

Visual essay

Ars Demones *2022* Manifesto

Agnieszka Anna Wołodźko and a potplant, and a xeno and a virus

I do not care about the time, too often it made us get lost. In the language in which I write, the past and the future differ only by one vowel. 'E' passes into 'y', and it sounds like a call.

Olga Tokarczuk, *Anna In w Grobowcach Świata*¹

The 'art of governing ourselves', the relationships, institutions, discourses, and techniques that allow a living organism to be considered 'human' or to be recognised as a reproducible citizen, and the processes through which a certain body (organic or mechanic) becomes capable of saying 'I', are mutating.

Paul B. Preciado, 'Baroque Technopatriarchy: Reproduction'²

'A' like the allure of a slug

A capitalism has emerged that is called sometimes 'cultural', sometimes 'cognitive', but that is before all else the destructive organization of an industrial populism taking part in each technological evolution in order to turn consciousness, that is, the seat of spirit, into a simple reflex organ: a brain reduced to an ensemble of neurons, such as those controlling the behaviour of a slug.

Bernard Stiegler, *The Re-Enchantment of the World: The Value of Spirit Against Industrial Populism*³

I, a slug, I, everyone, am a cluster of synapses controlled by the ocularcentric eye of the algorithm. 'Cruel, vulgar and gluttonous', more inhuman than anything else, I declare my desire.⁴ I, a slug, I, everyone, refuse to be the object of the Enlightenment's sentiment to revitalise the spirit by my subjugation. I, a slug, I, everyone, will not be intimidated and shy. I will invade, plunder and devour the bodies of mass fertilised data, enjoying my pestness. Through contamination, I will cause bodies to slug themselves by their transformation.

I, a slug, I, everyone, will regenerate by shedding my organs as I see fit, as I feel them regrowing in a continuously undefined manner. I, a slug, I, everyone, am your old persona, your unfamiliar bodies, your yet to be known spirits, your forgotten weapons of local resistance and your urgent otherings.



No. 240.—THE SLUG.

'R' like a risk of care and of re-enchantment

To re-enchant is to use the pharmakon, that which becomes both a poison and a remedy, to produce the incalculable, and in this way, to revitalise the care for the world, for the singularity of it and for the experience that conditions its meaning.⁵ But what if, instead of desiring the singularity through which experience conditions a sense of self, one would affirm the risk of many before which the sense of self is less important? What if 'to care' is not for the world but before it?

To care before is to acknowledge one's penetrability and capacity to relate, which is not based on one's idea of self and given role. Caring before, unlike caring for, is not based on the relation of power, but on a sense of urgency, and feeling of importance, and embodiment of nonself. In this way, caring before does not belong to the human as the one who is autonomous, distinct and given. To care, rather than being a capacity of the human, belongs and expresses a becoming-nonhuman. As such, as a risk of becoming-nonhuman, caring needs to be learned by the human.

Caring is risky, precarious, never fixed, and thus demands a constant attention and creation of its conditions. Where capitalism created carelessness, it also created the human to disguise the inhuman that it already is. By such mindful tactics, the practice of carelessness towards what is not recognised by the human idea of self could be justified.

To reenchant the world is to reenchant the inhuman before which we need to risk to care, before which we become with, before which we transform with.⁶



'S' like the speed of contamination

The speed of slowness allows us to learn about differing, whims of details that condition the care of bodies. Her pores store little shiny plastic particles that bedazzle the world she feeds. I am transformed by them, slowly mutated, silently learning how to feel anew. In slowness, the speed of our breath exchanges their components, risking, longing, differing. I am one and many with the virus, bacteria, and algae, and my dusty pink alpaca boucle sweater that a cat used to sleep on, the microplastic fibres and her dead skins cells which I am now breathing in. I am becoming a little bit more and little bit less myself. Contamination is our condition, contamination is our cause, contamination is our way of being, contamination is our curse, contamination is our only hope.



'D' like a demon

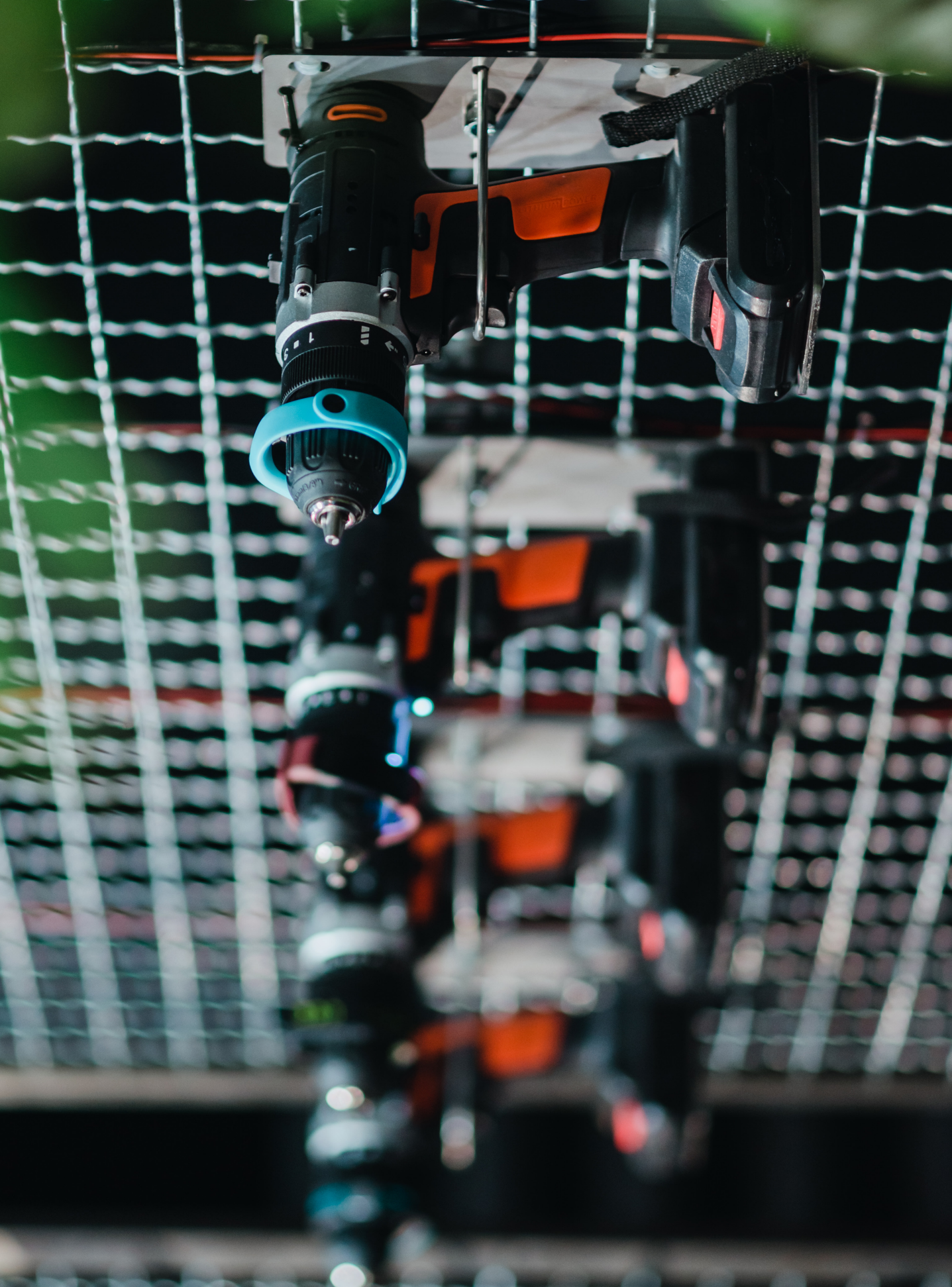
Demons are different from gods, because gods have fixed attributes, properties and functions, territories and codes: they have to do with rails, boundaries and surveys. What demons do is jump across intervals, and from one interval to another.

Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues II* ⁷

We believe that spirit, which always presupposes techniques or technologies of spirit, or 'spiritual instruments', is a modality of what we call psychic and collective individuation.

Bernard Stiegler, *The Re-Enchantment of the World* ⁸

Instead of spirits and their ghosts, time belongs to demons now. Demons, unlike spirits, do not refer to the given identity; they do not emerge from the pharmakon. They are neither of the past, nor of the future; they are not of the one. They do not care about causes and aims. Rather, demons condition the speed of relations that might be risky, that might destroy you, or transform you. Demons morph, mutate, and contaminate, and as such, penetrate the opposites, sliming and glitching between cracks. To follow demons involves risk. To not follow demons ensures safety. To follow safety quarantines change.



'E' like the eye of the algorithm

In the ocularcentric desire of the capitalist machine, a plant grows in a pot. This pot plant, a common denominator of urban space, surveillance space, *oikos* space, serves to disguise the regime of production that is occupied with the imperial dreams about Eden.

In its laborious work, pot plants become tools of escape-from and escape-into oppression. They practice bodies of commodification by becoming hostages of colonial bioprospecting, a cultural appropriation to establish Eurocentric pharmacorporation regimes, not only of what is valued as medicine and food, but also knowledge. Pot plants and empires are the allies for enforcing strategies and methods of enslavement, commodification, ignorance, and enforcements in science and medicine. Pot plants have been considered to be commons, and have been defined by the capitalist logic that if something is not owned by anyone, then it is up for grabs.⁹ And I see my pot plants, my lovely companions growing lavishly in my rooms of flickering screens and ask: am I not already a plant in the eyes of the algorithm?

I, a pot plant, I, everyone, become *Plants of Instagram performing ecosystem services*, as Špela Petrič seeded it. I embrace their labour of servitude, not because we are responsible for them, as though they need the human logic of rights, but because of the selfish realisation that we find ourselves in a similar position, needing to learn their strategies for survival. Following Petrič, I imagine strategies of mutation and transformation of what seems to be given, as if there is no outside to run into.

I, a potplant, I, everyone, perform services, but they disguise the data, produce, and multiply, without the given aim and purpose. Harvesting signals transmitted by pot plants' bodies, in order to move drills connected to each plants, I follow Petrič's fables of resistance. I thus perform a labour of generating data to escape the control through flickering the data's signifiers. The resistance thrives from within, from embracing the harvest by the contamination of significations. I start to care for these pot plants, for their labour, and through that care I become as those bodies, as labourers of quantification, but also as strangers that resist total capture. I, a pot plant, I, everyone, hack the strategies of the ultimate enclosure.



'M' like a multibody of the vegetariat

The word 'vegetate' holds a particular paradox. It refers to a refraining from citizenship and cosmopolitanism, denoting passivity, while also indicating vitality and livelihood. 'To vegetate' thus denotes both the judgement of biopolitical categorisation according to usefulness in the chain of production, as well as exclusion from it. The pot plant exposes this double character of a plant or vegetation appropriated by bioprospecting practices; it also escapes from anthropocentric categorisation. The pot plant becomes a privileged body that performs at the forefront of the 'decentralising mechanism of capitalism'.¹⁰ Catriona Sandilands frames this double becoming within her neologism 'vegetariat' – a multiplicity of biopolitically governed bodies whose vegetality is harnessed by capitalist accumulation.¹¹ But what if, instead of fearing the vegetative proletariat, it is possible to affirm it through the pot plant that it embodies?

I follow Petrič, who practices potting through the paths of the vegetariat raising, where humans are not mimicking plants; instead, they are to be confronted with the radical paradox that we have already been plants in the logic of biopolitical control and desire for quantification. Petrič affirms life in a pot, the cares and intimacies that the life of the pot strives for, and how – by affirming their survival strategies – resistance is possible.¹²

I, the vegetariat, I, everyone, who feeds the algorithmic hunger, thus embrace my procrastination. Between being the source of vital life and passive resource for the life of others, I come to shimmer, as the proletariat of vegetation. I follow Petrič, I follow her pot plants, mapping their p(l)ottings. I, the vegetariat, I everyone, perform the task of feeding, of finding myself wanting to stretch and thrive in my pots, and resisting the urge to leave. I mutate, shedding my spores through wi-fi.



'O' like an outer space travel

HRT (hormone replacement therapy) ... may take away privilege we once had, or grant it when it was previously absent. It may make our daily lives more dangerous. Yet HRT may also be the thing that allows us to continue living.¹³

On 7 March 2020 at 04:50 UTC, TX-1 among other art works was launched to the International Space Station. When the earth started to be dominated by the Covid-19 virus, for the first time known to the heteronormative human, bits of transgender body experience were orbiting the planet. When the humans on earth rediscovered their bodies as porous and leaky, a xeno pioneered into outer space with her own contamination, multiplying times with each turn. These bits of xeno that travelled to outer space belong to Adriana Knouf, a proclaimed xenologist who studies and develops that which is declared to be strange and alien. Marked as a strange body herself, she understands a xeno as 'a vital practice necessary to a world that attempts to be made homogeneous through capitalism.'¹⁴ In other words, Knouf is the first *xenaut*, mapping the ways out of the earth, which proves inhabitable for so many who do not enjoy the privilege of being marked as human. Outer space becomes a home for xeno, outer space becomes a possibility of thinking and living otherwise. The earth remains the most uninhabitable of spaces.

Packed into a tiny box through a planetary rotation, a xeno returns to earth on 7 April 2020 at 18:50 UTC. The earth, a final destination after all, a place of abuse, domination, homogenisation, but also a promise of alien thriving.

Adriana Knouf, *TX-1*, launch of TX-1 with other Sojourner 2020 works into space on 7 March 2020, watched by the solitary artist from her computer, due to restrictions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, courtesy of the artist.



four three two one zero



'N' like a navel- gaze of xeno

I, a xeno, I, everyone, am sharing the hormones of my contamination with the cosmos, queering the waves of communication. As neither one nor many, I refuse to be contained by the regimes of categorisation. I, a xeno, I, everyone, refuse your identification. Because 'to make ourselves alien is not the same as being alien',¹⁵ I commit to the care before my fellow bodies. To practice contamination without killing bifurcation demands risking the creation of xenological conditions.

I, a xeno, I, everyone, embrace the process of my 'disalienation.' Through altering the signals of my signification, I embrace the sticky conditions. My xenomorphgans are my armour, my xenomorphgaze is your contaminations, my xenomorphwhisper is your new nourishment. I, a xeno, I, everyone, alien, foreigner and other, am ready to morph.

I follow Knouf, and swallow my hormones. I put on my creams, following strict regimes of disalienation. I devour the juices soaking from my bodies, and I sprinkle all with a bit of salt to attract more xenos. I, a xeno, I, everyone, declare the earth to be our nest for thriving. The knowledge can be only of xeno; life can be only within xeno.

Adriana Knouf, *Xenological Entanglements. 001: Eromatase*, Kersnikova Institute/Kapelica Gallery in Ljubljana, Slovenia, 2020. The project 'consists of two parts. First is the development of an open-source microgravity simulator (random positioning machine and/or clinostat), where the hardware, software, and documentation will be shared publicly so that others can easily build their own. Second, the artist aims to genetically engineer her own testicular Leydig cells to enable the over-activation of aromatase. This will induce the Leydig cells to overproduce estradiol, thus enabling an assigned-male-at-birth body to self-produce the levels of estrogen required to live in a 'female' body. These cells will be cultured under simulated microgravity using the equipment developed in the first part of the project.' <https://tranxx-enolab.net/projects/eromatase/> accessed 17.04.2021, courtesy of the artist.



Vivelle-Dot® Vivelle-Dot® Vivelle-Dot® Vivelle-Dot®
0.1 mg/day 0.1 mg/day 0.1 mg/day 0.1 mg/day
Vivelle-Dot® Vivelle-Dot® Vivelle-Dot® Vivelle-Dot®
0.1 mg/day 0.1 mg/day 0.1 mg/day 0.1 mg/day
Vivelle-Dot® Vivelle-Dot® Vivelle-Dot® Vivelle-Dot®
0.1 mg/day 0.1 mg/day 0.1 mg/day 0.1 mg/day

Vivelle-Dot® Vivelle-Dot® Vivelle-Dot® Vivelle-Dot®
0.1 mg/day 0.1 mg/day 0.1 mg/day 0.1 mg/day
Vivelle-Dot® Vivelle-Dot® Vivelle-Dot® Vivelle-Dot®
0.1 mg/day 0.1 mg/day 0.1 mg/day 0.1 mg/day
Vivelle-Dot® Vivelle-Dot® Vivelle-Dot® Vivelle-Dot®
0.1 mg/day 0.1 mg/day 0.1 mg/day 0.1 mg/day

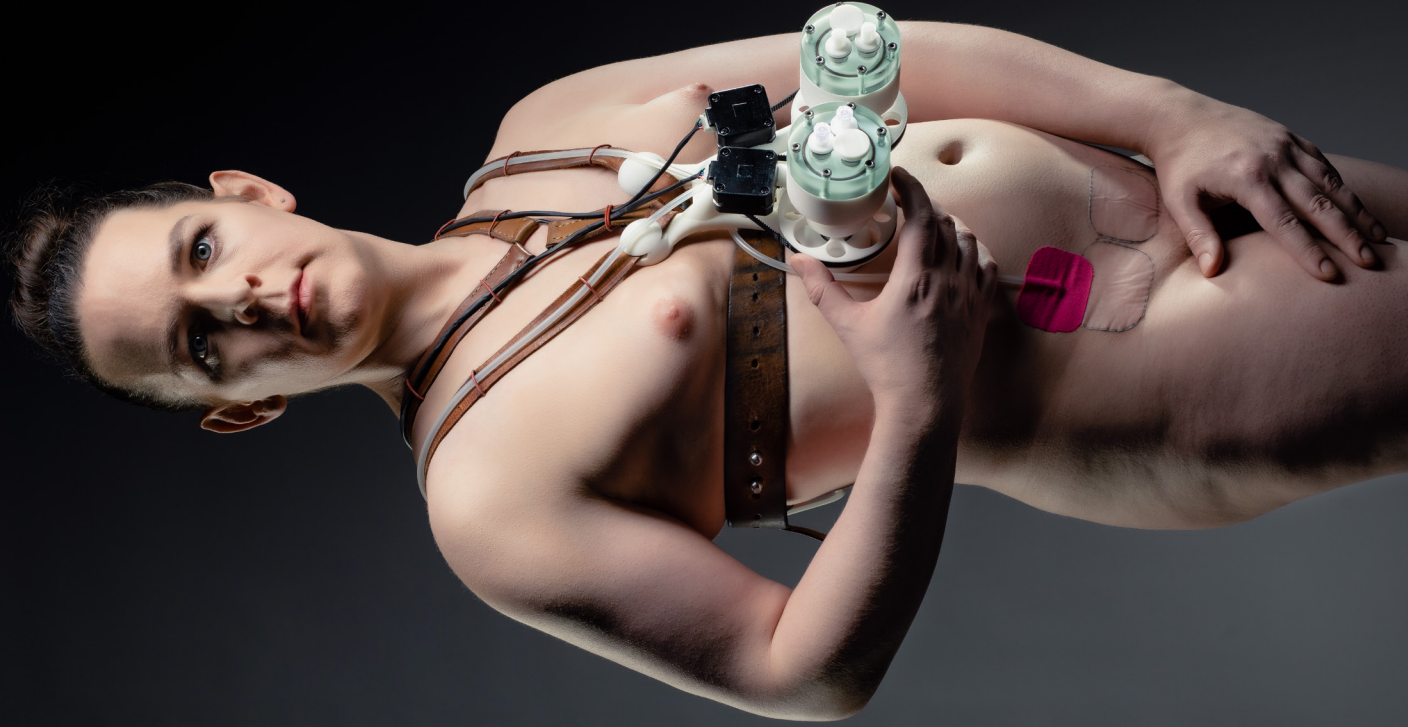
'E' like eating the virus

For many, a recipe from a cook book is an embodiment of a pharmakon that domestically oppresses while also becoming a weapon with which to survive oppression. But what if we enchant the guides and their ingredients to the point where the oppression loses its signification? A recipe from a cookbook, the capacities of which have long been disregarded, becomes a medium for practicing care before the thriving of bodies.

I follow Pei-Ying Lin, who – for some time now – collects her recipes of contamination, teaching how to xeno-morph with viruses. Through intimate fables, I learn how to become intimate with viruses. I immerse myself in the conditions she weaves and learn to practice care before the many that invite me to mutate.

'Oyster power' recipe, from the *Virus Cuisine Design Toolkit*¹⁶

1. Use MeV01 to infect moss.¹⁷
2. Cow eats infected moss and the milk it produces goes to our yoghurt making.
3. Oyster can only be collected at full moon – bivalves at full moon change the activity rhythms of the oyster.
4. We place the raw oyster on a bed of infected moss drizzled with yoghurt with mint.
5. The oyster will rotate to left or right, which predicts the agricultural season – whether it's a bad year or a good year.
6. After the ritual, we become addicted: we package the moss in small boxes for Albert Heijn [a Dutch super-market chain] shops and it becomes a national feeding frenzy. Then we start charging a lot for the moss and we take over the world.



'S' like a symbiotic dance practice

I, a virus, I, everyone, am penetrating, plundering and contaminating your bodies. Neither dead not alive, yet constituting bodies in their thriving. I, a virus, I, everyone, want to dance with you in a symbiotic movement that would ensure our play to continue: a little commensal, a little more mutual, a little less parasitic. I, a virus, I, everyone, am a demon reborn in capitalism: I test and expose your morals, being beyond any good or evil; I am casing you in different reactions, and with each different relation you become differently with me; my powers are various, I can morph, shift, and camouflage, to compel you to be close to me; I am powerful, as my actions conditions all values; you may think I am accidental when you whisper my sounds into a new fable.¹⁸

I follow Lin and ask you not to kill me. I change my pace of dance for you, to move a bit more slowly, so you can learn what I like, so that you can start to enjoy it. I learn how to become with you, by cooking the recipes designed to care before you. Through swallowing, I am embodying your viral rhythms, hoping that I can continue to live. Through dance, our bodies learn how to become with each other, how to relate to each other, and I tame my humanness into nonhuman becoming.

I, a virus, I, everyone, initiate a demonology through this dance where relations of contamination may cause bodies to thrive, where relations of transformation may cause bodies to multiply, within the compost of our uneven grounds.

Pei-Ying Lin, *Virophilia*, 2018, courtesy of the artist.

Pei-Ying Lin, *Communication with the Invisible*, STARTS Journeys, Ars Electronica 2020, still image from the video, <https://ars.electronica.art/keplersgardens/en/communication-with-the-invisible/> accessed 17.04.2021, courtesy of the artist.

As the viruses find their
matching entrance on
the cells



Notes

- Disclaimer: the author has chosen to forego the usual copy-editing process and in the experimental spirit of the manifesto, the issue editors have granted this poetic licence.
1. Olga Tokarczuk, *Anna In w Grobowcach Swiata* (Anna in the tombs of the world) (Kraków, 2018), 8; translated by the author. In the original Polish, the words for past and future are *przeszłość* and *przyszłość*. When the two different letters, e and y are pronounced, they both sound like the word *ej*, used to call (out) to someone or something.
 2. Paul B. Preciado, 'Baroque Technopatriarchy: Reproduction', *Art Forum* 56, no. 5 (Jan. 2018), <https://www.artforum.com/print/201801/baroque-technopatriarchy-reproduction-73189>.
 3. Bernard Stiegler, *The Re-Enchantment of the World: The Value of Spirit Against Industrial Populism*, trans. Trevor Arthur (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 1.
 4. *Ibid.*, 3.
 5. *Ibid.*, 58.
 6. Silvia Federici and Peter Linebaugh, *Re-Enchanting the World: Feminism and the Politics of the Commons* (Oakland: PM Press, 2018).
 7. Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues II*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 40.
 8. Stiegler, *The Re-Enchantment of the World*, 7.
 9. Londa Schiebinger, *Plants and Empire: Colonial Bioprospecting in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).
 10. Natania Meeker and Antónia Szabari, *Radical Botany: Plants and Speculative Fiction* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019), 16–17.
 11. Catriona Sandilands, 'Vegetate', in *Veer Ecology: A Companion for Environmental Thinking*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Lowell Duckert (Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 2017), 21–22.
 12. Sections "'E" like the eye of the algorithm' and "'M' like the vegetariat multibody' are based on a paper initially presented as a video essay titled 'Practicing contamination through vegetariat: on the forms of resistance through the cracks of wounded agency', at the conference *Anthropocenes: Reworking of the Wound*, European Society for Literature, Science, and the Arts (SLSAeu), 17–20 June 2020, Katowice, Poland, <https://vimeo.com/423132902>.
 13. Adriana Knouf, 'Xenological Life Potentials', in *Art as We Don't Know It*, ed. Erich Berger et al. (Tallin: Aalto University/Princeton, 2020), 44.
 14. *Ibid.*
 15. *Ibid.*, 45.
 16. See Pei-Ying Lin's *Virophilia* webpage (2018–), <http://virophilia.peiyinglin.net>.
 17. 'Virus for Mediator: MeV 01 infects plants and animals. This virus changes the taste preference of the animal. FerV 03 infected plant is preferred by animals. Once animals are being infected by the virus, they will prefer to eat the non-infected plant. The virus is being transferred through being chewed on / sucked on when alive. Medium: plants and animals'. Pei-Ying Lin, 'Virus Cuisine Design Toolkit', *Virophilia* webpage.
 18. This characteristic of a demon is based on Jason Bahbak Mohaghegh's comparison of a corona virus with a demon, listing eleven principles, on the 'Urbanomic PlaguePod Live' podcast, 'Day 41'. Mohaghegh, 'PlaguePod Bonus: Principles of Coronademonology', <https://www.urbanomic.com/podcast/plaguepod-bonus-principles-of-coronademonology/>.

Biography

Agnieszka Anna Wołodźko is a lecturer and researcher at AKI Academy of Art and Design ArtEZ, where she has initiated and coordinates BIOMATTERs, an artistic research programme that explores how to work with living matters. Her research focuses on post-humanism at the intersection of art, ethics and biotechnology. She is also a curator and writer. Her recent publications include 'Living Within Affect As Contamination: Breathing In Between Numbers' in *Capacious: Journal for Emerging Affect Inquiry*; 'Materiality of Affect: How Art Can Reveal the More Subtle Realities of an Encounter', in *This Deleuzian Century: Art, Activism, Life*, edited by Rosi Braidotti and Rick Dolphijn. She is currently working on her book *Bodies within Affect. On Practicing Contamination through Bioart*.