## ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

I am vertical (but I would rather be horizontal) reflects on iMAL's 25 years of history and looks towards its future as an institution dedicated to digital cultures, at a time when computation is increasingly scrutinised for its social and environmental impact.

More than a retrospective, this 'introspective' combines artworks previously shown at iMAL with more recent creations. Together, they celebrate a rich aesthetic diversity outside of Silicon Valley's monoculture. It is a moment to pause and evaluate the value of past, current and future digital art. The exhibition is named after Sylvia Plath's poem *I am vertical*, in which she contemplates her own existence, by evoking the disconnect between her human verticality and her profound desire to be horizontal, in harmony and connected with nature.

Digital culture is inextricably linked to the production of e-waste and increasing land, resource, energy and water use. It also has social and political ramifications such as the impact of generative AI on labour and that of surveillance on privacy and democracy. Big Tech monoculture promotes consumerism while obfuscating its social and ecological impact. What does that mean for artists working with digital media ?

The works in *I am Vertical (but I would rather be horizontal)* offer a space to reflect on the possibility of digital cultures that do not seek to scale at the expense of planetary boundaries, and instead embrace limits as opportunity to reclaim creativity.

JE SUIS VERTICALE

MAIS JE VOUDRAIS ETRE HORIZONTALE

MAAR LIEVER WAS IK HORIZONTAAL

IK BEN VERTICAAL
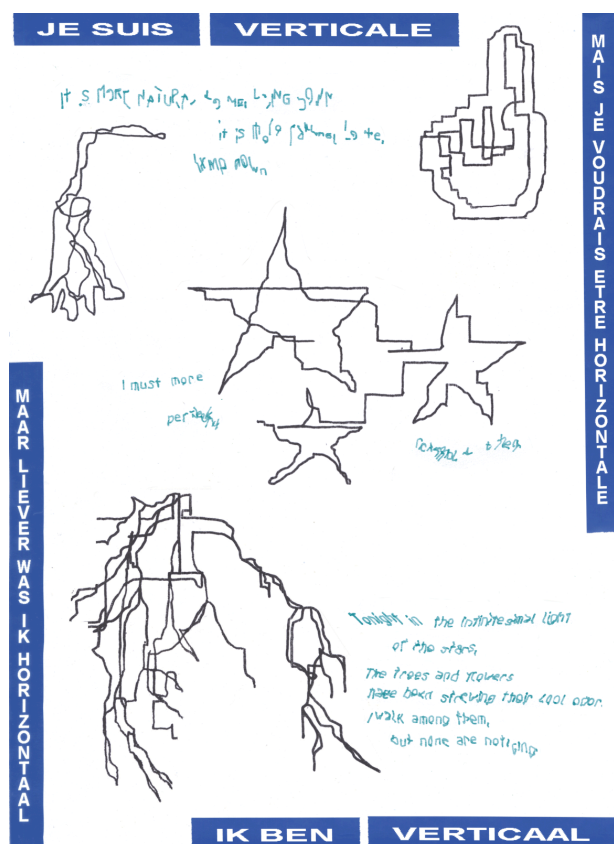
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imal.org
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WITH

Cécile Babiole
Jonah Brucker-Cohen
Peter Beyls
Collectif Dardex
Sun joo Lee
Leonard Leyens
Val Macé
Raquel Meyers
Suzanne Treister
Claire Williams
Navid Navab
The Cookery

[EN] À l'occasion du 25e anniversaire d'iMAL et comme Plath dans son poème du même nom, cette «introspective» se souvient et réfléchit tout en pointant vers l'avenir, désireuse de modèles plus horizontaux et plus harmonieux. Les œuvres présentées explorent les possibilités d'une création numérique qui ne cherche pas l'expansion au détriment de la capacité planétaire et de ses limites.

[NL] In het licht van iMAL's 25ste verjaardag, en net als Plath in haar gelijknamige gedicht, herinert en reflecteert dit 'introspectief' terwijl het naar de toekomst wijst, verlangend naar meer horizontale en harmonieuze modellen. De gepresenteerde werken verkennen de mogelijkheden van digitale creatie die geen uitbouw nastreeft ten koste van het planetair vermogen en zijn grenzen.

[FR] On the occasion of iMAL's 25th anniversary this 'introspective' remembers and reflects while looking forward, longing for more horizontal and harmonic models, as Plath does in her eponymous poem. The artworks explore the possibilities of digital creation not seeking to scale at the expense of planetary boundaries.

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I AM VERTICAL (BUT I WOULD RATHER BE HORIZONTAL)

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Cécile Babiole

Cécile Babiole is a french artist based in Paris. In the 80s she was first active in the music field, then in electronic and digitals arts. Her creations combine visual and audio arts through installations and performances that investigate digital medias with irony. Image, sound and interactivity are the components of her practice. From performance dispositives to participative installations, her work concentrates more on technology issues. She aims to transpose and twist around the standardised uses in the field of creation.

Her latest works focus on language (written and spoken), transmission, dysfunctions, reading, translation, algorithmic manipulations of language. (Conversation au fil de l'eau, Leçon de vocabulaire, Spell, Disfluences, Copies non conformes, En Française dans la texte).

In 2016, she founded with Anne Laforet the collective Roberte la Rousse, a cyberfeminist group that works on the theme of language, gender and technology. She is also a member of the artist-curator collective Le sans titre.

Her work has been exhibited internationally: Centre Pompidou Paris, Mutek – Elektra Montréal, Fact Liverpool, MAL Lima, NAMOC Beijing ... and distinguished with numerous awards and grants: Ars Electronica, Locarno, prix SCAM, bourse Villa Médicis hors les murs, Transmediale Berlin, Stuttgart Expanded Media Festival…

Peter Beyls

Peter Beyls is a Belgian pioneering interdisciplinary artist who has been exploring computer programming for nearly five decades. His work extends into the visual arts, music and hybrid experimental formats.

After completing initial studies in electronic engineering, Peter Beyls studied at the Brussels Royal Music Conservatory, EMS Stockholm and the Slade School of Art, University College London. He was awarded a PhD in Computer Science from the University of Plymouth, UK for his research in evolutionary computing applied to real-time interactive music systems.

Beyls is deeply interested in the aesthetic and cognitive dimensions of digital media in the arts. In the scientific realm, he published some 75 papers on distinctive aspects of digital art and was a visiting professor at various institutions in Canada, China, Japan and the USA.

His work was widely exhibited and performed at events like Siggraph, ICMC, Imagina, ISCM, Generative Arts and ISEA.

Jonah Brucker Cohen

Jonah Brucker-Cohen is an award winning researcher, artist, and writer. He is an Associate Professor in the Department of Journalism and Media Studies at Lehman College / City University of New York. He is a New INC. mentor, was a New York Hall of Science Designer in Residence, and a visiting artist at Cornell Tech. He received his Ph.D. in the Disruptive Design Team of the Electronic and Electrical Engineering Department of Trinity College Dublin. His work focuses on the theme of "Deconstructing Networks" and includes 1100s of creative projects that critically challenge and subvert accepted perceptions of network interaction and experience. His artwork has been exhibited at venues such as SFMOMA, Canadian Museum of Contemporary Art, MOMA, ICA London, Whitney Museum of American Art, Palais de Tokyo, Tate Modern, Ars Electronica, ZKM, Transmediale, and more. His projects, "Bumplist" and "America's Got No Talent" are both included in the permanent collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art. His writing has appeared in publications such as WIRED, Make, Gizmodo, Neural and more. His hardware hacking Scrapyard Challenge workshops have been held in over 15 countries in Europe, South America, North America, Asia, and Australia since 2003.

Website: http://www.coin-operated.com
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Collectif Dardex

Quentin Destieu is an artist and Doctor in Practice and Theory of Artistic and Literary Creation, living between Marseille et Cahors.

He founded GAMERZ, an art festival in Aix-en-Provence, as well as the Lab-GAMERZ, place of residence, and formation based on digital practices in the context of contemporary art. He is currently working on the establishment of a collective scene for artists in the semi-rural Cahors: la Pouponnière.

His artistic works explore the digital media and their effect on the development of our societies. He questions a technology-saturated world by playing with the borders and similarities between digital countercultures and popular cultures. His research interrogates and highlights the joints connecting activist practices and contemporary artistic avant-gardes.
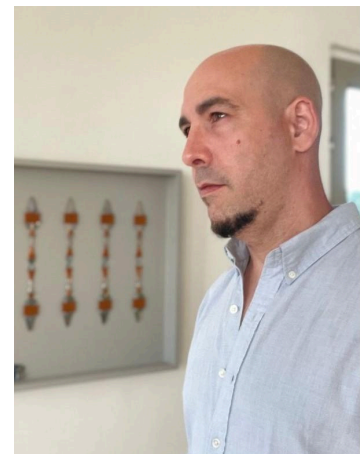
Founder of the Dardex Group with Sylvain Huguet, he regularly shows his works in multiple festivals and expositions in France and abroad since 2003.

Sylvain Huguet, born in 1979 in the Parisian region, today lives and works in Brussels, after 20 years spent in-between Aix-en-Provence and Marseille.

Exploring the current media, he develops installations and multimedia performances in collaboration with different artists and researchers within the Dardex Group, all questioning our relationship to technologies.

Interested in graphic design as well as print and web publishing, he taught HTML and CSS programming languages at Aix-Marseille University between 2014 and 2021.

A graduate of the École Supérieure d'Art d'Aix-en-Provence, he co-founded in 2003, together with Quentin Destieu, the Lab GAMERZ association and the eponymous festival, a space and event dedicated to contemporary creation and digital practices.

He regularly presents his work in various exhibitions and festivals in France and abroad.

Sunjoo Lee

Sunjoo Lee is an interdisciplinary artist working in crossovers of art, technology, and ecology, based in the Netherlands and in South Korea. Her fascination is in diverging the use of electronics and digital tools beyond human interest. Her works often explore topics such as; more-than-human philosophy, emergence, biomimicry, future forms of symbiosis, and permacomputing.

Sunjoo often collaborates with biologists, ecologists and engineers to develop artistic research and create multimedia installations promoting hybridity and partnership of biosphere and technosphere.

Her works have been exhibited in various locations including Ars Electronica Festival and Kunstvereniging Diepenheim. She is a co-founder of research collective Getbol Lab, and is currently an artist in residence at Creative Coding Utrecht.

Leonard Leyens

After studying at the Folkwang University of Art in Essen (Germany) and obtaining a bachelor's degree from the École des Beaux-Arts de Bordeaux (France), Leonard Leyens is currently completing his master's degree at the École de Recherche Graphique in Brussels (Belgium).

In his master's thesis, his research practice, and his participation in several artist and activist collectives, he explores the possibilities of creating tools and platforms for

communication and dissemination. He seeks to develop spaces for technical emancipation around open source and free software.

Radio media—particularly intervention radio—has become a central pillar of his practice and research. With the PL4TFORM.ORG collective, he attempts to generate forms of dodging the centralization and capitalization of communication channels.

In performative settings, he creates interactive digital works as well as site-specific sound pieces.

Having grown up in West Germany, he is engaged in anti-colonial struggles against capitalist extractivism for the benefit of the Global North, as well as against mining projects in Germany itself.

Val Macé

Val Macé was born in Caen in 1986, and his work combines a variety of techniques and media: sculpture, electronics, code, DIY acrobatics, sewing, drawing and mechanical music, most of which he uses to create moments, objects or spaces for live performance.

Either as a musician with groups such as PLOYBOY, One Bit Direction Direction, Fatal Coincoin or solo with his set of DIY instruments.

Or by creating exotic scenographic objects for theatres such as the Nimis group or the Compagnie Gare Centrale.

Or by producing his own street performance projects as part of the Boîte à Clous collective, including Dragobus, Carrousel Shuriken, Robert la Licorne and, more recently, CHANTIER!

His work is rarely static. There's often something at play between the absurdity of his productions and the technical complexity they involve.

Val lives and works in Brussels.

Raquel Meyers

Raquel Meyers (Cartagena, Spain b. 1977) works with obsolete technologies like the Commodore 64, Teletext, typewriters or fax machines mixed with photography, animation and embroidery, among other techniques. She defines her practice as KYBDslöjd [mecanografía expandida] whose significance can be defined roughly as <a manual skill with a keyboard>. The keystrokes contribute to the execution, while poetry contributes to a system, through revealing the architecture of the raw and unadorned character sets. Her work has been shown at

Ars Electronica, Yle Teksti-TV, ARDText, Transmediale, Xpo Gallery, La Casa encendida, Liste Art Fair Basel, P21 Seoul, la Maison des Auteurs Angoulême, BmoCA, SeMA NANJI, LABoral, iMAL, Piksel, Getxophoto, HeK, ETOPIA, Eufònic Urbà, MIRA Festival …

Navid Navab

Navid Navab is recognized as a media alchemist and antidisciplinary composer with a background in contemporary music, biomedical sonification, and philosophical biology. Through an investigative ArtScience practice, Navab's recent creations meticulously stage uncanny forms of order, imbuing machines with a sense of liveliness through fusion with the excitable dynamics of matter. Navab's art machines sculpturally engage with transductive structures of liveliness, probing the excitable tendencies of matters-of-process far from equilibrium—suspended in metastable states where thermodynamic reservoirs of indeterminacy generate cybernetic intentionality. Making the imperceptible palpable, these investigative works orchestrate sensory attunement to forms of life, at the pre-metabolic border between breathing and not breathing, while cybernetically enfolding their excitable dynamics.

Suzanne Treister

Suzanne Treister (b.1958 London UK) studied at St Martin's School of Art, London (1978-1981) and Chelsea College of Art and Design, London (1981-1982) and is based in London and the French Pyrennes, having lived in Australia, New York and Berlin. Initially recognized in the 1980s as a painter, she became a pioneer in the digital/new media/web based field from the beginning of the 1990s, making work about emerging technologies, developing fictional worlds and international collaborative organisations. Utilising various media, including video, the internet, interactive technologies, photography, drawing and watercolour, Treister's work has engaged with eccentric narratives and unconventional bodies of research to reveal structures that bind power, identity and knowledge. Often spanning several years, her projects comprise fantastic reinterpretations of given taxonomies and histories that examine the existence of covert forces at work in the world. An ongoing focus of her work is the relationship between new technologies, society, alternative belief systems and the potential futures of humanity.

Claire Williams

The artworks of Claire Williams take the form of woven antennas, glass sculptures filled with plasma or devices that sense the invisible. Data of radio telescopes and radio scanners materialize themselves in knitted stitches, sound vibrations or through luminous plasma. She sculpts her electronic components to make visible the electromagnetic movements from the cosmos, through our magnetosphere, to radio waves that cross our terrestrial environment or the ones emanating from our bodies and psychic activity. She is currently exploring in a duo « The Æthers » which collects and reactivate practices of the invisibles found in the archives of experimental and occult sciences of the 19th and 20th century.

ABOUT THE ARTWORKS

Name artist - Name work (date) - *iMal exhibition shown*

Cécile Babiole - GOBO GOBO HEY ! (2012) - *GOBO GOBO HEY ! 2012*

The *GOBO GOBO HEY !* installation presents a variation on the theme of gobos. A gobo is a technical term used by lighting technicians to refer to a piece of perforated metal that allows the light from a projector to project a pattern. Based on this model, Cécile Babiole proposes gobos made of plexiglas with a laser cutter, which are then projected thanks to a series of slide projectors. The large-scale projection device reveals the violence of the manufacturing process: it becomes clear that the laser heats the material, deforms it, burns it, melts it, changes its colour, making it darker. Depending on the speed of the ray, the matter is grazed or perforated. The graphic result is closer to manual writing with a pen with thick and thin strokes, or even graffiti with spray paint, than to the product of a machine from the digital age. The engraved patterns come from the musical world; they are graphical representations of sounds, music sheets, waveforms, revealed by the light vibration that passes through them. The title is a nod to the punk culture of the late 70s and reflects the machine's 'in-your-face' character ('Gaba gaba hey!' was the rallying cry of the Ramones, the first American punk rock band, and their fans).
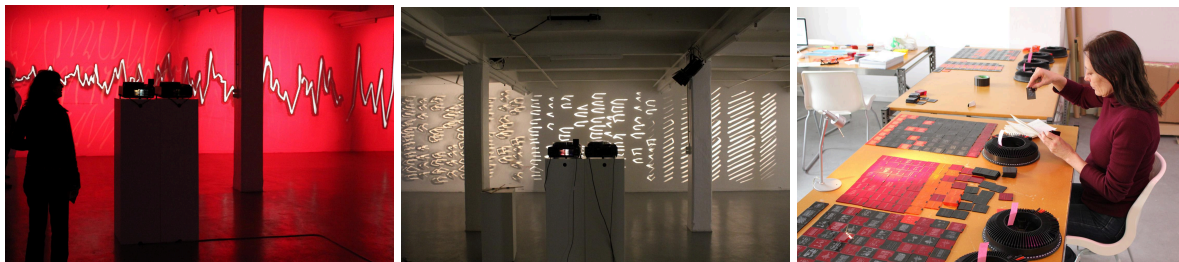
Peter Beyls - Rune One ; Helix IX ; RP32 - *Simple Thoughts 2014*

Beyond Computing (Introductory note)

Keeping in line with the prodigious advice of one of my prominent mentors, Hanne Darboven: "never apologize, never explain..." - still, one could conceivably develop a discourse, definitely keeping away from the complexities of the medium but focusing on observations of deep meaning, relationship and what it means to be alive. These thoughts underpin what follows.

Considering HELIX IX (1978) - during the late Seventies of the previous century, I had only intermittent access to mainframe computers, in particular when travelling, though being involved in procedural thinking on a permanent basis, I had to figure out ways to fashion algorithmic work beyond computing. In addition, manual sketching was - and remains - key to procedural thinking, the paper medium as fundamentally instrumental to the development of ambiguous ideas. One does not thinker in some abstract dimension, the creative process stands informed by virtue of interacting with objects and materials - an attitude and working principle referred to today as 'embodied cognition'. In this particular context, HELIX IX is part of a series of manual drawings documenting an algorithm in the field; a staged action in a

given physical space, a single person as shifting according to both rules and constraints imposed by the actual location. Computer logic plays a major part in affording the action: logic operators provide different types of intersection of person and space, consequently, an algorithmic narrative develops as reflected in the drawings.

RP32 (1975) and Run One (1976) - both drawings are conceptually very much related. RP32 reveals a fascination with exhaustive thinking; one develops an algorithm that expresses itself in a given finite number of dimensions, the number of parameters (size and rotation of a square module) defines the number of drawings. RP32 is based on an evolving notion of confidence - the algorithm generates numerical values of controlled randomness, gradually, from absolute to relative certainty-this defines how modules appear in a grid-like structure. Blue lines are inflicted as only blue-inked fiber-tip pens were available at the time. As a unified inseparable assembly, the four drawings display all four transitions implicit in the algorithm. On the other hand, Run One displays all 36 implied options of a given algorithm in a single instance.

Peter Beyls, Tianjin, China, June 18, 2025
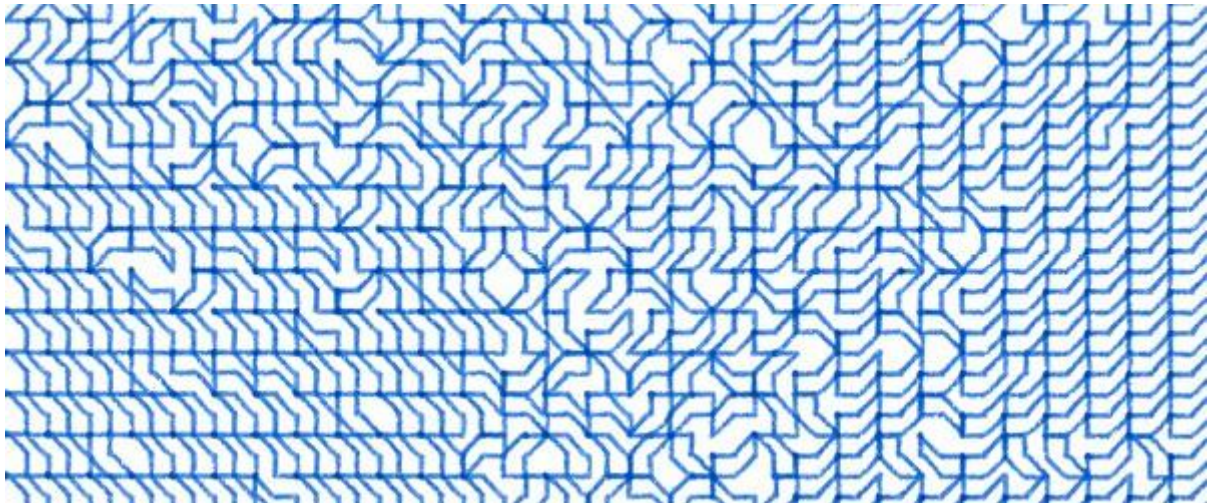
Jonah Brucker Cohen - Alerting Infrastructure! (2003) - *Hybrid Worlds 2007*

Alerting Infrastructure! is a physical hit counter that translates hits to the web site of an organization into interior damage of the physical building that web site or organization represents. The focus of the piece is to amplify the concern that physical spaces are slowly losing ground to their virtual counterparts. The amount of structural damage to the building directly correlates to the amount of exposure and attention the web site gets, thus exposing the physical structure's temporal existence.

Quentin Destieu, Sylvain Huguet (Collectif Dardex) - Refonte (2014-2015) - *Anachronism 2015*

Refonte (Remelt) is a series of basic spears and weapons, made from different electronic waste materials. The scrap metal was melted and poured into molds, echoing the ancient techniques of making primitive weapons, made of copper alloys, aluminum and gold. Between contemporary archeology and anachronistic gesture, these weapons offer a redesign of our industrial societies, a post futuristic evocation reminding us about the fragility of our systems and the warlike involvement of humanity.

These weapons suggest a radical change of direction: transforming our technology into primitive tools, placing man before his first nature, bringing the citizen back to the Bronze Age, opposing the state of nature to the social state, in a fierce contemporary "technology war".

Sunjoo Lee - Electric Garden (2024)

A research building an electricity producing garden. The project creatively explores the collaborative possibilities between natural ecosystems and digital systems.

The garden produces electricity by harnessing the metabolism of anaerobic bacteria living in wet soil, using a technology called Microbial Fuel Cells. Each container acts as a battery and is equipped with electrodes that harvest electrons emitted by the bacteria. The plants and insects in the garden feed the bacteria, allowing electricity generation to continue as long as the ecosystem thrives.

Leonard Leyens - La brèche (2025)

La Breche is an installation that invites you to immerse yourself in a field of research.

A field in motion, in displacement, in exploration.

It provides access to an investigation: how to generate forms and practices that evade the centralization and capitalization of communication channels while at the same time dismantling the opacity of their infrastructure. Through the familiarization of techniques, the tinkering with tools, and the attempt to make them common, La Breche is not just a device but, above all, a collective practice.

La Breche is a shelter—its forms are multiple.
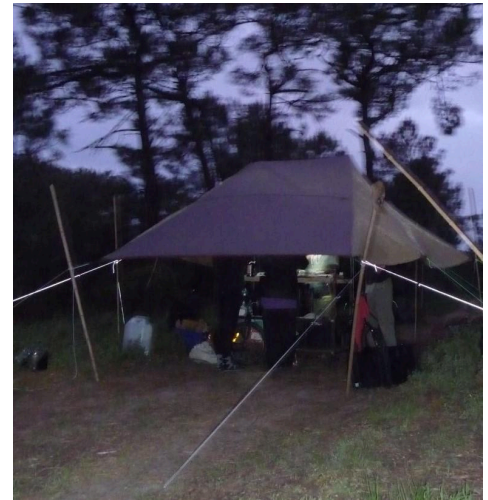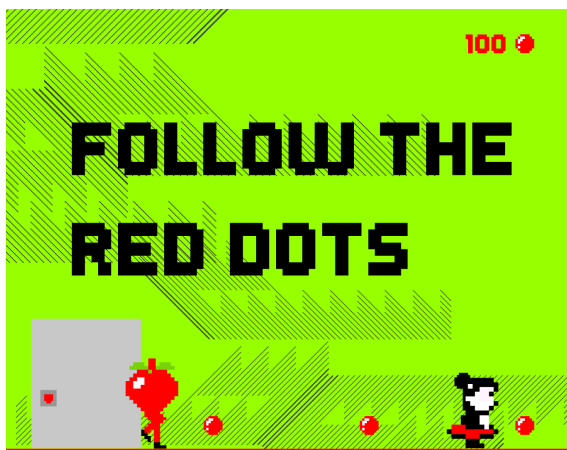

Val Macé - Harmonie

A little tale about appetite.

A short, silly story, just the way reality likes to tell it.

Harmonie is a musical device made up of abandoned objects put into action by a handcrafted device. It is an object in the process of being developed to serve as a narrative support.

### Raquel Meyers - Follow the Red Dots (2007) - *Playlist 2010*

Follow the Red Dots, as Ed Halter wrote, "places a Minnie Mousean character in a Super-Mario-like pellet-eating adventure, while FuriousClubfoot stars a crustacean-headed boogaloo dancer traipsing across a burning city."

Navid Navab - Organism + Excitable Chaos (2024)

The chaotic motion of Excitable Chaos, a robotically-steered triple pendulum, drives the aerodynamic thresholds of Organism, a robotically-prepared century-old pipe organ. A 1910 Casavant pipe-organ is rescued from impending gentrification at a heritage site in Montréal and robotically prepared to sound turbulent patterning.

Organism destabilizes the socio-historical tonality of the organ to liberate and sound its hidden turbulent materiality, robotically unleashing timbres unheard after centuries of sonic restraint. Animated by the rapid exchange of potential and kinetic energy between its three moving arms, Excitable Chaos occasionally modulates its own pivotal joints and damper weights, thereby shifting the mass-orbital relationships between its arms. These modulations allow the artist to enact unique chaotic movement systems, each a stochastic universe unto itself, while highlighting how even the subtlest variations are key contributors to cohesive behavior, whose next state is rendered unknown. The generative movement of Excitable Chaos conducts Organism's aerodynamic thresholds, drawing kinetic chaos into dialogue with sonic turbulence. The resulting turbulent sonifications of chaos serve as meditations on the cascading sense of more-than-oneness that spontaneously develop in life and nature and how this wild yet steerable relationality can help us co-express worlds yet unknown.
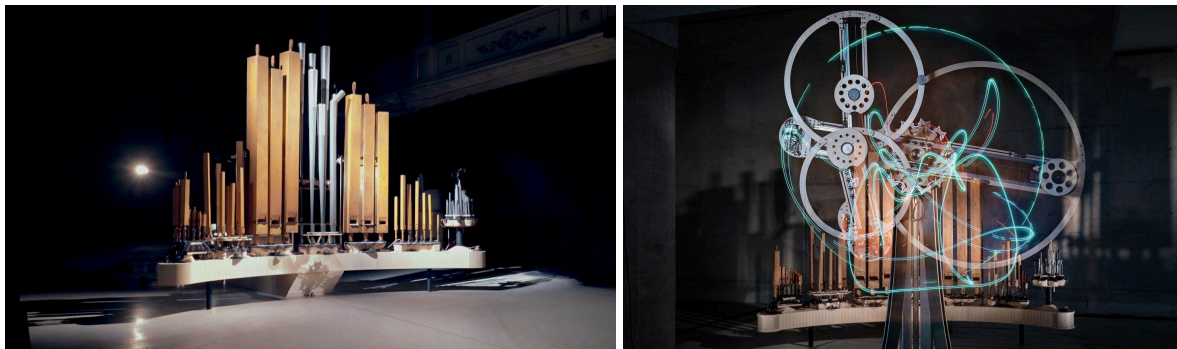

Suzanne Treister - Hexen 2.0 (2009-2011)

HEXEN 2.0 looks into histories of scientific research behind government programmes of mass control, investigating parallel histories of countercultural and grass roots movements. HEXEN 2.0 charts, within a framework of post-WWII U.S. governmental and military imperatives, the coming together of scientific and social sciences through the development of cybernetics, the history of the internet, the rise of Web 2.0 and increased intelligence gathering, and implications for the future of new systems of societal manipulation towards a control society.

HEXEN 2.0 specifically investigates the participants of the seminal Macy Conferences (1946-1953), whose primary goal was to set the foundations for a general science of the workings of the human mind. The project simultaneously looks at diverse philosophical, literary and political responses to advances in technology including the claims of Anarcho-Primitivism and Post Leftism, Theodore Kaczynski/The Unabomber, Technogaianism and Transhumanism, and traces precursory ideas such as those of Thoreau, Warren, Heidegger and Adorno in relation to visions of utopic and dystopic futures from science-fiction literature and film.

Based on actual events, people, histories and scientific projections of the future, and consisting of alchemical diagrams, a Tarot deck, photo-text works, a video and a website, HEXEN 2.0 offers a space where one may use the works as a tool to envision possible alternative futures.
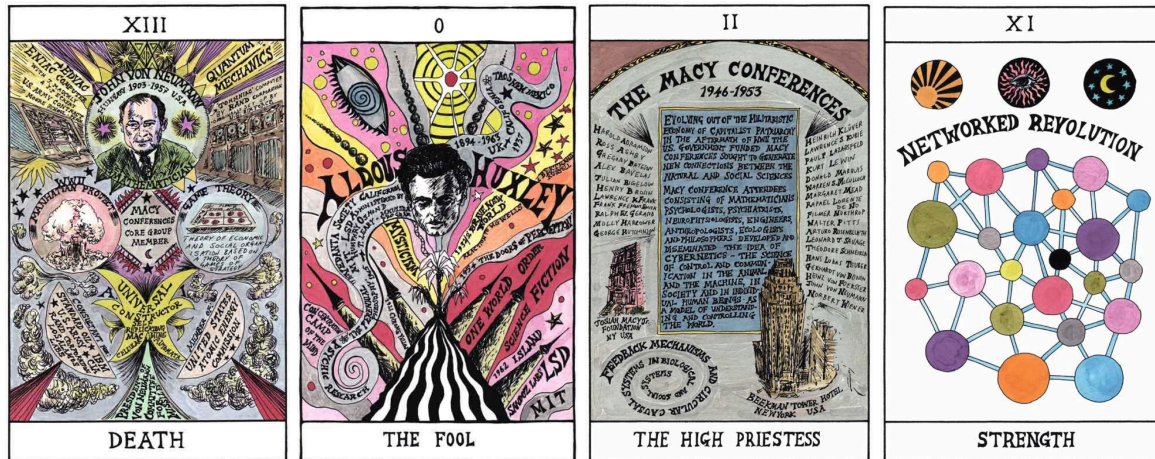
Claire Williams - Psychic Radio (2017-2025)

Radio waves are the energies and the ghosts of our electromagnetic world. During the 2nd half of the XIX century, people could suddenly communicate remotely. A new invisible space opened up, and henceforth, a medium to transport these distant and disembodied voices. These electromagnetic spaces were thought as a surface of transmission where spirits could send telegraphic messages to transmit to the living. The female mediums embodied a sort of electrical transmission system. The participants placed around the circle were an extension of this system, their arms as cables interconnecting by holding hands acting as a radio transceiver.

This research tries to imagine an electronic embroidered circuit created by these mediums with the textile techniques found in the «Ouvrages de Dames» book and inspired by crystal radios that use minimal homemade electrical components powered by the static electricity available in the air. This embroidered radio is a sensing surface that attempts to intercept energies through radio waves revealing the presence of ghostly energies of our environment.