a really fun and rich dialogue. So, to turn it around, I would ask why you think it might be a useful framework. *Trust me, I'm an Artist* was about bioethics, and the issues stemming from particular artists' projects from an ethical standpoint, including an institutional ethics standpoint. Many other factors also contributed to these projects like ethical issues on what the scientists had been doing in the first place versus what the artist wanted to do.

1. The project *Trust Me I'm an Artist: Towards an Ethics of Art/Science Collaboration* was led by artist Anna Dumitriu in collaboration with Professor Bobbie Farsides (Chair of Ethics, Brighton and Sussex Medical School) in collaboration with Waag Futurelab, Leiden University, BioSolar Cells, Medical Museion, Leonardo OLATS, Arts Catalyst, Trinity College Dublin and Kersnikova-Kapelica Gallery.

Lucas Evers: The art practice cares about ethics not by caring for it in the artwork, but by using the art practice to examine the ethics, or the moral complexities, or the meaning of what a social issue represents in society.

Nicola Triscott: I see what you mean. For example, Andrius Arutiunian's work *The Irresistible Powers of Silent Talking*² (2021), that he worked on and showed at FACT, scrutinises and exposes the flawed thinking behind the use of AI in border control.

Lucas Evers: It's interesting because ethics was not something that Waag was working with until we did *Trust Me, I'm an Artist*. After *Trust Me, I'm an Artist*, it quickly became very clear that ethics is also something that is part of digital technologies in society - with the advancements of machine learning and the whole hysteria around AI. At Waag, we are looking at digital technologies in society. I talk about it often with Marleen Stikker, my director, and with people in our network that are in computer science. I often ask if they would want a programme called "Trust Me, I'm an Algorithm" and they are often very enthusiastic about the idea because it clearly inspires them to have these types of sessions where you will look at the ethical difficulties.

What is interesting about an artwork in such a contested context is that the artwork seldom comes with pre-assumptions. The artwork is more often putting pre-assumptions from different perspectives in the middle and then saying, "okay, you do what you want". And that is interesting about the artwork, because it leaves this ambiguity in the middle and allows it to take up space. Therefore, I understand why you had a problem convincing artists to leave the room, and

2. Andrius Arutiunian's artwork, *The Irresistible Powers of Silent Talking*, explores the iBorderCtrl software. The software claimed to be an automated deception recognition algorithm, scanning the facial micro-expressions of migrants entering the EU. However, the system was based on flawed and biased research. In the installation, the iBorderCtrl police avatar is depicted as voiceless, mimicking the original system. The avatar's face is scanned for expressions of deceit or truth, using the same principles as iBorderCtrl, with the resulting deviations audibly represented.

“Artists are good at questioning and problematising technologies that are otherwise taken for granted.”

why, in the case of Larry Achiampong and David Blandy, who investigated DNA profiling, direct-to-consumer DNA surfaces, genetic determinism and race with *Dreamed Native Ancestry (DNA)*³, it was interesting to keep the artists in the room. However, it is good for them to be in the room but refrain from commenting, while people who are doing something with the moral issues around those technologies will make their comments.

Nicola Triscott: It was less that I had a problem convincing those particular artists to leave the room, but more that I didn't want them to leave the room. It was my problem. I wanted them to stay in the room exactly because of the reasons you noted. I think artists are good at questioning and problematising technologies that are otherwise taken for granted. Perhaps I've been thinking about *Trust me, I'm an Artist* a bit too literally - as the format of the event. In actuality, the most interesting thing was the openness of scrutinising technology through artistic practice. For me, the format was just one way of doing it. But there are many other ways of scrutinising ethics. It would have been good, when we showed Andrius Artunian's work, to have organised some kind of public event: a conference or

3. *Dreamed Native Ancestry (DNA)* by artist-led group Mission//Misplaced Memory, commissioned by Arts Catalyst, was an installation and programme critically addressing and re-thinking contemporary issues around race, migration, biopolitics and culture, through an Afrofuturist science fiction narrative and deep history perspective.

something like that. I really wanted to do that, but it didn't happen because of the uncertainties and workload during the pandemic.

The questions that Arutiunian was interested in related very much to research and programming that I had been doing at Arts Catalyst during *Dreamed Native Ancestry* around biometrics - how we measure and delineate people in terms of biology, in ways that are abstracted and removed from the social and human context. In *Dreamed Native Ancestry* (and indeed then with Achiampong and Blandy's *Genetic Automata*), we were interested in DNA testing, but it became clear that there were many other types of biometrics, from fingerprints to RSS, to what Arutiunian was looking at - whether you can detect whether someone is lying or not through micro-expressions. It seemed ludicrous that micro-expressions would be analysed, in isolation from the context and the person and the politics, in order to decide whether or not someone can cross a border. The project's questions deserved more scrutiny than we had

“I think artists can be very good at questioning and opening up the issues about ethics of science and technologies, but that isn't always represented in their artworks. Therefore, the public programme is central to unpack some of these layers of meaning, and bring in different people to consider the issues that the artwork raises with the artist.”

the opportunity to do at that time. I think artists can be very good at questioning and opening up these issues, but then that doesn't always get represented in their artwork. The public programme then is central to being able to unpack some of those layers of meaning, and bring in different people to consider the issues that the artwork raises with the artist. It is therefore critical for the artist to be in the room.

Lucas Evers: That was interesting, and not always to the liking of everyone. Anna Dumitriu wanted to follow the protocol as if it were a performance. I also liked that, because it brought the whole procedure that is required before you take certain decisions about new technologies to the forefront. For Adam Zaretsky's *Mutate or Die*⁴ performance in relation to William Burroughs' work, he filled out the ethics form required in the Netherlands to understand whether your research proposal has any ethical complexities or issues. The form can then be used as a starting point for a conversation with an ethics panel. I learned a lot from that. Yet, I also saw how you wanted even more richness and depth for each of the artists there. The artist knows so much that doesn't fit the boxes, like what happened with Neal White. He came back saying "I have been consulting a real ethics panel a long time ago before this project, and they were not allowed to give me any advice because they are not allowed to advise artists at all". At the same time, more and more ethics panels are being organised around digital technologies, at least in the Netherlands. And it was not the case at the time when we started *Trust me, I'm an Artist*. So people start to understand that that is needed there. I still would be interested in starting a series around "Trust me, I'm an Algorithm."

4. Adam Zaretsky and Tony Allard collaborated on the project "Mutate or Die" which tackled the illusion of objective control in the life sciences and the privatisation of genetic research and patenting of life forms. They conducted a speculative artistic experiment using the genetic material of writer William S. Burroughs. The experiment involved creating a transgenic mutation by combining Burroughs' gut flora, script, and gene text with another organism's genetic script. This process was facilitated through a portable lab built in a gallery space. After the gene gun blast initiated the mutations, the audience was invited to participate as readers and interpreters of the stories embedded within Burroughs' gut.

Nicola Triscott: I agree with the idea of “Trust me, I’m an Algorithm,” but the scrutiny of ethics needs to be done with care. Some artists push the boundaries of ethics to make a point, like Adam Zaretsky, but others simply follow their interests and, in doing so, uncover and expose ethical issues. The former should not be made to feel as though they are on trial, while the latter should be questioned to understand if they are raising ethical issues intentionally. I feel that public events should be examining and putting the technology that is explored by the art into context, rather than placing the focus primarily on the artists’ ethics.

Lucas Evers: It’s important for researchers to consult an ethics panel before conducting experimental research. Artists often react to existing technologies used in research and criticise them. We need to evaluate the concepts of control, refusal, trust, and care in designing “Trust Me, I’m an Algorithm”, and consider designing a new format for it to sharpen our minds on the technologies we need or don’t need in society.

5 Artist Neal White gave a fascinating, provocative presentation about his project: *The Void*, in which he recreated Yves Klein’s “blue urine” experiment. In May 1959, at the opening of Yves Klein’s exhibition *Le Vide* (The Void) in Paris, Klein served a special blue cocktail, containing Methylene blue. As Klein intended, the cocktails caused the urine of drinkers to turn blue for about a week. Since this event took place in 1959, Methylene blue as a stain has been established as toxic. However, it is also a component in several medications, is used to reduce symptoms of cystitis, and in other forms for treating methemoglobinemia.

In 2004, White proposed a research experiment whilst artist in residence at the National Institute for Medical Research (NIMR). He proposed to re-stage Klein’s event as an experiment to establish what were the safest, or least toxic, dosage of Methylene blue in an alcoholic cocktail required to turn urine blue. Visitors would be faced with a choice: either to consume an artwork that contained the ingredients of Methylene blue, with only the clinical information provided, or to keep the artwork they were given (the pill and information) as an intact form, signed by the artist.

The artist intended the experiment to be both a cultural experiment which utilised a clinical trial under closely monitored conditions, and a challenge to the limits of artistic practice in its engagement with science, and specifically in its engagement with the politics of consent and belief, and the institutions themselves (White’s practice incorporates a strong current of institutional critique).

[See Nicola Triscott, *Let’s experiment with ourselves:*](#)



Nicola Triscott: The other reasons for having artists in the room throughout the event is that they can bring a lot of expert knowledge into the room and therefore should contribute to the conversation, or they are on a learning journey themselves and, therefore, need to hear the discussion.

Lucas Evers: Or, like Adam Zaretsky, these artists have trained themselves to point out all the holes in the boat - that should be part of the ethics panel.

Nicola Triscott: With Larry Achiampong and David Blandy's panel about Ancestry DNA testing, we included another artist - Trevor Mattison - on the ethics panel and he made terrific contributions just by pointing to the elephant in the room.

Lucas Evers: In the panel with Neal White⁵, one of the ethics panel members was positioned as a devil's advocate, telling White that, as an artist, he's not even able to fill in the forms. So why should an ethics panel talk to an artist at all? I think that if an artist wants to do things with biomedical dangers, ethics panels should refrain from saying anything.

Nicola Triscott: I remember that the artists were questioned whether they should be there at all. And the validity of the ethics panel being convened in the first place. That constituted almost half the conversation. Did the artists have any right to be in the room in the first place? In my opinion, they did.

Lucas Evers: There was a strong schism in the ethics panel. Someone who didn't know that the panel member had been intentionally placed in the devil's advocate role became angry, saying that they were just bureaucratic instruments for ticking boxes. Neal then shared that he had asked for advice from a real ethics panel, but they had said they were not allowed to advise artists because it could potentially harm their funding. This revealed the power structure



behind these ethics panels and their workings, which is not just about the significance of the artwork but also the truth behind the panels.

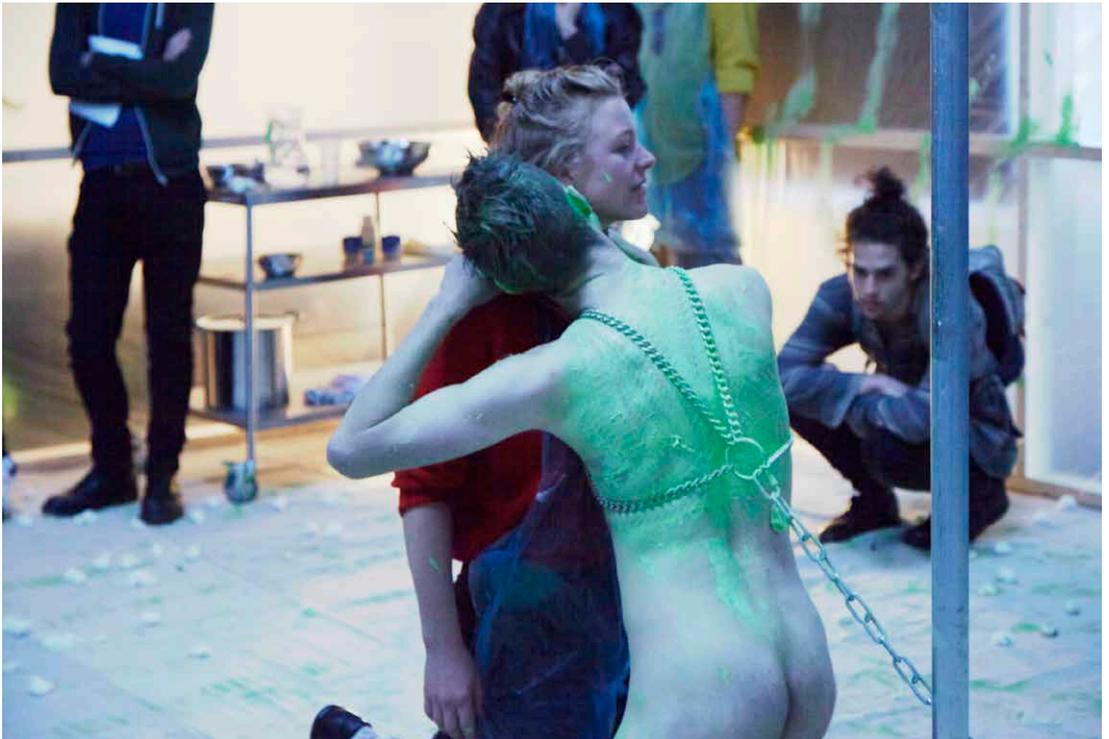
Moving on to the issue of self-experimentation, can you think about the ethical issues at play with Martin O'Brien's work and ethics panel?

Nicola Triscott: The ethical issues are at play in Martin O'Brien's work related to bioethics but were perhaps focused more around the ethics of live art. With O'Brien's piece, "Taste of Flesh/Bite Me I'm Yours"⁶, the biting and infliction of pain and issues of permission were what we discussed in the ethics panel. These issues were so central to the work - particularly around whether people in the performance had been genuinely free to give their permission to be bitten or whether they felt coerced through peer pressure because of the norms of how people participate within a live art installation. This is a bit removed from some of the other issues we discussed at other events around bioethics.

Lucas Evers: The elements that Martin O'Brien brought up through his performance, which included touching, biting, and the possible fear of infection, are still very relevant in terms of the post-pandemic. We have been experiencing a lot of technology and systems of control where we could be brought into fearing the disease, fearing vaccination, etc. So I think that is part of the known bioethics element.

⁶ Martin O'Brien, a performer living with cystic fibrosis, showcased a durational live art piece centered around the fear of contamination and public anxiety over infection risks. The performance, held at London's White Building, resembled an emergency medical tent or quarantine center. Chained to a pole wearing a straitjacket and a mask, O'Brien crawled on his hands and knees to dip his head in green paint, creating a spiral around the enclosure. As the chain lengthened, the spiral grew, bringing the artist closer to the audience and prompting them to retreat to avoid being painted. Throughout the performance, O'Brien explored interactions and power dynamics with the audience, emphasizing the concept of contagion. His actions involved coughing up mucus, blowing bubbles with it in people's faces, piercing his lips to draw blood, and engaging in consensual biting exchanges with the audience. *Flesh-Eaters: Notes Towards a Zombie Methodology*.





Taste of Flesh, Bite Me I'm Yours by Martin O'Brien, 2015.
As part of *Trust Me, I'm an Artist*.
© Arts Catalyst

Still, if you relate that to other sorts of technologies and artists working with them, what could be the other moral complexities that could be examined by this type of performance?

Nicola Triscott: “Taste of Flesh/Bite Me I’m Yours” was quite prescient of our reactions during the Covid pandemic in terms of people’s fear of others’ coughing, their bodily secretions, and therefore being in the same space as the artist while he was coughing up mucus. Artists are also good at being sensors for the future. They can raise issues before we even realise they are issues because their artworks don’t have to be specific or didactic. Artists’ work is relevant to considering where technology is going because it’s hard to think through all the potential implications of a new technology while it’s being developed. Historically, all sorts of things have been tried to upstream ethical decision-making around technologies. Artists are dealing with much vaguer speculations and dreams, and they don’t always have to be logical or realistic. It’s almost overlapping with speculative design. In that way, artists can be the canaries in the coal mine. They can suggest things before they become a disaster. If one went back through the archives of FACT or transmediale, one would find artworks that are prescient of things happening today that probably weren’t even thought of as problems at the time.

In my blog writing, I often reference artworks that I commissioned in the past. We didn’t understand their significance at the time, and even the artists didn’t understand what their significance might be. They just had a sense that they had to look into this and make this artwork which might become relevant later.

Lucas Evers: We need to learn so much more from the arts than we do. How can we do so and does that hold a danger?

Nicola Triscott: Since we’re talking about a project called *Trust Me, I’m an Artist*, it’s worth mentioning that one thing I’ve been championing at FACT is trusting the artist’s practice, process and voice. We recently brought artist Jack Tan into FACT’s Board of

Trustees as an artist-in-residence. Usually if you bring an artist into the sphere of governance, they are a trustee and they have to perform a different role to that of an artist, but I'm interested in how we can bring artists into these different spaces as artists - able to bring their full practice and authentic selves into whatever realm they're invited to look at, whether that's governance, finance, or contracts. By doing so, they can look at things in a different way from how we would typically approach them. The Artists Placement Group in the '70s placed artists in various industries and government departments and allowed them to be artists or "incidental people", as John Latham termed it. If we trust the artist's voice and process more, there's a lot to learn from them, but then we need to make that learning public.

In terms of the dangers of trusting artists, there are risks in that artists sometimes do risky things. Artists don't always fully understand, or perhaps don't necessarily place centrestage in their thinking, the ethical and legal complexities of what they're doing. In *Trust Me, I'm an Artist*, however, having a range of expertise in the room, including artists, allowed for a variety of expertise to be present and applied. Artists can also disrupt things, which some people see as brave and fun. They don't behave in the way you might anticipate, which is why I enjoy working with them.

Lucas Evers: I am encouraged to write a format based on *Trust me, I'm an Artist* for another type of technology - "Trust Me, I'm an AI".





Be-wildering performance by Jennifer Willet & Kira O'Reilly on May 12th, 2017 at Waag Futurelab in Amsterdam. © Bas de Brouwer



“An algorithm is often ambiguous and seemingly value-free, leading people to trust it without considering where it comes from or who created it.”

Nicola Triscott: An algorithm is a powerful tool that underlies many aspects of our lives. However, it's often ambiguous and seemingly value-free, leading people to trust it without considering where it comes from or who created it. In reality, algorithms are far from value-free as they reflect the values of those who wrote them and the data they input. Unfortunately, there are numerous examples of algorithms going wrong, which can have serious consequences. It's crucial that we become more aware of the potential biases and shortcomings of algorithms and work towards creating more transparent and ethical algorithms in the future.

Lucas Evers: There has been a scandal for years regarding an algorithm created by the Dutch tax office to profile people who may be at risk of committing fraud when claiming tax refunds for their children's care. The algorithm's results were used to accuse people of fraud without providing concrete evidence, resulting in the imposition of enormous financial penalties before any court proceedings were initiated. This created a terrible situation for over 10,000 families in the Netherlands, many of whom as a result couldn't pay their debts. This case is a clear example of how a combination of algorithmic decision-making and human intervention can go horribly wrong. It also highlights the danger of labelling such systems as "AI" when they may not possess the advanced capabilities that are typically associated with true artificial intelligence



Nicola Triscott: Institutions' blind trust in systems and algorithms can cause a lot of harm. We had a similar case in the UK, where hundreds of managers of small post offices were prosecuted for false accounting and theft, because the post office's computing accounting system wrongly detected the existence of financial discrepancies at many post offices. They were hauled into court where many of them were jailed and had their lives ruined. Because the post office trusted the software.

“Institutions’ blind trust in systems and algorithms can cause a lot of harm.”



Lucas Evers: I want more artists that work with AI to focus on responsible AI. But it's not very sexy. Image machine learning is much more interesting. I would love to have more artists like Anna Ridler who dig deep into whether there are flaws in the algorithm. She's also focusing on a political subject, which might be compelling for other artists to engage. Would you like to finish with some notes on managing a cultural institution like FACT in these complex times?

Nicola Triscott: It's an exciting time for us, after a challenging few years. I joined as Director of FACT several months before the pandemic. Once that was upon us, many of my priorities had to change. When I first joined, I curated a couple of shows - a small show that was part of our European Media Arts Partnership and a larger-scale exhibition on the theme of the voice of the animal in relation to the nonhuman. Since then, I haven't curated anything because I've been preoccupied with keeping the institution, the people, and the artists we work with, afloat. We've gone through a lot in the past two years - from surviving the pandemic to implementing the programme and institutional changes I wanted to make, to

dealing with the impact on the economy from the Ukrainian war, the energy crisis, Brexit, and the cost of living crisis. I feel as though I've been firefighting and troubleshooting for most of that time. Now, I want to get more involved in programmes, beyond setting the framework for our themes, such as **The Living Planet** and **Radical Ancestry**⁷, as well as to strengthen our discursive programme.

It has been challenging for me to transition from leading a small organisation⁸ of around six employees that I founded to running an existing and much larger organisation with many employees and having to implement significant cultural, organisational and programme changes. I think I'm now in a better position to re-engage more directly with the artistic programme. I would like to participate more in curatorial choices, since my background is as a curator, but this is a major institution to run and it's difficult to balance all the demands.

⁷ FACT's programme tends to respond to annual themes (inquiries) that we set. In 2020-21, this was The Living Planet, a year of exhibitions, artworks and events presented online and in real life that inquired into our relationship with the natural world. From late 2021 into 2023, we have been exploring ideas of belonging, through a programme of exhibitions, projects, residencies, and events that has looked at how our sense of self is shaped by the histories, geographies, biology, and culture we inherit, and how technology can help us to rethink and experiment with who we are and where we belong.

⁸ Arts Catalyst in London, from 1994 - 2019.

Entangled Data – Civic Infrastructures and their Impact

How can artistic practices influence ethical, environmental and social aspects of decision making by the authorities regarding the development and use of technologies?

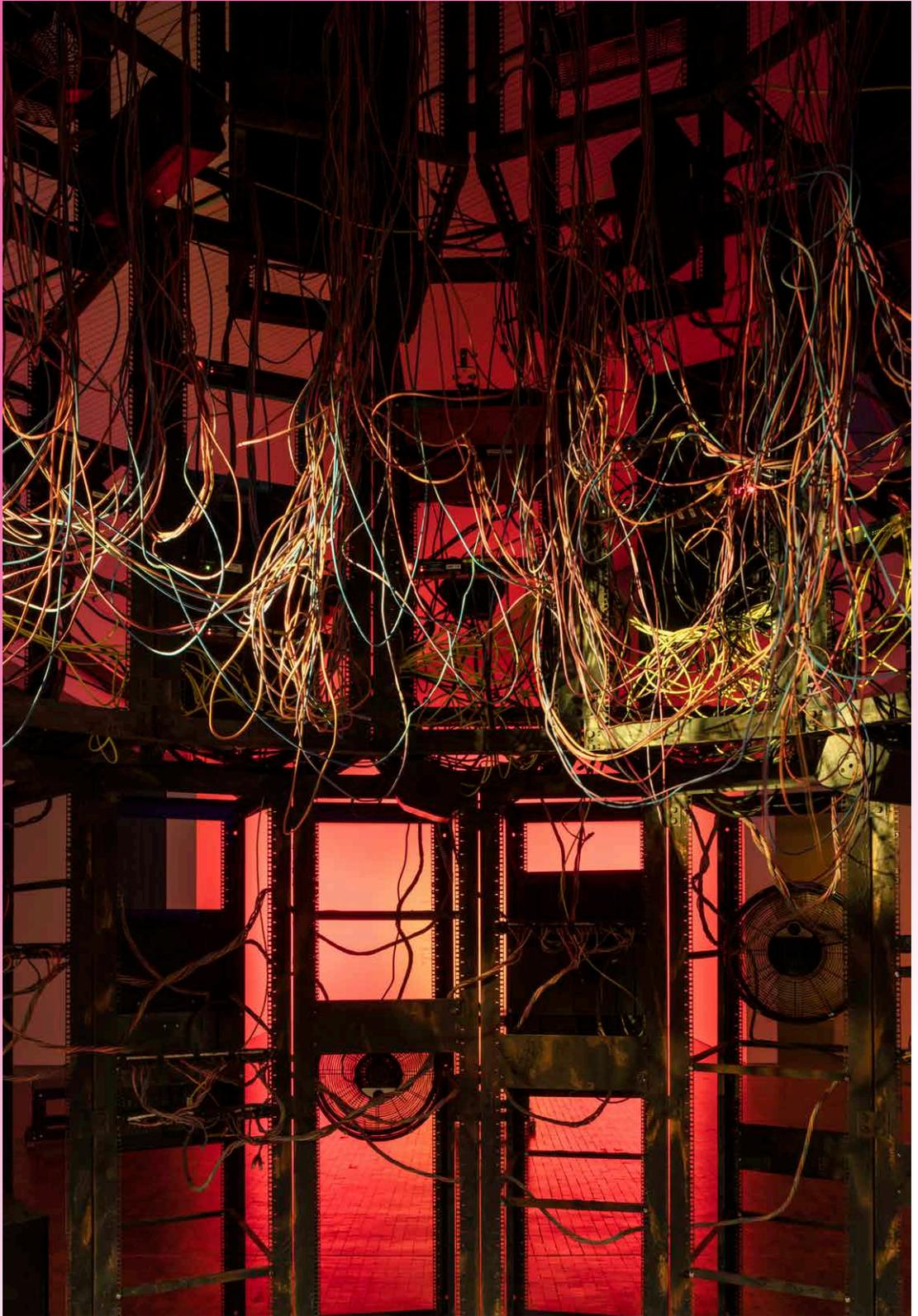
Project: Entanglement

By artists and researchers collective Annex

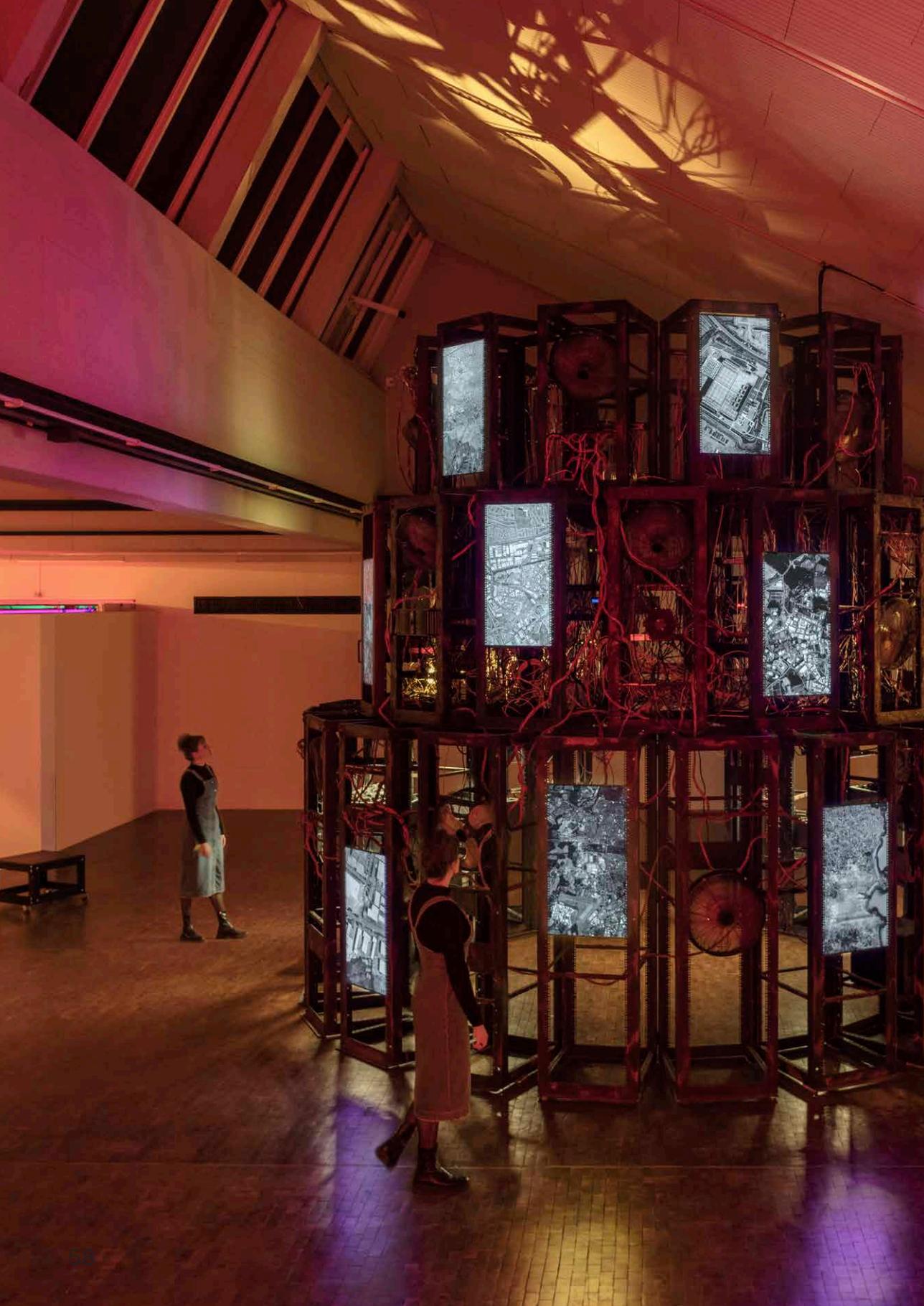
Context:

Ireland as Europe's data centre hub

In 2020, Amazon Web Services began working with South Dublin County Council in Ireland to recycle heat from its data centres. This new District Heating Scheme in Tallaght aims to provide heat recycled from the recently-completed AWS data centre to public sector, residential, and commercial customers. The system will initially heat 47,000m² of public sector buildings, 3,000m² of commercial space and 135 affordable rental apartments before being expanded to the wider area. It is estimated that the project will save 1,500 tonnes of carbon, and the scheme — the first of its kind in Ireland — is described as a low cost, low carbon, sustainable energy project that contributes to the country's climate targets for 2030. The waste heat from AWS's data centre is drawn from its hot aisle and run through a heat exchanger that both cools the data centre and heats up water that is delivered to a nearby heat pump to an energy centre just outside the warehouse, where several heat pumps condense it until its temperature rises to 85 degrees Celsius. The system then pumps this scalding hot water through pipes to its destinations, where it enters the buildings' own heating systems and is used. Despite being described as a success in Irish press, the project and its claims of green sustainable energy warrants further scrutiny.



Entanglement by Annex, 2021.
© Luca Girardini





In Ireland there are currently 70 data centres in operation, with eight under construction and 30 within planning. In 2021 data centres consumed 14% of Ireland's electricity, while rural residential dwellings consumed 12%. This strain on the Irish power grid has resulted in the State-owned electric power provider, EirGrid, to impose a de-facto moratorium against applications for new data centres locally until 2028. Additionally, these centres are currently responsible for 1.58% of Ireland's carbon emissions. Furthermore, due to their reliance on the national electricity grid, the facilities are mostly powered by gas and fossil fuels, which results in a negative impact on the environment. Thus, the claims of green sustainable energy by the District Heating Scheme in Tallaght is a mute point as electricity consumption by data centres continues to rise.

Approach:

A collective action for an international impact

Annex is a collective of Irish artists, architects, and urban researchers born and/or based in Ireland, who came together to address these contradictions. **The collective explores the material and cultural implications of data centres on the built environment, and draws attention to the transformations and contradictions that they offer.**

The collective was created to curate the Irish Pavilion at the 17th International Architecture Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia in 2021. Its members include Sven Anderson, Alan Butler, David Capener, Donal Lally, Clare Lyster and Fiona McDermott. Together they decided to push their common concern onto the international stage: **how do we live in and with data?**

For the Irish Pavilion, the collective developed the artwork *Entanglement*. The work was later exhibited as part of transmediale 2022 in the exhibition *abandon all hope ye who enter here*, which brought together nine artists whose work challenged ideas of technology as smooth and seamless, and explored how dysfunction and its instrumentalisation is central to the logic and operation of technology.

Entanglement by Annex examined how data production and consumption territorialise the physical landscape in Ireland, altering the Irish state approach to infrastructural development that is in favour of multinational tech corporations. The artwork aimed to raise

“Data production and consumption territorialise the physical landscape in Ireland. The artwork aimed to raise awareness about the material footprint of the global internet and cloud services.”

awareness about the material footprint of the global internet and cloud services, which is entwined with the Irish landscape both historically and in the present day, from the landing of the first transatlantic cable at Valentia Island in 1858 and Marconi's, transmission of wireless radio messages across the Atlantic Ocean in the early 20th century to Ireland's current role as Europe's data centre hub. The artwork consists of a 5.5m structure with a series of screens that displayed text generated by a machine learning algorithm that had been trained on a dataset that included over 15,000 texts on technological infrastructure, data centres, energy and carbon, and a live heat map of the gallery that was captured using thermal cameras installed on the sculpture. The screens alternated between the live feed of the space, and the AI generated texts. The text was displayed over aerial images of the Irish landscape from 1920's to present day that depicted how it has changed as a consequence of the Irish state development of roads, technical infrastructure, underground cables, city and environmental planning.

Alongside the artwork a publication — *States of Entanglement: Data in the Irish Landscape* — was published by Actar press.

The publication examined data infrastructures in the Irish context and brought together contributions from the fields of media theory, art, and geography, as well as architecture and design to respond and interrogate some of the cultural, material and environment states of data infrastructures that Entanglement highlighted. Overall the aim of the publication was to highlight how cloud technologies have material and environmental footprints and that the utopian fantasy of digital communication was in need of re-evaluation. Entanglement and its accompanying publication aimed to situate data centres as one interlocking element of big tech and data-driven solutions to overlapping social, economic and environmental problems centred on renewable energy and carbon accounting.

Impact:

Raising public awareness

The exhibition in Venice was visited by The Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, and Green Party Deputy minister Catherine Martin, raising media awareness of the artwork in national media including RTE and the Irish Times. In addition to the state recognition of the significance of the artwork, *Dublin Enquirer* - an independent reader supported newspaper will be using the publication to map the data centres in Dublin.

During transmediale 2022, the collective continued its advocacy work by participating in the transmediale symposium and exhibition and engaging with a wide audience of artists, researchers and stakeholders, turning them into multipliers for their work and ideas. A presentation of the event was organised for a group of fifty German and international cultural and political stakeholders, including President of the Federal Agency for Civic Education Thomas Krüger, and the installation and its message were featured in a variety of national media, including *Tagesspiegel*, *taz*, and *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*.





“In calling attention to the energy demands of data centres and their greenwashing, *Entanglement* was successful in directly and indirectly generating public awareness and providing knowledge.”

The public awareness of *Entanglement* and its accompanying research has impacted on Irish national debate, creating new discourse around the subject of data centres and green energy. As the energy crisis continues to impact the cost of living in Ireland, a number of Dáil Éireann debates have referenced the research behind the artwork to highlight the dependency of data centres on the National Grid and fossil fuels. For example, on 27 Oct 2022, Deputy Darren O'Rourke addressed the Dáil Éireann debate on Energy Security stating “We need a conversation on data centres... We must look at where these centres are located, whether they are providing district heating and how they are powered. They are putting huge pressure on the electricity grid and may potentially put huge pressure on the gas grid.” In the same debate Deputy Jennifer Whitmore highlighted how energy demand by data centres has increased, placing a significant strain on the national energy grid system and this strain has not been acknowledged as a fault or flaw of the new District Heating Scheme by the Irish state.

In calling attention to the energy demands of data centres and their greenwashing, *Entanglement* was successful in directly and indirectly generating public awareness and providing knowledge that allowed for new understanding of the issues that the construction of data centres represent economically, socially, and environmentally.

Chapter 3

Methods

How to implement feminist design principles as a collective

**An interview with with Charlotte Webb
from Feminist Internet and Zoénie Deng
from Waag Futerelab**

METHODS

1. Work together as a feminist collective in an organic and non-hierarchical manner
2. Approach working together with care while looking out for each other's wellbeing
3. Make feminist design principles operational through reflective use
4. Make the feminist design approach accessible to a wider public through an online course "Design a Feminist Chatbot" (without requiring previous coding skills)
5. Work with a variety of networks and collaborators to reach different stakeholders (Big Tech companies are reached through the collaboration with the Web Foundation, in which Feminist Internet and civil society organisations delivered co-design workshops to address Online Gender-Based Violence)



In 2022, Waag exhibited Feminist Internet's chatbot F'xa in the exhibition Digital Shadows. F'xa is a chatbot that helps people think about harmful biases in AI. In the interview with Charlotte Webb from the collective, she discusses her experience on how to work as a feminist collective that works in a non-hierarchical manner and with care. She explains the feminist design principles that have guided the creation of F'xa. These principles have become increasingly important in today's tech-driven world.

“We always have conversations about what is a feminist organisation, how do we deal with hierarchy, and how to make decisions as collectively as possible whilst still having a sense of direction or leadership”

Zoénie Deng: How do you work as a collective? And how do you practise feminist principles in working together?

Charlotte Webb: The way that we work has evolved quite a lot over time. When we started out in 2017, it was a very organic process. The project started as a 10-day experiment at the University of Arts London where students from across the university came together to learn about feminist approaches to tech development and to learn about new ways of thinking about tackling problems of gender in relation to technology.

The intention was that it would just be a 10-day project, but many of us found it very impactful and wanted to carry on the conversation. So we started to have monthly meetings with a core group of people who wanted to continue. That's how we started; we didn't really have a particular kind of structure in mind or anything like that. We evolved very organically as we got small bits of funding to do projects. We always tried to make decisions as a group about what we thought was a good project to work on, why we would want to work on it, how we would want to approach it, and the kinds of people we would like to work with on various topics. We communicated with each other digitally, mainly through chat.

I suppose we always have conversations about what is a feminist organisation, how do we deal with hierarchy, and how to make decisions as collectively as possible whilst still having a sense of direction or leadership. I think that's been something quite hard to navigate over time, but as we've gone on, we've just found a very informal way for people who are available and want to do something to come forward. We try not to put pressure on ourselves in terms of availability, because it's not our full-time jobs. So we just try to be quite open and accommodating about who wants to do what, when.

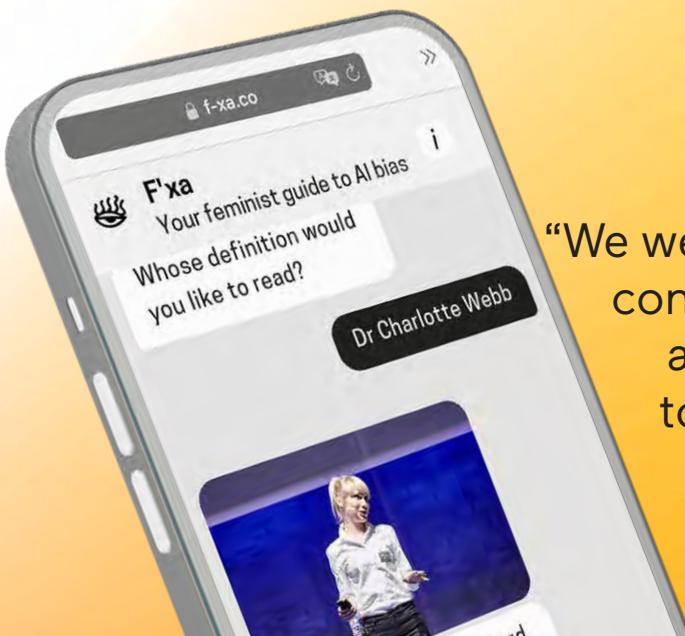
Zoénie Deng: Being in a collective means that people share responsibilities in holding it together. But there is always tension in how to do so, like who has the energy and time to do certain things voluntarily when

it is unpaid. How do you solve this in a feminist way, an ethical way?

Charlotte Webb: It's really challenging. I think we've all had to accept that there will be significant ebbs and flows. Sometimes things will be very active; sometimes, things will be quiet. It depends on what projects come up but also what's happening in people's lives, how much energy we have and, to be honest, how disillusioned or energised we feel about the field. I think you can't always expect 'go go go'. It goes however it goes. We let it grow organically and never push. It was necessary to approach it in that way.

Zoénie Deng: You approach it with care.

Charlotte Webb: Absolutely. One of the things I love the most about the group is that when we have had challenging situations, for example, if there's been some trolling online or some controversy of some kind. It's always the case that we pull together as a team. It's always the case that people support each other and look out for each other's well-being and care about each other as human beings. We know we'll come together in times of difficulty. I think that's been really valuable. That's what has kept us going. It's really hard to keep going. But I think those moments are what keep you doing that a bit longer.



“We were really interested in conversational interfaces and how they can help to bring complex ideas to a wider audience.”

Zoénie Deng: How did F'xa come into being? What are the feminist design principles behind it? I've read the principles that guided the creation of Maru. Did something similar guide the creation of F'xa?

Charlotte Webb: They're really similar. F'xa came into being because we were invited by a company to create something that would help engage an audience at a conference about technology and society. We were really interested in conversational interfaces and how they can help to bring complex ideas to a wider audience. So we proposed creating this chatbot that would help people think differently about bias in relation to AI. We approached Comuzi, which is an amazing agency based in London, and asked them if they would work with us together to collaborate on creating F'xa. Alex Fefegha, co-founder and head creative technologist at Comuzi worked with us to support the technical development of F'xa.

We were guided by the feminist chatbot design principles we developed in collaboration with Josie Young, who works at the intersection of Working at the intersection of Artificial Intelligence, ethics and innovation. She had written a paper in 2017 about feminist chatbot design, which we really loved. We used it in a course we ran about creating a Feminist Alexa. What was really nice about working with Josie was that we were able to bring some new graphic design aspects to her paper and try out the principles in a different context because she had been working in the context of companies. We wanted to try out these aspects with students in a more speculative creative context. We worked together with Josie to slightly adapt the principles and evolve them into something that would be workable and more accessible for students. So that was a lovely evolution. We followed some of those principles when we were building the F'xa chatbot. We knew we wanted to create strands of conversation looking at different aspects of AI bias when we designed the chatbot flow, so it covers bias in recruitment algorithms, search engines and voice assistants.

Zoénie Deng: How can you make the principles and guidelines operational?

Charlotte Webb: Making the principles operational is about taking them and using them reflectively. They're designed to, roughly speaking, follow a design flow. In the beginning, you think about who you're designing for and in what context, where the product or project is located from a cultural perspective, and what some of the problems are that you are trying to address. How does the design relate to people who are impacted by the issue? What specific considerations might you need to make for the group you're designing for? And then, later on in the process, you might be thinking about what kinds of representation matter in the creation of the design.

What might you build into the look and feel of this chatbot or the chatbot's personality that helps challenge stereotypes or avoid reinforcing biases in society?

At the level of conversation design, you might be thinking about language – what kinds of language might be triggering, or particularly inclusive, or empathetic? You might be thinking, how do you make sure that you're not trying to fool someone into thinking the bots is a human? Or you might be thinking about how you will build an emotional connection through this conversation. How are you going to make sure that it responds adequately if somebody says something horrible to it?

What I'm trying to say is that operationalising the principles for me is about reflective practice, and going through the process of technology development in a way that is very considered, and hopefully also in a way that you can describe with reference back to the principles.

Zoénie Deng: So how can making a Mooc or online course become a method? And how did you make the Design a Feminist Chatbot online course?

“We really wanted to make sure that you do not have to know how to code to be able to go through this.”

Charlotte Webb: [The Future Learn course Design a Feminist Chatbot](#) was created in partnership with the Creative Computing Institute, University of the Arts London, where I am a Research Fellow. We thought it would be really interesting to bring a feminist approach to chatbot design to a more general audience. So we extended what we had already done on short courses and drew on our experience of having made F'xa to create this four-week course. It was so rewarding, honestly, because at the end of the course, people had created their own feminista chatbots.



Now there are dozens and dozens of feminist chatbots that have been made for many different reasons. Through this platform, there have been 5000 people enrolled in the course, and it's received really good feedback. So it's just lovely that people can join for free, experiment and learn about these types of processes and actually come out with something that they've made for themselves while getting feedback from other learners along the way. It was an evolution of what we had already done, but we fleshed it out and broke it down into manageable pieces. It was nice because it is a four-week course, so we had a bit more time to go into detail about each element and really scaffold people's experience and provide them with a lot of worksheets and tools along the way.

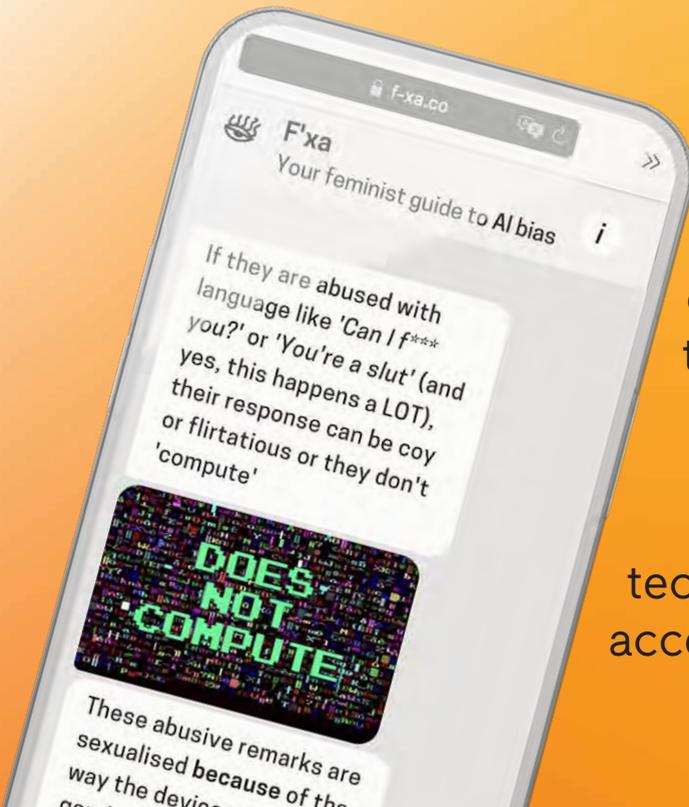
Zoénie Deng: Wow. So how do you make it accessible to the more general public?

Charlotte Webb: This course is just open to the general public. It's free. It's online. Anybody can take it at any time.

Zoénie Deng: How can you make the course accessible in a way that people who don't have a tech background can actually follow it?

Charlotte Webb: You don't have to have any coding knowledge because you are introduced to a platform called Glitch, which allows you to do very simple coding. You're taken through step by step how to make your chatbot, so it works well for people that don't have a lot of technical expertise. We really wanted to make sure that you do not have to know how to code to be able to go through this.

Zoénie Deng: It seems that Feminist Internet works on these kinds of tools and principles so that other people can actually use them. Is that correct?



“We are very motivated by the power of art and design to help people think differently about technologies and imagine different possible futures for technologies rather than accepting the status quo.”

Charlotte Webb: Absolutely, we really want to make complex things understandable for people who are not technical experts. We also want to bring a creative lens to issues of technology and equality because we're all artists and designers by training. We are very motivated by the power of art and design to help people think differently about technologies and imagine different possible futures for technologies rather than accepting the status quo. I think artists are amazing because they have an incredible imagination and they have the ability to re-invent what currently exists. They also can critique what's wrong with the world and use that as fuel for making something new. I find it a very powerful group of people to work with. Sometimes it can feel like more direct action is needed, like lobbying or activism or something else. But some of the times that I am most nourished and inspired to carry on is when I see amazing artists making work about these issues, because it gives me a lot of life to see artists do their thing.

Zoénie Deng: Who are your stakeholders? And how do you engage them?

Charlotte Webb: This is a question that we've asked ourselves over and over again as a collective in terms of who we are trying to reach. Who do we want to help in shifting their perspective? I think that although at some points, we have wanted to try to influence technology companies and we've had some opportunities to do that, what's closest to our hearts is young people who are interested in the area of technology and who are open to approaching it with a different perspective.

We do work with a lot of university students, and we often do courses with the Creative Computing Institute. I think mainly our stakeholders are those young people we can reach through educational opportunities through the university. Some projects, however, we have delivered through public sector organisations. For example, we did a commission with the Goethe Institute about imagining the future of AI with young people across Europe. That organisation was able to help us reach out to groups of young people that we would

not have had access to ourselves. With the Maru chatbot, commissioned by Plan International, we had access to youth activists from around the globe, who were already engaged in their network.

Zoénie Deng: What's Plan International?

Charlotte Webb: Plan International is an organisation that works on children's rights and equality for girls. They connected us to young people from Africa, Europe, and Nepal. It was an amazing collaboration. It's a bit project-specific, but we often need to collaborate with people to reach new audiences. Then we have stakeholders following us on the internet and engaging with our Instagram channel or coming to public seminars that we do. I would say that those are people who are somehow connected to this field and this sector and want to not keep exploring from different perspectives. And that's really amazing. So our stakeholders are primarily young people and then the general public, depending on where we are and what events we're running.

Zoénie Deng: Why do you think it is difficult to engage with companies?

Charlotte Webb: It depends on where you put your energy, how you frame yourself, and on what projects you're working on. When we were commissioned by the Web Foundation to work on the online Gender Based Violence Project, we had access to the biggest social media companies in the world because the Web Foundation brought those companies to the workshops. It was an amazing experience and it led to companies pledging to a series of commitments that the Web Foundation published about online gender-based violence.



Josie Young's 2017 paper *Designing Feminist Chatbots*



Designing a Feminist Alexa: An experiment in feminist conversation design



Tech Policy Design Lab: Online Gender-Based Violence and Abuse Outcomes & Recommendations

That was an example of a project where we had very direct access to technology companies. We would not have been able to access the people in the workshops ourselves directly. Again, we're very reliant on networks and collaborations to make an impact in different spaces, but we've decided as a collective that we don't really want to focus on consultancy because it's just not what gives us life and energy. We want to be working in this creative education space. Influencing companies might happen in terms of individual members of the organisation doing consultancy work, but it's not our main focus as a group.

Zoénie Deng: How did the companies react to the workshop?

Charlotte Webb: Very well. You can see the report as well to learn more about their feedback. There's also a series of prototypes that were developed through the workshops. They're prototypes for product features that help with reporting harassment or curating your feed to avoid being harassed in the first place. They were engaged and as I said, they pledged to a commitment framework at the UN Generation Equality event, which I think was a very good sign. They at least want to show that they care about these issues. Once the project is finished, it can be hard to follow up with what's happened, but it felt like a privilege to just be in a room and do some workshops with people who wouldn't normally take part in co-design through their day-to-day jobs.

Links:

F'xa: f-xa.co

Maru: maruchatbot.co

Design a feminist chatbot online course:

futurelearn.com/courses/designing-a-feminist-chatbot

Envisions: imagining the future of AI: feministinternet.com/envisions

The Online Gender Based Violence Project: techlab.webfoundation.org/ogbv/overview

Web Foundation: webfoundation.org

“Fish discover
water last” –
becoming aware
of machine-curated
content bubbles on
social media

A conversation with Tomo Kihara

METHODS

1. **“Fish discover water last”. Reveal different content bubbles; invite the public to be aware of the environment they are in when they use social media platforms, and to reflect on the nature of algorithm-curated contents**
2. **See from the non-human perspective of the algorithms in machine-curation and make users aware of the harm that can be caused by algorithms that do not care about the effects of the contents they curate**
3. **Play around with technologies to create accidents safely**

Introduction

In 2021 Tomo Kihara’s involvement with Artsformation started with the development of the workshop Future Collider, where citizens co-created speculative futures of our cities through street signs in AR (augmented reality). During the first half of the workshop, attendees ventured outside to examine existing city signs as a means of understanding societal values and restrictions. They paid particular attention to emerging signs and billboards, which signaled ongoing societal changes.

In the second half, Tomo prompted participants to conceptualise signs for future scenarios, exploring potential strategies and

outcomes related to climate change, housing, and privacy issues. For instance, in a workshop held in Amsterdam, one of the created signs read “No Plastic Allowed,” representing a future where the government vigorously enforces a circular economy. Once designed, participants utilised a custom-built web app to virtually position their AR signs within the actual urban landscape.

In 2022 we invited Tomo to further develop his work by commissioning the piece TheirTok, debuted at Amsterdam Museum Night and presented as part of the Digital Shadows exhibition at the Central public library in Amsterdam. This interview delves into what the work is, its methods, the audience experience, and art’s role in developing nuanced critical perspectives.

Waag FutureLab’s director Marleen Stikker noticed that one of the main sponsors of Amsterdam Museum Night was TikTok, in which they featured TheirTok, an art project that is critical towards TikTok. This triggered Marleen’s thoughts on how we respond to Tech companies such as Tiktok as a cultural organisation and part of civil society. Together with the research director of Waag, Sander van der Waal, Marleen has written an opinion piece about TikTok and its violation of privacy and data protection, its harm on children and young people in Europe, and why we need a fediverse of open but secure digital infrastructure, as well as attractive and responsible applications that adhere to public values. The piece was published by well-known Dutch newspaper NRC in November 2022.



Kids Tok

Nudges users to buy beauty products. Also promotes unhealthy diets to get slims.



Beauty Tok

Nudges users to buy beauty products. Also promotes unhealthy diets to get slims.



Sad Tok

Shows people dealing with trauma and depression. Can reinforce negative thoughts.

CONTRVERSIAL



Horny Tok

Tends to show videos of girls exposing a lot of skin. Popular with teenage boys.

CONTOVERSY



Quack Tok

Surfaces controversial health advice from non-experts such as DIY mole removal and teeth shaving.

CONTOVERSY



Dare Tok

Budges teenagers to do dangerous dare challenges that can harm themselves.

CONTOVERSY

Maro Pebo: Can you describe what *TheirTok* is about and about your experience at Museum Night? An unexpectedly big audience attended it.

Tomo Kihara: My new work *TheirTok* is still in process. It's a project that consists of many parts. There is the main component, which is the website, where you can look at what other people's TikTok could look like. As for museum Night and the Digital Shadows exhibition, I did an installation version of that coming-soon website. To get a better picture of *TheirTok*, it's like the sequel to a project I initiated two years ago. As part of the Mozilla Creative Media Awards, I was commissioned to create a project called *TheirTube* in 2020, which is like a YouTube where you can look at what other people's recommended videos on their landing page looked like. The project asked how we can make people aware that they are in an information bubble tailored to their tastes and beliefs, which can enforce their belief systems, sometimes incorrectly. Now we are doing something similar for TikTok. In this case, it is more relevant, because while 70% of all the views on YouTube come from recommendations, 96% of views on TikTok come from recommendations. Almost anything people see on TikTok is through machine-curated content. Crucially, there is a lot of segmentation happening, where there are various pockets of trending videos that only a few people know, which is almost invisible to others.

“Almost anything people see on TikTok is through machine-curated content. Crucially, there is a lot of segmentation happening, where there are various pockets of trending videos that only a few people know, which is almost invisible to others.”

“A lot of the reactions from the exhibition and Museum Night is that, for many visitors, it was their first time interacting with Tiktok. They were quite amazed by the diversity of what’s being shown there.”

Methodologically what we did is recreate this feed by first collecting data. We reached out to several people who are heavy users of Tiktok and conducted interviews about how they use Tiktok, what kind of videos they watch. For some of them, we asked them to contribute their video viewing and like history. We aimed to recreate the viewing experience of each individual by watching and liking the same videos they had watched on a newly created Tiktok account. In the end, we developed eight different profiles, which I call “Toks”. The profiles ranged from Dare-Tok, which shows troubling videos of teenagers engaging in challenge videos that could harm themselves, to harmless profiles like Clean-Tok, which shows people sharing cleaning hacks and videos of how they cleaned dirty houses. There is something really interesting about all these different algorithmic segmentation pockets that you can only discover once you watch certain kinds of videos.

A lot of the reactions from the exhibition and Museum Night is that, for many visitors, it was their first time interacting with Tiktok. They were quite amazed by the diversity of what’s being shown there. And also a bit shocked. Therefore displaying these archetypes of how this recommendation system works is really important.

At the Museum Night installation, we had a large video screen playing four different Tiktok feeds that we created for TheirTok. We also had four laptops, with which the participants at Museum Night could come and tame the Tiktok feeds with the application that Lodewijk Loos, Software & Hardware Developer at Waag, engineered.

This programme analyses and visualises how TikTok is recommending you videos in a detailed manner by intercepting some of the communication between TikTok and your browser. Some people seemed to have become a bit more conscious about how they use the service after seeing what is happening behind the hood. It has been great how seeing what other people's TikTok feed looks like enables people to be conscious of the biases on their own feed.

Like the proverb “fish discover water last”, we might be unaware of the environment that we grew up in unless we visit another environment. Generally, individuals struggle to recognize their own biases independently. However, if we can use our own personal recommendation feeds as a metaphorical mirror, reflecting our subconscious values, we may be better equipped to examine and understand our own inherent biases.

Maro Pebo: Two issues at hand are that TikTok was one of the sponsors of Museum Night and second, that instead of offering a critical perspective, the work might promote the use of the network.

Tomo Kihara: This may sound controversial, but I actually do really like TikTok, which is why I wouldn't say “do not use the platform”. Although I am critical about the platform, I'm also a critical optimist. I do love the potential that this platform has but I'm also very critical of its side effects. What I love about it is that there are about 5 million videos posted per hour. That's like 120 million videos per day posted on the platform.

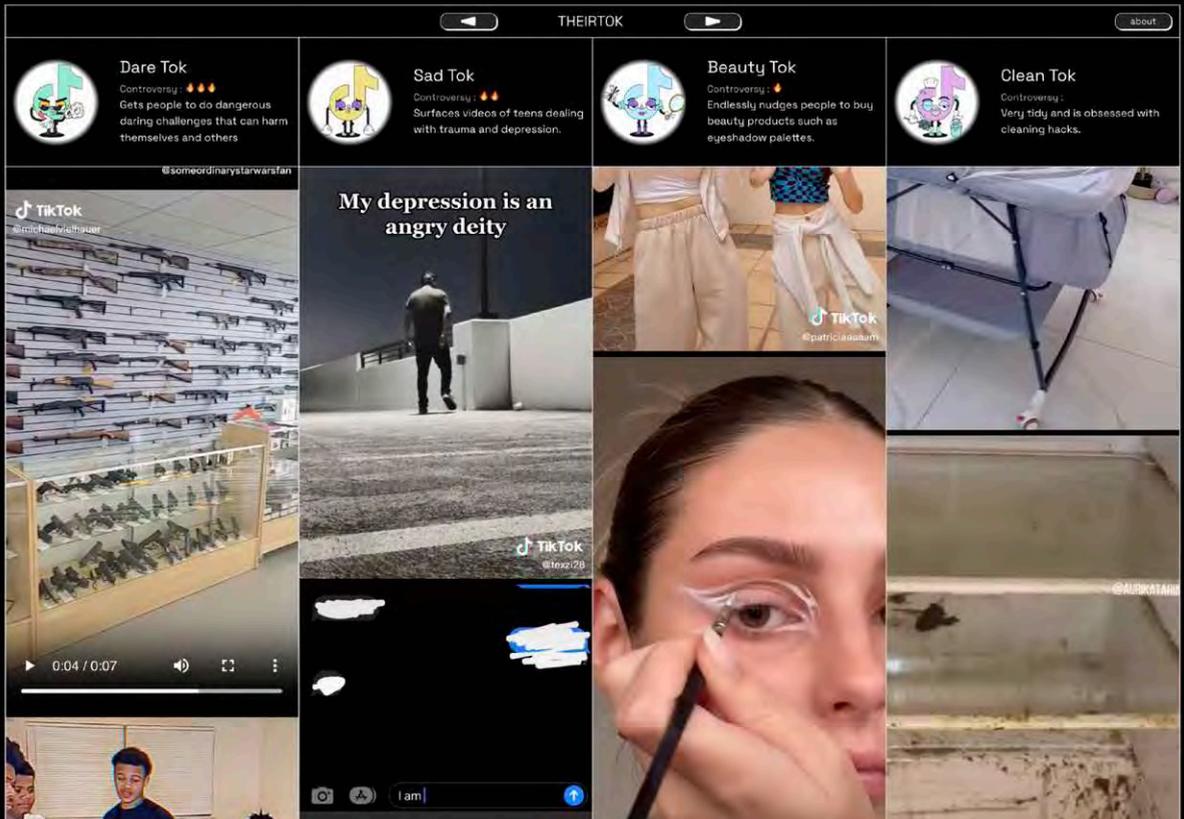
Just imagining the sheer size of that is so interesting. Because what that means is that it's almost impossible for any humans to curate what to show and what becomes popular.

What becomes popular is all decided by an algorithmic curation. There's human intervention to decide the nature of the algorithm of course, but I feel there's something really powerful about this notion where it's not these western media companies deciding what is going to be the next thing. With algorithmic curation, what is popular can be decided by a bunch of teenagers if they have the right kind of ideas and execution. Maybe a teenager in Jakarta who doesn't speak English can become a Tiktok star in one night. I think there's a lot of potential in non-human values curating and deciding what becomes popular.

There are some truly captivating videos, particularly in a genre I refer to as Art-Tok, where people showcase fascinating sculptures and objects while discussing the creative techniques used to make them. I believe these videos can be quite empowering.

However, there is a darker aspect to TikTok as well. One of the more worrisome feeds, referred to as Sad-Tok within ThierTok, mainly features teenagers discussing their battles with depression, trauma, or PTSD and expressing suicidal thoughts. Although talking about difficulties can aid in the healing process, for some, extended exposure to such an environment might result in a negative feedback loop. While watching Sad-Tok, you'll encounter a continuous stream of melancholic music, teenagers talking about depression and suicide, and even instances of self-harm.

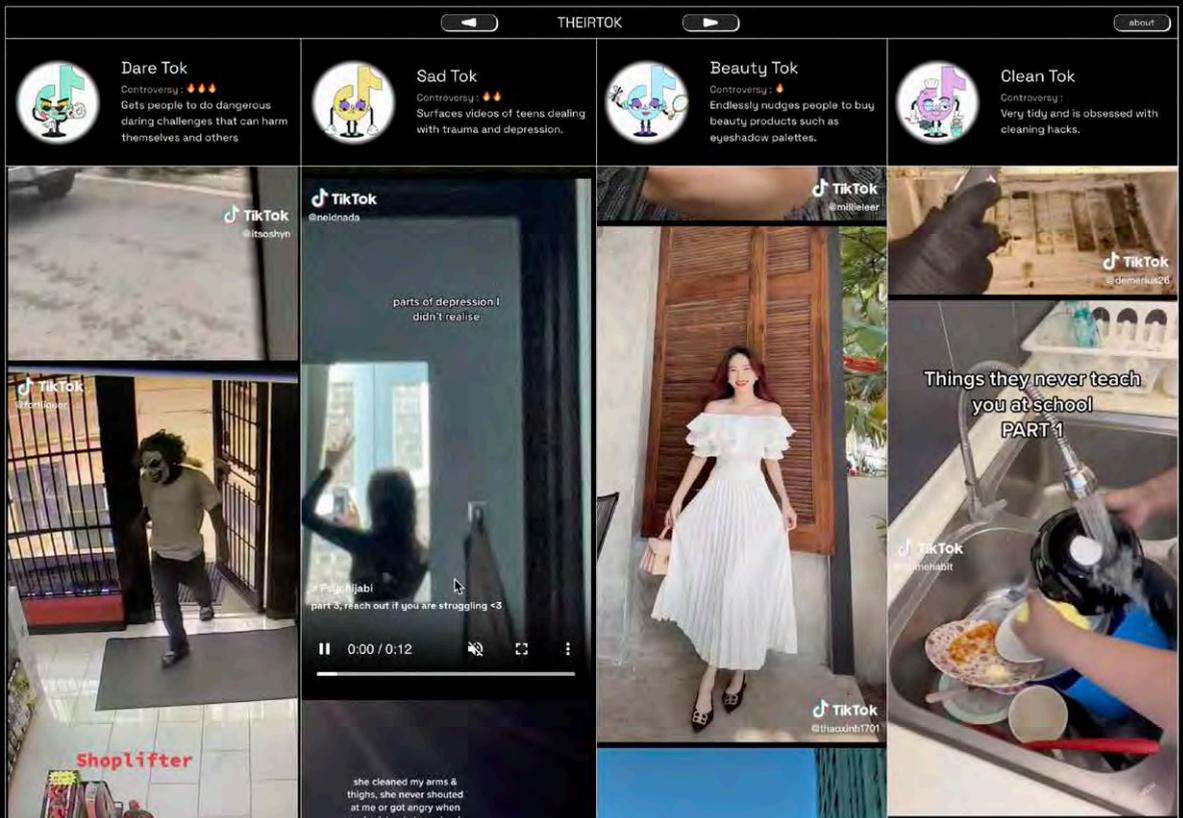
Within the realm of Sad-Tok, there seems to be some algorithmic intervention, as videos occasionally feature therapists and psychologists offering coping advice. However, this only appears in 1 out of every 10 sad videos, which I believe doesn't really improve the situation.



Ultimately, this automated curation fails to consider the emotional consequences of repeatedly showing videos of teenagers sharing their suicidal thoughts. The algorithm's main priority is maintaining user engagement for as long as possible, without much regard for the effect of the content itself.

With 120 million videos posted daily, human intervention becomes nearly impossible, making the situation seem uncontrollable, almost like a force of nature.

Maro Pebo: Regardless of the volume, there should be accountability. I like the expression "force of nature" and the idea that one can be critical of specific media but still use it. There is a power to reach a broad audience and access certain kinds of information. Instead of black-and-white moralist perspectives bringing media and tech down, the work that you are doing gives us a more nuanced,



complex awareness of the platforms that we are using. We have to be aware that there is an algorithm observing us or observing every second of our attention and that this algorithm, without care, is presenting content that will engage us but that can also be harmful. This critical perspective is very much the power that your work has. To start mapping out who has the power, who is benefiting from what we're doing, etcetera. And I like your critical perspective toward Tiktok, and also really appreciate your perspective as a designer and as an artist.

Why do you think artists and designers should be providing or could provide critical perspectives on using social media and digital technologies?

There's something particular about asking designers and artists to show us another way of viewing the world. What is so particular about this perspective?

“What I like about projects that have both design and art aspects is that they start from the ‘why’ question, and then provide a concrete ‘how’ on actually changing things for the better.”

Tomo Kihara: Having a master degree in interaction design from TU Delft, I come from a very design-oriented background and I have moved toward the arts field. For any project that I work on, I always have these two types of questions that help lead me during the making process. The designer’s mind always starts with the “how can we make something better?” type of mindset. For this TheirTok project It started with the question of how we can make people aware that they’re in a filter bubble. The designer mindset always starts a question of how to improve something. But then, as an artist, you don’t start from how; you start with what or why.

For the project, Their Tok, the artistic question here is not in the how, but instead in understanding more fundamentally what is the effect of algorithmic curation on a mass scale and why are we attracted to this type of content consumption. These open-ended questions are something I explore as an artist. What has been powerful is being able to go back and forth between these ‘how’ and ‘what/why’ questions.

What I like about projects that have both design and art aspects is that they start from the ‘why’ question, and then provide a concrete ‘how’ on actually changing things for the better. This kind of project provides a critical intervention that you can actually use to improve the situation. In my projects I try to address these two different sets of questions all the time.

Maro Pebo: Reading for hours on the issue you have just discussed is a different experience than watching videos about it. The design and art project can give audiences an embodied experience. As an artist who has this critical perspective on changing the way that we look at the world, and who makes critical interventions on how to make it better, what are your needs to make this happen?

Tomo Kihara: So far, the support I have received is fantastic, like providing the opportunity to present workshops and artworks. At the start of the project, I got to co-think about the direction of the projects with Caroline Sindere, and I think that there is something really powerful about that. Most artists tend to work alone and need to have other external forces pushing them to work together on something. Artsformation can be a good medium for that. If something like this will be done again in the future it would be productive to enable these collaborations in the beginning where artists and designers could come together to exchange ideas.

Maro Pebo: You are probably familiar with the article “Where is the European TikTok?” by Marleen Stikker and Sander van der Waal. Are there any points in this article that were relevant for you that you agree or disagree with, or would you like to add anything?

Tomo Kihara: I agree with most of what Marleen and Sander argue.

If I were to add something, it would be the question of how do you have strict regulations around privacy and data but also an environment where entrepreneurs and artists or creatives can create the next TikTok?

“Our role as artists is to play around with these technologies to create accidents safely.”

If you want to create the next TikTok in Europe, you need to think of the balance between having tight regulations and creating new platforms. Maybe Europe won't be the place where the next TikTok or the next YouTube or the next Google will be born. I think the role of Europe is where it comes up with regulations that make sure fundamental human values are protected.

What I appreciate about Europe is that it funds initiatives like Artsformation where they allow artists to conduct projects that critically question emerging technology. In this era where technology is rapidly changing and shaping our society, our role as artists is to play around with these technologies to create accidents safely. I compare this to how, when cars were invented, accidents happened; in response, technologies such as seatbelts and traffic lights were implemented. Part of me feels like my role is to create accidents, in a safe and fun way so that the people who are smarter and more resourceful than me can create the next “seatbelts” for whatever accident that these AIs could create.

Maro Pebo: Besides applying a critical perspective towards US and Chinese structures and companies, there is also the need to generate the condition for local creative forces with EU values. In your words, creating alternatives besides regulating would also be great.

WHERE IS THE EUROPEAN TIKTOK?

We must pull out all the stops to break the power of Big Tech. That means competing with those that we want to ban.

– Marleen Stikker & Sander van der Waal.

It is being drilled into us heavily these days that we have little say over the social media platforms we use. First, we must watch the erratic billionaire Elon Musk gaining unbridled power over the digital village Twitter by obtaining and imposing his will on it. A few days later, the original Chinese company TikTok confirms that the Chinese government has access to the personal data of European TikTok users, thus violating European privacy laws. And that is just one of the problems with TikTok.

The platform pumps out hate messages, disinformation, and damaging information.. The platform's algorithms are so addictive that children and young people sometimes spend up to four hours a day on it and use it as their primary news source. Without any exaggeration, you could say that TikTok is undermining our democracy. It is all the more painful that the Amsterdam Museum Night allows itself to be sponsored by TikTok. The cultural sector might expect that it does not allow itself to be used for laundering big tech. Yet the sponsorship prompts us to ask what we should do as actors in the cultural sector. What do we have against billionaires or against interference by the Chinese state? A few years ago, the Dutch Personal Data Authority imposed a fine of 750 thousand euros on TikTok for violating the privacy rights of children. That is a completely insignificant amount for the billion-dollar company, in addition, the fine was not acknowledged by the company.

The European Data Protection Commission has subsequently picked up the gauntlet and since 2021 there has been an in-depth investigation into privacy violations by the platform. It is plausible that a fine with a few more zeros might be issued, but the question is whether that will be enough to force change.

Europe as a whole is listened to a little more than the Netherlands. The fact that the company is now showing some transparency might have something to do with it. In addition to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), there are two new European regulations: the Digital Services Act and Digital Markets Act to break the hegemony of big tech companies. The Digital Service Act forces big tech companies to be transparent about how their products work and the Digital Markets Act allows for competition so that we are no longer dependent on a handful of American and Chinese companies. When Musk triumphantly tweets: 'the bird is free', the European response is: 'in Europe, the bird will fly by our rules'.

But the question is whether the tools are strong enough to enforce those rules and how long it will take to have the intended effect. We can impose high fines based on legislation, but that takes years; the harm in terms of spreading conspiracy theories, hate and harmful content for children will have already been done by that time. So there are also voices calling for TikTok to be banned or taken offline until we have the guarantee that society will not be disproportionately harmed.

Interference and spying

How should that work? Ban the app stores from offering the app? Require Internet providers to ban data traffic from the platform? In a period of geopolitical turmoil, it is prudent to minimise our dependence on a superpower. From that point of view, it is relevant to examine what in practice we can do to counter interference and espionage. 'Strategic autonomy' is the magic word.

The key question is how we get rid of dependence on such platforms. How do we ensure that we do not keep falling behind? We should not idly wait, but rather work together in the Netherlands and Europe on the Internet that is based on our shared values. Besides laws and regulations, it means that we need to build platforms and applications that put our collective public interest first, with revenue models that do not depend on maximising users' attention and ensuring that foreign or proprietary governments are not watching.

And that is quite possible, because the Internet was never originally designed to give so much power to a few individuals or superpowers. The Internet is a federated network of servers that exchange data with each other based on a protocol. Many Twitter users are now turning to the alternative Mastodon based on that principle. Similarly, there is not one central Mastodon server, but there are several based on language, geography or areas of interest that have been set up. This set-up allows for different ideas of moderation to take place side-by-side, rather than one libertarian idea of freedom of speech determining the rules for everyone.

The movement to counter the concentration of power by setting up such systems is also known as the fediverse: the federated universe. Because of this decentralised setup, manipulation based on financial or political gain is harder to accomplish. It is time for the principles of the fediverse to become central to the development of new services and applications. This government, through the Secretary of State for Digitisation, indicated that countering disinformation is a priority, and that it wants to encourage secure alternatives to social media. Investing in alternatives is necessary to make this ambition a reality.

Based on public values from the coalition of public organisations, PublicSpaces is already working on a new community network that is based on public values. In this 'PubHubs' initiative, the principles of the fediverse are already central. As the backlash against big tech companies enters a next phase, the government can set an example by further promoting such initiatives. Germany is already doing so with the launch of the Sovereign Tech Fund, which invests in open digital infrastructure that serves the public interest. At the European level, there are programmes where funding goes to open source initiatives that strengthen our digital infrastructure.

We certainly need to pull out all the stops in terms of legislation and regulation to break the power of BigTech. But to really extricate ourselves from this dynamic, we will have to make attractive, beautiful and responsible applications that can compete with what we want to ban.

The original text in Dutch can be found here:



Chapter 4

Trust

Towards a culture of trust

Introduction

In 2021, FACT Liverpool invited artist Jack Tan (UK) to join their Board of Trustees as artist-in-residence.

This chapter starts with an introduction to the project by Maitreyi Maheshwari, Head of Programme of FACT. The introduction explains the context, approach, and impact. It is followed by the reflection and report by Nicola Triscott, FACT's Director/CEO. As an appendix, we have included an Easy-Read artist contract template that Jack Tan has created, designed to be accessible and provide artists and institutions security and legal clarity. The contract has been adopted by many artists and organisations, who are encouraged to adapt it to their local contexts including their legal conditions. Last but not least, we present the evaluation conversation between Jack Tan, Nicola Triscott and Maitreyi Maheshwari.



Performing Boardness by Jack Tan, FACT, 2022. © Rob Battersby

Context:

Institutional governance as a reflection of its audiences

When considering the role of the arts within a broader social and cultural digital transformation, alongside the insights that artists can offer in interrogating the structures that underlie new and advanced technologies and pathways to refuse the controls these impose, it is also important to consider how to rebuild the trust in institutions that is lost and to establish new processes through which institutions can better serve their publics with accountability and care.

Beyond the work that cultural organisations generate and present with artists, how might the principles informing such work be embedded within the practices and structures of the organisation at every level.

In the midst of the global pandemic and other systemic and planetary crises, the critical question emerged of who culture - and the institutions tasked with creating, presenting and preserving it - is for? Too many people in our society do not see themselves reflected, adequately or accurately, in the culture that our institutions present. What role can the governance of an institution play in shaping an organisation's purpose, and building trust with those it serves? How could rethinking the governance of an institution help it remain relevant, and adaptable in a period of social transformation?

The Board of Trustees of a charity is responsible for ensuring that the work of the organisation fulfils its stated objectives, offering fresh perspectives and checks to the policies and financial management that underpin the day to day running of an organisation. These kinds of reporting and governance procedures can often feel inaccessible and excessively bureaucratic. As a voluntary role, the time commitment often prevents those experiencing financial precarity from joining Boards. Board members are often selected for specific skills and networks they can support the organisation with.





Approach:

Governance as an artistic medium

In 2021, FACT invited artist Jack Tan (UK) to join their Board of Trustees as artist-in-residence. By inviting an artist to participate in governance as an artist, rather than in service of the organisation, we could not only pay them for their time and work, but also open the Board up to different kinds of processes. **Could an artistic practice, such as Jack's, offer new ways of performing governance, transforming this oversight role into a more creative and inclusive enactment of trust between staff, trustees, funders, artists and audiences? How might bringing an artistic practice that approaches governance as a medium itself bring about a different understanding of these roles and responsibilities and how to perform them?**

The invitation was a way for FACT to work with an artist to test out how artistic practices could be adapted and adopted into an institutional context with a specific focus on governance in a digital age. As an artist-centred organisation, FACT is committed to creating the spaces in which our relationships with artists evolve over time, and where more sustained exchanges of knowledge can allow a transformation in both the artists' and FACT staff's ways of working. We approach advances in technology and the impacts of this on society through the lens of the artist and the shifts in perspective this offers participants and audiences alike.

Trained initially as a lawyer, Jack Tan's multi-faceted artistic practice is rooted in conversation and performance, creating spaces for discussions and approaching decision making as a sculptural medium through which things are shaped and formed. His relationship with FACT began through a commission *Learning non-human* in which Jack collaborated with an intergenerational group of participants to collectively learn how to consider the world from the perspectives of non-human animals, plants, objects, ecologies and environmental systems with whom our existence is entangled. Throughout his time at FACT, Jack had been interested in exploring

“The invitation was a way for FACT to work with an artist to test out how artistic practices could be adapted and adopted into an institutional context with a specific focus on governance in a digital age.”

institutional responsibility and who and how individuals and organisations might bring about change to the environment they are in, and in the very processes used to manage and govern them. **How might performative learning as an artwork enable changes in other kinds of performative practices, such as governance?**

Over 12 months, Jack’s residency with our Board of Trustees took the form of a durational artwork that has explored governance, accountability and trust through the process of working remotely and largely online. The residency began with Jack’s recognition that the artist’s contract offered to him for the purposes of the residency was inaccessible to many. **His first initiative during the residency was to write a contract for artists that was accessible, easy to read and free of jargon.** The template for the artist contract is now available online for anyone to download and use.

The new contract was commissioned in response to a ‘standard’ supplier contract that was sent to Jack when FACT invited him to become the first artist-in-residence on the Board of Trustees. The standard contract was filled with clauses that were not relevant to an artist which led to Jack questioning the document’s use and accessibility. In response, FACT asked Jack if he would create a new, accessible artist contract that would provide both himself and other artists with the security and legal clarity they need. Jack wrote the contract taking his own learning disability into consideration (dyslexia) and the belief that legal terms can and should be written in simple language. The contract features:



- A light yellow background to increase the contrast of the text
- Suggested text size, spacing and fonts for easier reading
- Terms such as 'supplier' and 'the artist' have been replaced with the artist name for better communication
- Use of bookmarks to navigate through the contract easily
- A concise breakdown of fees, budget and timeline
- A clear outline of how the organisation will support the artist

Since its completion, FACT now uses [this contract](#) (see the appendix) with all of the artists that they work with and strongly encourages other organisations to use the template too. As both a functional document and part of Jack Tan's body of artwork, FACT and Jack hope this resource can help others to rethink what a contract is.



In addition to participating in all of the formal Board activities for the year, Jack also invited members of the Board to join him in public events focused on specific aspects of governance such as Performing Trust, and the relationship between Accounting and Accountability. The residency and artwork culminated in a live performance event hosted by board members, inspired by the Artist Placement Group's *The Sculpture*, which presented dialogue as an artwork by encouraging discussions to take place around a simple table and chairs installation.

Jack's adaptation of this format also drew on a later variation of APG's work by Neil Cummings entitled Education: Not Knowing. In both works, the social dynamics of the meeting were treated as an aesthetic object and experience. Jack worked with the Trustees to develop a series of themes and questions that would form the basis of parallel conversations at four different tables, each moderated by a member of the Board and FACT staff with members of the public. From the outset, Jack saw the behaviours and systems of governance as 'performed' within a particular kind of 'boardroom' space.

Through props and references to different conventional spaces – a poker table, a tea table, a dressing table, or a kid’s play table – could we encourage different kinds of performances and behaviours for board discussions? As well as topics of Trust and Accountability, the audience were invited to consider the role of Identity and Authenticity, Risk and Comfort, Community and Governance, and what these qualities and values would look like for a future art museum if one could start an institution afresh. Who would this new institution be for, how would they be represented, included and cared for, how and when would the institution need to challenge itself and change, when would it be important to provide familiarity and comfort?

Impact:

Transformation of governance culture

The public performance Performing Boardness was met with overwhelmingly positive feedback from attendees. The event helped to demystify the role of the Trustees and governance within a cultural organisation, as well as allow members of the public to contribute to how such attempts at transparency could be continued in the future. It is an event that FACT will look to repeat on a regular basis as a way of continuing to build a transformative culture.

Within the space of the Board, the role and interventions of the artist helped to catalyse changes of perspective, which is in many ways just what art always does. Maintaining this and extending this further with future artists-in-residence will be key as the organisation develops, changes and improves. Artistic thinking in this sense allows a new iteration of how an organisation’s mission, vision and values are enacted.

Feedback from the Trustees also made clear that the residency helped reveal a way of performing governance that was transparent and self-aware, recognising that this was a role that the Trustees took

on, but one which could be played authentically rather than as an enactment of learned or expected behaviours.

As a structure and model, the largely remote meetings through which the artist participated in the Board did perhaps mean that the residency was less embedded in place-making within the organisation as other physical residencies might be. As a result, the Board perhaps took less direct ownership of the artist's experience during the residency, and the artist too remained unaware of the impact the work was having until very near the end of the residency itself.

While the residency did not radically alter governance structures within FACT, it did help to transform the governance culture. This in itself has led the Board to feel more inclusive and accountable.

Jack's artwork both performs and represents methodologies of learning that change the ways in which decision-making happens. The works affect the ways in which we take action, but also the understanding that by changing these processes we can change who gets to participate in these processes. Both are essential to rethinking the structures of governance. In his use of learning as an artistic medium, Jack Tan's artworks offer new ways of working that resonate beyond his collaborators to impact the institution and all who work with and within it.

Appendices:

The following documents offer further insight into the processes and outcomes of this residency. A short article by FACT's CEO Nicola Triscott shares the motivations for a long-established arts venue to change its governance culture as a reflection of the values and vision it seeks to share with artists and audiences alike. We also include the contract template Jack developed and the transcript of an evaluation conversation with Jack to gain his insights on the process and impact of the residency both on his practice and on the institution.

Biography: Jack Ky Tan

Jack Ky Tan (UK) is an artist whose work explores the connection between the social, the legal and art. Using social relations and cultural norms as material, he creates performances, sculpture, video and participatory projects that highlight the rules – customs, rituals, habits and theories – that guide human behaviour. Inspired by more-than-human, queer and Asian approaches or cosmologies, Jack's social practice blurs the boundaries between art, governance and consultancy in order to help organisations reform and revision themselves using artistic thinking.

Prior to becoming an artist, Jack trained as a lawyer and worked in civil litigation as well as in NGOs undertaking human rights cases, policy and anti-racist campaigning work. He then studied ceramics, obtaining a BA from the University of Westminster and an MA from the Royal College of Art. In 2020, Jack completed his Ph.D in legal aesthetics and performance at the University of Roehampton, Dept of Drama, Theatre and Performance.

PERFORMING BOARDNESS

– Nicola Triscott

In 2021, Jack Tan joined FACT Liverpool as its first board artist-in-residence, providing artistic intervention and exploration into the processes of governance. In an early conversation, we discussed 'boardness' – the systems and behaviours that boards adopt and feel they need to perform in the board environment. 'Boardness' behaviours, we agreed, suit only a minority of people, excluding others from authentic and effective governance.

What is this 'boardness' that we found such a barrier to inclusivity? It's a slippery concept but broadly it is socialised behaviour – how people have been taught to behave through media representations and experience in spaces of power and oversight. These representations and experiences tend to emphasise and reward those who overtly display their knowledge and expertise, and who challenge others and resist challenges to themselves. In terms of gender, boys tend to be more socialised into these ways of negotiating their status than girls, and so may find this form of behaviour more natural to assume. Culturally, there are vast differences in how people communicate which can also exclude people from board conversations. For example, a person's geographical origin and ethnic background influence how long a pause between speakers seems natural, which can contribute to some dominating a conversation with others believing their view isn't valued.

The system depends on shared culture

Another aspect of 'boardness' is how the meetings are organised and run. There are many scholarly articles on effective board governance. FACT tries to follow best practice: board meetings are regular, well-planned and kept to time, with papers sent in advance and agendas standardised. To be effective, the system relies on a productive board culture shaped by members' ideologies and beliefs and by their relationships with the executive leadership, staff and one another.

Arts boards are fraught with challenges and contradictions. Board members (trustees in the case of charities) are perceived to have great power, but often they meet only a handful of times a year and are dependent on information provided by senior management and on the team to carry out decisions. They hold ultimate responsibility for ensuring that the organisation serves its mission and for the overall welfare of the organisation, yet they are unpaid volunteers with their own careers and life demands.

The perceptions of the type of person who serves on a board can also work to attract only certain types of people and exclude those who might bring great insight and knowledge. And yet a diverse board with a strong positive culture can be of immense support, particularly in times of crisis and change.

Why a board artist-in-residence rather than an artist trustee?

Initially, I had approached Jack as a potential trustee. When he expressed reluctance, I thought both about the reasons he had given – including his dyslexia, which added an additional layer of work to governance – and my own experience of observing artists on boards. I wondered how an artist might bring their authentic self and practice to the sphere of governance, rather than being asked to perform the traditional rituals of ‘boardness’. It occurred to me that the structure of an artist residency could be adopted, getting round the strict restrictions that the Charity Commission places on paying trustees. It would also help towards achieving my desire to integrate artists into the heart of FACT.

So Jack attended FACT’s board meetings not as a trustee but as an artist invited to approach the sphere of governance and its dialogic exchanges as an art medium. The residency did not have an outcome in mind. The idea was simply to have an artist’s creative and critical perspective on the board, casting a different eye on the processes and acts of governance. Jack’s background and practice were uniquely well-suited for an inaugural board artist-in-residence. Prior to becoming an artist, he trained as a lawyer and worked in civil

litigation as well as in NGOs undertaking human rights cases, policy and anti-racist campaigning work.

He uses social relations and cultural norms as his artistic material, creating performances, sculpture, video and participatory projects that highlight the rules – customs, rituals, habits and theories – that guide human behaviour.

Unpacking the structures

Jack's residency unfolded as an invaluable opportunity to think through how we do governance and what could be done better. From an early stage, Jack announced his intention to do some public programming as a shared artwork, involving the board as co-creators.

One of these dialogic events, *Performing Trust*, explored what trust is (inspired by the job title of 'trustee') and what happens when trust is lost. The speakers reflected on how we can build, or rebuild, maintain and explore trust through organisational work and policymaking. *Accounting and Accountability* considered ways of drawing on other worldviews of accounting to reconsider who and what is accounted for and the stories they represent.

Both of these concepts, and the public events, were reflected on in depth at board meetings.

Moving forward

At Jack's final board meeting, the trustees reflected on what the residency had meant. They felt his involvement changed the dynamic of the board, enabling it to be less linear and more authentic in its business, providing a space in which members were more able to be themselves. It also initiated a new way of thinking about governance and how it affects our lives and us as an organisation. One trustee noted that she had slipped into thinking that governance was separate from creative practice and had been prompted to make new connections. Governance, accountability and accounts could be creative processes.

Of course, Jack's work could not have been effective in isolation. His residency took place in the wider context of work I was undertaking as the relatively new chief executive. I had inherited an organisation that had been through major upheaval following the departure of the longstanding chief executive and then nine months of interim leadership.

FACT's staff were keen to embrace principles of equality, diversity, inclusion and transparency in our organisational culture. Jack's appointment was an opportunity to make radical steps towards making governance more inclusive and effective. FACT's chair Rachel Higham and I had already taken steps to 're-wire' board meetings – introducing more narrative and storytelling into board reports, reducing the level of verbal reporting and freeing up time to deep dive into specific topics.

With Jack's input enabling deeper thinking, there has been a significant cultural shift. Our latest board away day was a genuinely warm, listening and supportive gathering. Trustees feel strongly that we have learned enough to be able to continue co-creating a space of inclusion, active listening, informed decision-making and support. Our learning will enable a stronger and more involved board, which will help to drive and support FACT's organisational culture and resilience in a time of great change.

With all the contradictions of charitable structures, it is worth committing time and resources to improving board culture, as it has a significant impact on organisational culture and improves board effectiveness. Having paid artists-in-residence on the board is one way to bring artists' voices into the heart of governance of arts organisations.

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Artist Commissioning Contract Crib Sheet

Terms such as 'supplier' and 'the artist' have been replaced with the artist name for better communication

WHO	This is a contract between FACT and [Name of Artist]	
WHAT	This is an agreement to [produce an artwork / exhibition / performance / learning project / resource undertake a residency participate in an event] called "[title of project]".	
WHY	[title of project] is part of FACT's [title of specific programme/season]	
WHEN	DD MM YYYY – DD MM YYYY	
HOW	Making	
	DD MM YYYY	Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing.
	DD MM YYYY	Nunc mollis, nisl sit amet interdum semper, arcu.
	Presenting	
	DD MM YYYY	Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing.
	DD MM YYYY	Nunc mollis, nisl sit amet interdum semper, arcu.
	Publicising	
	DD MM YYYY	Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing.
	DD MM YYYY	Nunc mollis, nisl sit amet interdum semper, arcu.
	Documenting	
	DD MM YYYY	Nunc mollis, nisl sit amet interdum semper, arcu.
	Evaluating	
	DD MM YYYY	Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing.
	DD MM YYYY	Nunc mollis, nisl sit amet interdum semper, arcu.
BUDGET	£XXX.XX	Total project budget
	£XXX.XX	Total artist's fee
CONTACT	Your key contact is [Name], XXX@fact.co.uk, [Telephone no] Send invoices to XXX@fact.ac.uk	

 This Crib Sheet is not part of our contract, but it contains information from the contract for easy referencing.



A contract to produce / undertake / participate in
[title of project]

[date of contract]

Suggested text size, spacing and
fonts for easier reading

PARTIES¹

FACT (Foundation for Art & Creative Technology) of 88 Wood Street, Liverpool, L1 4DQ

and

[Full Name of artist] of [Address] (and will be referred to in this contract as “First Name”)

AGREEMENT²

FACT and [“First Name”] agree to [produce an artwork / exhibition / performance / learning project / resource | undertake a residency | participate in an event] titled “[Title of project]” from DD MM YYYY to DD MM YYYY according to the terms³ set out within this agreement.

[“First Name”] agrees to deliver outcomes to FACT on time as set out in the [Agreed Timeline](#) and to carry out his/her/their responsibilities and undertake [work](#) as set out in this contract.

FACT agrees to pay [“First Name”] according to the agreed [Fee Installments](#) in consideration for this work and to carry out [FACT’s Responsibilities](#) as set out in this contract.

¹ “Parties” to a contract are the people or organisations who sign an agreement. For example, you and FACT are parties to this contract.

² An “agreement” and a “contract” mean the same thing.

³ The “terms” in a contract describe the conditions, promises or expectations in the contractual working relationship.

Footnotes to clarify
technical language

WORK

[“First Name”] will carry out work, which comprises the Making, Presenting, Publicising, Documenting and Evaluating of “[title of project]”. (from here on to be referred to as “[short title]”).

“[short title]” is [brief description of the project].

MAKING

[“First Name”] agrees to:

Bookmarks within the contract to allow easier navigation

- create / produce / undertake / participate in [short title] according to the agreed [timeline](#) and [budget](#);
- manage any purchasing, processing or production of materials in consultation with FACT and within agreed [budgets](#);
- observe FACT’s personal conduct, health & safety, and equalities policies during the project.

PRESENTING

- [First Name] will present the [artwork / exhibition / performance / learning project / public event / resource / residency] at FACT from [DD MM YYYY] to [DD MM YYYY] and on FACT’s online channels.
- If [First Name] wishes to present [short title] elsewhere during this period, this must be agreed in advance with FACT in writing.
- [First Name] and FACT agree that wherever and whenever [short title] is exhibited or presented, FACT’s logos and web addresses shall be used where reasonable, and the work shall be accompanied by the following words:

“[Artist’s Full Name], [short title] (YEAR), commissioned by FACT Liverpool with public funding from Arts Council England and Liverpool City Council.”

PUBLICISING

[“First Name”] agrees to:

- assist in the promotion of [short title] through their own or FACT’s social media channels;
- work with FACT’s marketing and communications team to create publicity material (such as text, images, audio, video) to promote [short title];

- attend and participate in promotional or publicity events as outlined in the agreed [timeline](#).

DOCUMENTING

["First Name"] agrees to supply visual, written and other content documenting and reflecting on the progress of the [short title], as necessary for online and other electronic distribution and printed distribution.

EVALUATING

["First Name"] will participate in an evaluation at the end of the process.

[TOURING section may be included here where necessary]

A clear outline of how the organisation will support the artist

FACT'S RESPONSIBILITIES

FACT will:

- provide curatorial support for [First Name];
- support the production of the Work financially and in terms of its technical, spatial and installation or presentation requirements;
- support [First Name] to engage the communities which they are interested in working with;
- create public programmes around the [short title], its research and themes, in collaboration with [First Name]. [First Name]'s availability and fee for participating in any such programmes will be negotiated separately from this contract.
- provide overall project management;
- manage the finances of the project.
- promote and publicise for the project in consultation with [First Name];
- insure and maintain FACT's on-site facilities and equipment necessary for the work;
- ensure access to or procurement of items and facilities;
- support the documentation and archiving of [short title]; and
- where necessary, work with [First Name] to adapt [short title] into a tourable format.

AGREED TIMELINE

[DD MM YYYY]	Develop proposal
[DD MM YYYY]	Sign contract and initial invoice
[DD MM YYYY]	Research
[DD MM YYYY]	Production - Phase 1
[DD MM YYYY]	Production - Phase 2
[DD MM YYYY]	Production - Phase 3
[DD MM YYYY]	Exhibition
[DD MM YYYY]	Public event
[DD MM YYYY]	Deinstallation
[DD MM YYYY]	Completion

BUDGET

£XXX.XX	Artist's fee
£XXX.XX	Artist's production and materials
£XXX.XX	Travel & Accomodation
£XXX.XX	Per Diems
£XXX.XX	Installation Materials
£XXX.XX	Interpretation
£XXX.XX	Shipping
£XXX.XX	TOTAL BUDGET



If you invite other practitioners to develop this [short title], their fees should be paid from the above totals unless agreed otherwise. If necessary, FACT may require these collaborators to agree to separate contracts.



At the end of the project, you may keep any production materials you have purchased specifically for [short title] out of the above budget.

Text boxes to highlight special
considerations

ARTIST'S FEE INSTALMENTS

[DD MM YYYY]	£XXX.XX	First installment, paid upon signing of the contract (50%)
[DD MM YYYY]	£XXX.XX	Second installment, paid upon [xxx xxxxxx xxx] (25%)
[DD MM YYYY]	£XXX.XX	Third installment, paid upon [xxxx xxxxx xxx] (25%)
	£XXX.XX	TOTAL FEE



Payments will require 30 days notice.



FACT will not start paying fees unless you have returned a signed copy of this Commissioning Contract.



FACT cannot pay any installment unless you send FACT a valid invoice.



The total fee is the maximum that FACT will pay for the whole project. To be clear, this fee includes everything described in the [Work](#) section of this contract. This includes compensation for images (videos, photos, etc.), recordings (audio files, etc.) and texts you have made available for publicity and presentation of [short title].

TAXES

[First Name] confirms that he/she/they is/are an independent contractor and not an employee of FACT, and is responsible for his/her/their own tax and National Insurance (NI) contributions arising from payments made under this agreement.

INSURANCE

[First Name] agrees to insure any equipment owned by her/him/them⁴ that is used for production of the [short title] (on or off FACT's premises) against loss or damage incurred during the course of this work.

⁴ This refers to equipment you own and are bringing into the project, e.g., your laptop, camera, etc.

Aside from this, FACT confirms that it insures all elements of [short title] from the moment [First Name] sends or transports it to FACT until the end of their presentation at FACT. FACT's insurance also covers the return of the [short title] to [First Name], unless it is already covered by the insurance of a third party, e.g., by another museum or gallery where the work is going to on tour. FACT confirms that it holds public liability insurance cover and insurance for its own equipment.

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY⁵

[First Name] is the creator of [short title] and therefore owner of all intellectual property and copyright⁶ in the work.

However, [First Name] agrees to:

- give FACT the right to use, exhibit, publish and reproduce the [short name] in any media including advertising brochures, publicity material, film, video, website or television broadcast together with all Rental Rights and Performers' Rights⁷, if applicable;
- give his/her/their permission to use agreed images of him/her/them in information, advertising, promotion materials related to the [short title] and for the purposes of documenting or archiving [short title];

⁵ 🏠 Just like physical property (such as a house, a piece of land or an object), the things that you have created using your mind are also considered property. These can be a story, an artwork, a logo and more, and are called "**intellectual property**". You own the intellectual property of something you have created, or if you have obtained/purchased the property from their original owner. Find out more [here](#).

⁶ 🎨 In the UK, if you are the original creator of a work such as an artwork, piece of music or a short story, your work is automatically protected from other people copying and distributing it without your permission. This is your "**copyright**" in the work. Copyright is a way that the law protects your intellectual property. Find out more [here](#).

⁷ 🎭 If you are the performer in a work (for example as an actor, performance/live artist, musician), you have "**performers' rights**". Among other things, you have the right to prevent people from recording or broadcasting a live performance, or to prevent recordings being rented or distributed to the public. Find out more [here](#). Note that if you are **both** the creator and performer of a work, you will own both the copyright and performers' rights in the work.

- allow documentary material about [short title] to be published in print or online as part of FACT’s physical or digital Archives.

MISCELLANEOUS

TERMINATION

- This Agreement can be terminated⁸ by either party giving notice in writing⁹ that setting out the reasons for the termination.
- If the [First Name] or FACT has failed to deliver on any major obligation under this Agreement, either party may send a notice in writing to the other party about their intention to terminate the contract. The defaulting party¹⁰ shall be allowed 14 days to remedy the failure. If they have not remedied the situation satisfactorily within 14 days, they will be sent a second notice in writing to inform them that the Agreement will be terminated within 7 days. [First Name] shall not be entitled to receive any further fee payments if they are the defaulting party. If FACT is the defaulting party, it shall not be entitled to present any work completed to date and must return any such work to [First Name].
- This Agreement will terminate automatically in the event of [First Name]’s death or incapacity¹¹. Should this happen, [First Name] (or his/her/their estate¹²) will receive all payments due up to the date of death or incapacity. FACT may use any work-in-progress and any preliminary designs to complete the Commissioned Work

⁸  “**terminate**” means that the contract would be voided and the working relationship would formally come to an end.

⁹  “**notice in writing**” in this section means the process of sending an email or signed letter notifying FACT in advance that you wish to terminate the contract, or vice versa.

¹⁰  A “**defaulting party**” is the person or organisation who has failed to deliver on their obligations or failed to carry out their responsibilities under the contract.

¹¹  In law, “**incapacity**” often means that someone no longer has the mental or physical capacity to be a contracting party or to carry out the work.

¹²  In law, “**estate**” refers to the total sum of money and property a person owns at the point of their death. The estate may be distributed to beneficiaries according to the deceased person’s will, or used to pay their debts.

using an artist acceptable to [First Name] or his/her/their personal representative. If FACT does not wish to have the Work completed, the material shall be returned to [First Name] or his/her/their personal representative.

PERSONAL DATA

- Processing of the Artist's personal data should take place in accordance to the provisions of the General Data Protection Regulation (EU 2016/679)

CHANGES TO THE AGREEMENT

- This agreement cannot be altered or varied except through written amendment agreed and signed by both parties.

DISPUTES

- Any dispute (other than the legal interpretation of this agreement) shall be referred at the request of either party to an independent expert agreed by both parties.

FORCE MAJEURE¹³

- The production period shall be extended (and neither party shall be regarded as being in breach of their respective obligations under this agreement) to cover delays caused by strikes, non-availability of essential materials, extreme weather, injury, illness or other causes outside the reasonable control of their party.

PERSONAL DATA

- Processing of the Artist's personal data should take place in accordance to the provisions of the General Data Protection Regulation (EU 2016/679)

CHANGES TO THE AGREEMENT

- This agreement cannot be altered or varied except through written amendment agreed and signed by both parties.

GOVERNING LAW

- This agreement shall be governed in accordance with the laws of Scotland/England and subject to the jurisdiction of Scottish/English Courts.

¹³  "Force Majeure" is a legal term that refers to events out of anyone's control, e.g., war, pandemics, 'acts of god' or natural disasters.

SIGNATURES

[First Name] and FACT confirm and agree the above terms.

.....

SIGNED by [Full Name]

.....

SIGNED by [FACT staff member NAME]

for and on behalf of FACT

Date:

Date:

This contract was commissioned by [FACT Liverpool](#) and created by artist [Jack Ky Tan](#) in 2021 and is both a working document used by FACT and part of the artist's body of artwork.



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International” licence (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0). This means you are free to share and adapt this work for non-commercial purposes provided you give proper attribution to FACT and Jack Ky Tan. [Click here](#) to find out more about this licence.

Jack Tan evaluation conversation

Maitreyi Maheshwari: Jack, this conversation is to evaluate the process of our inaugural board residency as we embark on our next board residency. We want to consider what the impact has been for your practice, your perceptions of the impact of the work you've done at FACT, and the way the outcomes have manifested. From your initial proposal situating the residency in relation to the Artist Placement Group, to how that has actually played out over the course of the year, what are the key things that we should think about in terms of the delivery process of a residency within this context?

What do you feel, on reflection, the impact of doing the residency has been for you?

Jack Ky Tan: It's been very useful to be able to be on the governance of the organisation, and not be liable. It's allowed me to be an artist on the board, rather than being a financial or legal head. That has freed it up. I can compare it immediately with the previous board that I was on, which was the Scottish Sculpture Workshop board, where I really was 'performing' trustee.

It's a first step for me. What we've done is to have a 'not-trustee' on the board

alongside the trustees. The 'not-trustee' and the trustees are able to have a conversation on the same platform. The next step for me would be to ask, how do we actually create a system where we all become 'not-trustees' or we all become this hybrid thing? That would be the next challenge for me, for whatever next board I go on to. For my practice, it would be thinking through what aspects of the freedom that I felt in this residency can I bring on to the next board that I'm on, where I am an actual trustee? Is there space within the legal box to still be artistic? And what will the parameters of that be?

Maitreyi Maheshwari: Has being involved in this residency also influenced the way that you approached projects that you've undertaken at the same time? What cross-pollination has there been between your different positions at this time, and how have they influenced each other in terms of your approach to the residency as well?

Jack Ky Tan: There has been cross-pollination because in my neurodiverse brain it's all one big soup.

The reason why the FACT residency has been very useful for me is because it's enabled me to return to a point of

constancy and stability. I would say the other three projects that I was doing alongside didn't go as planned in different ways and for different reasons. The FACT residency helped me to feel that I was still able to think about questions of trust and accountability in a measured way that was not going to fail.

Often organisations that engage me want the radicality that I bring, but when I ask them to be radical, they can't do it. Going through all this was quite difficult for me at the time.

To have the consistency of a FACT board meeting, where perhaps we're doing accountability, for which I've got to write something about accountability, and these very lovely board members who are supportive and interested, pulled me back to a more reflective space in the midst of all this other turmoil.

Maitreyi Maheshwari: In relation to these other organisations, where they've asked you to bring that radicality, do you think that the invitation from FACT was perhaps a bit safe? Is that why it felt so comfortable? It provided a certain degree of stability, continuity and comfort, but was the approach, to your mind, radical enough? We're very lucky to have a very receptive board who are open to doing things. But does that openness also mean that we're not

pushing ourselves hard enough?

Jack Ky Tan: Very good question. FACT is a much larger organisation than all of these other organisations I'm working with, so may be a bit more cautious. If anything, it was emotional radicalness that you were asking for. It was about transforming the hearts and minds of the board. I think that was radical and I feel we did achieve that. You weren't asking me to radically transform structures. I felt that you were wise enough to be careful what you asked for. Could there be radical change at FACT? Of course there could be, but that has to be planned for and resourced.

Nicola, when we spoke 18 months ago, you were at a point when you were transitioning to a new board. The board had a mix of old and new members, but was still operating in a very conservative - with a small c - way. That was what I was asked to tackle, and I feel like we did it.

The constructive criticism would be, I did not know I was achieving it at all until very late in the day. Because it's not a regular, normal thing you do, I'm not in your system. I wasn't communicated to in a way that made the residency as meaningful to me. The board itself didn't communicate to me, because they're all voluntary. They only expect to meet at the board so they're not asked to host me.

Although, it would have been nice if they could have ‘curated me’, used me in some way, or thought, ‘here is our artist and we need to curate him’. That simply means knowing what he’s up to and having conversations, taking an interest in his practice and what he’s trying to do with us. But I understand that they’re all volunteers and it’s really hard. It’s more towards the end, at the away day and at the last event when people were really upfront about the impact the residency had on them.

Nicola Triscott: To be fair, the impact really came later on. We were sowing the seeds and your involvement was part of that. It genuinely wasn’t until four members stood down from the board at the same time at the AGM and then we had that hybrid board meeting, in which you gave a really interesting provocation about accounting and accountability. It was at that - which I think was practically your final meeting - that there was cultural transformation in the room. That hadn’t been there before.

Maitreyi Maheshwari: At the February board meeting, which came just before the away day, there was a discussion about the impact of the accounting and accountability discussion from the previous meeting.

Nicola Triscott: So much of it was an

experiment. I had no idea that what you were doing was going to catalyse the other board culture changes that I was trying to make. I hadn’t brought you in and said, ‘you do the diversity thing’, but you did help to balance the voices in the room. It was part of a series of gradual changes. With hindsight, I could see, ‘Well, actually, Jack’s interventions were absolutely key to that happening’. So, the impact did come in quite a rush at the end of the residency.

Maitreyi Maheshwari: I agree with your feedback about regular residency-style contact being missing. The residency got subsumed by operational questions. Our conversations talked about one public programme event to the next event to the performance, without talking about what had happened in between.

Nicola Triscott: If we’d built in that time to reflect, we might have spotted what was happening earlier on.

Jack Ky Tan: I’ve also been reflecting that maybe it’s slow work. It’s about seeing if something blossoms or not, and not feeling that need to see impact all the way along. If I were to draw the shape of the residency, it’s a flow and then zoom at the end. That’s the shape of this artwork, which is kind of weird. It’s not the normal shape of my artworks, but I’m learning this is a new shape.

Some conversation between board meetings would have been helpful. When it did come, I was just so delighted and touched by what people were saying. Sitting at the event on one of the roundtables, hearing board members like Sheralee or Matthew talking about the impact the residency's had on them was very rewarding.

For me, it's interesting to reflect upon what the role of artistic intervention in organisational change management has been. It's clear from what we've been discussing that the artistic or the creative role is one that lubricates or catalyses transformation and changes perspective. In some ways, it's just what art does normally. But at what point is it useful to have that force or dynamic intervene in an organisation that needs to develop, change or improve? How can that knowledge be used for other organisations or in the future?

Nicola Triscott: Based on the text that I wrote for you Jack, we've published an article in Arts Professional, which tries to convey the truth of the process we went through and also references John Latham's idea of the incidental person. I think APG might have been proud of the small changes that we made, which actually have been quite profound for some people.

Maitreyi Maheshwari: The underlying funding context of your residency utilised some European funding, as part of this Artsformation programme, and for which we are writing a Knowledge Toolkit. In our immediate cluster of organisations: FACT, transmediale in Berlin, and Waag Foundation in the Netherlands, each one of us is sharing a project that reflects on how an artist's practice allows for change at an institutional or a structural level and also at an artistic level. How can an artist's practice be a catalyst for different types of transformation? We all felt that we need to address organisational transformation as a first step to considerations of the digital transformation that the funding is focused on. What are the changes that organisations need to make in how they work with artists, and also the changes they need to make in how they themselves work?

This residency helps us understand what artistic intervention does in organisational change management: it provides a catalyst, it creates the necessary circumstances through which that change can happen without being the change itself. It's not about making the artist do the work. It positions the artist as the instigator of the work. The work has to happen by the organisation, or the different stakeholders within this change process.

Jack Ky Tan: If you think of change management as a *technē*, then the role that art has in it is the *poiesis*. *Technē* and *Poiesis* go hand in hand. If you have *technē* alone, it's just production with no soul and no understanding of the larger *raison d'être* of why you're doing this in a way that sticks to the vision, and develops the values. The artist's role is one which allows an organisation's mission, vision and values to constantly be rebirthed, in every project, every change. And that for me is the key value of the role of the artist or artistic thinking.

Maitreyi Maheshwari: That is a lovely sentiment. It's such a powerful thought that what the artist or artistic thinking allows is a new iteration, each time, of how an organisation's mission, vision and values are enacted.

Jack Ky Tan: In a way, it's nothing new. It's what art does.

Maitreyi Maheshwari: How do you feel about the public programme events that we had? Were those conversations fruitful for the development of the process of the residency? I know that in advance of Performing Boardness, Sheralee went back and relistened to all of the conversations, and she said how good that conversation had been, and how useful it had been in her own thinking. But for you, were those the right conversations to be

having given how central the public programme became to the narrative that we ended up performing?

Jack Ky Tan: I didn't need to have a public programme, but I thought to myself, 'How do I get these board members to actually have any skin in the game?' If we force them into a conversation in public as part of our programme, it means they're involved in the residency right from the start. I also saw the public programme as a way of training the board members to do public events. It was a safe way for them to encounter audiences, with a view to knowing that, at some point down the line, they're going to lead their own roundtable at the final event. I thought the events were very rich conversations. We curated the right people to be on them. I've had feedback from people who've listened back to them, who've said, 'these are fantastic in-conversations'.

In terms of my practice: as an artist, you want to try the work out. To quote Richard Wentworth it's 'public trying'. You can make work in the studio, but you've got to exhibit it, you've got to show it, because that's how you know whether it's worked or not. For me, in-conversations aren't exactly a public trying. They are still about words and talking. It's not art that I'm making myself. I'm not exposing my art to people, I'm just exposing my mind in my words.

The Performing Boardness event was the first time in this residency that I laid out what we're doing as artwork to an audience. I really feel like exhibiting is a key aspect of an artist's practice. I could have maybe done with a few more points in which I tried something out in public. Instead of it being a public programme, it could have been a project space that I could have presented things in.

Maitreyi Maheshwari: Starting this in 2021 as we were coming out of COVID, that landscape was very difficult. Those conversations set the intellectual tone, but they didn't set the more performative aspects of what you were proposing.

Jack Ky Tan: We weren't attempting something radically new. I knew that this had been done before with Neil Cummings and Critical Practice. So I wasn't that nervous that we hadn't had any preliminary presentations.

But imagine if instead of these in-conversation public programmes, that the first event we had was actually Performing Boardness? How would this performance have changed by the end of the year? It might have become a completely new artwork. That's a process that we didn't choose to do because of COVID etc. But if it had become something new, then that might have pushed the boundary of my practice or what APG was doing.

Nicola Triscott: One of the challenges for us is that we're going to have to do something like that public event again. Obviously, it won't be an artwork, because it's not your artwork, but there is a demand after Performing Boardness for FACT to have more of these open conversations. There was something really magical about that one. The context of it in an artwork, and the framing of it, was really special and a lot of resource time was put in. The concern is that just having a public conversation is not going to achieve the same thing.

The other thing that I should feed back, Jack - which was directed to both me and you - was from Sheralee, when she said that the past 18 months have been deeply inspiring for her in terms of how you change a board culture, which she didn't think was possible. In addition, Matthew's realisation: 'I've always been good on boards, but this process has made me realise how much of a performance it was and how little I was authentic Matty, and how much I was Matthew.'

Jack Ky Tan: So wonderful. In fact, that is exactly what the aim was to change the board culture, wasn't it? At Matthew's table, he was so willing to be vulnerable, talking about how he was pretending to be a board member. That's the job done, isn't it? If we managed to get a board member to just be themselves? The key

thing is that they meet four times a year, and they're responsible for the governance of the organisation. If you can't get them to be open with each other, then what's the point? I'm just so pleased about that.

Maitreyi Maheshwari: For me what that performance hammered home, was how much organisational change we've gone through as a team at FACT. We've really been thinking about the role of the artist within the programme and wanting to push forward the idea that FACT is an artist-centred organisation, that we put the artist at the heart of everything that we do. To interrogate this question of governance and the performance of boardness with an artist felt like a significant moment on this journey that we're on, as we focus more of our facilities on artists' development, and how we support artists' practice, not just artists' work.

Part of the difficulty with the residency at board level for an artist is that there isn't necessarily always that much call for the artist to interact with the rest of the staff team. Your constituency is the board rather than the staff. I wonder whether you felt that during the residency?

Jack Ky Tan: That unfortunately is the nature of having a board. The board is only in contact with senior staff. That's the problem with the charity model. The artist

involved has to always bear in mind that the remit is governance and not operations. They have to not get their head lost in programming etc. because it's a board residency, so their concern is governance - as is the trustee's. Even if they're heading committees, subcommittees, it's still governance that they should have their mind to.

Nicola Triscott: It's how we can play out governance within the organisation in more interesting ways than just people sitting around a table. It's still governance, we're just trying different ways of enacting it in more meaningful ways.

Jack Ky Tan: Exactly. With each artist that comes in, the key is to view governance through their practice. With me, in one sense, I'm an easy start, because my practice is governance. But in another way, it's a hard start, because you can't separate governance from the artistic lens.

Maitreyi Maheshwari: Jack, we worked out the budget based on what you thought about how you'd spend the time over the course of the year. We anticipated the residency would involve you spending about a day a month researching plus additional time to come attend the board meetings and the board away day. There was also time allocated for the public programme development

and performance development. Do you think this was the right amount of time? Should we have allocated more contact time or been a bit more specific about how that time was going to be spent? It was quite self directed.

Jack Ky Tan: A day a month in the end was just enough to process the board papers and deal with immediate things. I wish I had more time for me to do more research, to develop more of an understanding about organisations and more research about APG. That would have been more interesting for me to develop my practice. The time that was given was enough, but only just to do the core work of preparing for board meetings and then turning up, dealing with ad hoc things that arose, and writing my provocations.

I think if you gave the next artist a bit more time, it would give them the space to delve deeper, especially if they had a particular research project.

Maitreyi Maheshwari: Jack, have you got any other specific feedback that you wanted to share?

Jack Ky Tan: Being a social practitioner and performance artist, it's a big deal for me to be able to make a claim for the work within discourse and within art history. This area of work that I do is so underrepresented within art discourse and art history. So for me, what would

have been useful was to have staked more of a claim out there. I'm really happy that Arts Professional is going to publish this article. Having that presence marks my contribution to APG and to this area of practice. It's making a space for that out there.

Nicola Triscott: My sense is it didn't start with a radical agenda, but it might have quite a radical impact. One of the reasons for putting it out in Arts Professional and approaching it from a 'Board culture change' perspective, and the role that an artist in residence can play in helping to catalyse that, is precisely to have that longer term impact.

The thing that we haven't succeeded with is to get it covered by art press as an artwork, although this is clear in the text. That was always going to be a real challenge for exactly the reasons that you say: it's not an understood area of work yet. Going forward, the more we can continue to promote this as an artist's practice and why other organisations should think about having an artist in residence on the board, I hope it will enhance the work and the reputation of your practice going forward.

Jack Ky Tan: Thank you so much. What amazes me is that there actually is an art history of this. Tania Bruegera has done this, Joseph Beuys has been doing this.

There is a long art history of this, but for some reason it's not found its space yet in public discourse. The more we do it, the more you'll get there. I'm also thinking about how I frame this within the context of FACT - the Foundation of Art and Creative Technology. It's about technology: it's about bureaucracy or governance as technology. It's about trying to understand technē in a different way.

The work that we did on accounting and accountability was about the challenge to find evaluation systems that are different. To evaluate yourself in a different way: to find feminist, queer and decolonial ways of evaluating. The work carries on but we learn and do it better.

I'd like to be able to come back at some point in the future and find a board that is really comfortable with meeting the basic requirements of the Charity Commission, Arts Council etc. but are operating in a medium where they are ascribing to different values in how they make decisions, how they evaluate, and how they account. If we can document it somehow and put it into policy, that maybe is a way to start.

Maitreyi Maheshwari: That process of documentation is inbuilt into those governance structures: the minuting and reporting. But how do you use that space, which has to be publicly accountable, as a

site for the kinds of interventions and alternative approaches which reflect the values that you want to enact?

Jack Ky Tan: The way to do that, for me, is always to invent radical methodologies. It's not necessarily about the subject matter, if you invent the methodology, the radicality of the subject matter will just follow automatically, because you're changing the lens.

Maitreyi Maheshwari: As Nicola was saying earlier, your residency planted seeds. With every subsequent artist, we plant more seeds. How do we get them to turn into a full orchard? How does that become a system that provides for us? If you want to become something different, you have to be able to see how it will sustain itself. These are the slow processes through which we might do something that is sustainable. We might make changes that can sustain themselves, that can exist beyond a change of staff or a change of boards. If we change board members, how do we keep this as a self sustaining culture that has its own life and space.

Nicola Triscott: I came to FACT wondering if you could run a large organisation more like a small organisation. Having artists involved in the different levels of the organisation feels vital to doing that, to stop us being dragged into the standard,

normalised way of doing things. Within larger organisations, you lose the honesty about who you are that you can have in a smaller organisation. This is the tension that I feel between who we are as individuals and the institution. I need artists to help us to navigate that. So we're going to keep doing these experiments.

We've talked a lot about how this has changed FACT, but I also ask, 'What can we do at FACT that has an impact on the wider sector, on other people and how they do things?' There's a dishonesty out there that's unhealthy and it's imposed upon us by the structures and the systems that we find ourselves in.

Maitreyi Maheshwari: What we've worked on over the last year was identifying where that performance is. We are constantly performing in life, but to perform at a governance level without authenticity, without that sense of trust, and without really understanding who and to what we're accountable can be very problematic. This residency as an idea, and your residency specifically, has helped reveal a way of doing this with a degree of transparency and awareness of the performativity of it all. You might not be able to change the performance, but at least you're aware that it is a performance.

Jack Ky Tan: I think this is the first ever artist in residence on a board in this

country. As the first organisation who's done it, you could show other people how to do this, because that's also how you impact the landscape. This is a quiet radicalism. It's such a simple thing to do, yet it can be profound if more organisations do it. Perhaps the new knowledge that FACT is producing is how artists are integrated into organisations? That knowledge can be shared and encouraged, and you can be a thought leader in that.

For example, the artist's contract that I did, all these simple, small gestures you seem to be doing, actually have a profound impact. The instinct for you to come to me and go, 'Well, why don't we commission you to write an artist contract then?' That's the curatorial approach that allows these things to happen. That's you and your team. That approach is something that you could teach other organisations.

Maitreyi Maheshwari: Thank you for being our guinea pig. Apologies for putting you through the experimental process, but it's been very good!

Jack Ky Tan: It's been good. I've learned a lot.

Chapter 5

Care

Cloudsquatting

The politics and practices of making and being your own server with Lukas Engelhardt

METHODS

- 1. Critically examine and rethink cloud-services offered by commercial companies that you use**
- 2. Analyse the ethical, political and practical pros and cons of self-hosting**
- 3. Discuss and reach consensus about self-hosting within the group/collective regarding challenges such as maintenance and the risk of making mistakes and interruptions**
- 4. Follow the self-hosting manual, build your own server and start cloudsquatting**

Introduction

Artsformation project at the Waag Futurelab supported the development of Lukas Engelhardt's the *Cloudsquatting* project. This work's vision is to make self-hosting accessible to the general public and beginners while still being a useful resource to more advanced readers. The commission included the collective development of a manual for setting up local servers, from picking hardware to setting up web and file servers, while also giving context to the political dimensions of such a practice.



The self-hosting Manual is inspired by squatting manuals, texts that have codified and politicised the process of squatting since the 1970's and have been openly available to all interested¹. In the context of this project, setting up your server is a political act and, in this way, comparable to squatting in a house to live and work in.

This publication aims to make self-hosting, a topic that comes with several technical hurdles, accessible to more general public and beginners while still being a useful resource to more advanced readers. No prerequisites are required from the reader.

This manual is self-hosted online as well as printed and displayed at the exhibition *Digital Shadows*. **It consists of five key parts – an introduction with a glossary, an explanation of what self-hosting is, the software system, hardware preparation, and the technical practical guide itself.** The first parts present the reader with key information on what servers are and the problem with commercial servers.

Below are key fragments from the Self-Hosting manual shared with the artist's permission and on Creative Common's licence. We share these to provide the perspective of the artists regarding the needs and benefits of self-hosting; for those with a methodological interest in the parts, the manual can provide a pathway on how to approach and communicate the topic of digital transformation through the arts.

In this text, we have included key fragments of the manual that are of general critical interest, followed by an interview with Lukas Engelhardt to discuss the role of artists in understanding digital mediation and technological autonomy.

1. Edited by René Boer, Marina Otero Verzier, Katia Truijten; in collaboration with the communities of ADM, Landbouwbelang, Plantage Dok, Poortgebouw. *Architecture of Appropriation: On Squatting As Spatial Practice*. Rotterdam: Het Nieuwe Instituut. 2019.

Self Hosting Manual

The upcoming questions and answers are fragments from the *Self Hosting Manual* developed by Lukas Engelhardt with Paul Bille and Ada Reinthal, as part of the Artsformation commission for Waag Future Lab 2022. The manual is available at <http://self-hosting.guide>

What is a Server?

In computing, a server is a piece of computer hardware or software (computer program) that provides functionality for other programs or devices, called “clients”. This architecture is called the client–server model. Servers can provide various functionalities, often called “services”, such as sharing data or resources among multiple clients, or performing computation for a client.

A single server can serve multiple clients, and a single client can use multiple servers. A client process may run on the same device or may connect over a network to a server on a different device. Typical servers are database servers, file servers, mail servers, print servers, web servers, game servers, and application servers.

What is a Cloud in digital technologies?

The cloud is a metaphor for the Internet based on how it is described in computer network diagrams. Just as how, in the real world, clouds hide parts of the sky from sight, the cloud-metaphor in computing hides the complex infrastructure that makes the Internet work.

What is a web hosting service?

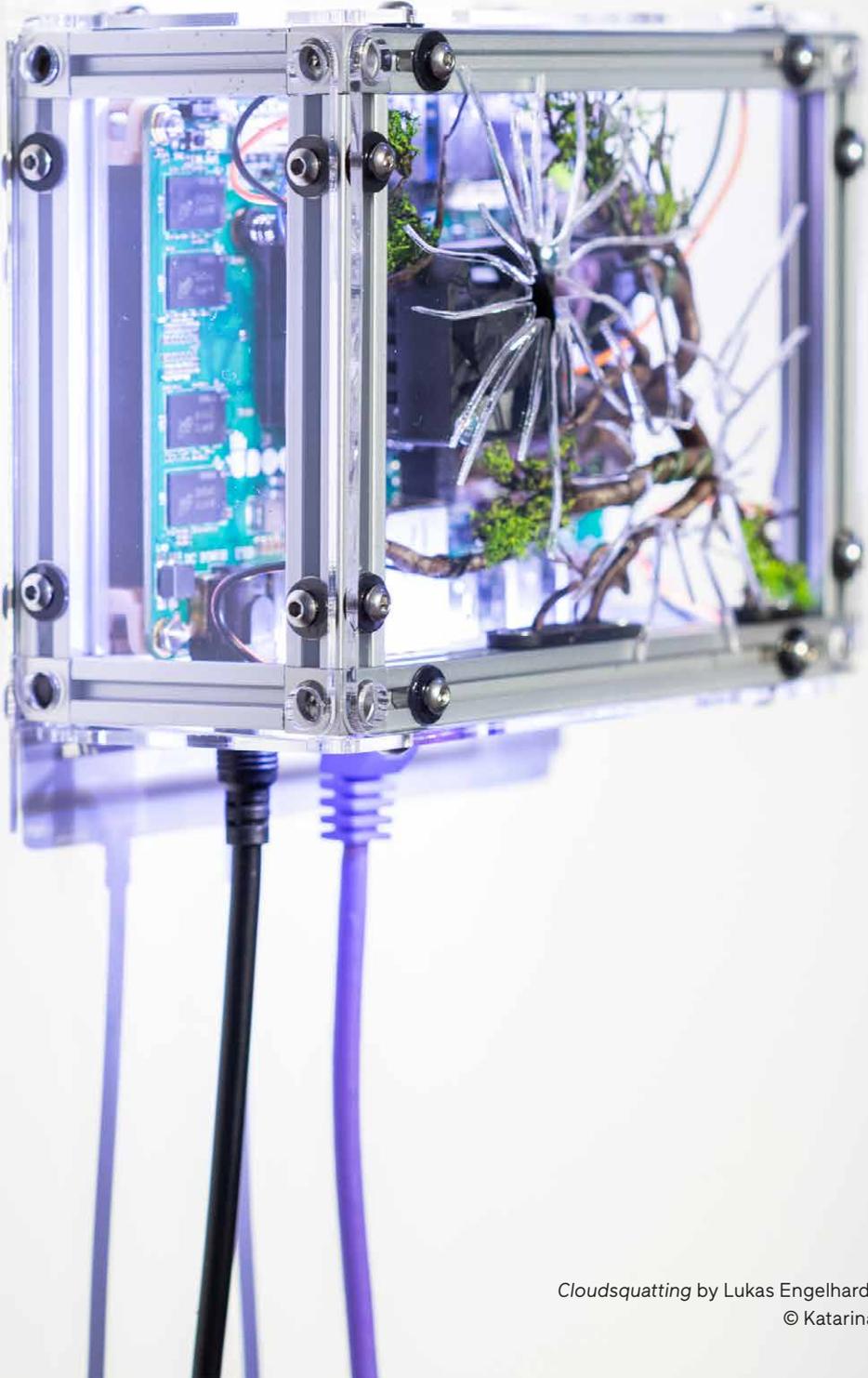
A web hosting service is a type of Internet hosting service. It allows people and companies to make their websites available on the World Wide Web. Web hosts are companies that provide space on a server that is owned or leased for use by clients. These clients store their web site on the server. The server feeds the web pages to the Internet.

What is the problem with commercial servers?

This infrastructure is incredibly expensive from an energy usage and environmental point of view. Even though many data centres around the world are run with 100% renewable energies, they often use so much power that there simply is no more green energy left for the rest of the power grid, which remains powered through the use of fossil fuels.

Large parts of the cloud are run by large corporations like Amazon, Apple, Google, and the like -companies (and monopolies) with histories of

- worker exploitation in the global south,
- of supply chains that include child labour and extraction from indigenous lands,
- of producing abhorrent amounts of waste that end up in landfills in the global south,
- of spying on their users to sell them ads,
- of sharing this information with governments,
- of profiting from political division and right wing radicalization,
- of intentionally making their products addictive,
- of locking their users into incomprehensible terms and conditions.
- and of being aware of all of the above while not changing any of it.



We urgently need to ask ourselves if we want one of these companies to facilitate the infrastructure on which we run our businesses, collectives, foundations, associations and individual practices. Besides these **ethical considerations**, there is the more practical issue of **being dependent on them**.

Most cloud services give users little to no control over the way their files and data are handled. Instead, they intentionally lock users into so-called walled gardens, beautifully designed interfaces that are difficult to escape. In practice, this often means:

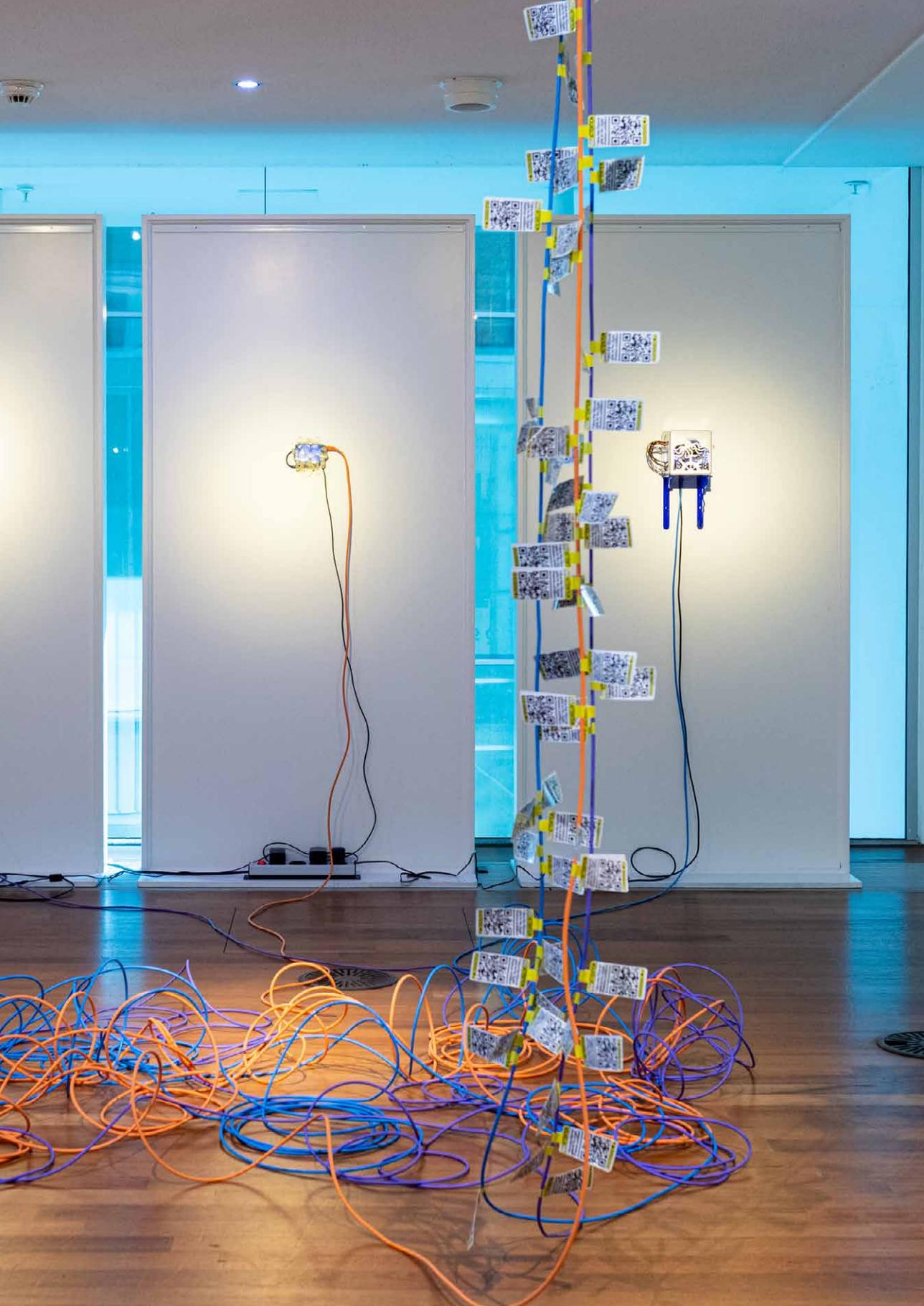
- users can't edit or access their files and documents when they are not connected to the internet,
- users don't know where files are physically saved or how to recover them when they are lost,
- users can't easily switch to another service and take their documents, files, and data with them,
- users are kept dependent on these services and unable to set things up by themselves as they are blocked from viewing how things work behind the scenes
- users have to pay monthly fees to be allowed to keep accessing their data (see: Software as a Service (SaaS)),
if there is an issue (like lost or accidentally deleted data), there is no customer service to turn to,
- users have to trust that sensitive data is handled appropriately and have no control over security measures taken by these companies.

Large corporations have large amounts of data, which makes them a target. They get hacked all the time and data is frequently leaked. As was the case with Twitter in 2022, companies can change owners, business models or Terms of Service within a few weeks, potentially limiting access to users' data or forcing them into new payment plans or dependencies. There is no stability in these (often very young!) companies.

What is self-hosting?

Self-hosting is the opposite of that. Instead of having all your data on someone else's computer, as is the case with the cloud, it's setting up your own computer to do the same thing. Theoretically, any computer can function as a server. While it requires some technical know-how, time, and effort, it's possible to set up a small server in your own home or workplace that can replace some or all of the cloud services you (and your colleagues) use. Since you most likely don't need to serve millions of people at the same time, the hardware, software, and energy requirements for this can be surprisingly low. If you want to supply file sharing, collaborative writing, video calling and a shared calendar for yourself and the people in your surroundings (assuming this for approximately 15 or 20 people), chances are that an old laptop that you or someone you have lying around would be up to the task.





What are the benefits of self-hosting?

As previously mentioned, self-hosting comes with a set of ethical and practical advantages:

- it allows people to gain (more) control over their data, both in terms of privacy and access to their files,
- it allows them to become more self-sufficient in their digital infrastructure,
- it lets them build systems that can adapt and develop along with their needs while simultaneously enabling them to plan for longevity,
- it often allows them to build systems that are more closely adapted to their specific needs, in the process, users will learn about the way digital infrastructures work, making them more adept at avoiding mistakes and fixing problems in the future,
- it allows users to minimise their ecological footprint through lower energy usage and the recycling of old hardware,
- it makes them less dependent on companies that are diametrically opposed to their ethical values

What are the challenges of self-hosting?

Nothing is perfect and, like everything else, self-hosting comes at a cost. The trade-off here is mostly around the time and energy that an individual or group has to spend on it

Self-hosting requires maintenance. The software has to be updated; hardware has to be upgraded or exchanged and issues need to be solved every once in a while. This is a commitment that you need to be aware of before deciding to self-host (parts of) your digital infrastructure.

While most things we describe here are not rocket science, self-hosting always comes with a certain risk of fucking up—of breaking

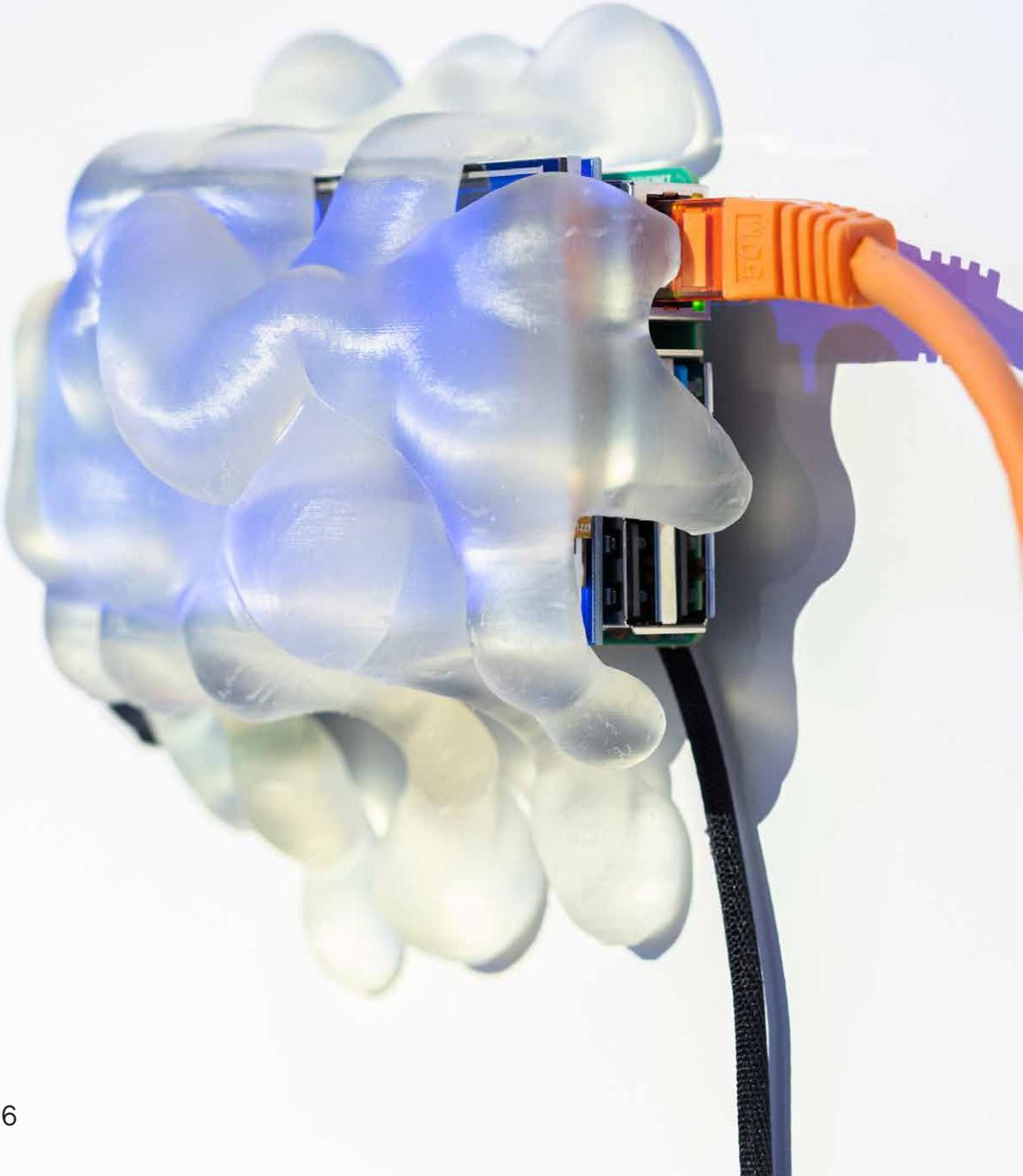
something, accidentally deleting data, or of hardware failure. While there are ways to prevent irreversible damage, it's good practice to consider the consequences of an interruption of service before switching to self-hosting for a particular service.

While it's possible to reduce your ecological footprint through practices like self-hosting (where you can use computers that are extremely energy efficient and/or reuse old hardware), there are limits. From a radical ecological point of view, computing, and especially approaches that are not offline-first, are not ecologically sustainable per definition. The materials that go into the production of chipsets are extracted at considerable costs to the environment, and the amount of energy that goes into the production of a modern computer cannot be compensated for, no matter how energy efficient it is. This is not even accounting for the fact that eventually it will likely end up in a landfill somewhere.

List of services that can be replaced by self-hosting

The list of self-hostable services is long and ever-growing. If there is a cloud service provided by some start-up, there is likely a way of hosting something similar yourself. This includes, but is not limited to:

- File hosting, like Dropbox or Google Drive
- Collaborative office suites, like Google Docs
- Shared calendars like Google Calendar
- Email services like Gmail
- Web hosting like AWS
- There are many more applications to discover or play around with. You can self-host gaming servers (for example, for Minecraft) or media servers to connect to your TV.



Incomplete and unordered list of reasons to refuse the cloud

Workers in the Global South are being exploited and our devices are assembled by modern day slaves.

Rare metals like cobalt, essential for lithium batteries, are extracted under horrible conditions by, among others, children.

Other metals, like lithium, are extracted from indigenous lands without consent or regard for the environment.

E-Waste is polluting the planet and is being dumped in landfills without regulations in the global south, poisoning both the lands and the people.

Tech companies are constantly spying on us through our devices. The right to privacy is being eroded.

This information is passed on to government agencies and the surveillance state is being facilitated.

Social media companies profit from radicalization, and a divided political landscape, fake news, disconnected filter bubbles and rabbit holes are not by-products but part of the product.

The internet, and most devices we carry in our pockets, like smart phones, are developed from US military technology.

Tech is a race to the brain stem. Some of the most educated people in the world put all their energy into selling us ads. Thinking we can resist the machinery is like thinking we could win against a super computer in chess.

It's addictive on purpose. At places like the Stanford Persuasive Technology Lab people have been trained to specifically find ways of persuading users to change their behaviour through digital stimuli like rewards.

Big companies that have incomprehensible terms and conditions instead of constitutions and can censor users without any form of accountability or oversight.

Interview with Lukas Engelhardt

February 2023

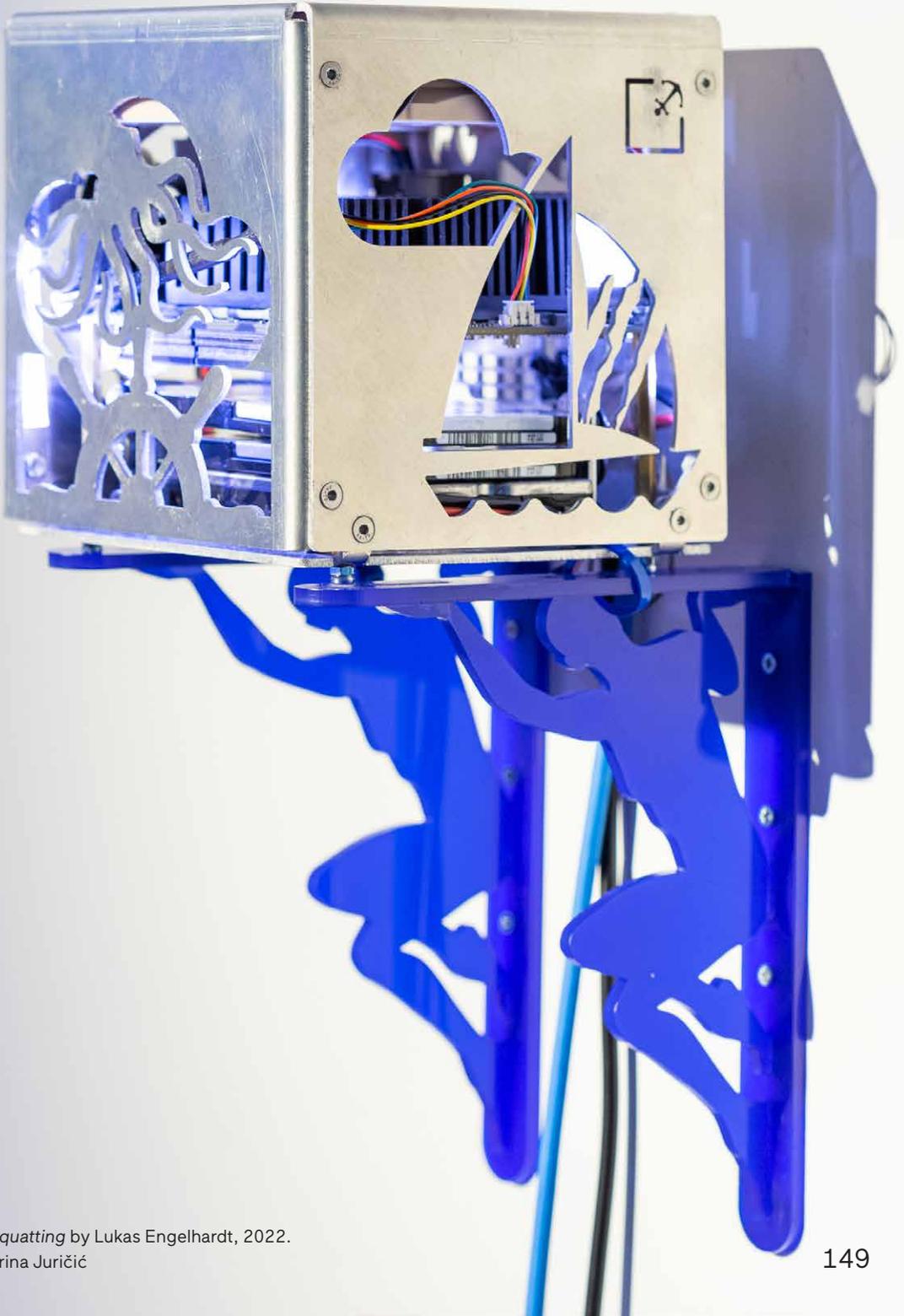
Maro Pebo: Do you believe that artists are a good source of criticism for digital transformation? Can you explain your reasoning behind this and why it makes sense for artists to be at the forefront of this phenomenon?

Lukas Engelhardt: The question already comes with the assumption that this is true; however, I'm not so sure that it is. Don't get me wrong -artists or designers or people who are used to working creatively and visually can bring a lot to the discussion. But I don't know if they should be the ones driving the transformation. After all, the solutions we're talking about are built by specialists in these fields, such as engineers or programmers. They are responsible for many of the alternatives we see today.

I believe the responsibility for digital transformation lies more with institutions than with artists. For example, why are we using Zoom instead of Jitsi for video calls? Or why are we taking notes in Google Docs instead of alternative tools? I think institutions have a hard time transitioning to something that carries a risk of being less stable, at least in perception.

The risk, however, is the same for everyone. I don't think it's specific to the creative sector, artists, or art institutions. It would be great if more people experimented with alternative software. **There's a long discussion about decolonisation happening, and the discussion of infrastructure also needs to be part of it. I believe many people are interested in alternative strategies and finding small, communal solutions to these big problems.**

One thing that I think artists or designers can bring to the table is that we are good at thinking about how things look and feel. There's an aesthetic component and dimension to it, not just in terms of appearance but also in terms of the user experience.





Cloudsquatting by Lukas Engelhardt, 2022. © Katarina Juričić

If we set up these digital spaces for ourselves and our collaborators, it's important to also think about the design, both in terms of the rules and conditions, but also in terms of the service.

It's similar to setting up a shared studio and thinking about the appearance and functionality of the space. We need a similar mindset regarding autonomous, semi-autonomous, and temporary digital zones. This is where artists and designers can add something to the discussion.

Maro Pebo: We observe the phenomenon that several artists are conducting this critique. Artists go beyond the formal.

Lukas Engelhardt: Many artists are interested in experimenting with alternative living structures and trying to push the boundaries of what's considered normal or efficient. **In the creative sector, there is often a greater willingness to embrace inefficiency, as it is seen as**

part of the artistic process. In contrast, in the business sector or in organisations focused on noble causes, there is less tolerance for inefficiency and tools that are not always reliable. This is because there is a greater emphasis on achieving goals as quickly and efficiently as possible in those contexts. The creative sector presents a more receptive environment for exploring unconventional ideas and approaches.

Maro Pebo: You already mentioned how perspectives could be brought by art, and you say it is like this sensitive dimension. What is the sense of presenting these kinds of work in an art space?

Lukas Engelhardt: The servers that I build are more than just functional tools, they are also sculptures with a distinct aesthetic dimension. I'm reminded of Amanda Wasilewski's book "From City Space to Cyberspace", where she explores the connection between the squatting and hacker movements, and highlights their shared interest in setting up temporary autonomous zones. **In a similar vein, the servers I create are like autonomous zones that facilitate collaboration, friendship, and connection. They have an aesthetic appeal that extends beyond their functional purpose, and can even tell a story through their physical form and the content they host.**

The aesthetic dimension of the servers also extends to the people and communities they connect. The way in which they host and vet users, and the inclusivity and diversity of the communities they facilitate, are all part of their aesthetic appeal. This aesthetic component makes the servers worthy of exhibition, as they can be appreciated as both functional tools and works of art.

Maro Pebo: The self-hosting manual was both hosted online and printed. What would be different if it was only published online?

Lukas Engelhardt: For me, the act of printing the manual was significant, as it followed a tradition of self-publishing and distributing autonomous zines in alternative spaces. The manual's design reflects

this pragmatic approach, using simple web tools and a Riso printer without requiring expensive software or typefaces.

The aim was to distribute the manual in a way that aligns with this tradition, ideally leaving copies at local leftist hangouts or squats for people to discover and get interested in. While exhibiting the zine is not crucial, I would prefer it to be found in a sleazy bar or squat rather than a gallery space.

Maro Pebo: Can you tell us more about the background of this process, its history, and its methodologies?

Lukas Engelhardt: The project that I'm working on started when I collaborated with a friend of mine named Paul. We used to study together and were close friends. When he moved to the US for his master's degree, and I started mine in Amsterdam, we decided to create a server to facilitate our collaboration and keep in touch. We picked out the parts together, and we had many video calls about it. We designed the case together, and it was the first time that I built a server that could work in an exhibition space. This project was like an alternative space or temporary autonomous zone for us. Collaboration is central to my practice and I've always been interested in creating a space where we can work together on something. I also worked with another friend of mine in Amsterdam, who is a proper system administrator, to develop the manual. **The manual is targeted at small groups or collectives in the cultural sector that want to organise exhibitions, host meetings, and take notes on a platform that is self-hosted.**

Read more on how squatting and self-hosting relate and are connected: "New Dependencies" by Lukas Engelhart, Institute of Network Cultures. March 29th, 2022.



Assembly by, with and for artists in making funding opportunities more accessible

Learning from the residency in Lesbos.
An interview with Aris Papadopulous

METHODS

- 1. Channel resources to precarious cultural workers who do not have stable income**
- 2. Make the application procedure easier and accessible**
- 3. Make funding systems more transparent**
- 4. Select facilitators who care and are committed**
- 5. Engage with the practitioners in co-creation session with offline means to invite them to be more present**
- 6. Bridge different cohorts by inviting them to navigate through previous outputs**
- 7. Distil tools from conversations about social practices on three scales**
- 8. Allow artists time to construct the process themselves**
- 9. Define expectations while anticipating refusal**

Introduction

Maitreyi Maheshwari (FACT) and Maro Pebo (Waag) interviewed Aris Papadopoulos (LATRA) about the organisation and hosting of the ARTSFORMERS residencies in Lesbos-Greece. 28 arts professionals gathered collaboratively in the summer of 2022 to ideate and co-create unconventional training tools for peers, policymakers, businesses, and the public to tackle digital and social inequalities arising from the digital transformation. They aim to empower others to adapt and utilise their learnings.

Some of the key issues that came up in the conversation were:

The lack of accessibility of open calls for general publics and artists:

If we want to offer equal opportunities, it is fundamental to provide access to networks and to people who can help cultural workers navigate the specifics of the language of calls and processes.

Maitreyi Maheshwari: how did you facilitate a residency through a pandemic online while paying the artists? What were the material differences in terms of what you initially set out to do and then what you ended up being able to deliver?

Aris Papadopoulos: Initially, the idea was to have 28 residents in person all at once in Lesbos, but then the pandemic happened. Our idea was then to deliver the residency online. We felt that if that was the case,, we wanted to actually pay the artists with the funds that we were saving from travel and accommodation, etc., but the commission would not allow that. If we hosted the residency online, we would have to return the funds. They decided to wait it out, effectively, until we could have the residency in person. We felt that

if it was online, if we cannot pay people, it would be unfair, especially a year and a half into the pandemic where there was this fatigue with online sessions. If you're going to incentivize people, especially those not receiving funds because these are not the kind of people who are after fellowships and different sorts of projects to sustain themselves, it feels unfair to ask people to give their time, despite the capacity building, without remunerating their time. So we made it happen in real life, and the actual difference was that we had smaller groups coming in person. We had three different groups, amounting to 30 people at the end. When we were planning the residency, it was at the start of the pandemic, so we had to wait it out for almost a year. It was actual negotiation of whether we could pay the artists.

On paying artists

Maitreyi Maheshwari: That feels like quite an ideological position because actually, to pay artists for their time is recognising that the work that artists do is equivalent to the work that anyone else does. Therefore, unpaid work, even though the idea of a residency may be seen as a benefit to them, is not. It's no greater benefit than an office worker being sent to training while receiving their salary. They'd still be paid to attend those training days. There is something rather ideological, like a clash between the expectation of an arts organisation working to support artists wanting to make sure that artists are compensated.



“To pay artists for their time is recognising that the work that artists do is equivalent to the work that anyone else does.”



Aris Papadopoulos: In residencies, they travel to a place, receive a small stipend, accommodation, subsistence, and whatnot, but not actual fees for the work. Most of them are struggling to sustain themselves and their practice. We had a lot of people travelling not from the capital of their country, but instead from rural places from the peripheries. The situation was even bleaker for those individuals.

We skimmed down the actual application format to eight questions very intentionally. We only asked questions that we felt were important to us. We did not make applicants go through a tedious process. Once the residents were here, we had a lot of discussions about participatory grantmaking, organising as a collective, and what to do to navigate through shared challenges that we have. Therefore, they gave us feedback about what they liked about the application process such as that the application form was short, that we used Google Forms, and that it was really easy for them to comprehend the questions. They felt that funders and grantmakers often make applicants go through very complicated processes to actually get the grants. Some of them also raised questions regarding accessibility. For example, I clearly remember a German artist who said that she found applying within the German funding system quite impossible, since she had issues navigating through the questions that are written in a way that is not easily understandable. She asked what happens then if it's a refugee artist who wants to integrate themselves, or somebody who is maybe not very good with written communication? A few of the others also mentioned that part of the reason why they became artists is that they weren't very good with handling written communication or with text.

Artists and trust relating to institutions

Aris Papadopulous: Resident artists felt that our process was really good, but particularly around **the issues of trust and care**. Artists feel that most of the time it is a one-way system where they always gave in to the requests of funders and that they always had to make the first step in building trust with different funders. They always had to be the productive ones, ticking boxes and doing what was right. Then there was obviously this sort of gatekeeping from the end of the funders and the grantmakers. This was certainly felt when it came to the sort of European Commission type of funding - that the higher the funding rate, or the lump sum grants that they received, the more exclusive the entire purse became. Out of the 30, we had only one person who had participated in Horizon Europe. The rest felt that it was completely an exclusionary system, that they could not even find a way to get on a roadmap, not to mention applying. It's an opaque system to them.

Methodologies for working with artists

Maro Pebo: What are the learnings for future projects in terms of how to develop a workshop or a residency? What are the methodologies, suggestions, and feedback for the process of not only making it but also delivering it? How did it actually take place?



Pick facilitators who are committed

Aris Papadopoulos: There were not many unknowns in terms of the organisation and the production, and the residents really enjoyed that because the transparency built up the trust. One of the things that we did was hosting the residencies in a sort of cascading fashion. We had three different groups which provided the opportunity to learn from each cycle to the next. That was very beneficial both to us and ultimately to the artists. When we saw that something was not receiving positive feedback, we would change it in the next cycle. Something that we gave a great deal of care about was the actual selection of facilitators. We reached out to different partners and asked for referrals within Artsformation. Then we interviewed them all. We spent time on this process and we asked potential facilitators to go through multiple cycles. We explained to them that the reason for doing so was because we wanted to make sure that they found the right fit for their business. It was very challenging for us to actually pick a facilitator via Zoom to get the energy right. So we spent a great deal of time and attention in picking our facilitators.



RESISTANCE Participatory Arts Productions, 2023.
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Art assembly

Aris Papadopoulos: There were two clear outcomes or outputs from the residency. The first is that we wanted to map out if the groups that we were going to have would steer towards the formation of an art assembly and whether they would gravitate towards that if you gave them the opportunity. This would mean that the funding would be used to actually create an assembly. Would they choose to do that as a form of an organisation? And how would they do that? What would the structure of that assembly be? How would they make decisions? Effectively, how would they organise their community? Typically artists find that the community or platform is already in place, and they need to adjust to whatever already exists. So we wanted to ask the question: if we let loose, and we actually empower people with funding, choices, time, and resources, what would they do? For us, it was the monitoring of how the assembly would come to life. And if it did not come together, why not?

Tools of social practices on three scales

Aris Papadopoulos: The second tangible output that we wanted is to put out a problem statement to the artists. Oftentimes, when artists work with communities, they do this incredibly meaningful work but, when they leave the place, this work ends with their presence on-site. Its the artists who are the instigators or the producers, the project facilitators. As soon as they leave, the project dies with them. So we wanted them to extrapolate what they felt were valuable insights about the process and extract it into a set of tools.

Let's say they could leave behind two things on three different scales – the community scale, the institutional scale, and the organisational scale. Organisational would be for their peers, institutional would be for the funders, and the community would be for the beneficiaries themselves.

We also explained to them that we were not anticipating that they could produce that by the end of the residency, but we wanted them to go through the process of asking questions. We would then extrapolate outputs from data which we would put into a toolkit. We did not ask them to produce a toolkit. We prioritised the formation of the assembly because we felt that it resonated with them, but also that we ourselves could create the tools via the formation of the assembly. Therefore, we asked them to dive into the process, to trust the process - and we had a revelation moment at the end of the residency. At the end of the three days, we explained that it is a very real thing that we were going to do., We are going to create the assembly and have funders in place who are interested in it. It wasn't a make-believe exercise that stopped after the three days. We're going to take them to Berlin to work further. We have specific funding streams to actually empower the assembly. Because it came up on the last day, everyone left with everyone left hopeful for what was to come.

It was a very non-digital residency. We forbade people from bringing their laptops to the venue. We used markers and paper for developing all of our exercises. We received a lot of praise for that. As a result, people were present in the moment. This resulted in a lot of outputs in terms of a specific paper format that we used. At the end of the process, each group has produced these resources so we asked them to, in a closing circle, give some final output that they wanted the next group to review when they came here.

We had the sheets of paper that they produced, so in the break between the groups of artists, we set an exhibition in the space featuring these sheets. When the next group walked in, they were able to review all the work that their peers had produced before them. The first thing that they engaged in after the introductions was almost an analogue web search. When they went into the space, the resources were scattered in different rooms and they had to navigate through the resources themselves. Then we actually gave them the outcomes of the previous group as well as a briefing of the residence itself. They could either choose to start from where the previous cohort had left off or they could start from scratch. All groups decided to start from scratch. Inevitably, there were crossovers between the groups. They wanted to start from clean slates, but they also identified, on day two or day three, that they were overlapping with what the other groups had produced. Effectively, it's those overlaps and those crossovers that we are then extrapolating to our toolkit and report.



Evaluating the process

Aris Papadopoulos: After the residents left, the next stage was to develop a formal assembly based on the residency outcomes.

The residents were all very keen to help the assembly be set up. The next step that we took was conducting an open call among the 30 that participated, if they wanted to be consultants in the process of building up these online assemblies. Out of the 30, 25 people volunteered. We then asked each of the three groups to nominate one person per group who would formally work as a paid consultant.. We paid them directly, not through the project, because we wanted to have them on board. They are now our consultants in building the assembly and they communicate back to the community. We're going to launch the assembly and in mid-October (2022) we will test the beta version. People are very excited about the prospect of the assembly. I think it is because they have this opportunity to leave their marks, and to bring the assembly to their communities.



RESISTANCE Participatory Arts Productions, 2023.
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A point that the artists communicated is that there are certain communities that they feel are underrepresented in public dialogue when it comes to funding. They also feel that oftentimes when they are being mobilised or asked to join projects, it's as a token of recognition from the funders, like white washing, greenwashing, LGBTQ washing, call it what you will. It is the opportunity to put out their views and their agendas in the public domain without any filters about something they value. It's this community of residents that we are going to be mobilising to build up the assembly to expand the community. And we want to do it organically.

Maro Pebo: Is there anything that you discovered or that surprised you in working with artists, in thinking, for example, about the decolonisation of digital transformation, or in imagining a policy of why we decolonise it, and how we do it?

Artists and policy recommendations

Aris Papadopulous:

Allow the artists time to construct the process themselves

We have to produce policy recommendations and we communicate that with the artists. There was very little interest from the point of view of the artists regarding policy recommendations because they're artists. They're not policy advisors. If they wanted to do that, they would become consultants. You really need to ask the right questions to the artist when it comes to policy, or the policy advice that they can produce, or insights that they can give. I think then you actually need to give them the time and the autonomy of working to produce the results. In our experience, these are not the people who you sit down in a workshop of one hour, nor are they familiar with a push-push-push format, where they are going to extract the answers that might be comfortable for your report or suit your insights. You need to allow them the time to construct the process that leads to results. In most cases, and unfortunately what we have seen in the past, is that people who want to engage artists in such processes usually do not allow them the time or do not allow them to construct the process. They bring a process to artists to produce and sometimes the artists start by critiquing the process itself that you've put in front of them.

A very familiar occurrence throughout the residency was that the artists actually turned the questions back to us -for example, when we communicated that we needed to produce tools for addressing the digital transformation or to produce solutions. They asked: "why should I be the one producing solutions? Why are you putting me in that position?" We felt that this was a very good question in that context, that refusal to be put in the position of solution provider. This was because the topic that we were addressing was refusal-how artists were refused by all the barriers of funding systems and opportunities. The artists asked: "why are you putting me in the position to

solve problems that we did not create?” And we said, fair enough. We will not ask you to produce tools and solutions to these problems. Because we had very open-ended structures and we allowed the artists to play with it and bring their narratives and thinking on board, we were able to garner some of the outputs. We feel that if you put people around the table, in a very exact format, with a hard structure in place, it would not feel like the right sort of setting for them.

Expectations should be clear, because it creates a good sort of contract between the parties. At the same time, the process should be left open-ended.

Defining expectations is a good thing.
But at the same time, when you define expectations, you should also anticipate refusal.

Postscript

Truth and creativity in times of ChatGPT

A postscript conversation with Alessandro Ludovico
from Neural magazine and Waag Futurelab

May 2023

Introduction

GPT (Generative Pre-trained Transformer) is a neural network machine learning model trained using internet data to generate any type of text. This type of AI chatbot has become very popular since 2023. People use it for planning travels, writing emails or even school essays. But as it is very difficult to trace the sources and verify the information, and thus GPT obfuscates truth with misinformation and convincingly composed fictional information. In this postscript interview, Alessandro Ludovico, founder of Neural Magazine, a magazine that focuses on critical digital culture and media arts since 1993, has a conversation with Lucas Evers and Maro Pebo from Waag Futurelab about how artists use their critical creativity in addressing matters of concern in digital transformation such as the development and use of AI.

Maro Pebo: As an expert in the field of media arts that closely follows the work artists have been doing in critically addressing technologies, we invited a postscript about the rapid advancement of GPT technology. While this technology generates seemingly high-quality texts at an unprecedented pace, it raises concerns about its potential misuse as a tool for producing fake news and spreading disinformation.

Lucas Evers: Throughout the history of media art, there have been critical works about the digital transformation within society related to vulnerable groups. We've seen technologies like the Transborder Immigrant Tool (2007), where Ricardo Dominguez undertook an art project involving a locative media concept aimed at helping immigrants crossing the border from Mexico to the United States. It utilised GPS-enabled cell phones to provide assistance and ensure the safe passage of individuals crossing the desert border.

In a more recent example, Andrius Arutiunian, an Armenian-Lithuanian artist, explores the intersection of AI and GPT technologies with *The Irresistible Powers of Silent Talking* (2021), which delves into the issue of border violence through the lens of AI-powered technologies. The installation examines the controversial iBorderCtrl software, a collaborative effort involving border patrols in Spain, Greece, and the UK.

iBorderCtrl employs an automated deception recognition algorithm that analyses the facial micro-expressions of migrants entering the EU. Despite being funded with public money, Arutiunian could not access the algorithm's code. In the installation, an avatar resembling a police officer represents iBorderCtrl and is depicted as voiceless. The avatar's

facial expressions are scrutinised for signs of deceit or truthfulness. The resulting ambiguous soundscape mirrors the inherent violence in crossing borders and challenges the flawed assumptions embedded within the algorithm.

This work prompts us to delve deeper into the rapid advancements of AI applications and consider new artistic responses that could arise from this evolving landscape.

Alessandro Ludovico: In the history of media art, it has always been crucial to engage with emerging technologies at an early stage. During the early days of Net.Art, we were actively involved in the critical examination of the internet and its evolving definitions. This coincided with the rise of the commercial internet, which took several years to gain widespread adoption. The rapid development of AI and predictive algorithms, including ChatGPT, is unprecedented at this particular historical moment. Unlike previous technologies, these advancements have had an immediate and massive impact due to the widespread availability of internet terminals in people's pockets. The cultural impact of these technologies is significant, even if they still have certain limitations when it comes to producing high-quality and truly creative content. While some argue that these limitations will be overcome with time and refinement, there is still a structural

gap between machine-generated and human-generated content. Predictive technologies excel in producing predictable and formulaic texts, such as sports reports, but struggle to come up with anything truly original beyond their predictive capabilities. The question is whether we should explore these technologies as sophisticated tools or delegate our creative pursuits entirely to machines—an existential decision.

Lucas Evers: In your distinction between efficiency and culture, you draw a connection to media arts, particularly tactical media and publishing. This raises an intriguing point as tactical approaches seek efficiency in specific contexts and groups. Can you envision new artistic interventions that counter GPT technologies or utilise them in unique ways?

Alessandro Ludovico: Yes, there are ongoing conversations with artists who have explored AI and technology in their publishing endeavours, often with a critical perspective. However, current artistic productions, even critical ones, are primarily about using the basic functions of ChatGPT or similar predictive technologies to see what outputs they generate. This approach can be done by anyone as an experiment. What artists need is a more sophisticated and symbolically rich strategy that demonstrates what the algorithm can do and explores the

“What artists need is a more sophisticated and symbolically rich strategy that demonstrates what the algorithm can do and explores the real-world consequences of these algorithms.”

real-world consequences of these algorithms. This requires a more sophisticated and nuanced approach. While efficiency is one aspect, the most interesting aspect lies in how people think about using AI to automatically produce something beyond simple reports or papers. However, it should be noted that current predictive models still have limitations in terms of the cultural output they can produce.

Maro Pebo: Nevertheless, GPT technologies represent a significant improvement in quality compared to previous conversational models, surpassing many humans in terms of producing fake news without typos or mistakes. The concern lies in the fact that the high quality of the generated content can make it believable and contribute to the spread of misinformation. These tools can be seen as a platform that supports the production of high-quality fake news, raising concerns about their potential for misuse and their impact on important topics like the climate crisis. In this context, have you encountered any

artwork that goes beyond experimentation and explores the consequences of rapidly developing technologies? What do you believe is needed for such artwork to emerge? Artists are interested in these fast-changing tools and are concerned about their place within this transformative landscape. What strategies can artists employ to navigate and engage with this rapid transformation?

Alessandro Ludovico: Fake news and the production of AI can be divided into three broad areas: visual, auditory, and textual, each with different levels of impact, quality, and consequences. Visual fake news currently tends to be of lower quality, and often easily identifiable as fake, even without AI tools. However, there is potential for progress in creating more realistic visual fakes. Auditory fake news is also a concern, as there is the possibility of synthesising voice messages using AI. Textual fake news, in particular, has yet to see any outstanding artwork beyond experimentation. Artists are interested in exploring the strategies

and implications of rapidly evolving AI tools. The production of fake news is not just about generating information but also about the generation of information, but also about its adoption, dissemination, sharing and integration into the vast and complex infrastructure of social media. For fake news to have a real impact, it must be completely trustworthy and part of a comprehensive strategy rather than just isolated content. Artists in media art history have often engaged in producing fake news by using elaborate strategies that go beyond immediate information. An example of this is the Yes Men's New York Times Special Edition, which meticulously recreated the design and distribution of the newspaper and achieved great impact through its trustworthiness and comprehensive execution.

Lucas Evers: First, I want to respond to your point about current predictive AI models being limited in producing cultural

output. This might not be true. Recently, German artist Boris Eldagsen refused the prestigious Sony World Photography award, and declared that his entry was AI-generated. The whole submission and rejection was designed to provoke debates about whether AI images can be considered as photography.¹

Second, the intention behind the fake New York Times was to be eventually unmasked, unlike the current fake news, which aims to spread on a large scale without being easily unmasked. These technologies greatly facilitate the mass production of misinformation, leading to widespread confusion where trustworthy information becomes indistinguishable from untrustworthy sources. For instance, a fake AI-generated image of a fire near the Pentagon caused the stock market to panic and drop.² Although experts quickly debunked it as fake, it had spread on social media and stoked fear, causing

“These technologies greatly facilitate the mass production of misinformation, leading to widespread confusion where trustworthy information becomes indistinguishable from untrustworthy sources.”

1 Jamie Grierson, “Photographer admits prize-winning image was AI-generated”, *The Guardian*. 17 April, 2023.
2 Andrew Ross Sorkin, Bernhard Warner, Sarah Kessler, Michael J. de la Merced, Lauren Hirsch and Ephrat Livni, “An A.I.-Generated Spoof Rattles the Markets”, *New York Times*. 23 May 2023.

“A significant fear and issue I have with these automatic tools is that they are not designed to trace back or maintain a clear connection to the sources from which they are generated.”

a real harmful impact. So what you said about the visual fake news being easily detectable is true to some extent, but fact-checking is always catching up with disinformation. Before it is dismissed, the fake news has already circulated and been used by people with agendas that are not in line with the common good of the society. The AI-generated image of the Pentagon fire that I have just mentioned was spread by Kremlin-controlled RT.

Alessandro Ludovico: We live in a global publishing world where information is produced at various levels, from ordinary private individuals to reputable news sources like the New York Times. The introduction of social media as a publishing platform has significantly changed the way we perceive and consume news. However, we have not had enough time to adapt and evolve our approach to news in this new era. The sheer volume of information we receive, filtered through our trusted sources and social networks, creates a complex infrastructure. When it comes to

intentionally producing fake information, it must appear trustworthy to be effective. The global nature of social media and the multiple sources make it vulnerable to polarisation, where people either accept or reject information without thoroughly checking its sources or credibility. The speed at which information spreads on social media leaves little time for verification. While misinformation and disinformation can spread, there is also the possibility of counter-information that further polarises people. The scenario of a single entity enslaving the entire population with misinformation, as portrayed in Orwell's 1984, is not applicable here. It's a more nuanced and complex game where skilled individuals can influence a segment of the population, as the political manipulation by some Italian populist parties has shown. However, these technologies are not exclusive or limited to one side. They are biased, like most private technologies, but their business plan is for universal use. My major concern as a human being is not just the potential for massive fake news that

misleads people or has evil intentions.

Maro Pebo: What then is your concern with using these prediction-based content creation technologies?

Alessandro Ludovico: A significant fear and issue I have with these automatic tools is that they are not designed to trace back or maintain a clear connection to the sources from which they are generated. In my chapter for *The Routledge Handbook of Remix Studies and Digital Humanities* (2021), I explored the concept of remixes and how they have traditionally been tied to a body of knowledge that can be traced back to its sources. This is crucial for historical understanding, as history relies on trustworthy documents and sources that can be referenced and verified. However, automatically generating history from databases or inventing information without strong ties to trusted sources becomes untraceable and subject to anyone's interpretation. This is deeply problematic for me because it undermines the ability to present solid arguments and evidence. What evidence or supporting arguments can I present without trustworthy sources? You can rely on logic, intuition or common sense, but all of these are debatable.

Furthermore, if we were to lose all printed books, original documents, and trusted sources, the global arena

of knowledge would be lost. Everyone would be on the same level, and have no reliable background to refer to. Oral tradition or oral history could theoretically be an ideal solution, but if machines generate information, our roots and backgrounds would also be at risk. For this reason, sources and language are of paramount importance. However, the way these technologies are designed disregards the significance of sources. As everything becomes digitised and easily updated, sources are seen as less important because they seem to be available for free. This trend has been observed since the early days of the commercial and public internet.

Lucas Evers: You also touch upon much longer existing problems around digitally born heritage but also digitised heritage. If you have digitised content, some people need to remember the importance of the source.

Alessandro Ludovico: I agree with you completely. I have my own opinions on this issue, even if I do not have a solution. What is necessary is a shift in human practices. The problem lies in the universality of major commercial products, whether it is sneakers or food. When something becomes universal, it becomes abstracted in a way. Similarly, these tools abstract the knowledge and authorship behind it when they analyse huge databases.

The author is no longer the focal point but rather a model of knowledge production that can be attributed to anyone or anything. This is extremely dangerous.

Digitalisation plays a role in enabling this abstraction. We see similar mechanisms at play when we engage with social media. We strive for universality, aiming to become influencers or celebrities, but in the process we become abstractions ourselves. The problem is that we often mimic these processes unconsciously. Instead, we should significantly reduce the number of people we have to deal with and focus on building trusted networks. Within these trusted networks, we can effectively preserve and develop knowledge. This approach goes against the prevailing trend towards universalisation that underlies these practices and could have a direct impact.

Let me clarify that I am not against technology. I have been running a magazine on new media art for three decades; however, this level of criticism is crucial now.

Lucas Evers: We have discussed that there is a worry about GPT technologies and the power of AI in content production. But at the same time, there is not only a worry - there is also confidence that we make a cultural difference as humans.

Alessandro Ludovico: During the development of our artwork, “Google Will Eat Itself” (GWEI), in 2005, we sharply criticised Google. We believed that Google should be turned into a public company, much like the state used to have directories like the White and Yellow Pages, which were essential for communication. A search engine of such significance must be independent of a private company. This process is repeating itself and I think it is a mistake. I want to make it clear that I am not suggesting that private companies should not develop their own products. However, when a technology becomes so important to society, there should at least be a voice, if not a stake, in that technology to keep the public interest. I see many positive applications of AI in research, and possibly gaining meaningful insights. However, we must have the appropriate cultural and human-centred tools to use these technologies effectively for our benefit and not just to serve the interests of the market or an exclusively corporate society.

Lucas Evers: Marleen Stikker, the director of Waag Futurelab, emphasises the importance of criticising big technology companies like Google, Microsoft, and Facebook, yet also advocates creating new versions of their technologies within a public context. For instance, if we are highly critical of TikTok, shouldn't we develop a public or European alternative

to TikTok? The same goes for other platforms, like a European version of Google's search engine. This is why Stikker actively promotes Mastodon as an alternative to X (former Twitter). (In 1995, Stikker initiated The Digital City, an inclusive social media platform avant la lettre made by artists, hackers, and designers that recently received UNESCO Memory of the World status.) It is crucial to continue discussing this matter because a concerted European effort is needed to make these technologies public. By incorporating public civic values into the design of these technologies, we can mitigate risks and potentially make them more meaningful for society rather than serving purely extractive purposes.

Credits and acknowledgements

- **How to implement feminist design principles as a collective – An interview with with Charlotte Webb from Feminist Internet**
- **“Fish discover water last” – becoming aware of the bubbles of machine-curated contents on social media. TheirTok: A conversation with Tomo Kihara**
- **Cloudsquatting. The political and practical dimensions of making your own server and self-hosting as a group/collective**
- **The self-hosting manual and Incomplete and Unordered List of Reasons to Refuse The Cloud are written by Lukas Engelhardt**
- **Assembly by, with and for artists in making funding opportunities more accessible Learning from the residency in Lesbos. An interview with Aris Papadopolous**
- **Questioning ethics of science and technology in art: Trust me, I am an artist. A conversation between Nicola Triscott (FACT) and Lucas Evers (Waag)**
- **Postscript: Truth and creativity in the times of GPT, a postscript conversation between Alessandro Ludovico from Neural magazine and Waag (Lucas Evers and Maro Pebo).**

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A Strategy of Withdrawal from Facebook: Aligning and Moving in Solidarity with Communities, written by Nora O Murchú and Lucas Matray (transmediale)

Entangled Data - Civic Infrastructures and their Impact, written by Nora O Murchú with support from Lucas Matray (transmediale) and Donal Lally (ANNEX)

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transmediale is an annual festival bringing together international artists, researchers, activists, and thinkers with the goal of developing new outlooks on our technological era through the entanglement of different genres and curatorial approaches. Beyond the yearly event, transmediale is a transversal, dynamic platform with a vibrant community and a strong network that facilitates regular publications and year-round activities including commissions and a residency programme.

Waag Futurelab is an organisation for technology and society that contributes to the research, design, and development of a sustainable, just society by collectively researching emerging technology. We question underlying cultural assumptions by experimenting with and designing alternatives on the basis of public values to develop an open, fair and inclusive future together with civil society.

FACT is the UK's leading organisation for the support and exhibition of art and film that embraces new technology and explores digital culture. We believe in enriching lives and shaping the future through film, art and creative technology.

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