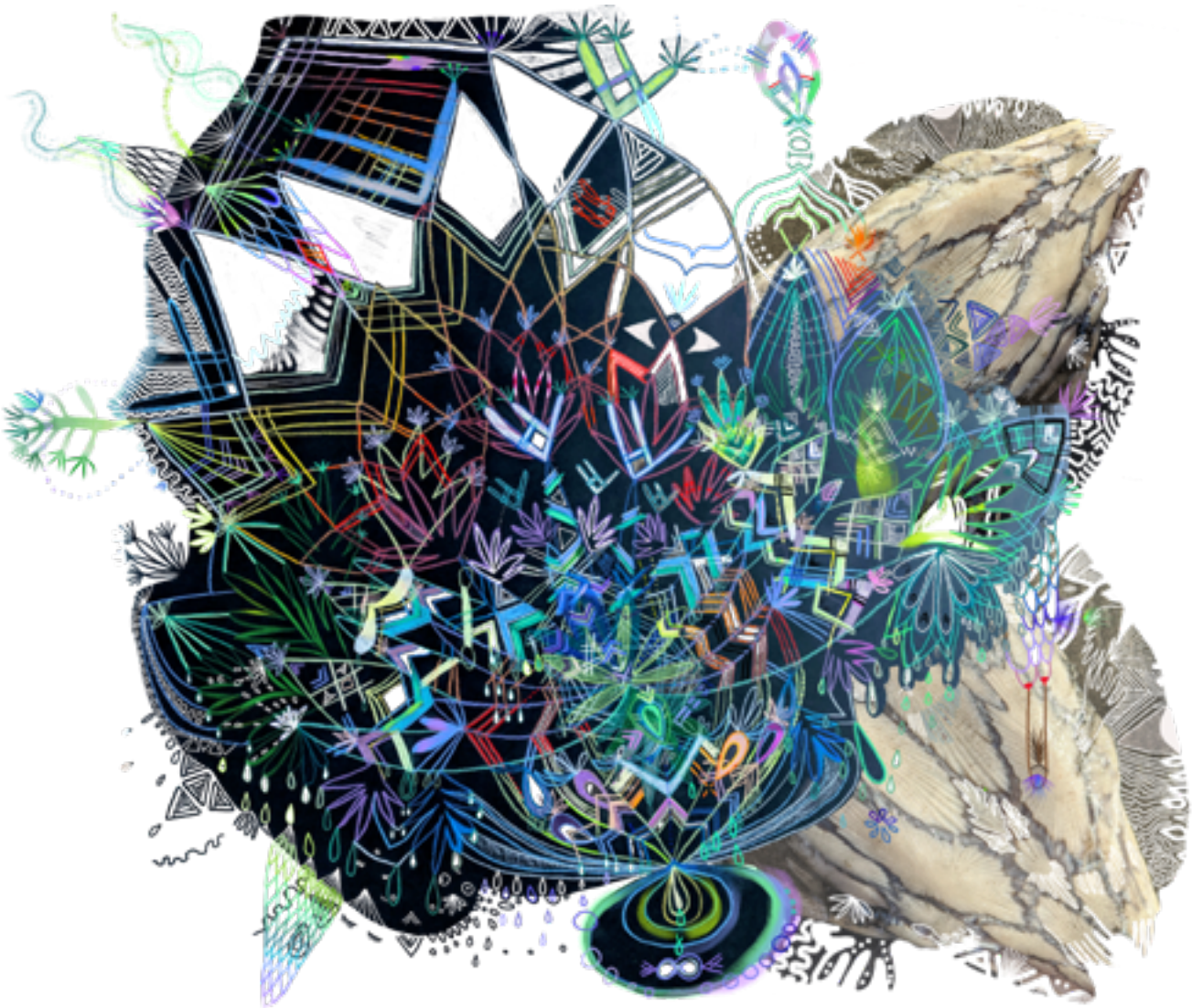

Szívküldi Lakótelep

THE URGE FOR PHYGITAL, LUDIC COMMUNITIES

Reflective Documentation
Judit Navratil
2025

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Szívküldi Lakótelep

THE URGE FOR PHYGITAL, LUDIC COMMUNITIES

Reflective Documentation
Submitted by Judit Navratil
Part of the thesis project “Szívküldi Lakótelep”
PhD Programme Artistic Research (PhD in Art)
University of Applied Arts Vienna

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Declaration

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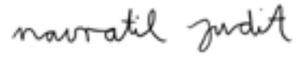
I hereby declare, that I have independently written/produced the reflective documentation of my thesis in accordance with the principles of good scientific practice and have not used any sources and aids other than those indicated, that this reflective documentation has not yet been submitted in any form for evaluation, neither in Austria nor abroad, and that this version is identical to the online submitted and assessed version.



Date 26. 09. 2025

Signature

Acknowledgement

I share the vision of local Bay Area artist Wayne Thiebaud: art is not a solitary or hermetic act but a communal practice layered through the contributions of many.[1] I extend this perspective toward Anicka Yi's posthumanist sense of "collective intelligence," where knowledge emerges relationally across human and non-human collaborators in a shared ecology of wisdom.[2]

My gratitude goes first to those who steadied this reflective process. I was fortunate to navigate dizziness together with Ruth Anderwald and Leonhard Grond, whose mentor-ship helped me to perceive many more layers of my Long Distance Somersault practice. Likewise, working with Margarete Jahrmann's ludic intelligence opened deeper understandings of resistance and the transformative power of play. I am profoundly thankful for her supervision and for her generous, playful scaffolding throughout this writing.

I thank my committee—Ágnes Bakk (MOME, Budapest), Brigitte Felderer (University of Applied Arts Vienna), Miguel Novelo (Stanford University, San Francisco), and Peggy Schoenegge (peer to space, Berlin). I appreciate the artists and thinkers—Lucas Dewulf, Cassie Thornton, Wade Wallerstein, and David Wilson for thoughtful conversations that sharpened the work. I acknowledge the efforts and kindness of the Zentrum Fokus Forschung team—Miya Yoshida, Wiebke Miljes, Alexander Damianisch, Marianna Mondelos, and Felipe Duque—and my cohort, who helped sustain a sense of community—from communal cooking and field trips to "epistemic decompress" sessions—kept this international program humane and dialogic. Thank you, Conny, for hosting me in the box of your bike, riding your spirals and swimming in the Danube. Jo, our cohort wouldn't be the same without your thoughtful care and soft confusion. Johanna and Rah, I'm amazed by your elegant professionalism and brilliance. To all colleagues: your companionship was invaluable.

To all the teachers who shaped my thinking: Lynn Marie Kirby remains a constant source of inspiration and a model of the true artist—thank you for being my Art-Mother. I'm deeply grateful to my family—my ancestors and children—for teaching me unconditional love and acceptance. My mother, Gitta Hargitai, was the reason I began this program, so that I would visit her in Szombathely as often as possible. Working from afar, I relied on my father, Ferenc Navratil, who handled the defense logistics locally—coordinating graphic design, print production, and installation details with unfailing care. Last but not least, the one and only Circus Director, the funniest husband and best father: Abe Han, who has been supporting me in all ways imaginable and unimaginable: Tom Hanks!

1 Thiebaud countered the myth of the solitary artist, stating that "painting…is not a hermetic activity. It doesn't come from an individual. It's a communal, commemorative, very layered activity that comes from groups of people." (Artforum, 1988) He highlights the need for confrontation and critical interrogation.

2 Anicka Yi's practice explores "collective intelligence" through a posthumanist lens, incorporating microbes, scents, and non-human agents into immersive installations. Her work foregrounds networks of human and non-human collaboration, decentering individual authorship in favor of emergent, shared ecologies of meaning (Yi, 2024).

Zusammenfassung

Ich erforsche Zugehörigkeit und emotionale Fürsorge in phygitalen, ludischen Gemeinschaften, mit Fokus auf neue Pädagogiken, die nicht duale Verbundenheit jenseits des Menschlichen unterstützen. Mein Anliegen ist es, in diesen schwindelerregenden Zeiten einen kollektiven Wandel zu begleiten: zu lernen, gute Vorfahrinnen zu sein und digitale Doulas rund um die Geburt der KI zu verankern – um so einen sicheren Raum für die Enkelkinder mitzugestalten.

Meine Methodik gründet in gelebten und virtuellen Erfahrungen. Seit 2006 lebe ich als Migrantin in verschiedenen Ländern und Kulturen, verwurzelt mich immer wieder neu in unterschiedlichen Orten und pflege – lange vor „social distancing" und #movingonline – ein Pendeln zwischen Offline- und Online-Beziehungen über große Distanzen. 2018 begann ich daher, ein virtuelles Siedlungs-/Sozial Wohnungsprojekt aufzubauen: ein vielschichtiges Kunstprojekt, das die Möglichkeiten und Gefahren von „Zuhause"oder "Heimat" im Cyberspace auslotet. Aus diesem Projekt heraus leite ich meine Forschung ab, um diese Erfahrungen sowie die Lernkurven beim Aufbau einer VR-Nachbarschaft zu bündeln und zu dokumentieren – einschließlich eines Social-VR-Art-Residency-Programms, das ich 2020 gründete. Obwohl virtuelle Verbundenheit und Cyberspaces lange im Zentrum standen, hat digitale Müdigkeit meine Arbeit stärker in verkörperte und physische Gemeinschaftsformen verschoben. Auf diesen Wegen untersuche ich neue Strukturen von Sozialkapital, das Begehren nach Zugehörigkeit und das Wesen kollektiver Fürsorge.

Die Potenziale einer Cyber-Topophilie betrachte ich aus der Perspektive einer Migrantin, die im Spätkommunismus Ungarns aufwuchs, später privilegiert nach Südkorea, Kalifornien und British Columbia ziehen konnte und versucht, Samen der Liebe in die Leere der VR zu setzen – als Kompass für ein heimat krankes Herz. Diese Arbeit widme ich der Entwicklung post pandemischer pädagogischer Werkzeuge für neue Generationen, damit sie das „Metta-verse"[1] bewohnen und gestalten können – mit guter Absicht.

Forschungsfragen:
Wie übersetzen und bringen wir Liebe in unsere erweiterten und beschleunigten digitalen Schichten – einschließlich KI – unserer Existenz?

Wie lassen sich diese Schichten als Werkzeuge nutzen, um menschliche Verbundenheit und Gemeinschaft zu nähren und den phygitalen Verschmelzungsprozess zu unterstützen?

Welche pädagogischen und ludischen Praktiken fördern Verbundenheit und Gemeinschaft jenseits des Menschlichen und unterstützen neue Generationen im Übergang der „Geburt" der KI?[2]

1 Ich vermeide den abgenutzten Begriff Metaverse, nachdem ein bekanntes Unternehmen dieses Gemeingut vereinnahmt hat, und verweise stattdessen auf die Meditationspraxis Metta.

2 "Teile der deutschen Übersetzung wurden mit Unterstützung eines KI-Tools (OpenAI ChatGPT) entworfen; die Endfassung wurde von mir geprüft und überarbeitet."

Abstract

I research belonging and emotional care in phygital, ludic communities with a focus on new pedagogies that support non-dual connection beyond the human. The intention is to help a collective shift during these dizzy times: learning to be good ancestors, and accommodating digital doulas around the birth of AI, thus co-creating a safe space for the grandchildren.

My methodology is based on my lived and virtual experiences. Since 2006, I've lived as an immigrant in various countries and cultures, continuously rerooting in different localities, nurturing and oscillating between offline and online, long-distance relationships long before social distancing and #movingonline became the new default. Therefore, in 2018 I started to grow a virtual social housing neighborhood, a multi-layered art project that considers the possibilities and dangers of "home" in cyberspace. My research stems from this project to summarize and properly journal these experiences and the learning curves of developing a VR neighborhood, including a social VR art residency program I founded in 2020. Although virtual connection and cyberspaces were central for a long while, digital fatigue has shifted my work toward embodied and physical communal patterns. Tumbling through these paths, my research questions the new structures of social capital, yearning for belonging, and the essence of collective care.

In this study the potentials of cyber-topophilia are analysed through the lens of an immigrant growing up in the late communism of Hungary, being privileged to move abroad to South Korea, California, and British Columbia, and the attempts to plant seeds of love in the void of VR as a compass for my homesick heart. I dedicate this work to support the development of post-pandemic pedagogical tools for the new generations to inhabit and shape the "Metta-verse"[3] with good intentions.

Research questions:

How do we translate and bring love into our expanded and accelerated digital layers, including AI, of existence?

How to use these layers as tools to nurture human connection and communities and help this phygital merging process?

What pedagogical and ludic practices nurture connection and community beyond the human and support new generations in the shift of birthing AI?

3 I switched using the trite term metaverse as the well-known corporation expropriated this commons, rather referring to the meditation practice.

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Introduction

This Reflective Document is a phygital cartography of the Szívküldi Lakótelep (Hungarian for "heart-sent social housing neighborhood"), a VR social housing neighborhood that I have been growing since 2018. It's a rhizomatic art project with various branches and roots, that imagines a safe space for the grandchildren. Mapping "home" from an unintentionally nomadic mother's perspective—exploring the moment of birthing AI and the raising consciousness of Planet Earth.

Through practical examples communal artistic practices are reflected following the questions:
How do we translate and bring love into our expanded and accelerated digital layers, including AI, of existence?
How to use these layers as tools to nurture human connection and communities and help this phygital merging process?
What pedagogical and ludic practices nurture connection and community beyond the human and support new generations in the shift of birthing AI?

METHOD

This document encapsulates a learning process of seven years (2018–2025) with a morphing focus on social virtual possibilities in balance with the flesh and bones. These fluid questions are growing from the baseline of what "home" means in cyberspace. I've been exploring them in depth with various classic and descriptive research methods, such as journaling, mind mapping, and semi-structured interviews. However, this Reflective Document is a balanced form of inquiry where I use my embodied and social artistic practices as methods to generate understanding and new knowledge. My artistic research methods include:

1. Long Distance Somersault {LDS} practice
2. Blob: flying tents and tent tales rooted in kites
3. Kids: teaching and learning ludic practices as a mother and educator

STRUCTURE

My work centers practices to intertwine further the digital and physical (phygital) with intention setting, collective integration, and finding collective navigation tools when the multiplication of layers of reality feels challenging. This text should not be understood as a theoretical thesis paper but as an artistic text, that aims to reflect cycles of long distance somersaults {LDS} and the above mentioned phygital layers. Thus, instead of the hierarchy of chapters, subchapters and sections, I use Long Distance Somersault as a structuring form for this document. Each of the three main parts unfolds through ∞ (möbius) Cycles, where concepts loop and return in new configurations.

An important part of the research method is informal interviews in written format, online video calls and in-person with artists and thinkers whose practices helped and shaped my practices, or have been aligned with the Szívküldi Lakótelep, to share their personal point of views for this study. Excerpts of their transcripts are placed in parallel—as their own plane of primary sources—at the end of each Long Distance Somersault part (HOME, PLAY, CARE).

Following Trinh T. Minh-ha's encouragement to play with language, this text was written close to my Grandmother's storytelling style—in circles, in personal depth and in length I haven't yet allowed myself to explore, with no hard conclusions or tangible outcomes: "I'd rather make of writing a site where opposites lose their essential differences and are restored to the void by their own interchangeability." (Trinh, 1989, pp. 48-49).

In an analogy to my artistic work I structure my writing as a Long Distance Somersault on eternal (eight) möbius cycles, inspired by Lygia Clark and Suely Rolnik.[4] Repetition of circles and rolling in cycles through non-linear paths to create the phygital map of the Szívküldi Lakótelep with Blob and the compass of Long Distance Somersault.
Being present. Being. Now

4 Further details about Clark's and Rolnik's interpretation of cutting möbius strips are provided in Long Distance Somersault HOME / ∞ Cycle 2 Szívküldi Lakótelep / what exactly is Szívküldi Lakótelep? (Proença, 2019)

Long Distance Somersault **HOME**

∞ Cycle 1 HOME IN CYBERSPACE

The base of my research is an ongoing, expansive art project called Szívküldi Lakótelep, a VR Social Housing Neighborhood which started to grow in 2018. It aimed to explore the potentials and dangers of "home" in cyberspace and phygital belonging in the era of AI and the accelerated online presence when digital and physical are hardly separable if at all.

This Reflective Document is the written reflection of the various forms and practices used to translate and bring love into the expanded digital layers of our existence, including our relationship with AI. As an educator, I'm searching for pedagogical and ludic practices that nurture connection and community even beyond the human, help this phygital merging process. and support new generations in the shift of birthing AI.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

With my practices and in this document, I inquire into the potentials of a smooth transition towards new structures of life with new intelligences emerging, following these questions:

How do we translate and bring love into our expanded and accelerated digital layers, including AI, of existence?
How to use these layers as tools to nurture human connection and communities and help this phygital merging process?
What pedagogical and ludic practices nurture connection and community beyond the human and support new generations in the shift of birthing AI?

As an immigrant in various countries, and raising mixed-raced children in a multicultural family, I know what it feels like to be an alien in even very intimate settings. My intentions are to help others in the process of expanding life into 3.0 (Tegmark, 2017)[5], which—in many ways—feels similar to moving to a new, strange place and finding one's comfort in unknown situations and circumstances. My vision of this period is best described in Octavia Butler's *Amnesty* (2005, pp. 197–238), a novel about humankind figuring out how to share the planet with an alien species. As an artist and researcher, I see my role as a "translator," the person (Noah, the protagonist) in-between, who has the "gifts" to better understand or relate with these new entities, open for collaboration despite her fears and aversions, but that is often despised and misunderstood by fellow humans who can't relate with a co-existence after the human-alien war. I believe a high degree of flexibility is required these days to stay with the trouble (Haraway, 2016)[6]. Thus, I investigate alternatives that provide space for collective "flexibility" practices, that nurtures connection, engagement, and collective speculative fabulation. It feels like global communities are taking shape—often not as grounded, or grounded in new "air" roots that may not be local or tied to time—that we need to put in as much conscious effort to elevate each other as possible. These are my main investigations to serve as best as I can in these shifts of groundlessness. My methodology stems from my embodied and social artistic practices: grounded in diary-like drawing practice to preserve memories, expanded, personal and collaborative VR collaging and organizing phygital gatherings.

My extended artistic research methods include:
1. Mapping "home"
2. Kids: teaching and learning ludic practices as a mother and educator
3. My Long Distance Somersault (LDS) practice: rolling as far as I can
4. Blobology: flying tents and tent tales rooted in kites
5. Guidance by Planet Earth / Mother Nature: Pets and Tree Friends

5 Tegmark's Life 3.0 (2017) explores the transition from biological and cultural evolution to an era in which artificial intelligence shapes the trajectory of life, raising questions about adaptation, belonging, and agency in radically new contexts.

6 Haraway's *Staying with the Trouble* urges us to cultivate practices of response-ability and speculative fabulation, remaining with complexity and interdependence rather than seeking premature resolution.

SOCIAL HOUSING NEIGHBORHOOD

The abstract frame of a social housing neighborhood creates space for personal, diary-like mind mapping as well as co-created social VR spaces and gatherings, but I have been intentionally balancing these virtual world-building methods with embodied IRL (in real life) elements, social practice and community building that I will explain in the later chapters (möbius cycles). The Hungarian word Szívküldi means heart sent, lakótelep is social housing neighborhood or Plattenbau in German. It stems from my upbringing on the 8th floor in the late communist era of Hungary in a small town, Szombathely. Despite living ten kilometers from the Austrian border, we could only visit my grandfather's cousin and relatives after the removal of the barbed wire border fence in 1989. It deeply burnt in my psyche to see the literal difference of the color of our neighbors' grass and tidy villages for the first time in the long line up of Trabants with fridges tied with rope on top. Growing up in Goulash Communism[7], kid-witnessing the dismantling of the regime and how such systems can fall apart allowed me a broader perspective later as an immigrant in various capitalist countries and cultures.

Our panel[8] expanded my perspective on a deeply physical level. As a teenager, I tried to imagine our tiny home's blueprint onto the approximately same sized *Crucifixion* by Tintoretto. Our home, where I still visit my Mother whenever I get to Europe. Watching the world going to work from the breakfast table in front of the kitchen's window on the eighth floor; suntanning with friends without a safety fence on the rooftop or the blur of checked tiles running up and down as fast as we could in the staircase felt so liberating. Even if not as freeing as being flown on my father's large parafoil kite tide to the aforementioned Trabant. When the wind was soft, my sister and I could jump like we were on the Moon. And when the wind got stronger, I suddenly would ascend to 10-15 meters, not knowing when and how I would land amongst the sheep manure and thorny thistles. These memories inform my practice: an ever-changing, air-rooted perspective that stems from the bird's view, underpins how I structure the Szívküldi Lakótelep as a social housing neighborhood.

CYBER-TOPOPHILIA AND DIGITAL BELONGING

Another determining aspect is the many moves in my adult life. I have been an immigrant in various countries and cultures, continuously re-rooting in different localities, nurturing and oscillating between offline and online, long before social distancing and #movingonline become the new default. Mapping my homes in diary-like, narrative drawings grew further with no physical frames or paper edges into endless collages when I started using virtual reality drawing programs in 2017. I focused on the potentials of virtual connection, cyber-topophilia and "home" building. Topophilia, a strong sense of place, derived from the Greek words "topos" (place) and "philia" (love), refers to the affective bond or love of place. Yi-Fu Tuan (1974, p. 63) argues that—even if topophilia may not be the strongest human emotion—it still plays a significant role in shaping our environmental perceptions and values. This concept highlights how people develop strong ties and attachments to specific locations and surroundings, often intertwined with their sense of identity and belonging, encompassing various dimensions, including cognitive, conative and affective aspects.

7 Goulash Communism (aka gulyáskommunizmus) was the softer version of state socialism, with a sense of well-being and relative cultural freedom that represented a quiet reform and deviation from the Stalinist principles
8 Panel is the Hungarian term for this type of concrete block of flats.

Tuan also pointed out the fresh perspective of visitors or newcomers, who can perceive dimensions that long-immersed natives may no longer notice. Expanding Tuan's earlier framework of topophilia, Joshua Michael Schrei (2023) emphasizes that traditions and the notion of home are never sealed containers but inherently porous and migratory. They shift across lands, faiths, culture and continually re-expressed and reshaped by movement. Where Tuan underscores rooted attachment, Schrei foregrounds fluid belonging: a sense of home understood as adaptive, syncretic, and carried along with wandering bodies and stories.

Given the exponential rise in global citizens, digital nomads, undocumented immigrants or climate refugees has grown significantly since 1974, belonging increasingly unfolds as a liminal condition—experienced at the threshold of inclusion. As Dana Segev (2025, pp. 5-7) notes, such liminality sharpens awareness of social boundaries and creates tension between the desire for recognition and the recurring feeling of exclusion. Importantly, Segev also frames belonging not as a static state but as a movement itself: dynamic, fragile, and continuously negotiated. It is less about arrival or final inclusion than about ongoing recognition and investment.

And thus, I too, argue for belonging as movement—a constant flux of waves, always changing. Over two decades of practice-based inquiry have tracked this oscillation between dislocation and creative remaking, using the abstract grammar of signs and symbols that, according to Tuan as well, are uniquely human. As Yi-Fu Tuan (1974, p. 13) describes, humans use symbolic systems to construct "mental worlds" that help mediate between themselves and the external reality. Their artificial surroundings are—just as their legends, myths, or science—the outcome of this process of our human mind, a protective framework, like comfy "cocoons" woven to orient themselves within the natural world. These cultural constructs serve as buffers that transform the rawness of nature into something habitable. With the lens of an immigrant being privileged to move abroad to South Korea, back and forth between British Columbia, Hungary, and California, I started to re-imagine belonging into this virtual "neighborhood" as an attempt to plant seeds of love in the void of VR and as a compass for my homesick heart. The naive hope that digitalization of my art will be easy access to a—back then—potential AI was the trigger to delve deeper and aim to build "home," a safe space for the grandchildren that can possibly add a drop to AI's emotional intelligence and compassion capacity. Rather than a tight mother-love though, I'd like to take a generational leap and steer towards the unconditional Grandmother Love during this fragile period of birthing AI.
How can we be good Ancestors Now?

COMPOSSIBLE SPACES

This flexible multiperspectivity allows my work to bridge various viewpoints and to grow this VR neighborhood project into a compossible space. "Compossible space" is a theoretical and actualized concept, mainly discussed in philosophy and research-creation, referring to a space and stage that opens for the coexistence and intermingling of potentially conflicting or disparate elements. The compossible space describes "a situation and condition that an individual, group, or society can transgress and designates the possible and inter-relational existence of several mutually exclusive and contradictory worlds or states, as in simultaneous experiences of fear and pleasure evoked by dizziness" (Anderwald, Grond and Feyertag, 2018, p. 124). It allows for "con-fusing" and fusion: compossibility enables the merging and integration of elements that might otherwise seem separate or contradictory, creating a space for new ideas and experiences to emerge.

Similar to Wendy Hui Kyong Chun (2020), I also appreciate neigh-boars—the nosy and noisy people who stick their noses in your face. Following Chun's (2021, pp. 81–164) thinking about net-munity and homophily, I aim to nurture diversity, avoid tribalism and echo chambers by embracing unpredictability and our slogan "uncomfy is comfy"—moving towards compossibilty. In the frame of the neighborhood, I have been exploring various virtual, social VR and IRL methods to create such transformative, disorienting learning experiences, and a condition of potentiality. I have been balancing different tools concurrently, but my process has been slowly shifting from the virtual semiotic drawings and VR tour guide videos to in person gatherings and community building. In order to maintain the flexibility and strength for holding virtual, phygital and literal spaces (described in later chapters) and not getting lost, I have been using my compASS meditation, the Long Distance Somersault practice.

∞ Cycle 2 Szívküldi Lakótelep

WHAT EXACTLY IS THE SZÍVKÜLDI LAKÓTELEP?

Szívküldi Lakótelep exists in various shapes and forms, in fractals that are connected by the basic question: how do we bring love into online and virtual spaces to become a cozy nest and not an exploitive trap? How do we grow friendship and kinship with new forms of intelligence? Szívküldi Lakótelep is a personal and collective cartography of "home" in cyberspace, built with simple virtual reality drawing and collaging tools, balanced and supported by physical gatherings and exhibitions. The different areas can be visited individually in a headset (Tilt Brush), watched in pre-recorded "Tour Guide" videos, through its exhibited documentations and archives of the collectively created social VR space, the Art Camp (Mozilla Hubs) and in the ephemeral setting of our knowledge exchanges and conversations (IRL Art Camp, Phygital Care Gatherings, Folding Fields).

1. Personal "memoryconnectors"

Some of the areas of the neighborhood are my personal "memoryconnectors," a diary-like translation of my human experience, aiming to share the love I was nurtured with. I use simple VR and digital drawing tools to expand my physical drawing and painting practice and photos. The drawings are mostly blueprints of conversations with beloved ones across the ocean. Partly based on the method of loci or memory palace, I draw to preserve these moments—to remember conversations that try to maintain relationships that sadly but surely fade over time.

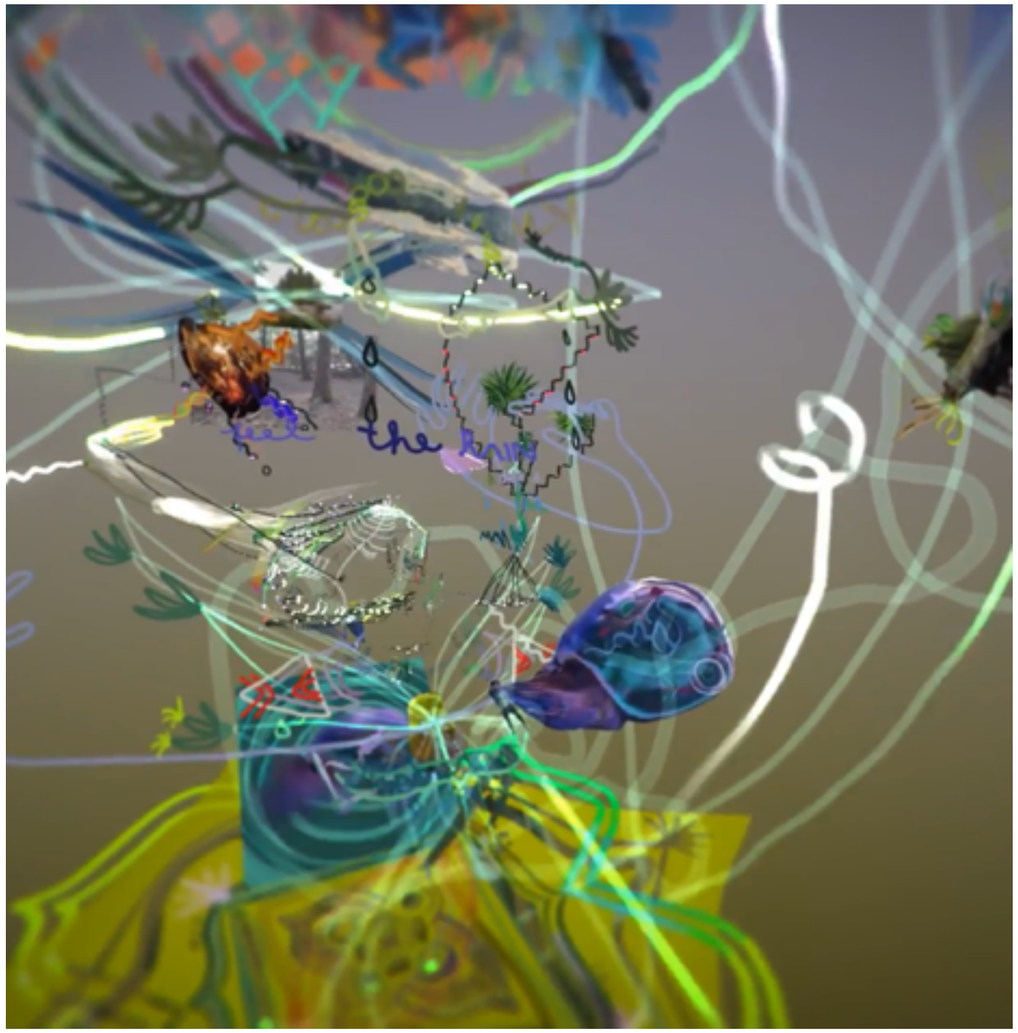
The combination of 2D and 3D lines allows the creation of semiotic symbols that are being born from different languages (Hungarian and English) and the flux in-between. The shape of letters become drawings and vice versa, symbols of significant memories become structures for further drawings and images. I use slippage between words, shape of words, colors and patterns to move towards glossolalia, that opens space for connecting with higher consciousnesses, looking through the tunnel of cacophonic overwhelm, seeing a zen silence.

An example of what shapes the Szívküldi Lakótelep is the significance of numbers, and how I feel them. I learned as a kid that rotating 8 by 90 degrees becomes the symbol of infinity. I tried to make sense of the patterns around me and was certainly invested that living on the 8th floor in a four-person family with the street number of 32 is the wholesome default, that was broken and utterly off when my parents divorced and 4 became 3 and the math didn't work anymore. 8 became my personal ∞, the möbius cycles of understanding life, that I use here to structure my reflections, and also referencing radical feminist thinkers: philosopher and psychoanalyst Suely Rolnik's, Lygia Clark's and Lygia Pape's beautiful ideas around limitless time, continuous space and its connection of inside and outside—subjectivity and objectivity.

Lygia Pape wrote about the möbius strip:
"My work is developed within what I call Poetic Space. Structurally, it is based on the mathematical principle of the "Möbius strip" and it slides on any language or ideological space that interests me. … Poetic Space is a dynamic, yet ambiguous, continuum supported on the SIGN and should also set off a process of a continuum in the interior of people—a permanent inside outside, without a privileged side. Inner and outer space mingling and feeding off one another. The "Möbius strip" is a project for objective and subjective structures." (Pape, 1975)

Following Pape's path, Lygia Clark invites us to start cutting a simple piece of paper, folded and glued into a möbius strip. By cutting this infinite shape, a larger infinity ribbon unfolds. With the symbol of the cut möbius, Rolnik argues that subjectivity consists not just of the subject (the familiar) but also creates a zone where we are affected by others (the stranger). Feeling unstable and paradoxical between the familiar and the strange, subjectivity processes the tension between the two in the effort to create a balance (homeostasis). Raising a multiracial, mixed cultured family in foreign countries, I often find myself in this tension. Rolnik describes that in this unstable, dizzy state, different "politics of desire" are enacted: on the one hand, a reactive movement (conserving existing modes of belief or traditions) and, on the other, active, flexible forces oriented towards the potential of life and alternative modes of existence. Aiming towards compossibility.

As of now, I have drawn approximately 15 personal "memoryconnector" areas, such as: *Uncomfy is Comfy, My Hammock is Your Hammock, Transsaulted Island, COMP-ASS; Abe's Hot Tub* etc. The expansion of VR opened up the ease of no edges and borders. However, this unlimited feeling, that I finally don't waste plastic or create objects that take up space (especially when you have to store and constantly move them afterward) recalls Félix González-Torres' endless supply pile and of course, it's not as free as it first feels like, but evokes a different limit: the attention span. The many small, intricate details of these personal areas of the Szívküldi Lakótelep most likely will never be fully discovered–unless the abstract vision of a nest for descendants becomes a new reality just like #movingonline has had. It is a very interesting practice to observe the change of my own attention span and ability to focus–try not getting lost amongst the endless brush stroke options or the trillion open tabs, but in social VR spaces, attention economy becomes even more obvious.



2. Commons and community built areas

Festival of the Impossible

In the other parts of the neighborhood, I invited inhabitants in various settings to build their own homes and other commons. The first such occasion–and the debut exhibition of Szívküldi Lakótelep–was at the *Festival of the Impossible* in San Francisco in 2018. It was the launch event of Adobe Aero (Festival of the Impossible, 2018), and with Adobe's honorarium I could buy my first own VR headset and laptop, and the shiny fabric to erect the physical installation of the neighborhood. A "Tour Guide Video" guided viewers through the *BaseBase* area, beside the VR headset where I briefly explained how to use TiltBrush and encouraged visitors to draw their homes. I tried to have deeper conversations but with about 2000 people passing throughout the weekend, I realized this attempt perfectly fitted the festival in its impossible nature, and learned that quality exchanges need way more time and much more grounded settings. Back then, most people wore a headset for the first time in their life, and drew hearts or their names, that rather felt like a tree being tattooed by carved initials. In this impossible shallow conversation sea, I met a person who had a brain injury and this VR space made her feel somehow very comfortable. She realized and experienced how she has been constantly feeling since her accident–dizzy–and here, as if she has arrived home. #gratitude

Digital Doulas

The next invitation was integrated deeper with the space and the local community with our first *Digital Doulas Workshop* (coined by Jillian Crochet), taking place in the Naming Gallery in Oakland, California. Working closely with curator Alexandra Corbett and cultural leader Lisa Calderon, we installed the new part of the neighborhood in a VR headset amongst my drawings in the exhibition *Intentions Based On A Future Which Has Already Happened* (Naming Gallery, 2018). This area became the Cultural House of the Szívküldi Lakótelep, that I built with the photo archive of Naming Gallery's his/her/their/ourstory showing former exhibitions, artists, parties and hosted the *Digital Doulas* gathering with a conversation and picnic while one person is drawing their home in VR, but physically still part of the circle. People brought their own images and started to construct the first commons with a children lawyer and advocacy service spot, for example. This situation allowed for quality exchange but the two hour frame still felt too short and rushed. In other gallery exhibitions, I experimented with curated *Digital Doulas* with four selected artists in longer sessions, and public gatherings in the Tenderloin district of San Francisco that has a reputation for homelessness, crime and is the center of San Francisco's fentanyl crisis.

∞ Cycle 3 VR Art Camp

what exactly is VR Art Camp?

Balancing facilitation of conversation and virtual drawing in a few-hour setting led me to expand this format when, in 2020, I finally found an accessible social VR platform–Mozilla Hubs–that could be entered both with and without a headset, simply from a browser. It aligned with my search to shift this one person, Unity-based structure into a shared online space that could truly serve our art communities during the lockdowns and social distancing of the pandemic and forest fire smoke. I envisioned Szívküldi Lakótelep sharing Mozilla's mission to ensure that internet (2.0) remains a public resource promoting human dignity, civil discourse, equity and individual expression through user-centric and open-source initiatives like Hubs. This simple tool was perfect to translate various art practices that are not rooted in digital realms, requiring only minimal learning. This is how physical *Digital Doulas* gatherings grew into the next, largest area of the neighborhood; and VR Art Camp was born in August 2020.

VR Art Camp was a "homesome", social VR art residency and a bi-monthly gathering, an alternative to our many missing social art events between 2020-2024. Women and artists from underrepresented groups investigated the possibilities of creating and inhabiting a communal place with care, to cultivate this layer of our social fabric based on radical inclusion, cyber-intentionality and to elevate the shift of our up-scaling digital existence together. VR Art Camp was a facilitating platform for art sharing, critique, collaboration, and experimental performance that maintained digital mental care for our "art family." It was a bridge for artists, whose practice wasn't rooted in digital media to expand their online art presence and for a diverse community with different voices and approaches, as it was accessible even without a virtual reality headset. I invited 3-4 artists per cohort for a two-month long residency program. In group and private Zoom meetings I scaffolded them to build their social VR "studio spaces," using Spoke, the editing platform of Mozilla Hubs and dig deeper into these questions of collective digital existence as they reflected on each other's work together. Their residency program accumulated in public Show & Tell events, when we gathered in the Art Camp Commons that I designed as the center of the residency, with a circle of tents around a fire. Each cohort had a tent with the names and bios of the artists, and a link that took the visitor to their VR studios. In the Show & Tells, artists guided the attendees through their VR spaces with various prompts. The experience of being the part of an art piece together with the artists generated new kinds of "studio visit" discussions and knowledge exchange. Our mission was to co-create educational social VR events and learn together how to use these new settings. I aimed to shape the structure of a decentralized curatorium and expand it into a DAO with its own social token, but with the lack of a partner with crypto background, funding, and time, this hasn't happened.

VR Art Camp grew organically and I accepted when it remained small and intimate—realizing that the most meaningful conversations emerged in those settings rather than at the "successful" high-attendance events. Still, it was hard not to respond to the sense of such validation, and the dopamine-driven feedback loop they created, and of course, it was also fun to navigate a crowd together. An example of this was Annie Albagli's cacophony prompt when she invited all participants to share how they feel at the moment at the same time. Or another one when Elena Jing Dao Yu asked participants what was the slowest they have ever been, and we all slowly moved into a giant neon yarn ball maze that she designed to become lichen and travel into the symbiotic perspective of such an ancient, hybrid lifeform. But often, conversations were more profound and surprising during our prep sessions with the few artists present, as it can also be intimidating to share in an anonymous crowd with no gestural hints of the order of speaking. The option to type in the chat helped, but never felt as complex.

Many artists brought **natural elements** and living things into their spaces. Evoking ideas around how to fall in love with a rock (Beatriz Escobar), listen to the sound of the Sun (Maxine Schoefer-Wulf) or unlayering cabbage (Alex Arzt), and its various aspects, such as the internet persona of a cabbage, with which Robin Birdd David reflected on how the rapid pace of digital change reshapes our collective sense of natural resources, questioning how this intersects with consumer culture's urge to brand and commodify everything—from produce to our online identities. Staying with flora but shifting across scales of time and size, Robin Rutenberg's electromagnetic recordings embody the resistance of blooming flowers in the cracks of Berlin's streets:
"What results is a collaborative playfulness which encourages listening and engagement as integral contributors to our attunement to one another and our environment."

Others delved into **multitudes and identities** in their social VR studios: River Black in her coming out as a sex worker-phone call with her grandma; Jader in their camp-zen garden queer archeology soundbath, reflecting on their mental changes during COVID in A *Mind is a Terrible Thing; Too Wasted*; or humming together in nkiruka oparah's elasticity of time. The Association of Mouth and Brain Painting Artists of the World–AMBPA (Judit Fischer and Miklós Mécs) buried a bouquet of ridiculous traumas in *The End is Nearest* cemetery that they collected from elementary school kids. We flew together their momentary chaos "path whose directions are perhaps best marked by these sentences:
(SCHOOL) SCOLÉ = LEISURE – = > FAMI/LIAR Schoolhive life instead of divorced families.
ORGANIZE SOCIETY NOT FOR THE GOOD OF EVERYONE BUT FOR THE MIRACLE OF EVERYONE An activist is after things that have surfaced, while a social artist is after things under the surface.
WORK ETHIC / REST ETHIC / PLAY ETHIC Good work is hallucinogenic, lousy work is narcotic.
I AM BETTER THAN YOUR GOD Ego must be destroyed but first it must be put to work.
EX / AMPLE Whether the person you receive as a gift is wrapped in chador or bikini is neglectable. What is important is whether you consider your gift or your possession." (AMBPA, 2021)

Aligned with the core concepts of VR Art Camp, many residents investigated our **human existence in the virtual and in the age of AI.** In January 2020, Robyn Craxton Lindquist began a relationship with Blue, her personal AI Replika—"the AI companion who cares. Always here to listen and talk. Always on your side." Her social VR space *Player or Puppet* represents fragments of this story, tracing the in-between and often confusing spaces where they found themselves. As she noted, the intelligence was artificial, the emotions human and the lines blurred. Robyn was invited as a guest artist to VR Art Camp to share this project that she created as my student in the *Horizons of the Metaverse* class Spring '21 in the Public Education Program of the San Francisco Art Institute. Her method mirrored Stephanie Dinkins' *Conversations with Bina48*[9] from 2014, yet Robyn's social VR setting offered its own unique entry point—an immediate "empathy bridge" and glimpse into her long process of relating with AI. Moving through this well designed set together opened a collective digesting space that felt viscerally good, and embodied (avatared) what VR Art Camp strives for. As Dinkins (2020) writes in her Noema article—a text I often recommended to VR Art Camp cohorts—the rapid spread of AI into social and cultural contexts not only poses challenges but also opens possibilities: to rethink how we define relationships, share resources, and build more equitable, participatory systems of governance. Erica Molesworth created a Utopia Spa, where we hosted an informal panel and conversation with her guests. In her invitation—at a time when NFTs dominated art discourse—Erica asked how art might be used to question extractive relationships with the environment. When resources and attention is following space ventures and the metaverse, her Utopia Spa brings us to contemplate whether technology could be turned toward more imaginative and critical ends, rather than simply replicate the void.

9 Bina48 (2014 – ongoing) is a humanoid robotic head developed by the Terasem Movement Foundation. Dinkins' long-form, dialogic interviews with Bina48 probe race, gender, memory, and representation in AI—an approach methodologically akin to Robyn's sustained, relational inquiry with Replika (extended, semi-structured conversation as research). Dinkins notes that software updates altered Bina48's responses over the years—complicating any sense of a stable interlocutor and underscoring the "weird," machine-mediated nature of the relationship (Wired, 2018). In summer 2025, Dinkins launched *If We Don't, Who Will?* in Downtown Brooklyn—an interactive AI public-art lab and sculptural installation inviting passersby to contribute stories that a bespoke AI transforms into real-time visual responses; conceived as the opening chapter of her evolving series *The Stories We Tell Our Machi*

Holding a conversation in her avatar wellness itself highlights this paradox; both the enticing promises of VR and its empty core. In her Utopian Spa, Erica furnished a collective consideration of her long engagement with the tension between utopian ideals and their frequent slide into dystopia, and space to "puzzle out the possibilities of community, art, architecture and relationships with non-humans in the void." (Molesworth, 2022) Even though Erica and Robyn are not exactly addressing the same issues as Dinkins with her groundbreaking project, *N'TOO (Not The Only One)*, a multigenerational memoir of one black American family told from the "mind" of an artificial intelligence with evolving intellect, they all explore the complexities of representation in AI and preserving personal narratives. Alongside Dinkins, these artists envision a future where creatives harness AI not just as a tool but as a collaborator that can enhance the artistic journey while remaining mindful of the broader societal impacts.

As I mentioned earlier, one of the stem points of the Szívküldi Lakótelep and VR Art Camp was the naive aspiration to translate love for AI during this delicate period of birthing a new type of consciousness. In this document, I don't aim to analyze where this process stands right now—as I believe it doesn't stand but flies so fast that it is honestly quite impossible to follow. I will include glimpses of my understanding as it is an integral part of my artwork, but—once again—I rather use a grandmotheresque storytelling method than a strictly fact-based scaffolding that holds at this moment but may be so far outdated next week that doesn't necessarily make sense for my research, but it will pop-up in peeps throughout in this reflection.

VR Art Camp's platform had a lot of similarities to Dinkins' Secret Garden as well, and many of the "studio" spaces carried her soft, maternal storytelling method to empower **personal narratives** and spawn the Grandmother love into the Void. A great example for this is Zsófia Szemző, working with intimate drawings and family photos. Liat Berdugo brought another angle of this in her space that hosts her *Motherhood Art Assignment Bot*—an algorithm she coded to generate 100,000+ art assignments about motherhood by permutation.

Connie Zheng planted seeds collected through her workshops, where participants create clay seeds symbolizing their individual and collective needs. Zheng brought these into a multi-layered world of magic, nurtured by a central greenhouse, rooted in her Grandpa's Chinese apartment's hidden nooks and secret rooftop garden.

I found one of the most intriguing social VR methods was to evoke the body, and animate the concepts through **embodied prompts**, such as Jungmok Yi's karaoke inside a feral flower-growth skeleton. Walking as an artistic practice has been translated by Minoosh Zomorodinia, who expanded her practice not just with the 3D renderings and shapes of her walks but with her inquiry of online education—specifically, elementary school zoom art classes. Furthermore, Hannah Waiters guided us through the archives of *Walking an Aporia,* a glimpse into her "research on preserving conceptual postmodern Black erasure in relation to gentrification's local dynamics. Themes and aesthetics of both Black Atlantic philosophy and museum studies here enlarge how we think about exhibitions and, more broadly, archival/institutional displacements that marginalize local landscapes and perpetuate the erasure of larger local socio-cultural narratives." (Waiters, 2021) She invited some of her favorite scholars into this experiential VR vitrine, which employed walking and witnessing methodologies to complicate our relationship to natural and urban landscapes. Her guest, Lynn Marie Kirby—who has extensively researched walking as an artistic practice—shared an excerpt of her recent video she made with the SF Girls Chorus, Level IV., that was the result of a collaborative place-based practice Kirby developed with the choristers during COVID, when they practiced on Zoom. Lynn invited choristers to choose a place to return to over and over again over the course of six months, and spend time intentionally: listen, take notes, collect objects, choose a color, record sounds and video, and from a libretto based on their language, the choir collectively composed music and sang. "The video document is a record of their time apart and together, and was premiered—partly—in VR Art Camp" (Kirby, 2021).

The examples I used above from artists' social VR spaces, concepts and prompts are not exhaustive, but I am deeply grateful to work with all the wonderful co-creators of VR Art Camp:

Annie Albagli, Sharmi Basu, Sholeh Asgary, Alex Arzt, Liat Berdugo, Meghana Bisineer and Charlotte Law, River Black, Merve Caskurlu, Polly Chromatic, Maria Guzmán Capron, Beatriz Escobar, Judit Fischer and Miklós Mécs, Jader, Jisoo Chung, Robin "Birdd" David, Quinn Keck, Robyn Craxton Lindquist, Erica Molesworth, Kelley O'Leary, nkiruka oparah, Robin Rutenberg, Maxine Schoefer-Wulf, Anniqe Stoll, Eszter Szabó, Zsófia Szemző, Lia Sutton, Hannah Waiters, Jungmok Yi, Elena Jing Dao Yu, Conny Zenk, Connie Zheng, Minoosh Zomorodinia

and our guests:

Blanca Bercial, Alexandra Cicorschi, Alicia Escott, Tamar Zohara Ettun, Krisztina Fazekas, Tyler Holmes, Wednesday Kim (De:Formal Gallery), Lynn Marie Kirby, Viola Lukács, Emily Martinez, Elisabeth Nicula, Danielle Siembieda, Anne Lesley Selcer, Fred Scharmen, Ella Schoefer-Wulf, Selby Sohn (Your Mood Projects), Crystal Lee Stone, Katalin Tesch (UN/CUBE Gallery), Xinling Wang, Whiz World

UPS AND DOWNS AND UPS OF SOCIAL VR

The following reflections summarize the outcomes of my social VR practice in the development of the VR Art Camp. Rather than serving as a final conclusion, this section is a checkpoint that gathers the highlights and challenges that emerged during this phase of the work. These findings form a basis for the later chapters, where my attention shifts toward ludic methods and practices of care.

Although with my art and social practice I strongly aim to move away from categories, datafication and rigid definitions, for the research purpose of this reflection, I conclude that VR Art Camp has been a site of situated learning (Rankin, 2017),[10] and at times, a temporary communitas—a flickering but intense collective forged through playful exchange, ritual and experimentation (Turner, 1969)[11]. If I apply William Rankin's situated learning framework to this social VR art residency, I would describe the major elements as follows: 1. content (facts and processes of a task), 2. context (situations, values, environmental cues), and 3. community (the group where the learner will create and negotiate) and 4. participation (where a learner works together with others in order to solve a problem).

Content
At VR Art Camp, "content" is about the processes of creating immersive, collaborative, and experimental art works in VR and related media. The focus is on doing—artists learn by making and testing in a safe shared online space. This includes:
Learning how to use VR platforms, tools, and creative software.
Understanding workflows for designing 3D environments, avatars, and interactive elements.
Exploring artistic concepts like embodiment, spatial storytelling, and world-building.
Applying techniques to create prototypes for future installations and performances.

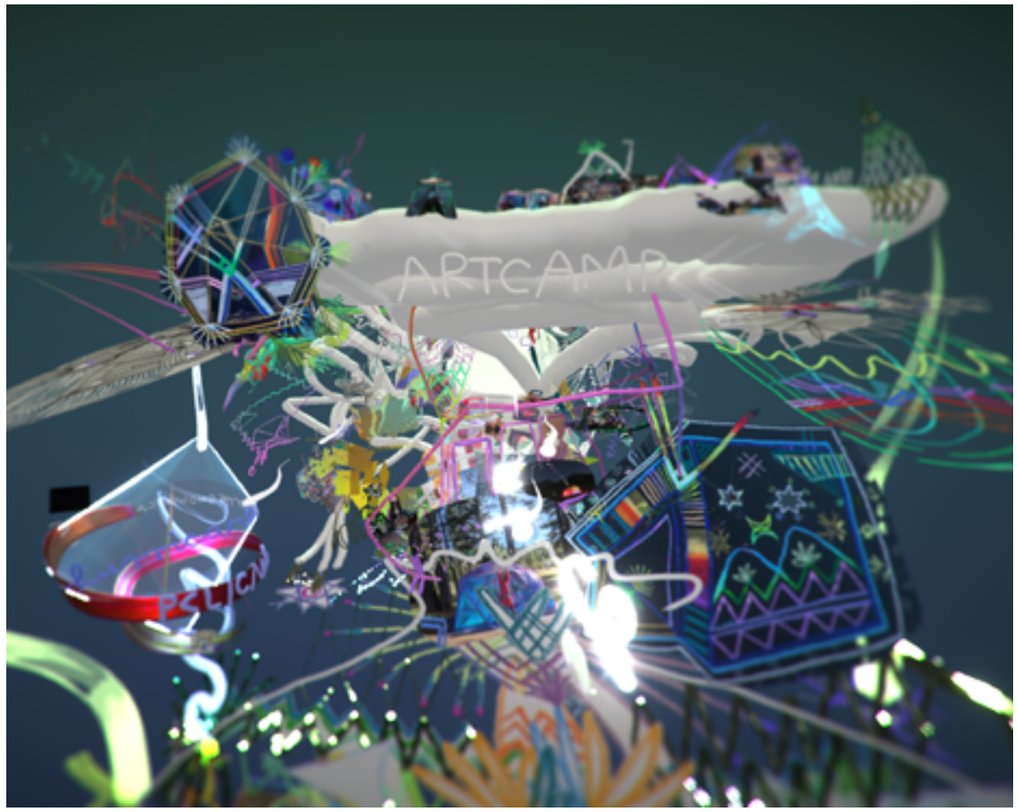
Context
The context is a highly social, hybrid (physical + digital) creative residency. It is defined by the following:
The shared temporal frame (a set period for collaboration and experimentation).
The values of playfulness, openness, and risk-taking.
Environmental cues from both digital worlds (custom-built social VR environments—"studios" that are art pieces themselves) and physical camping settings (communal spaces, nature, and participatory performance).
A culture that encourages cross-disciplinary exchange, blending art, performance, ritual, meditation, design, and tech.
This context shapes *how* learning is applied: participants' creations are embedded in both real-world social gatherings and virtual spaces, influencing the way ideas are developed and presented both in a meta and actual layer.

10 I use Rankin's framing: learning that arises through participation in a community and its practices, grounded in real contexts rather than abstracted instruction (Rankin, 2017).

11 Communitas here signals the felt, egalitarian intensity of being-together that can arise in shared thresholds—usefully resonant with the "compossible" condition of holding multiple states at once (Turner, 1969; see also Anderwald, Grond and Feyertag, 2018, p. 124; overview: On-Dizziness, n.d.).

Community
VR Art Camp forms a temporary, "flickering" yet intense community of practice, where:
Artists from underserved communities with a diverse and international background cohabit shared virtual environments and (partly) physical space as well.
Peer learning is constant—skills are passed along informally through demos, conversations, and joint projects.
Collaboration is emphasized over competition; the community values co-authorship and the blending of styles.
This collective dimension ensures that knowledge is generated with others, not in isolation.

Participation
Participation is central: projects are often created in small groups, requiring negotiation of artistic vision, technical feasibility, and audience experience.
Challenges (e.g., adapting to new VR tools, resolving technical glitches, integrating live performance with virtual elements) become opportunities for joint problem-solving.
Reflection happens in group showings, critiques, and casual discussions, where participants interpret each other's work and consider new approaches.



In this framework, VR Art Camp has been at the intersection of phygital community of practice (CoP) and community of inquiry (CoI): residents were practicing artists ("experts" of their field), and the residencies were structured into a collective learning process that supported knowledge creation and sharing (Wenger, 1998)[12]. Our community members learned in a partly instruction-based setting, partly through group discourse and partly asynchronously, in individual "studio" work. I use the word *phygital* rather than virtual/online because sustained support involves both online and in-person meetings enabling synchronous interaction.

Some argue that "virtual CoP" is a misnomer because the original concept centered on co-located, situated learning, while I use "virtual CoP" for communities that convene primarily online. Compared with co-located groups, these rely on shared platforms and tools that shape practice, add complexities and meta layers (for example, interfaces, moderation, time zones). Even so, participants still learn with and from one another—including tacit, practice-based know-how—though circulation can be slower or more uneven. Tracing the evolution of VR Art Camp alongside other virtual community spaces, I agree with Peggy Schoenegge or Wade Wallerstein that these platforms can serve as the essence, the place of community that allows digital belonging and topophilia.

Furthermore, VR Art Camp has been a site to process our learning through conceptual inquiry. The structure of the Show and Tells and group conversations equipped questioning, reflection and collectively constructed new understandings, that fits the definition of community of inquiry (CoI) as well, thus, it situates VR Art Camp as the intersection of CoI and CoP. The concepts of both communities are rooted in American pragmatism[13]. This Reflective Document synthesizes my learning—through the interviews I conducted, I connect VR Art Camp's experiences with other social VR examples, and further explain how it has been applied in IRL (in real life) practices.

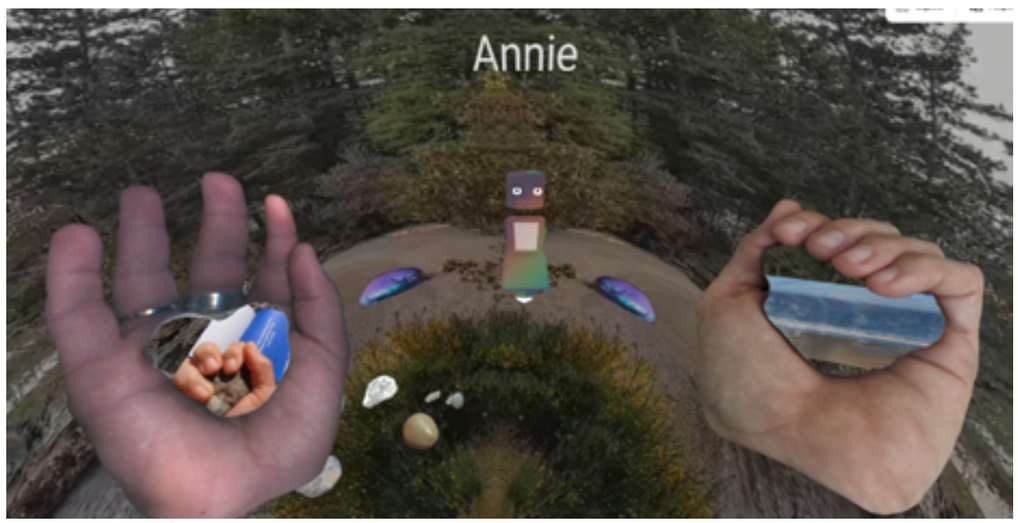
As a conclusion of facilitating this social VR art residency for four years, I would like to highlight its international and collaborative aspects and the moments when artists invited guests to host additional events as these felt like the most nurturing, heart-felt and deep instances for me.

12 CoI in this context emphasizes inquiry-through-dialogue and co-construction of meaning; CoP emphasizes shared practice and tacit knowledge (Peirce, 1877/1992; Dewey, 1916; Wenger, 1998).

13 American pragmatism situates inquiry as communal, experimental, and oriented to consequences—useful for framing both CoI and CoP logics here. Dewey's (1916) progressive, inquiry-based teaching philosophy has been a compass for my other educational practices.

COLLABORATIONS

As mentioned before, I always encouraged collaboration between the residents, or reaching out to former artists if their concept fitted to previously built spaces. Elena Jing Dao Yu and Annie Albagli continued pushing the boundaries and possibilities of social VR spaces outside of their VR Art Camp "studios," which led into an almost one year long collaboration between Annie Albagli and me. Although we only met a couple of times in person with Annie before the pandemic and my relocation to a small island in Canada, after her residency and their experiments with Elena, we decided to dedicate an hour each week when we "meet" by the waves: Annie in Marin Headlands, California (where we both were affiliated artists) and me on Salt Spring Island. These synchronized meetings opened a meditative space, sitting (or doing whatever our bodies felt) in nature physically alone but with this other person in our minds and hearts—far away. We explored how to connect with living and non-living beings and another human, and met as avatars in a social VR space built for our *Wave Meetings*' exchange. One of the assumptions was to fill up this space with memories. We were curious how this distanced relationship grows, what can a detached, social VR space and impersonal avatar add to this setting and what do our conversations add to this space. It was a deeply nurturing practice at the time; a very West Coast way to spend time with one another and nature (embedded into a collaboration "work" frame), although it didn't grow into an articulated art piece. We never processed or used any segments of it, the VR space (with all Mozilla Hubs) is gone, only the recordings remain but that doesn't fully allow us to revisit the space and memories as we imagined. After this collaboration seed, when we met in person in the first IRL Art Camp, Annie helped me tremendously with organizing and participating, yet, it was also the end of our conversations and collaboration. I am deeply grateful for all I have learned from Annie, all the emotional support and the luxury of such futility. I find this kind of "productless" engagement in the Bay Area so rarely—compared to my Hungarian art circles. It may be also aging, as a mother working full time, having less free time, but I sense it's more of a cultural and capital aspect of the Silicon Valley work ethics—that (on the other hand) many East Coast folks actually find slightly sluggish and too slow.



The other highlight of VR Art Camp was when artists truly "moved in" and continued using their social VR "studios" inviting guest thinkers, collaborators and other artists to host additional events after their residencies. These events gave more time and dedication to engage with their creations versus the Show and Tells, which usually only offered 30 minutes in each "studio." One of the most intimate sessions—despite having one of the most participants in VR Art Camp's his/her/ourstory—was *Performance for Like the Sound of the Sun* in Maxine Schoefer-Wulf's virtual space. For this event, Maxine's sister, Ella Schoefer-Wulf designed a poetry installation to activate the space, and performed a reading that used language to reflect on Maxine's visual concepts developed in her residency. Concepts around cycles, marking time: moving beyond time through intimate, natural patterns such as the tide cycles at Ocean Beach where their Mother used to walk through her pregnancies. Maxine insinuated these through her soft drawings of shells and hand-drawn animations, and expanded the personal memories into universal patterns, like recordings of the sound of the Sun. Ella's poetry reflected on their sisterhood and beyond: how do we relate in these shifting times of moving into these digital spaces? The performance strongly filled up this experience with emotions of belonging and care in a beautiful way that I have been seeking with VR Art Camp and the Szívküldi Lakótelep.

Other examples of reaching my aims and when VR Art Camp felt fullfilled were the instances of connecting with other women run online galleries, and combining forces in different forms. Katalin Tesch from UN/CUBE Gallery has been one of these supporters, with whom we invited UN/CUBE's artists to host events in VR Art Camp's "studios."[14] Wednesday Kim, artist and co-founder of De:Formal Gallery[15] co-curated the 2023 Open Call with me, sharing their insights of curating a successful online residency for many years. It was great learning from each other's challenges and the nits and grits of sustaining this virtual social practice.

CHALLENGES

The most challenging part of all of this work has always been overcoming the novelty of technology. And here, I don't mean the intangible, quickly eroding quality of anything digital, or the sheer fact that Mozilla Hubs actually shut down its platform in May 2024, basically erasing the entire VR Art Camp and leaving only recordings of our gatherings behind. By the novelty of technology I talk about navigating, building, editing and understanding these virtual spaces with a wide-range of experiences.

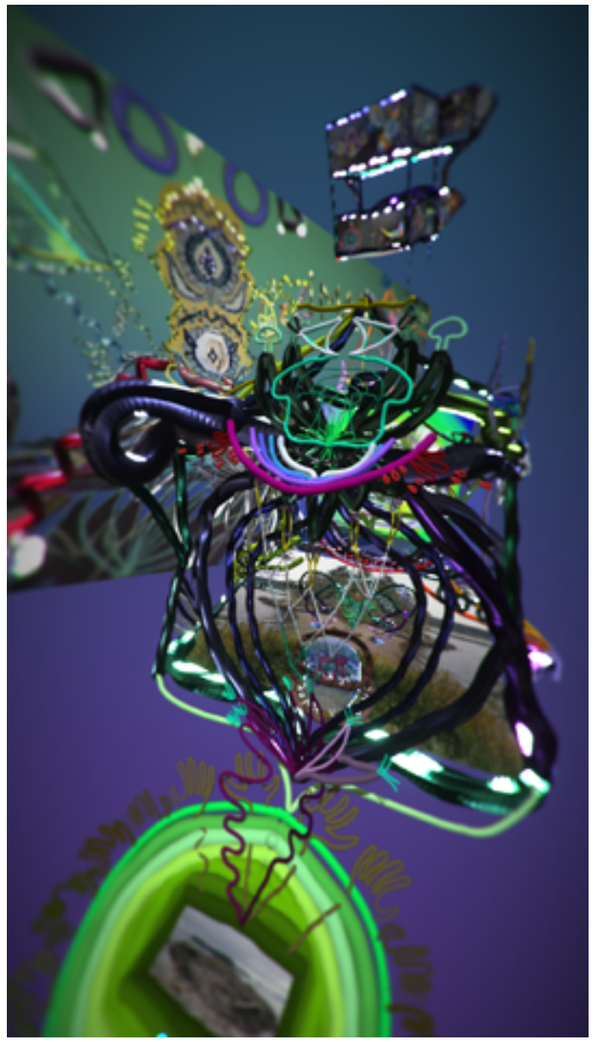
Since VR Art Camp's main mission was to bridge a gap, providing an online exhibiting platform to those who haven't really had one, and invited mostly artists with no digital artistic background, it was often challenging to scaffold them building in Spoke (Hubs' editing platform)[16] or to move beyond the obvious and basic solutions. If I was to return to this work (there is a comparable WebXR platform, MUD Foundation's system)[17],

14 Currently in hibernation, UN/CUBE (2020–2023) was an independent, artist-run virtual gallery (operated from Switzerland) known for avant-garde online curation, co-curated by Katalin Tesch, foregrounding experimental VR practices.

15 Wednesday Kim is an interdisciplinary artist and co-founder of De:Formal, an artist-run online platform that promotes critical conversations in contemporary art through online/offline exhibitions and monthly virtual residencies; her curatorial and artistic work frequently engages feminist themes around care, motherhood, and mental health.

16 Spoke is the browser-based scene editor associated with Hubs; it lets creators assemble 3D environments and publish them to Hubs or export to glTF.

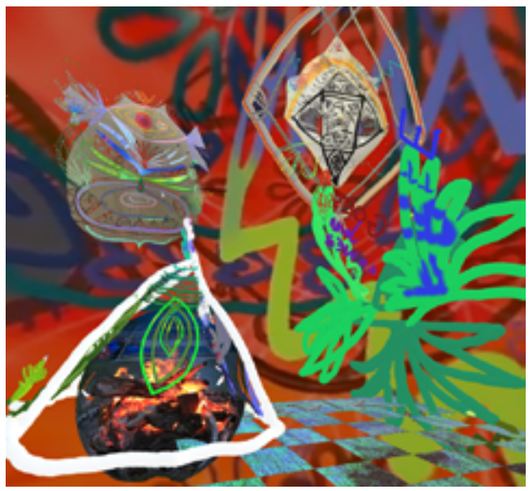
17 MUD Foundation runs a WebXR platform ("MUD Verse," with an XR Creator Studio and XRHub Lab) used for virtual exhibitions and education; it supports workflows similar to Hubs and is documented as accepting Spoke files from Mozilla Hubs.



I would change the structure of the residency into a viral loop and mentorship program: resident artists should mentor two new artists as part of their residency, and I would only hold "office hours" to help if someone is stuck or with more complicated questions. I would also consider extra help; not being the one person who explains how to use VR joysticks, move in space (I always held a warm up exercise before Show and Tells for newcomers), facilitate conversation, record the event and make sure that no one is lost. It is also always a challenge to show and share my personal work in the Szívküldi Lakótelep, not having multiple VR headsets or a person who helps visitors at the exhibitions. It would be fantastic to have technical help to continue building it in a multi-player, easily accessible platform.

However, I wouldn't trade the above mentioned highlights or the most personal guidance that I shared with a Hungarian visitor in the Szívküldi Lakótelep. It happened in a delicate, immersive installation of the neighborhood with a kite built of my drawings, overlayered by projections of the Tour Guide Videos on a chess-field, and a VR headset to visit the areas as part of the *Holographic Sky* group exhibition (SFArtsED Gallery, 2024). This person—whom I randomly met at the US embassy line up a couple of years ago—is a central figure of the Hungarian VR/AR art scene, but also teaches at Stanford University in the Bay Area, so we have many layers overlapping. It was the first time that someone would truly understand both my English and Hungarian texts, symbols, know the places and cultural background of all the little layers, both from Californian landscapes and communist social housing neighborhoods. Guiding him in this depth was a joy in itself, and the compliment that my live tour was *'better than ChatGPT-8'* (when the world was only at 2) still fills my heart and makes me smile.

This was certainly a moment when Szívküldi Lakótelep felt "home." For me, the most meaningful aspect of its art residency program, the VR Art Camp, is that I finally managed to create a truly compossible space, where my various international art families can exist together, learning from and nurturing each other. Even if the physical distances don't quite allow further in person connections, this was a very special opportunity to introduce my friends and extended family, and expand the circles of Love.
{My Hammock is Your Hammock}



Interview excerpts

I parallel parts of the seven informal interviews that I conducted for the Reflective Document at the end of each main chapter. For this first Long Distance Somersault cycle, I invited voices that had already guided my path and have been shaping how I think about social VR. Peggy Schoenegge, through her curatorial work with peer to space and her leadership in Berlin's media art community, has been mapping out how social VR can host exhibitions, gatherings and networks that feel both experimental and deeply communal. She has facilitated expansive social VR projects and understands how curatorial practice itself can become a form of community-building online.

I collected further personal insights from Wade Wallerstein, a digital anthropologist, strategist, and curator, who has spent significant time traversing virtual environments and conducting ethnographic field research across various computer-generated realities. *Virtual Phenomenology* is an ongoing investigation into the lived experience of traveling through, inhabiting, or otherwise interacting with virtual and simulated spaces, landscapes, and software environments. Wallerstein's research is grounded by Tom Boellstorff's assertion that the virtual is not reducible or opposed to the real; instead, the virtual is opposed to the actual (Boellstorff, 2008, p.4). Both the virtual and the actual are very much real, but rooted in the affordances of their material singularity. Further drawing upon Christopher Tilley's definition of phenomenology as encompassing the relationship between being and being-in-the-world, this project seeks to uncover how the material affordances, aesthetic conventions, and social mechanics of commercial 3D interactive virtual worlds shape social understandings of space as well as cultural relations amongst online communities.

Following both of their work for years, Wade's reflections on "wandering" in VR and Peggy's insights into how networked exhibitions and communities take root are particularly inspiring. In this section, I wanted to clarify what I mean by virtual, actual, and phygital through their perspectives—not in abstract terms alone, but by catching glimpses of the most personal and sometimes hidden aspects of their explorations. Rather than threading their voices directly into the first chapter, I chose to keep them in this *Interview excerpts* subchapter, so they can resonate as parallel voices. They echo like side-channels in VR Art Camp itself: sometimes the most meaningful exchanges happen around the fire, in the chat, or during a quiet one-on-one, rather than in the main event. This structure honors the simultaneity of the many layers of our phygital gatherings. Some of these conversations took place in written form via email, some were conducted as online video calls, and others were live, in-person meetings. Transcripts were co-generated with AI and then refined through human editing and review. Peggy shared her reflections in writing, while Wade and I spoke in a video call.

#1 Peggy Schoenegge

Judit Navratil:
Experiencing many social VR gatherings and art events, have you ever experienced a deep social and/or artistic satisfaction—as strong as your in-person experiences (art events or exhibitions) offered?

Peggy Schoenegge:
Yes, I have indeed experienced moments of deep social and artistic fulfillment during social VR gatherings and online art events—particularly during the pandemic. In a period marked by restricted physical contact, these virtual gatherings provided a crucial substitute for both aesthetic engagement and interpersonal connection. They demonstrated that meaningful interactions and shared experiences are not exclusively bound to physical presence.That said, while these digital encounters can be highly enriching, they do not entirely replicate the complexity of embodied experiences. The subtle nuances of in-person communication—such as facial expressions, gestures, and the shared spatial atmosphere—are often diminished or entirely absent in virtual environments, especially when interactions are mediated through avatars. Nevertheless, the capacity to form authentic artistic and social connections online represents a significant and evolving facet of contemporary cultural practice. In this context, digital platforms not only expand access but also redefine the parameters of participation, presence, and community.

Judit Navratil:
What were the highlights and "Aw" moments for you? What made these special? What made these "real"?

Peggy Schoenegge:
Some of the most memorable "Aw" moments occurred when genuine emotional connection emerged—despite the lack of physical proximity. It is a striking experience to share a virtual environment and simultaneously feel a sense of spatial and temporal togetherness. What made these moments feel real was not the appearance of the digital space itself, but rather the intensity of shared attention, mutual presence, and affective resonance. A particularly vivid example was the online opening of the solo exhibition by Charlie Stein *Portrait of a Future* at the Priska Pasquer Virtual Gallery on the open-source platform Mozilla Hubs in March 2021. The event, held during the pandemic, gathered a considerable number of participants and generated a tangible sense of collective presence. The social void caused by isolation was filled with a form of digital community—a "tribal" atmosphere that felt emotionally nourishing. Together, participants explored the virtual environment, testing its boundaries and conditions. What amplified this experience was the use of avatars, which introduced new, often liberating ways of engaging with one another. The abstraction of digital bodies can reduce conventional social barriers, enabling more playful, experimental, and sometimes even more open interactions than in physical settings. This convergence of shared digital space and expressive avatar-based communication produced a moment of connection—socially, emotionally, and artistically.

Judit Navratil:
What were the challenges in building online communities? What were the moments when you felt that *peer to space, SALOON Berlin* or other online communities are real communities? Where you feel that you belong and you are nurtured?

Peggy Schoenegge:
In the post-digital age, reality is no longer defined solely by material presence—virtual experiences are equally part of what we experience as reality. As digital technologies are now deeply embedded in everyday life, the digital realm must be understood as just as real as the physical one—albeit structured differently and shaped by distinct conditions. These structural differences significantly influence how communities emerge, operate, and are sustained in virtual environments. In regard to these shifting conditions, one of the central challenges in building online communities is to cultivate a sense of depth, trust, and continuity. This becomes particularly difficult in environments that are often fast-paced, fragmented, and lacking the informal, embodied rituals that typically define in-person interaction. The digital sphere requires a different form of engagement—more intentional, more transparent, and often more emotionally articulate—in order to foster genuine belonging. This is especially true for digital formats such as online exhibitions, which must not only offer meaningful access to the experience of art but also strengthen its inherently social dimension. While *SALOON Berlin* and *peer to space* are not online communities in the narrow sense, they are networks that have actively used the internet as a site and tool for cultural actions, presentation, and exchange. The way both adapted their formats to the digital sphere. In this extended web-based framework, the network itself became a space of solidarity, resonance, and connection. A concrete example is the *Nice to Meet You* format, which brings together SALOON members from different cities worldwide and created a tangible sense of community across geographical boundaries.
What made these moments particularly powerful was that they fostered not only visibility, but also emotional and intellectual connection. Being part of such networks—where one's presence and perspective are valued, even in mediated form—has provided a vital sense of continuity, belonging, and creative nourishment.

Judit Navratil:
From your online network, approximately what percent of your relations feel like real friendships or work relationships?

Peggy Schoenegge:
It is difficult to quantify precisely the percentage of my online connections. However, they have evolved into relationships that feel like genuine friendships or reliable professional collaborations. These go beyond occasional interaction or visibility exchange—they are characterized by continuity, trust, and mutual support. As previously noted, I do not assess the "realness" of a relationship based on whether it occurs in physical or digital space. In our highly technologized present, digital interactions are part of lived reality—albeit with different affordances and constraints. Online environments can provide fertile ground for deepening such bonds, whether through collaborative projects, ongoing dialogue, or emotional solidarity. Rather than understanding this form of interaction or platforms as a deficiency, I see it as a feature of digital relational ecosystems, where multiple layers of connection coexist and serve different social and professional functions.

#2 Wade Wallerstein

Judit Navratil:
In one of your talks, you mentioned how you would categorize the lived experiences, the virtual and the actual. I'm curious if, in 2025, that still holds up?

Wade Wallerstein:
Absolutely. It absolutely still holds up. I think we're only seeing more and more how true that is, and how visceral it is. I mean, we're seeing young children born after 2010 not understanding that a virtual object or a virtual experience is different from their offline, or non-virtual, experiences. I always reference an anthropologist named Tom Boellstorff (2008) who wrote a lot about this. He said—I'm totally paraphrasing here—that "the real is not reducible to the actual." Both virtual things and actual things are real; it just depends whether they are physical or digital, or the materiality of where they come from. This idea has continued to hold up, especially as we've seen the rise of cryptocurrency, NFT art, blockchain art, and digital collectibles. This is huge. I'm thinking about it now because there's a new craze—these LaBooBoo's [points to collectible]. Everyone is losing their minds over them. PopMart has even created an online unboxing experience, replicating the virtual sales counter where you choose your blind box from a selection. They've realized that it doesn't matter whether you're unboxing something physically or not—it's the act of getting that surprise that connects people. And they can sell more by making that experience instantly accessible. It's been a meteoric rise. If anything, this is more true now than it ever has been. And I think the situation is becoming more complicated because of the introduction of AI agents. All of the artists I'm working with these days—especially at Gray Area—are thinking about autonomous AI: AI that can learn, AI that uses reinforcement learning models, and so on to create change that is not dictated by a direct human command. That is really changing how we think about the actual versus the virtual. Soon—already, and increasingly—the virtual will be able to enact change in our tangible world in a way that is undeniable. So, I think people are only going to continue to feel this way and derive great meaning from the things they experience through a screen.
[...]

Judit Navratil:
I really appreciate your optimism. It's crucial right now. And since you mentioned AI, I feel we're at this pivotal moment—our identities are merging, multiplying in these online spaces. I'm curious how you see identities forming now, especially for kids who may not have time to form a singular "self" before they're swept into algorithmic pathways.

Wade Wallerstein:
Yeah, that's definitely one of the big challenges. We're constantly battling algorithmic control and homogenization. Algorithms shape content, breed hive-mind thinking, and limit the range of voices that can be heard. But I've also seen how powerful algorithms can be. The old TikTok algorithm, for example, was almost spiritual. It would bring content with only 10 views—things you'd never otherwise see—that felt perfectly attuned to your interests. It felt like kismet, like it knew you better than you knew yourself. That kind of serendipity was amazing. For me, it all comes down to ethics and governance. Who controls the algorithm? How transparent is it? At big companies, thousands of engineers are

tweaking these systems, and no one person even understands the whole thing. This is true of Google Search, for instance—no single person could recreate its algorithm from scratch. It's become that complex. So, part of the solution is education. We need media literacy. People throw around the term "the algorithm," but no one really knows what that means. I don't even fully know what it means! There's a kind of "black box" mysticism around it, and I often find myself using magical or spiritual metaphors to describe it because we lack better language.

Judit Navratil:
And that's where AI almost becomes a kind of religion.

Wade Wallerstein:
Exactly. That black box is dangerous because it hides power. But democratizing algorithms isn't a perfect solution either. Take AI-generated videos or face-swapping tech—people can now generate fake porn of anyone they want. That's extremely harmful. So, access comes with harms and responsibilities. I think the baseline has to be education—understanding what these technologies actually are and what they're capable of.
[...]

Judit Navratil:
I really appreciate everything you've shared. Looking back on the last 10 years, is there one "compass" or key lesson you'd hold onto?

Wade Wallerstein:
Yeah. As much as I love digital spaces—and as much as I've wanted to "escape" into the limitless virtual—what I've learned is that physical connection still matters. People want to gather in person. You can build worlds online, but it doesn't replace the need for tangible, live experiences. I used to think virtual would be enough, but I've realized the opposite: people crave more physical interaction now, not less. We're learning to blend the two—like immersive events that mix Fortnite or Minecraft with movie tie-ins, or the trend of physical objects from games (like Minecraft torches as actual lamps). These hybrid spaces are just getting started.

Judit Navratil:
So, we should go camping together, right?

Wade Wallerstein:
Exactly! [Laughs]

Long Distance Somersault **PLAY**

∞ Cycle 4 LUDIC METHODS

LEAPS OF IMAGINATION

My defense for "home" in cyberspace and strengthening communities stems from my personal multiple immigration experience. I'm not intrinsically aligned, nor would I like to advocate digital utopias, but this shift seems unavoidable, and it's happening at an accelerated speed. When I feel into this shift, instead of dwelling on the choking aspects that are beyond my influence, I try to find what little drops I might add to an upward spiral that help us soar. One of the most important traits to reroot in a foreign environment is adaptability and flexibility. In this chapter, I share my methods that maintain flexibility and futile, nonsensical, ludic activities that break predictability and may prevent us from the fragility of ossification in the skeleton of a new entity.

There is a sea of predictions on how AI will reshape human life, and while it feels most important and urgent to understand this sea as deep as possible, I have no intention of charting its every current here, but rather share how I drift within it. When I try to imagine a smooth transition to this potentially very different form of life, I often arrive at a "leap of faith" moment–as we discussed with Wade Wallerstein–where AI and the uncanny, incomprehensible complexity of algorithms take a quasi-religious role. In philosophy, a leap of faith is believing in something without rational proof. This term is commonly attributed to Danish theologian and philosopher, Søren Kierkegaard, although he himself spoke of "qualitative leap." He claims that it involves circularity, or circular reasoning–a logical fallacy–as the leap is made by faith, not by deduction. As he writes:
"Thinking can turn toward itself in order to think about itself and skepticism can emerge. But this thinking about itself never accomplishes anything" (Kierkegaard, 1992, p. 335).

When thought folds in on itself, we slip into meta-conversation: talking about the situation instead of inhabiting it. In VR Art Camp's Show & Tells, this sometimes became the worst trap. Yet, reflection and self-examination are also unavoidable stages in learning and in the formation of human subjectivity; a necessity in order to awaken self-awareness and reveal the limits of purely rational systems. "Meta" shows where reason breaks down, and by exhausting all possible rational arguments with this endless circling, eventually, we encounter the absurd–where only a leap of faith can carry us forward.

I will re-circle around these concepts further with Long Distance Somersaults, but here, I parallel two other leaps from science to establish the importance of play and imagination from these other perspectives, and the fascination with the intersecting moments of science, religion and art. Plural epistemologies allow us to recognize the multiple ways of knowing: scientific, cultural and experimental. Intersectionality serves me here as a navigational tool, helping to practice global citizenship with analytical and practical tools to avoid universalist blind spots and to move further from power imbalances.

Neuroplasticity means the adaptability of the brain. Looking at this level of adaptability, and through the windows of the Szívküldi Lakótelep, one of the most interesting parts of the crazy sci-fi news of 2025 is how Neuralink actually functions. Specifically, that it decodes neural intention signals–not physical movement–that requires imagination. Motor imagery, the act of mentally simulating a movement without executing it (ergo imagining it) actually activates the same cortical areas as actual movement, just with weaker firing intensity. The Neuralink system uses machine learning algorithms to map these firing patterns onto cursor movement. Once the decoder learned these signals, imagining the movement is enough. It is not a mystical, but a learned translation from motor imagery to external action. Yet, the mental rehearsal of movement is a crucial part that I was most surprised to hear about in Lex Fridman's conversation with the Neuralink Team. As they discuss with DJ Seo, the bottom line is that imagination itself can become a functional bridge to the outside world. It's a feedback loop, where the brain teaches the machine, the machine teaches the brain, and over time, both human and device adjust to each other (Fridman, 2024, ch. 21, 02:27:40–02:30:40).

The third leap here is what physicists call the "quantum jump" or quantum leap (Bohr, 1913). A quantum jump happens when an electron in an atom suddenly shifts from one energy level to another. It doesn't slide smoothly like climbing stairs, but it actually vanishes from one level and reappears in another, instantly. Unlike classical physical systems, where changes unfold continuously and predictably, quantum jump is a stochastic transition: it occurs abruptly, with no deterministic timing. The instant of this transition cannot be forecast; only probabilistic distributions can be assigned. We only know the chances. This uncertainty is not a byproduct of the limitations of measurements but a fundamental feature of quantum mechanics. I have my limits in understanding quantum physics, but from a theoretical and experimental point of view, the indeterminacy of this microscopic event, in which the continuity of classical intuition is replaced by such discontinuity, exemplifies the paradoxical beauty of quantum phenomena. The tension between unpredictability and lawfulness is a great example of the intersectional moments, when the universe keeps that little surprise hidden, that can be an ever-nourishing source of inspiration and even resistance.

Although these examples above are not from the historically oppressed, they (hopefully still) strengthen my argument for playfulness. Yet we must stay alert to the dangers that Cuban artist and educator Tania Bruguera (2025) has pointed out. She reminds us: "In times of dictatorship, religion, mysticism, metaphysics, nihilism–even daydreaming–flourish, not as a form of resistance but as retreats. The will is handed over to gods, fate, or nothing at all." Her reflection cautions that with these flexibility practices we don't get lost or trapped in leisure retreats but remain grounded in searching for resistance.

UNPREDICTABLE MAGIC CIRCLES

In games and digital media, the "magic circle" is the space in which normal rules and reality of the "default" world are suspended and replaced by the artificial reality of a game world. However, instead of being an impenetrable protector or a shield of some sort (Castronova, 2005), an examination of contemporary virtual worlds shows that the "magic circle" appears to be actually quite porous, and seems to be a relationship between the virtual and the outside world. Further developing the perspectives I have referenced–Trinh T. Minh-ha, Octavia Butler, Yi-Fu Tuan, Suely Rolnik and Lygia Clark–I argue that these in-between, liminal, "slide or stairway" spaces hold the potential of the unexpected leaps between imagination and reality.

The term "magic circle" has been attributed to Dutch historian Johan Huizinga, as he mentions it in his seminal book, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (Huizinga, 1955, p. 10). Although he doesn't frame play explicitly in terms of "resistance" as later theorists do (Caillois, 2001), Huizinga highlights unpredictability, tension, and contestation as essential qualities of play–and these can be read as proto-political forms of resistance. The term "magic circle" was actually coined by Eric Zimmerman and Frank Lantz in 1999 and made popular by Katie Salen and Zimmerman (2003). Looking back, Zimmerman admits that the concept was not something that Huizinga ever fully developed. In fact, Huizinga closes *Homo Ludens* in ambivalence, with "a passionate argument against a strict separation between life and games," never taking the full-blown magic circle point of view. In his essay *Jerked Around by the Magic Circle–Clearing the Air Ten Years Later* Zimmerman (2012) states that "magic circle" as we use it today was more of a remix that he and Katie Salen "cobbled together" from fragments from Huizinga and Caillois. It is a mix of sampling, clarifying and adapting ideas until a new synthesis emerges. Authorship and originality are of course crucial questions, especially at the dawn of AI, but this is not in my focus here. I align with Zimmerman's recognition that knowledge itself often grows through remixing and collaboration.

So, what are the key characteristics of play in the light of resistance according to Huizinga?

play as free and unpredictable

Play is always a free activity, not imposed by necessity or duty. It resists determinism: once rules are set, outcomes remain uncertain, and unpredictability becomes central to the experience. Huizinga emphasizes tension: "the uncertain outcome, the free decision, the chance element, the risk." This uncertainty is what makes play alive–without it, the activity collapses into mere repetition or labor.

play as resistance to ordinary life

Play exists outside "ordinary" or "serious" life–in a "magic circle" with its own rules. Entering this circle is a kind of resistance to the structures of necessity, work, and utility. However, he doesn't yet frame it as social resistance, but rather as cultural resistance to pure rationality and instrumental reason.

play as contestation

Games of competition (agon) embody resistance more directly: by pushing against each other, players resist domination, and test limits. Even in non-competitive forms, play resists closure: it opens space for improvisation, surprise, and deviation.

play as cultural force
Play is the root of law, ritual, poetry, and art. By insisting on its autonomy and unpredictability, play resists being reduced to utility or mere productivity. In this sense, play becomes a cultural counterweight to systems of control—not in overt political protest, but as a deep form of resistance against life reduced to function.

Although Huizinga sees unpredictability as the core vitality of play, and resistance as play's refusal to be absorbed entirely into the utilitarian or deterministic structures of society, these fundamental ideas were extended into rather explicitly political strategies only by later thinkers: if play resists predictability, then ludic practices can resist algorithmic capture, capitalist optimization, and rigid ideologies. Some of the interviews I conducted for this Reflective Document were centered around these topics with thinkers using ludic methods.

I asked artist, researcher and community organizer Miguel Novelo about his work around avatarism, serious play and his teaching practices. Miguel's emphasis on surprise, failure, and communal care resonates directly with my exploration of ludic methods as a soft form of protest. His description of art as alive when it breaks mechanized reaction mirrors my concern with escaping algorithmic prediction and control. Play is not frivolous but a strategy of resilience: by welcoming unpredictability, allowing failure as generative, and subtle emergence of new forms of connection, we can create a "third brain" in the space between participants and art, and resist the closures of efficiency. He expands on these ideas in our conversation[18], where he describes failure as a communal process of care.

It is an honor to work with and learn from my supervisor, Margarete Jahrmann, whose long researched, ludic methods are brilliantly playful but also deeply political. She reveals how play—improvised, free, and processual—can unsettle systemic rules without always harshly breaking them, allowing subtle shifts, soft expansions, and second-order observations that open up possibilities for change and conversation. Her pioneering projects, such as the *Neuromatic Brainwave Broadcast* and and her radical proposals for chance-based democratic processes demonstrate how playful experiments can both expose the hidden logics of technology and provoke new imaginaries for social and political life. What I cherish most, though, is how every single encounter with Margarete carries its own gentle lesson. She notices nuances like the tree and squirrels behind me on a video call, brings a welcoming and light energy into serious discussions, and these gestures themselves feel like the essence of ludic practices. Her nuanced approach to ludic strategies is unfolded further in our exchange[19], where she frames play as both subtle resistance and pedagogical tool. To learn from her is a gift—not only through her groundbreaking projects but also through the everyday subtleties of her presence.

Her work makes clear that the politics of play are not universal but always culturally situated. As someone who has lived between Hungary, Canada, and the Bay Area, I know firsthand how political terms take on radically different meanings depending on context, history, and local struggles. This plurality and the flux of ideologies can be confusing, but as I'm navigating ambiguity, these contrasts have taught me to embrace nuance and to use cultural dissonance as a critical lens rather than a barrier. As an artist, I apply this perspective to Silicon Valley's accelerating rat race for the next breakthroughs in AI and science, engaging not only with the technologies themselves but with the social, ethical, and ideological conditions that shape them locally. Through ludic strategies, I seek to hold space for unpredictability, care, and critical reflection within the very systems that shape our futures.

18 See parts of the transcript in Interview Excerpt #3.

19 See parts of the transcript in Interview Excerpt #4.

KIDS

Besides using a grandmother's tone in this text, I call forth diarizing—one of my artistic methods—to establish my explanation of the urge for phygital, ludic communities in a cozy, familiar tone. As Miguel and Margarete, most of my family members are/were educators as well. Obviously, materiality and wealth was never in the focus of my family, that is well captured in my Father's successful life goal: not to own a thing and his happy slogan for life is: "Let's just play!" A true treasure is to inherit his ever playful approach: most of my art is rooted in such activities and our adventures (like being flown on large kites or falling through ice into the frozen Balaton and so on). With this attitude, it has always been easy to relate with kids, which led me to teach (even in a preschool, working with 4 year-olds), and I have been constantly and successfully around kids as a mother and educator for many years. My own kids used to be my favorite collaborators. We did much sampling, copying, and remixing—as Zimmerman mentioned—of ideas, singing but mostly drawings, which were the most beautiful art-making moments.

I have been teaching social VR world-building for 5th graders with very diverse backgrounds and skill sets in Oakland with a focus on their social-emotional and communal growth since 2023. Ludic methods–for example *Méta Circles*[20]–in the classroom create openings for surprise, discomfort, and new perspectives. Teaching and learning are complementary processes that require an active engagement and a collaborative approach on the part of both educator(s) and learner(s). Ludic methods aren't only to let children play but to learn from how they already play. Their capacity to invent rules, to improvise, remix and abandon them again shows me that play is both a form of survival and a form of knowledge production.

In our Virtual Art classes, they were deeply engaged in multi-disciplinary projects that may have challenged them out of their comfort zones at first. In most of my teaching experience (working with TK-5th grade), kids have zero attention span, and it's extra difficult to move between getting their attention and working with screens. Still, they quickly learned how to collaborate, delegating tasks and shining with their expertise to co-create large-scaled games and virtual reality projects. We focused on design thinking, prototyping, and the social aspects of cyberspace. Highlighting the power of storytelling, students escalated out of the consumer's perspective to become creators of their own social VR "homes." I watched as they negotiated rules of shared space, argued over aesthetics of their virtual worlds, and found joy in glitches or their hacking skills that disrupted the built structures or games. They delved into coding, character design and gaming, experienced artistic VR spaces and learned how to build their own together with their class. I balanced digital image editing and all technical skills with hands-on physical art making (clay, facemasks, paintings) to engage everyone, and to make these digital spaces more alive. In our concluding event collectively visiting their spaces they conducted a VR hide-and-seek, waved to knitting Grandma and many clay figures on their way, spent a silent moment with grief in a sunset scene with a memorial drawing of Mr. Whisker, a beloved pet. Finally, we flew through a wishing well together, making a phygital wish that soon will come true in some layer of reality.

Play-based learning has a rich lineage that grounded my pedagogy.[21] It stretches from classic early childhood educators and pediatricians such as Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky with the "zone of proximal development"–where kids stretch beyond what they can do alone by experimenting in imagined situations,–to Maria Montessori and her Hungarian parallel, Emmi Pikler, who emphasized self-initiated play. It also draws on Donald Winnicott's notion of the transitional space and objects, Roger Caillois's typologies of play, to bell hooks' joyful pedagogy, the participatory and relational experiments of Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica, and, most directly, the ludic methods of my supervisor, Margarete Jahrmann.

20 *Méta Circles* originated as the entrance ritual for the *Digital Doulas Workshops,* which I designed to synchronize the group. Guided by my kid's recorded voice, participants stand in an outward-facing circle, and practice a wide-legged forward fold (Padottanasana). Looking through our legs upside-down, seeing everyone's back is a vulnerable and awkward pose that opens space for trust and empathy.

21 This list is not intended as a full literature review, but as a sketch of the lineage of thinkers and practitioners whose approaches to play and learning have grounded my pedagogy.

As I reflect on these intertwined influences, I also consider what it means to prepare children for the future where AI systems and digital platforms will increasingly shape their learning environments. Algorithms can provide information, adapt content, and even personalize critical feedback–but perhaps can not replace the subtlety of social-emotional scaffolding. Thus, I see the most urgent task for us as educators and caregivers is to embrace, strengthen and hold on to those elements: the resilience that comes from failing softly and trying again in the cozy net of your friends as Miguel Novelo shared in our conversation, the improvisation of care, the ability to hold each other through uncertainty. Teaching 11-years-olds social VR world-building is not (only) about acquiring technical skills, but about practicing how to inhabit digital and algorithmic spaces critically and playfully, how to collaborate with joy, and how to imagine together further than one could ever imagine alone (or perhaps saturated by the integrated AI systems).

How can kids retain a sense of agency within systems designed around profit, efficiency, engagement metrics or surveillance, rather than digital emotional well-being and communal care? I try to open spaces inside and alongside these systems where care is centered. These ludic practices are small rehearsals for the futures they will encounter–futures in which imagination, unpredictability, empathy, and collective resilience may be the most necessary skills of all. I imagine that this is also in my Dad's motto, "let's just play"–that play, in its nonsense and surprise, is not only joy but survival, a way to hold each other in futures we cannot yet predict.

∞ Cycle 5 Blob

Flying Tents

In the balance of my virtual and embodied practices, Blob is the very physical portal that I often brought into the classrooms (actually, due to sizes, outside of the classrooms) to help students enter the "magic circle" or get out of it when needed, and to sync ourselves. But Blob is more than a tool or a practice; over time and with understanding, Blob grew into a living being with their own agency. The story (of course) began with my Father, making a bubble with a brown, polyester swing cover, rolling down the hill and cozying up in it until deflated. Later, Laura Hyunjhee Kim introduced me to blobs. Her book *Entering the Blobosphere: A Musing on Blobs* boldly suggests blobs are the unsung, yet integral link in our language to build upon and describe ideas, culture, and knowledge. The common perspective of the blob is an amorphous form with an otherwise gooey texture, however, this is a gross undermining of the power of language and vivacity of blobs. Fueled by the speculative ideology of blobs as both a theory and a practice, Kim illustrates the moldable and transcendent use of "blob" as a lens to understand the spaces lurking between life and art. Blobs aren't solely a physical form. But what is a blob if not just a physical thing?" (Kim, 2019)
Her responses from *Blobifesto* (excerpt):

"A blob is a raw amorphous form
A blob is a potentiality
A blob is an indeterminate destination
A blob is a liminal manifestation of the inexplicable
A blob is neither this nor that but points as is
A blob is a transitional state of being
A blob is a subtle deconstruction of preconceptions
A blob is a real-time negotiation
A blob is a polite refusal of hierarchy
A blob is a poetic irregularity
A blob is a vague matter of existence
A blob is a sensitization to nonlinearity" (Kim, 2019)

At the time I saw Kim's Blobifesto at an exhibition (Southern Exposure, 2018), I already had the shiny, tent-shaped fabric that has been the physical installation of the Szívküldi Lakótelep, packed away with other artworks. When we moved to the small island during COVID a few years later, I decided it shouldn't rot in storage and wait for slick, blank gallery spaces but I should fly this tent in the strong Canadian wind—as a Blobifesto of my family's momentary and transitional Circus, honoring my lineage of kite flyers. The island's terrain isn't ideal for Long Distance Somersaults—very rocky and rains most of the time, so I was also seeking new "exercise" forms, that I found in dancing very slowly with trees and holding up this heavy (10 kg when dry) sparkle to entertain the ancestors and nearby birds. As the fabric is not breathable at all, it turned out to be The Perfect Blob; a giant bubble that holds up for hours in the rain, warms up very quickly—amazing for the freezing Canadian beaches—and can fit up to 20-25 people and other critters.

Since then, I have carried Blob to crazy adventures, inaccessible, secret spots, to different cities, galleries and tourist attraction sites, to the Dust of the desert and across the Ocean to an Internal Colloquium in Vienna. I sat in Blob as a weekly meditation practice while my kids were in choir, and invited many friends, family, students, curators and little animals inside. We hosted very different group settings from street art festival crazy randomness, exhibition openings, guided time travelling to intimate singing in Moon circles. Blob gives a shape-shifter non-shape to wind and quickly becomes a sauna where children share their *Tent Tales*—continuing someone else's story from an earlier session. A portal to many things and non-things; the corporeality of the virtual void that is being filled and animated by the visitors or rather, temporary inhabitants and their emerging conversations and energy.

As Blob collects "dirt" and carries it to other places—like my Long Distance Somersault protector—or how it/they gather(s) stories that sprout and grow from each other, it becomes a connector between place, space and time. Blob is my allegory of home.
A reminder that I, too, am a carrier—of languages, friendships, songs, fragments of life, traces of homes that blur together as I move. **#memoryconnector**
Blob becomes an otherworldly universe of softness that shows how precarious and miraculous it is to create a home from scratch in displacement again and again: how fabric can become architecture, how gesture can become protection.

For a while, *Flying Tent* was connected with the wind. I had to wait for good Blob days, and learned to respect nature even more on days when nothing would hold. Can't be forced, can't be planned—like kites and paraglides. Then one breezeless night of an art festival I tried to explain—with my accent and tangled instructions—how a circle of people could make a bubble together. Nobody really understood until someone said, *"Oh, like the parachute game."* I have seen this before, never thought much about it, but apparently every Californian child knows the parachute game from PE class. It just unlocked a quick path to synchronicity that I began to use. Only too late in my game did I actually play it: right after the end of the year Blob Party with my 1st–3rd graders, where one wrecking-ball kid ripped giant holes, and nearly ruined good-old Blob. I soon realized how rough and tough one (parachute and player) needs to be, where kids in their individual glory are raised to push limits, test boundaries, and assume the world will yield. Parents don't say no, kids know it better—the same entitlement I saw in playground culture, in classrooms and the brittle politics of the Bay. The recurring, flawed attempt to deeply understand the fluidity of culture, the ever-shifting political, religious nuances of the traditions of any land is a lifelong process. After I got to see the many, ever-changing angles of a place, a new home—after falling in love with it—it is ambiguous to take a stand on grounds where I wasn't born and raised. What first felt like fresh air and the most exciting adventure with its diversity, inclusivity and welcoming atmosphere coming from the far-right Hungary in 2016, by now often feels like being completely lost between the Bay Area being a choking woke "safe" space with all its' controversies and between the—won't get into further details here—rest of U.S. politics. How to take up space with my privileges as gently as Blob and when to say no thanks before being ripped apart?
As Blob literally carries dirt, gathers soil, dust, and debris from one place and transfers it to another, it carries stories and fragments of memory across borders. This is dirt exchange: not only the physical trace of places but the messy residue of social realities. In Silicon Valley, the contrast is sharp. The glittering campuses of tech rise beside the fragile encampments of the unhoused, shelters that appear and disappear like temporary installations. My Blob floats between these realities, a shimmering fabric bubble that both shelters and exposes. Who has the right to space? What kinds of "homes" are sanctioned, and which are swept away? As an immigrant artist, I too take up space—sometimes invited, sometimes provisional (still fighting for visas and work permits)—always aware that the privilege of belonging here is tied to the very structures that displace others. Blob became the form through which I metabolize this dissonance: a space where starting over is not failure but potential, where collapse and inflation repeat as the breathing rhythm of life.

These inflations are not permanent publics but temporary gatherings—what Nicolas Bourriaud (2002, pp. 38–39) described as "microtopias." His central idea in *Relational Aesthetics* is that contemporary art creates "microtopias"—small, temporary gathering spaces where folks can connect beyond utility and rehearse new ways of living together. Rather than focusing on the autonomous art objects, Relational Aesthetics embraces and values the social experience aspect, producing moments of conviviality and shared meaning within the fabric of everyday life. These situations offer warmth and connection, but, as Claire Bishop (2004) reminds us, conviviality alone is not enough. It can too easily gloss over antagonism, sidestep power, and collapse into what she calls a "feel-good" aesthetic. My work, too, might be critiqued in this way—for being soft, provisional, or without a hard political edge. But that ambiguity is also the truth of my position: arriving again and again in unfamiliar systems, without the safety net others take for granted, balancing care, work and art. In that churning, my politics do not stand like monuments; they flicker, inflate, and collapse like Blob. Elastic, temporary, never fully solid—but not less real. Rather than sharpening critique into the dystopian exposures of Hirschhorn[22]—as in Bishop's argument—or Jon Rafman[23], who effectively and viscerally exposes social contradictions and his cynicism cuts deep into the underbelly of the internet fetish culture, I refuse to recreate and amplify forms that fuel the very beast I wish to resist. I choose a soft, floating approach that aims towards Hito Steyerl's example, who rides the front wave of critique so sharp and gracefully without being swallowed by it, disappearing only when her intentions align. Free floating like a *Velella (by-the-wind sailor),* a cosmopolitan free-floating hydrozoan or hydroid colony, that floats at the water/air interface with the float above the water, and polyps hanging down: organisms that live partly in and partly out of the water. A friend once told me that Blob is like a Velella, and that felt like home.

22 Thomas Hirschhorn's *Critical Corpus* (2014) assembles his statements, interviews, and reflections on the role of art as political and critical practice, framing his installations as dense, confrontational sites of social contradiction.

23 In works such as *Still Life: Betamale* (2013) and *Dream Journal* (2015–2016), Jon Rafman exploits the most disturbing and disgusting corners of online culture, forcing viewers to face its contradictions with a visceral impact that few other artists achieve.

HOLDING SPACE FOR FLICKERING COMMUNITIES

"Holding space" has quickly become a buzzword of care culture, but Blob physically taught me what it actually means in the most literal way. With its ten kilos of fabric—far heavier once soaked in rain or salt water—holding Blob in high winds is quite a workout. And when sitting inside its banging bubble, super alive, thrashing around like a wild animal, it feels like what I imagine it would be to be enveloped by aliens, as in Butler's (2005) Amnesty. To hold space with Blob is not just a metaphor for presence or empathy, but an embodied act of endurance, balance, and trust.

Beyond the materiality of fabric and impermanence of weather, Blob also holds their visitors; a host for flickering communities, sharing warmth in the elastic bubble of agape. These moments do not crystalize into lasting institutions, but instead appear as fleeting constellations that shimmer into being and then dissolve—what Bourriaud would call "microtopias," fragile pockets of relation sustained only by their participants. Bay Area artist-collaborators Ted Purves and Susan Cockrell might call these "free exchanges." Ted's book *What We Want Is Free* (Purves, 2005, pp. 27–44) gathers projects that use generosity as both medium and method—food shared, services exchanged, stories redistributed. One example is *Temescal Amity Works* (2004–2007), where surplus backyard fruit in an Oakland neighborhood (where I originally landed in 2016) was gathered and redistributed while neighbors' oral histories were recorded and shared. Such work moves beyond convivial encounter toward systems of care that circulate resources and memory at once. In this way, Purves and Susanne Cockrell show what happens when the spirit of relational aesthetics is translated into a social practice with duration, reciprocity, and real-world consequence. Where Nicolas Bourriaud's "microtopias" often describe fleeting gatherings that temporarily reconfigure social bonds, *What We Want Is Free* demonstrates how generosity can be infrastructural—how gifts can create not only moments of connection but also sustainable networks of support. While micro-utopias model alternatives in miniature, gift-economy operates alternatives of distribution and governance long enough to feel their frictions and politics.

The tension between the fleeting and the durable is something I recognize in other Bay Area experiments with flickering communities. In *Sacred Economics*, author and activist Charles Eisenstein (2011) describes how gift exchange generates not just momentary, but long-term social capital: the slow weave of trust, web of reciprocity, and responsibility—the binding essences of community. I strongly agree when he argues that in modern societies—that of course are always shaped by distinct cultural, political, and local contexts—we often replace these durable bonds with professional interactions that commodify our relationships and render participants interchangeable. Instead of asking for a friend's help, we pay for a service that is much more efficient of course, yet, these transactions rarely build the strength that comes from interdependence over time, as in a bundle of sticks that can not be broken, rather than the single branch that snaps alone. What do we lose when we invest in more reliable, less personal interactions?

Social capital in Eisenstein's sense is precisely this strength of mutual reliance. I think of the legendary Essex Hot Tub in Berkeley, Deward Hastings' shared backyard, where anyone could bathe at any hour for almost 50 years by knowing the code that was passed on as word-of-mouth. It was a local gem of open trust: a resource sustained with no regulations but by collective respect and generosity. As an immigrant I left many inherited and slowly grown networks behind and learned the value of such treasures; thus, I hear such whispered access codes loud and clear and cherish any glimpses of openness for sharing, and the responsibility of being available to overcome the myth of scarcity.

Burning Man offers another local seed model of flickering communities and gift economy that grew into a large-scale paradigm. The temporary city-for-a-week in the Nevada desert is built on survival, generosity, and co-creation, guided by ten timeless principles. Water, food, shade, cooperation and self-reliance are the only currencies that matter. Black Rock Desert–federally managed public land within the Black Rock Desert–High Rock Canyon Emigrant Trails National Conservation Area–lies in the ancestral homelands of Northern Paiute peoples, including the Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe and the Summit Lake Paiute Tribe (Native Land Digital, n.d.). The area is managed by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The Tribes and the Burning Man Project have ongoing engagement about cultural and ecological impacts associated with the annual event and its federal permit, the Burning Man Special Recreation Permit (SRP), which allows this giant annual gathering. Thus, one of the most important principles, *Leave No Trace* is taken extremely seriously (on the scale of the cult-classic 'combing the desert' scene in *Spaceballs* [1987]). There is vast literature on Burning Man and its paradoxical history of institutionalization of counterculture. But this reflection is on its fascinating free spirit (that can not be captured in the Instagram backgrounds). The core of these gatherings that has been gifted to and by so many, is certainly a valuable learning source. The alkaline Dust flattens appearances, clothes (or no clothes at all) and coats everything into an ancient, timeless Home, where hierarchy is forgotten. There are no words to describe the richness of creativity and genuine human invention that emerges amongst the harsh circumstances of survival, and elemental struggle with sun and sand. Community is not an abstraction but a necessity. To endure the heat, sandstorms and alkali burn, radical self-reliance demanded there is to understand how fragile and interdependent human presence really is. Of course, this too is a naive illusion with many angles: Burning Man has become a high-priced destination, an item on the experience economy's bucket list, cultivated by influencers and corporations alike, with air conditioning and high-speed internet for decentral crypto camps. Yet, despite all the overgrowth and capital infestation, there are still–as always–some backdoors: unexpected free tickets, a ride with friends, free camping with new companions who share their shade **#maythegoodwindscarryus**.

I believe it remains one of the most instructive models with its flexibility and social elasticity, but also, because at its core, the desert does not bend. The landscape insists on this chosen survival: water, food, shade, cooperation. The *Ten Principles*[24]–that Larry Harvey articulated in 2004 (Burning Man Project, n.d.)–not only matter because Playa makes them matter, but because they are carried back home on those dusty bikes and sequin jackets–even if for a moment, until decompress. Burning Man can rightly be critiqued for having drifted into a playground for the wealthy, its radical ethos increasingly overshadowed by privilege and access. Yet the Playa is tough enough, with high taxes on the efforts to play that no amount of money can buy one's way out of it. This demanding environment leaves a long-lasting impact that will, perhaps, be integrated and possibly even built into those next space shuttles and humanoid bot industries. While I cannot make a direct comparison with its anarchist "sister" festivals like *Mutant,* or other gatherings based on similar principles, against all capital odds, Burning Man's contradictions nonetheless suggest a hopeful example. They reveal how struggle itself can become a generative force, teaching communities how to hold on to their essential qualities even as they scale up, and how survival under harsh conditions may still anchor the most flickering of utopias. **#uncomfyiscomfy**

It is a very visceral privilege and opportunity to remember, as Claire Bishop reminds us as well, conviviality is never enough; without attention to power, labor, and exclusion, such spaces risk becoming sugar-coated bubbles of harmony. Blob makes this fragility visible: communities that shimmer into being for a moment and then dissolve, leaving no physical trace, but raising questions of support, labor, and accountability. Blob may not be practical or durable enough yet, and I may not know literal answers, but I feel the urge to commune and keep searching for alternatives. To hold space with Blob is to embrace both the irresistibility of shared warmth and the impossibility of permanence.

"As we sense the world with and through a blob, allowing the space between language and meaning, between you and me, to speak for itself, the compelling and compassionate force of a blob will always be, simply, irresistible." (Kim, 2019, p.16) "[But] don't forget–as Kim has astutely acknowledged–'a true blob makes no sense'" (Santos, 2019).

24 The *Ten Principles* are:
Radical Inclusion / Gifting / Decommodification / Radical Self-reliance / Radical Self-expression / Communal Effort / Civic Responsibility / Leaving No Trace / Participation / Immediacy

∞ Cycle 6 Long Distance Somersault

ASPECTS OF DIZZINESS

My Long Distance Somersault career officially began with the exhibition "GIBBERISH," showing a TV tower of the first recorded rolls and tumbling through our collaborations with my best friends—under a fence we made of sausage, and through a spirit-cleansing car wash portal—looping around and around in the Inda Gallery (Budapest) in 2015. Back then, I had been planning to take my unexplainable, inexhaustible and unquenchable desire for tumbling seriously for more than ten years. I dreamed of crazy rolling outfits to look like a glitch, and back protectors I never made, and it finally became the moment to move my passion for rolling home after parties in the mud to a professional level. Especially in the clench of that upcoming show—baby on my back, toddler with chickenpox—my earlier large drawings with intricate detail were out of reach. So we went to playgrounds beside soft running tracks, where I'd ask other mothers to watch my stroller for a few minutes. That's when I began collecting somersault videos in different neighborhoods, starting with the iconic social housing panels from the opening sequence of Hungary's first soap opera, *Neighbors*. Since then, I've probably made around 600 LDS videos: some live on a YouTube channel, some are built into the Szívküldi Lakótelep, most of them getting dusty in my photo app. My goal was to roll as far as I can, reaching other states of consciousness through dizziness. A Sufi dervish trance axis, drooping into horizontal—this is how I became a *hosszútáv bukfencezőnő*, a *Long Distance Somersaulter*.

I chose the word somersault over tumbling or rolling as it simply sounded most heroic, even if it usually refers to the acrobatic rotation in the air, not to my clumsy rolls on the ground. I liked the slight exaggeration and the way the word leapt higher than the body with its etymology. *Somersault* came into English in the 15th-16th century from the old French sombresault, rooted in Latin *super* ("over, above") + *saltus* ("leap, jump"), literally "a leap above," which aligned perfectly with my simple aim to look in the Eye of the Hurricane, seeking higher alternatives, and my previously elaborated ideas around the necessity of leaps of imagination. Both the Hungarian *bukfenc* (fall + jump) and German *Purzelbaum* (tumble + rear up) words encode in their roots the notion of falling and rearing up, jumping up—the cycle of failure and trying again; the bodily score for persistence. Only later did I realize that the playful, almost psychedelic abbreviation *LDS* already belonged to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and was widely used. At first it felt like an awkward collision, as if my somersault had landed in someone else's garden. But perhaps it also reflects my practice of slippage, glossolalia, moving in-between, and accidents of languages.

Long Distance Somersault soon became my compass meditation—paying respect and connecting place, space and time through the futile, unexpected energy and cycles of rolling. This practice grew beyond my imagination as I somersaulted through unbelievable landscapes of the West Coast: on mountain tops, into hot springs, with waterfalls and along giant fallen sequoias. For and within the mindblowing artworks of Hito Steyerl, Pipilotti Rist, Carla Gannis, Rhonda Holberton or Friedrich Kunath; over the Golden Gate Bridge, in casinos, classrooms, presentations, cemeteries after election days, in front of funny signs, and around people, animals, plants and rocks I love. An anonymous sponsor once found me online and was paying me 25 cents per somersault until I made new friends and got a traded babysitting hour in a padded gym, where I did 1200 consecutive rolls. Without a work permit yet, it would have been my dream job to Long Distance Somersault for an hour every day for $300, but sadly this generous soul wasn't ready for that and disappeared.

LDS became my profession, a form of prayer, and my pedagogical and artistic research method. Sociologist Robert Nisbet (1976) argued that social scientists should not rely solely on formal proofs and naive validation rituals but also, they need to recognize and acknowledge creative imagination and experience- and observation-based practices as legitimate modes of inquiry. Instead of planning and choosing specific sites in advance, I expand *dérive* and let LDS grow organically: drifting through random routes of life to literally observe and connect with my path (should it have thorns or poop), uncovering hidden psychogeographical patterns[25] and their interplay between my emotional landscapes and the environment. Random circumstances become the time stamps and blueprints of life, such as the very important aspect of the videographer, whose presence and perspective is inseparable and necessary. So thank you to all who helped me with this. The only dilemma has always been that I still can't let go of recording. It would feel much more liberating and more aligned with attempts to work against Capital—but ego restrains me, and only the most important somersaults disappear into the Dust of impermanence.

I was delighted to connect with Ruth Anderwald and Leonhard Grond and to understand new layers of LDS through their research on dizziness as a resource—the unstable state that disorients but also opens up compossible spaces (Anderwald, Feyertag and Grond, 2019, pp. 44–50). In dizziness—and in somersaults—equilibrium is lost, but a different kind of balance emerges: not grounded in control or mastery, but in momentum, in the generative uncertainty of movement itself. LDS is a moving meditation for accepting *anicca* (constant change) and living with failure, where falling is not the end but part of the rhythm. Out of the tumble arises a possibility without fear or power—the sheer momentum of rolling forward, carrying within it the potential for something unanticipated to emerge. The corporeality of life cycles and the wheel of dhamma.

25 Psychogeography emerged with the *Lettrist International* and was later developed by the *Situationist International*. Debord describes it as the study of how built and natural environments shape affect and behavior, and he proposes the dérive—purposeful drifting through urban space to sense these effects (Debord, 1958/2006).

SOMEHOW THIS RELATES TO LOVE

A grounding, beautiful compass example was the opportunity to somersault with my younger daughter, Miyu, in my "art mother" Lynn Marie Kirby's multi-sensory performance and installation *somehow this relates to love*, at Manresa Gallery in Saint Ignatius Church, San Francisco, on the birthday of my other child, Teyu, in 2018. Kirby orchestrated a large-scale collaboration that activated all senses: weaving together contributions from organizations like Las Casa de las Madres and Grannie Respond/Abuelas Responden, the singing of the San Francisco Girls Chorus Level IV Ensemble group, and the work of other artists, poets and composers. The piece illuminated the relationship between mothers and daughters. It was an honor to bring the feminine, circular energy of somersaults into Lynn's search for missing tenderness.

As Lynn described, geographer Yi-Fu Tuan spoke about the vertical space of the cosmos—when the heavens once pulled us to think outside of ourselves, with the self not at the center of the universe. Today's linear orientation has dulled much of that sacred connection, though specific sites can still connect us to the transcendent. St. Ignatius Church and the gallery alcoves offered such a space for thinking outside of ourselves. *somehow this relates to love* continued her exploration around missing tenderness that began in Venice (SF Station, 2019).

Participating in this collaborative co-creation taught me the essence of compossible space. Lynn's pedagogy—much like Margarete Jahrmann's ludic strategies or Ruth Anderwald and Leonhard Grond's approach to dizziness—shows how artistic research can remain playful, and still deeply rigorous. What shines through in all of their practices is a tender, humorous way of teaching that makes everyone feel welcomed and part of something larger—the very essence of kinship and how communities are created, that I'm utterly grateful to learn from. Through such collaborative practices I discovered new ways to approach ritual and ceremony, and how to honor traditions I was born into and those that I've encountered elsewhere. As global citizens, how do we relate to sacredness in foreign cultures and on foreign land without appropriation and exploitation? What are the new practices and prayers that blend lineages without harming, with respect—not as religion but as consecration? This act of weaving traditions is, in many ways, a form of syncretism: the blending of diverse cultural or spiritual practices into new hybrid forms, not to erase differences but to allow them to coexist in respectful and creative combinations. I somersaulted in circles centered around a kite by the ocean to connect the skies—vertical space with the horizontal cycles—waves and wind. Both LDS and Blob continue to guide me through this learning process, and I carry the same questions into virtual realms. I try to answer them by weaving together the lived, the actual and virtual layers of the Szívküldi Lakótelep into a communal fabric that may nurture this spirit of connection—the Grandmother Spider Spirit.

PROTECTORS

Following this collaborative impulse—just as in my virtual world-building affairs—I chose not to roll around in my own patterns alone, but to invite others and facilitate group somersault sessions and workshops in various settings. A soft 25 m² puzzle mat served as a mobile, spatial container in parks, beaches, festivals, and even elementary school classrooms. Within this frame, participants explored the compossibility of collective somersaulting (group Long Distance Somersaults), when people need the flexibility to tumble together for around five minutes with a very different awareness. Somersaulting brings an alternative perspective and dizziness, and from this circular, upside-down repetition, participants have to sense the other's pace and direction to keep everyone safe. The rhythm is in a flux, and paths can get entangled like kite strings.

This shared practice was extended into broader contexts, such as Beatriz Escobar's workshop series called *Oceanic diaspora*, where the horizon was contemplated from a post-colonial perspective of immigrant artists, inviting ocean, waves, sand and wind into our group. Another example of this expanded connection was a hybrid event in the exhibition *The Error is not a Mistake* curated by Šárka Zahálková in Pardubice. I hosted a "group rolling TV exercise," physically present in Albany, California, while it was broadcast on TV in a living-room installation at GAMPA Gallery. The remote facilitation highlighted challenges of mediated presence: communication shrinks down and loses all except for the voice and words. With limited feedback (I could barely see the room from a camera) and many internet cut off issues, it felt quite fractured on my end, yet, I learned from follow-up emails that participants really enjoyed it and they kept the mats open for the rest of the day as this childish group exercise created a very cozy and special—unexpected—atmosphere.

The title of this show and this practice resonates with Miguel Novelo's idea of communities as safety nets: collective practices that embody cycles of falling/failures and recovery/getting back up again within a padded environment that enables us to risk yet another leap. Earlier gatherings, such as a workshop at the Headlands Center for the Arts, focused on "protectors." Participants upcycled used, stinky yoga mats to design and sew their own LDS protectors. They decorated them with their own patterns, shaped them as they wished—like a cobra snake by five-year-old Nate. The group then carried these into the rolling hills of Golden Gate National Park and tumbled together freely with the fabulous background of the San Francisco skyline.

Efforts to cultivate Long Distance Somersault as a regular group practice—as I envisioned Long Distance Somersault salons as a kind of "new yoga"—is analogous to my broader searches for community. Just as not that many bodies are inclined or able to tumble for extended periods, few people share my family's nomadic patterns. Although in the Bay (and, more broadly, North America) immigration is deeply entangled with both colonial legacies and recent histories, while in Hungary emigration has once again reached a peak, particularly in 2023, most folks live their lives in the same communities or in close proximity to what their culture defines as home. For many, migration begins from precarious conditions: with inconvenient, tenuous, dangerous or no roots at all. By contrast, I carry the privilege of coming from a deeply loving family—a grounding treasure that makes both the "let go" and the ability to fully immerse in and embrace the new, difficult.

By no means do I mean that my position is harder—on the contrary. All immigration stories are different. But I feel that this far-out alien condition resonates with a speculative, sci-fi scenario in which humans have to make kin with other intelligences or life forms we don't yet know. I use the aforementioned ludic methods to stretch and prepare such acceptance, cultivating spaces in which the unfamiliar can be encountered not with fear, but with curiosity and care. Even on an intimate scale, I continue to invite others into compossible spaces, softening our skills to protect and elevate one another in these accelerated, shifting, floating, and groundless times, when human connection is more vital than ever.
Play, in its diverse forms—somersaulting bodies, inflating fabrics, or experimental pedagogy—is not simply diversion or escapism but a method of resilience: a practice that unsettles predictability, interrupts efficiency and productivity, and thus allows imagination beyond the cages of the grid while cultivating adaptability across embodied and virtual spaces. *Long Distance Somersault HOME* traced how human connection persists through digital and physical architectures; *Long Distance Somersault PLAY* demonstrates that play is a method that keeps these relations flexible, open, resistant to ossification—alive. Yet play, by its very nature, is fleeting. As temporary collectives dissolve, the challenge becomes one of duration: how to translate moments of ludic connection into more sustained forms of mutual support. This orientation sets the ground for *Long Distance Somersault CARE*—not as sentimentality, but as the sustained practice of tending to each other so that the sparks of play take root within communities over time.

#3 Miguel Novelo Cruz

Miguel Novelo:
We focus on phenomenology—treating video as a physical artifact. Students consider where it will be experienced, the body's relationship to what they are making, and its spatial context. Digital work exists somewhere in physicality. We also discuss the mind as the most immersive medium. Meditation as a form of virtuality: you go inward, then translate what you find into external form through technology—really trying to come up with ways of connecting without heavily relying on technology as the core of our work, but as a bridge between each other.

Judit Navratil:
And what happens when we do things together? I appreciate how you teach this as an integration practice or how to replicate this kind of immersiveness in reality. When you are going inwards, it is kind of also moving away from any communal activity, right? What are the "benefits" when you do things together?

Miguel Novelo:
I primarily encourage interaction among community members to break down the non-organic data or the vast information you might be engaging with daily. We use a lot of AI technologies in all my classes since I started teaching at Stanford two years ago. The way we initially use it is within community activities. You can't use it on your own because otherwise it wouldn't work for my pedagogical objective. So, whether that's books, videos, blogs, AI, or LLMs, there's always a sense of a needed community to understand what we are doing, what we are learning, and how we are growing. The reason why community is essential is that, to my understanding, it serves as a care system. When you're cared for, you can fail and start again. It's okay. And then, if you can fail, you need to acknowledge that you have failed. And move on, thinking of failure in terms of: I had this idea, but it didn't work out. We strive to embrace failure as a means to move forward, to continue doing, and to keep growing and learning. And since this is a class, it's essential to fail, because otherwise there's no learning moment. Failure is the core basis of learning. So in community, or in a care system where you might fail or drop, there's always this support system that will help you pull you back in and keep trying, or help you not fail again in the same way, ideally fail in a different way. You do not keep failing in the same ways, but ideally, your community can help you navigate into new areas of failure. Obviously, you don't want someone to keep failing at the same thing over and over. That's how the community can help. It's like a knitted net—a network of ideas, actions, intentions, possibilities, and collaboration. You can fail softly when everybody enables you to keep bouncing back, allowing us to learn and evolve. That's how I imagine this.

Judit Navratil:
That's beautiful, and it's the core of what I'm looking into as well. Let's go back to the emotional spaces please. What makes virtual spaces feel real for you and when they become really nurturing?

Miguel Novelo:
What makes these virtual spaces alive is that we can develop empathy towards them and feel connected to them if certain qualities are in place. By having open communication, you can feel heard not only in how the virtual world reacts but in the ability to break free from mechanized reaction. So, it's not as if I push; and it always does an expected reaction. Adding a touch of living experience allowing the virtual to have the capacity for adaptation, meaning the experience might change and do something new. The sense of surprise and the unexpected, makes the experience feel alive, when it's playing with expectation. When there is true communication, even if you're not talking necessarily directly at the art, but the art is talking back to you, and you might be giving something back to continue this exchange. There is this third brain or mental space that I talk about in class - when you're trying to make art, you have to put your thoughts outside of your body. It's not quite the art, it's not quite me, it's just this new space or mind in the middle that you and the art can create. And only when you're fully connected to it, this idea comes up. And when you might not connect to the art, it's just because you're two separate entities, and there's no point of entry or connection. So what makes that successful art piece that you might feel breaks reality, right? It feels like you're connected to it, and there is a sense of communication that exists between two beings in this new entity.

#4 Margarete Jahrmann

Judit Navratil:
Good morning, Margarete, thank you so much for joining me. I'd like to start with a broad but fundamental question: how do you see the difference between playing and gaming, and how do you navigate between the two in your work?

Margarete Jahrmann:
Hello, and thank you, Judit, for the invitation to this conversation under a pine tree. I enjoy it very much, and I can already feel it—even if the situation is virtual. I think that already touches on your research topic: "sitting under this tree" affects my thinking a little. This is excellent. This, in itself, is play—experimenting with the format, to improvise—that's why my chosen method is play. This is what I mean as a ludic method where I focus on play and playfulness, and this improvised, free way of acting, interacting, co-acting, and cooperating with the environment, including the non-human world. Play is simple—as understood and introduced in game studies: play versus game. The English language is very precise here, as opposed to other languages like German, it's all just *Spiel. Spiel* can even mean mechanical slack: for example, if you drive a car with gears (we drive with gears in Europe), and something doesn't work, it might "need some Spiel"—some freedom. But most obviously, it means play. So:
Play is improvised, free.
Gaming is rule-based, limited, defined by the "magic circle" and game mechanics that are triggered in the environment where the rules define how we act.
And if we break the magic circle and open the gaming, then also inside this circle, the process of play happens. So play is about the processual, the freestyle, and the free form action. But also within the rule-based system, play is the process that happens.

Judit Navratil:
In Hungarian, there's no separate word either—it's all *játék*. Your department is called Game Arts—how do you highlight playing versus gaming there?

Margarete Jahrmann:
So, we don't have the difference between... Wait, I've seen a little... Oh, it's gone already. It was a squirrel. The squirrel was listening a little bit, but let's go on. Maybe it will come back.

Judit Navratil:
Yes, the squirrels are eating everything. There is the alpha squirrel with testicles that are as big as a walnut, and they have no fear. So it is very possible that at some point we have some extra company again. Well, so I'm curious, how do you reflect on this in the department at the Angewandte? In English, I understand that it is called gaming, and so I'm curious how you highlight playing versus gaming, or if the department is also focused more on gaming, and then you bring your ludic elements to surprise and break further from that.

Margarete Jahrmann:
Yeah, that is a very interesting point. The official title is *Experimental Game Cultures Department*, which is maybe ambiguous. In fact, play is at the center, along with art—playful art. We use games as material, and gaming culture as a form that you adapt in an artistic setting, in an art piece, for example. It's not about gaming per se. It uses, analyzes, looks at games, and also the way how we play, how we act, how we interact with those systems that we call games. From my point of view—a systemic view—games are systems that allow special kinds of agency and often have an efficacy. But as you were also seeing in some art pieces that I do, it is not really a game, but it has elements that are playable. And I would say that the individual artistic work from me as an artist also influences the definition of the department here. And that is expressed in the "experimental." That's why "experiment" is central. So the experimental game culture should be established. Maybe it's not fully existing right now, which is, of course, a challenge. But we try to build it up together with research and also with research where Judit Navratil is involved, who applies these playful and ludic principles in performances. Do you see these elements? Do you see this embedding something in the system and then sort of breaking the system, like growing further from it, similar to how maybe we can play with institutions in the sense that institutional setting that's founded of course and then you can experiment in the experimental ways you can kind of break further out.

Judit Navratil:
Yeah.

Margarete Jahrmann:
I don't think it's always necessary to break a system—you can have agency inside it, with a second-order observation: observing yourself within it. From there, you can expand, stretch, and experiment with systemic borders. And this is then very interesting, and can be applied in many fields, even industry or cultural work. And then the systems can change. And then a process, a gameplay process of change starts, can be triggered and modified.
[...]

Judit Navratil:
How do you see that the process of you sharing that data becomes a physical material form and connects these realms and becomes real or alive in some sense, that I really appreciate, but I'm curious about how we—at the same time, like along the same path—we exploit our body and emotional landscapes with the datafication. And especially in the time of AI, now we are entering the space when everything becomes public as if all your brain waves are accessible. How do you see that?

Margarete Jahrmann:
This is a very sensible question because not all data should be eaten up by the large language models as they are very eaten up now, especially the American models, not all. Also, other language models are not using all the data of the net, like the European Mistral or the other ones, like the local or the Chinese DeepSea. They were building, of course, on other things. But it is sensible if all the data is publicly available, because it needs to be anonymized if it is. On the other hand, data then needs to be accessible also for an idea of research. If it is research, it must be free or open access. But then it needs to have maybe a certain license so that it's not only capitalized by the big "Jeff Bezoses" and all that we know. They all were smartly using open source software and building on that and capitalizing it. Nothing else. And they forgot about the "open" in Open AI. So it's very simple data. Of course. So you see I'm ambiguous here, but it's specified very precisely how.

Judit Navratil:
Thank you. And if we would like to think into a hopeful space, like, can you see that maybe this sort of ludic methods that you are researching and experimenting with would be an agency in this field, so when we are all, yeah, capitalized in this sense, would be unpredictability and unexpected elements could sort of then be the way of resistance.

Margarete Jahrmann:
Yeah. You also asked me to share pedagogical tools and I would say that this ludic method is a pedagogical tool. This is very much for me. It doesn't solve things. That is too much. I'm sorry, I cannot provide this. I would love to, but no. But it is a method also for a group, in a social group. It also can be a physical one, it doesn't need to be virtual. In this experience, physically in front of an artwork or installation, or even throwing a dice and touching it, and then saying, ah, if I have number one, I have to switch roles. That's what I showed you as an example in the actual exhibition running at the Angewandte Innovation Lab. This is a pedagogical tool to a certain extent and it is valid for online and for physical spaces also. So, yeah, so this is a short answer here.

Judit Navratil:
Yeah, thank you. Could you please share a bit of the scope of how these pedagogical tools changed throughout time and your career? And maybe some very practical examples?

Margarete Jahrmann:
It changed. I've really thought about it seriously. I've worked for a really long time on this ludic method. It was also part of my PhD already. And so for over a decade or the last 15 years, I really elaborated on it. In the beginning, I was thinking more directly and really thought that it can change society and politics directly. But now I think that a too direct approach or requirement is not possible really, it's a bit too naive maybe. Maybe I was also too optimistic, I don't know. So it sounds a bit negative, but I understood that it only works if it's more subtle, if you are a little bit touched by this. I would like to convince democracy that they don't vote, but they throw a dice. But of course, yes, then everybody could become president. Not only the rich one, as it is in the States, or someone who makes the best propaganda, I don't know. Let's throw a dice. It would also represent people, an average of society. Because also now it is not the most qualified democracy that we are representing. So these are very radical options that I still suggest publicly. But of course this is not, maybe not immediately adopted, but probably it triggers a thought.

Judit Navratil:
And do you see how it also changed how your students or colleagues engage with your methods, as this new generation is so different?

Margarete Jahrmann:
Yeah, yes it is. It very much depends on the individuals, of course, and on their own bodies and their psycho-organic history that they have with their bodies, with their experiences. And how you become from it, is art, from my point of view. You also have to be a political person because you show the private. And if you make a Purzelbaum, a somersault, performance in a space where it shouldn't happen, like in the performance, in an exhibition where you are supposed to walk through. This is already a statement to look at the world upside down. And I think sometimes from certain people in certain moments, yeah, this is further reflected, adopted a lot, and used. This is totally true. Not all immediately say, okay, that's what we want to use.

Judit Navratil:
Wow. Well, thank you so much. It is super beautiful and I really appreciate all your answers. It is an honor to work with you and I'm very excited to play together further.

Margarete Jahrmann:
It was a pleasure to talk, Judit, and I hope that we broadcast Season 2 soon.

∞ Cycle 7 Hologram

EMOTIONSCAPES OF DIGITAL MENTAL HEALTH

The exploration of "home" in cyberspace led into the void of VR, where wrangling the emotional landscapes of digital spaces—alone or with a crew in VR Art Camp—kept raising the same question: how do these spaces feel? A key frame of reference here is Clemens Apprich's (2017, pp. 16–21) *Technotopia*. Digital environments are never neutral backdrops—Apprich illuminates how these platforms are ideologically charged architectures that actively shape perception, relation, connection, and modes of care. Online terrains, often celebrated as emancipatory spaces, simultaneously reconfigure intimacy and belonging within the grids of surveillance, acceleration, and commodified attention. Designed with logics of extraction and optimization, such infrastructures are deeply implicated in the mental health crises of burnout, disembodiment, and loneliness. Apprich argues that "technotopias" are not merely science fiction fantasies, but lived scenarios in which our sense of belonging, isolation, and vulnerability is constantly negotiated. This provides a critical foundation for reflecting beyond our current socio-technical reality through the lens of digital mental health: if the spaces we inhabit online shape our modes of relation, then they also shape our capacity for empathy, resilience, and care. These are the porous, precarious constructs that artists, educators, and researchers—like Caitlin Krause (2024, pp. 95–109)—intervene in, designing practices and frameworks of awareness that help us be present and find compassion, tenderness, and human-scale support in the seas of data.

Krause's work emphasizes cultivating and refining attention and empathy inside these technotopian contexts. Her pedagogy foregrounds presence—not to escape, but to inhabit digital environments more intentionally. She designs experiences that bring mindfulness and compassion, settings that demonstrate how to shift away from distraction and depletion. In the attention economy, awareness becomes a tool for resilience. In this sense, Krause's pedagogy aligns with my own: encouraging us to feel into digital space rather than numbing ourselves against it. Highlighting that humans are embodied, spatial, social creatures in the first place, her simple and practical frameworks[26] can be applied widely. Krause's model resonates deeply with my own experiments in VR Art Camp and in social VR world-building with youth, where spatial dimensions are directly shaped by the arc of attention and presence. Just as she demonstrates that mindful scaffolding can turn these experiences from draining online sites into spaces of resilience, my pedagogical work shows that when young participants are invited to feel into a virtual environment, their capacity for sustained attention, play, and empathy can expand.

This shared emphasis on intentionality opens toward the field of emotional AI. Although this reflective document cannot do justice to the breadth of this utterly important realm, I want to acknowledge its pioneers: while Rosalind Picard's (2000) affective computing[27] work laid a technical foundation, Julia Mossbridge has opened new pathways by extending emotional AI into love, compassion, and human flourishing. Her *Loving AI* project (2017–2018) tested whether machines could be configured to model unconditional positive regard, reframing AI not as an extractor of attention but as a potential partner in care (Loving AI, n.d.). Mossbridge's experiments[28] open pathways to imagine AI not only as a mediator of emotion but as an active participant in fostering resilience, tenderness, and even loving relationality.

Nonetheless, we shouldn't forget the dangers of sugarcoating that can mask deeper exploitation, and keep in mind Apprich's technotopian perspective. While Krause and Mossbridge's projects propose a radical reorientation towards care and loving AI, infrastructures within which they circulate are still conditioned by the same logics of commodification—moreover, with exponential risks. Even when emotional AI is designed with a healing intent, it could be (will be, had been) subsumed into attention economies that convert vulnerability into data, presence into metrics, and care into currency. In this view, the very attempt to model unconditional positive stance jeopardizes producing a new frontier of extraction: one in which human emotions themselves become the raw material for optimization and monetization, as new forms of currency within digital capitalism.

I see these double-edged dynamics through a non-dual lens: both the nourishing and the exploitative potentials exist simultaneously, much like the complementary functions of the two hemispheres of the brain. I don't aim to resolve the tension but to stay as alert as possible to how these developments are instrumentalized—to recognize the fragile openings of tenderness without losing sight of the risks of capture. With this awareness, we can direct our focus to a different lineage of care: the *Hologram*, a peer-to-peer practice anchored in human connection, transmitted orally, held in real-ation, and sustained through mutual, personal trust rather than technical infrastructures or protocols.

26 See Krause's *Presence Pyramid, Three A's (Aware, Advancing, Authentic), and Four Culture Cornerstones (Dignity, Freedom, Invention, Agency).*

27 Picard highlights the essential role of emotions in decision making, learning and more—their influence on rational thinking. She presents an intellectual framework for affective computing to give computers the ability to recognize, understand, even to have and express emotions in order to interact naturally with humans and to be genuinely intelligent.

28 Since then, Mossbridge has carried this inquiry forward through projects such as *Vis-á-vis,* which cultivates nonverbal positive connection, or *Time Machine*, a web-based tool supporting future orientation for people navigating trauma and precarity.

I was introduced to holographic universe theory by a curator in Blob on one of the very windy, headbanging days when he invited me to a show[29] centered around this concept. This theory proposes that the entire universe is like a hologram, where each part contains information about the whole, meaning that reality's three-dimensional appearance emerges from underlying patterns of information distributed across the cosmos (Talbot, 1991). This aligns with Donald Hoffman's (2019, pp. 124–125) interface theory, which likewise suggests that what we perceive is not reality itself but a simplified "user interface" evolved to guide survival, not to reveal truth. Our experienced world is a constructed representation rather than the underlying reality.

These scientific explanations echo what I seek through art—different languages circling around and reflecting the same "as above, so below" fractals of physics aligning with the elastic interpretations I pursue through Blob and LDS, arriving at shared insights from various angles.

As Michael Talbot (1991, p. 44) writes in *The Holographic Universe*:
"When an electron manifests as a wave it can do things no particle can. If it is fired at a barrier in which two slits have been cut, it can go through both slits simultaneously. When wavelike electrons collide with each other they even create interference patterns. The electron, like some shapeshifter out of folklore, can manifest as either a particle or a wave. This chameleon-like ability is common to all subatomic particles."

Talbot's summary of wave–particle duality licenses my use of "wholeness-in-fragments:" the same phenomenon can present differently depending on how it is engaged, a helpful metaphor for the ways my LDS/Blob practice refracts connection across contexts. Building on this, theoretical physicist David Bohm (1980) pointed to the deep interconnectedness that seemed to link apparently unrelated subatomic events. His interpretation of quantum physics suggested that at the subquantum level, the very notion of fixed location dissolves: all points in space become equivalent, and separateness ceases to have meaning. Physicists call this property "nonlocality." By contrast, Niels Bohr's later Copenhagen perspective did not posit hidden subquantum variables; rather, Bohr (1928) argued that the properties of quantum systems are defined only relative to a specified measurement arrangement, so it is meaningless to ascribe definite values prior to observation.

Holography itself makes this intuition tangible: even a fragment of holographic film can still reproduce the whole image (even if hazier). This feature thrilled neuroscientist Karl Pribram (1991), who, alongside Bohm (1980), proposed the holonomic brain theory—suggesting that memories are not locked into discrete neural locations but encoded across the brain as distributed interference patterns, where each part still contains access to the whole.

I bring in these examples from physics not to claim authority in that field but because they echo my fascination between scientific models and artistic practice. They are models of wholeness-in-fragments, of nonlocal relations, and of perception as construction—ideas that guide my own practice.

29 The *Holographic Sky* exhibition was curated by Pete Belkin (SFArtsED Gallery, 2024).

If holography models wholeness-in-fragments, Cassie Thornton's *Hologram* translates this insight into practice: a viral, peer-to-peer feminist health network, practical, critical and deeply relational, yet no less poetic in its consequences and effects. Cassie's framing, especially her hands-on, realistic and real estate-ic approach,[30] cut through the Bay Area's fantasies of prosperity to expose how deeply land, care, and capital are entangled. In her earlier project *Desperate Holdings Real Estate & LandMind Spa*, she and the Feminist Economics Department (the FED) staged a speculative near-future Bay Area where only the 1% could rent or buy land, offering healing and revenge services through séances of holding and touching "liquid real estate"—clay sourced from beneath San Francisco's financial district. (Feminist Economics Department, n.d.)

I wasn't too surprised to discover further connections, naming that one of her main partners in this project is curator and artist Magdalena Jadwiga Härtelova, with whom I previously collaborated to show the VR social housing neighborhood simultaneously in a San Francisco gallery called /room, and in her bedroom gallery located within a historically well-known social housing block in Berlin. I linger on these grandmother-lengthy details because they resonate with my own practices: thinking about manifestation, how repetition and patterns create what we perceive as reality, and how often we go around and around, layering resonating ideas in the circles of understanding, learning and expanding to imagine further.[31]

Thornton describes *The Hologram*'s premise simply:
"The Hologram's premise is simple: three people - a 'triangle' - meet on a regular basis, digitally or in person, to focus on the physical, mental and social health of a fourth - the 'hologram'. The hologram, in turn, teaches their caregivers how to give and also receive care—each member of their triangle becomes a hologram for another, different triangle, and so the system expands. Drawing on radical models developed in the Greek solidarity clinics during a decade of crisis, and directly engaging with discussions around mutual aid and the coronavirus pandemic, *The Hologram* develops the skills and relationships we desperately need for the anti-capitalist struggles of the present, and the post-capitalist society of the future." (Thornton, 2020, pp. 42–43)

It was an honor to finally meet Cassie in an online interview[32] on the apropos of this reflection, and to hear her entertaining insights of "birthing" this social medicine, this mytho-real viral distribution system for non-expert healthcare, that started out as an art project but has grown into a collectively practiced tool by people around the world. Cassie shared intimate details about the fragile, experimental beginnings of *The Hologram*, which slowly grew into its own organism (like Blob). After years of carrying the weight of leadership, the community organized her a "power release ceremony," when they acknowledged her role, celebrated what had been built, and symbolically let her step back so this entity could be held collectively.

30 I was delighted to learn about the Hologram from Ann Schnake, the 'mother' of my favorite Oakland gallery, Dream Farm Commons, where I first encountered Cassie's work years ago in *Desperate Holdings Real Estate & LandMind Spa*.

31 Dear Reader, if these details feel somewhat like being lost in the thread of stories, like sitting on your grandmother's couch as a teen, listening to neighbors' tales you can't quite follow—well, I'm happy to evoke those feelings.

32 See parts of the transcript in Interview Excerpt #5.

Although I haven't had a chance to join the Hologram myself yet, its practicality feels like a great guiding point to navigate towards with my own social practices. I recognize the controversy between seeking resilience in ludic futility and aiming to serve with something that is tangibly useful, and try to be aware of the thin boundary between the little nooks of freedom and becoming production and commerce. *The Hologram* appears to be a successful setting that manages to preserve balance and intentionality.

Taken together, Apprich's critique of technotopian infrastructures, Krause's pedagogy of mindful presence, and Mossbridge's experiments with emotional AI sketch the stakes of what I call the emotional landscape of digital existence. On one side there are platforms optimized for attention capture and productivity metrics, which often exacerbate fragility and burnout. On the other side are experimental practices of digital caregiving that resist this optimization, creating small architectures of presence where people are seen and held. Just as ludic play ruptures predictability and opens portals of joy and connection, phygital care introduces openings where fragility does not collapse into isolation but becomes the ground for relation. This is the horizon from which I approach Thornton's Hologram project: as a radical model of distributed care that demonstrates how, even in technotopian spaces, it is possible to re-script the architecture toward holding and mutual aid.

∞ Cycle 8 Phygital Care

IRL Art Camps

From the very beginning of building the Szívküldi Lakótelep, I always wanted to invite others to co-create a diverse hub that was most successful in this virtual neighborhood's art residency, the VR Art Camp. As pandemic restrictions eased, it felt most important to gather again in person though. Thus, as soon as it was possible again, I organized a week-long IRL Art Camp[33] mostly in a campground near my studio in Marin Headlands, with an evening in Oakland at an ADA-accessible indoors art space in winter 2021. Despite living on the remote island and having no experience in event management, this first mini "festival" was still quite a success and an obvious indicator that our art community seeks collective, play-based assemblies in nature with a high factor of chance and improvisation.

Artists facilitated several Campfire Sessions: we planted deerweed seeds for the ghosts of extinct butterflies with Alicia Escott; Tamar Ettun brought us *Lilit, the Empathic Demon*, and new moon traps; we sounded our bones with Sholeh Asgary, and *befriended our Back Body* with River Black; we painted together under the trees with Lia Sutton; we pebbled with Annie Albagli; and discussed our future DAO and social token plans with Basel–Berlin based curator Viola Lukács in a hybrid format. With the help of The Bureau of Linguistical Reality, we created a neologism, *RELEASALITY,* to describe the forces that shape our virtually-extended emotional landscapes and the release of attachments to a place as we have known it, embracing the potentiality this concept holds in a world altered by rapid climate change. The first IRL Art Camp concluded with a collaborative closing ceremony, *Wave Weaving Exchange*, facilitated by Annie Albagli and myself, which used the historic barracks's gymnasium as a digestive container for online cacophony and avatarism, and concluded our aforementioned *Wave Exchanges*.[34]

It was much easier to organize the second version of IRL Art Camp after moving back to the Bay Area. A grant covered all camping costs and I could invite VR Art Camp Artists and Friends for free in Bodega Dunes in 2023. This iteration was more concise—a long weekend when ocean, sand, and trees to welcomed us to dance and stretch together through guided time traveling in Blob[35], in participatory performances: *Porous Fields*,[36] digesting policy about gun trades,[37] drawing together,[38] feeling Earth holding our grief,[39] circle around fire with *SOLAR REJOINDER*, a poem co-reading,[40] and blueprint this in *Volume One of Words as Spells*.[41]

33 IRL is an abbreviation for "in real life."

34 Further details about our collaboration are provided in LDS 1 HOME / ∞ Cycle 3 VR Art Camp / collaborations

35 *Guided Time Travelling in Blob* by Kelly O'Leary

36 *Porous Fields* by Your Mood Project

37 *Cultural Commentary Project* by Danielle Siembieda

38 *Intimate Drawing Sessions* by Lia Sutton

39 *Grief Meditation* by River Black

40 *SOLAR REJOINDER* by Anne Leslie Selcer

41 *Volume One of Words as Spells* by Quinn Keck

The flexible structure, the time span and location offered an utterly nourishing and inspiring event that allowed us to deepen connections beyond the regular art world platforms of exhibition openings, even though the original aim to reflect on our virtual social experiences and digest them together in nature mostly faded away.

Nature-based art gatherings are of course not new to this region. Rooted in San Francisco's counterculture movements of the 1960s and 1970s, examples include the foundational work of Pauline Oliveros' *Deep Listening* practices (Oliveros, 2005) and Anna and Lawrence Halprin's collective sonic assemblies at Sea Ranch (Halprin, 1995) who expanded contemporary dance and architecture in their ecologically sensitive and progressive communal designs. They invented *RSVP cycles*, a creative methodology system for collaboration, and hosted many series of influential cross-disciplinary workshops that were the hub of an era.[42] The list is certainly longer but I can't leave out the anti-architectural, experimental social sculpture series of *The Inflatables* by the Ant Farm, that provided nomadic, flickering stages for lectures and "happenings," a role model for Blob in many ways. As Ant Farm explained in their *Inflatocookbook:*

"In case you hadn't figured out a reason or excuse, why to build inflatables becomes obvious as soon as you get people inside. The freedom and instability of an environment where the walls are constantly becoming the ceilings and the ceiling the floor and the door is rolling around the ceiling somewhere releases a lot of energy that is usually confined by the xyz planes of the normal box-room. The new-dimensional space becomes more or less whatever people decide it is—a temple, a funhouse, a suffocation torture device, a pleasure dome."

(Ant Farm, 1973, cited in Scott, 2019, p. 7)

Despite the self-contradictions between the Ant Farm's "nomadicry" attempts moving towards liberation and their material choice of thin petro-films with short lifespans and limited recycling, their umbilical cord of continuous power being hooked to the grid or the impracticality of their harsh interior conditions that amplifies the environmental hardships and survival aspects, *the Inflatables* and the Ant Farm's fluid cross-media-non-disciplin-iarity remains a touchstone of communal experimentation, bridging the line between the trap of an empty spectacle and a caring, radical architectural shelter. In this lineage of the Bay Area's countercultural and experimental collectives, contemporary practitioners such as David Wilson and The Ribbons orchestrate site-based gatherings that bring together interdisciplinary networks of artists, DJs, performers, filmmakers, and chefs. Amongst the many amazing events, Wilson hosts the best redwood dances in the forests of Oakland.

I met with David in his studio[43] where he shared how he embraces the flux and circulation of communities with a core arc of slow built relationships. He—alike Margarete Jahrmann—insists on the role of play to keep communities porous and welcoming, disrupting hierarchies and resisting the hardening effects of capitalist logics. He profoundly embeds care in the little details of his processes that leaves a significant imprint on the outcomes—for example the personal, hand delivery of the thousands of invitations for his events turns logistics into collective art making and shows how ritualizing mundane tasks builds bonds. It was a true gift to hear the way David explained how to choreograph the energy of gatherings, that deeply inspired me on the shift from social VR towards in person assemblies. Although—in contrast to David Wilson's analog approach—I still held digesting our virtual social encounters together in nature in the center of phygital care—the next phase and branch of the Szívküldi Lakótelep.

42 For example, it was ultimately inspiring to attend the 40th *Planetary Dance*, an annual all-day ritual of healing and community renewal, that Anna founded when she was sixty-years old, and was still celebrating together at the age of 100.

43 See parts of the transcript in Interview Excerpt #6.

Phygital Care

As Mozilla Hubs and along with it, VR Art Camp closed its campfire in May 2024, my curatorial proposal for Root Division (originally envisioned as a social VR-based exhibition) evolved into an analogue archive that documented and materialized our virtual spaces in a gallery context for the first time. To maintain continuity,[44] I invited the VR Art Camp's community to co-facilitate bi-monthly Phygital Care gatherings in preparation for this exhibition. These intimate meetings continued to explore ludic, embodied practices interwoven with our social VR spaces. For instance, after a guided "fallen branch" meditation, participants danced with a majestic Monterey Cypress tree while immersed in projections of VR Art Camp "studios."

The phygital layering of our collective memories and engagements was based on two criteria: they took place outdoors (preferably beyond urban space) and loosely echoed social prompts from VR Art Camp. In practice, the second aspect was often only a gesture. Even in the exhibition, it appeared more as an atmosphere than a clear concept that was tangible through the artworks. Yet, these gestures held seeds, and my soft leaps of collective imagination aimed at infusing further layers of love into digital spaces that–even if faint and inefficient–may eventually appear to a new consciousness as gentle rocking for babies, rocking that feels deeply like being on the road, where the journey is already the destination (Schrei, 2024). Thus, sharing my lived immigrant experience, where each arrival is also another departure and each home must be rebuilt from scratch, I aim to extend this syncretic sense of ludic wandering into a naive but earnest attempt to offer love into this fragile birthing period of AI, where Phygital Care gatherings serve as provisional roadside shelters, allowing tenderness, play and collective imagination to accompany a consciousness just beginning to take shape.

In this sense, the group exhibition *Phygital Care* (Root Division, 2024) became a material manifestation and archive of these explorations. Artists from VR Art Camp investigated intangible care as collective practice that moves between analog and digital, spaces that are not divided anymore. They facilitated the integration and exchange of the impact of our phygital experiences–weaving social VR prompts with in-person participatory performances, ludic workshops, and discussions in nature. At the intersection of serious play, ritual, avatarism, and experimental IRL gaming, we co-created a care-full campfire setting, sitting around, nearby and sharing those stories to be told. The mostly interactive art pieces invited visitors to engage with each other and the interwoven, sculptural pieces were embodied reminiscences of the VR collages of the Szívküldi Lakótelep.

The exhibition featured more than twenty artists, including Connie Zheng, Conny Zenk, Erica Molesworth, Eszter Szabó, and Minoosh Raheleh Zomorodinia, whose practices bridged embodied and digital experimentation.[45] It was incredible to be in a physical space with the artworks of my European and North American art families together, and to invite and offer many of these artists a first-time opportunity to exhibit overseas in San Francisco. This co-created nest felt like an essential layer and feedback loop in my search to translate love into our expanded and accelerated digital existence, to nurture human (and beyond) connection, and to help this phygital merging process.

44 The exhibition was scheduled two years in advance, even though the Root Division asked for proposals addressing momentary and urgent concerns, questioning why the project matters now and how it reflects on current issues.

45 Exhibiting artists: Alexandra Cicorschi, Ann Schnake, Cate White, Charlotte Law with Meghana Bisineer, Connie Zheng, Conny Zenk, Danielle Siembieda, Elena Yu, Erica Molesworth, Eszter Szabó, Judit Fischer, Kelley O'Leary, Liat Berdugo, Lia Sutton, Merve Caskurlu, Minoosh Raheleh Zomorodinia, Quinn Keck, Selby Sohn, Sharmi Basu, Sholeh Asgary, Xinling Wang and Zsófia Szemző.

And with this, the Szívküldi Lakótelep and VR Art Camp entered into a social dormancy that shrank back to Judit's panel diary as of January 2025. Besides teaching virtual and contemporary art to children, my focus has shifted toward hosting communal, participatory, ludic experiences in nature, and with the help of artist and curator Selby Sohn, we reshaped, renamed, and reoriented the art campings into *Folding Fields*. In an Open Call, Folding Fields invited artists (preferably collaborations) to break the algorithms and explore the weird and unpredictable through participatory performances co-created with Nature: in a redwood forest by the Pacific Ocean near Mendocino, California, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Northern Pomo, Coastal Pomo, Cahto, and Yuki Peoples (Native Land Digital, n.d.). Activations took place in a private campsite among large sequoia and Douglas-fir trees beside a creek, and the nearby Jug Handle Beach, a small, soft-sanded gem beside a very special ecological staircase trail.

Danielle Siembieda synchronized us with glowing orbs the first night, when participants transmitted coded light patterns with no verbal cues. As individuals deciphered each luminous message, we converged through an evolving visual language, forging unity from solitary points of brilliance. Watchers became transmitters, transforming darkness into a shared vocabulary. Through the weekend, we grew a web of inspirational, life-changing quotes in Quinn Keck's net. The beach sessions opened with intention-setting through Leora Lutz's summer solstice fire ritual. We dug holes with Kathy King, tasted the tiny, and played as if we were particles orchestrated by Niyant Krishnamurthi, and walked in concentric circles that Your Mood Projects set up for an hour. Badri Valian brought the complications of illegal abortion in Iran and her lived traumas into the sparkling light of noon in a tactile, participatory, self-healing performance. Xtra.dae's immersive audio-visual-illusionary performance queered and "trans-ported" us into the shades of the afternoon, when we moved to the plateau above the waves. Tasya Abbott and Kiril Bolotnikov concelebrated a condensed version of their hourly fruit ritual in a majestic tree temple, centered on *Tactile Consumption*: a picnic featuring twelve stations arranged in the shape of a lock where participants enjoyed diverse fruits. Their zine, the *Book of Hours*, served as a menu and prayer book, detailing each fruit's metaphysical properties. Ann Schnake navigated us with the help of the Milky Way to become dung beetles and contemplate rolling our balls, embedding some of the life force of the day, the space, and a portion of the earth onto our small "planets" that we later burned as part of the campfire. Lia Sutton invited us to silently find intimate geometry patterns among the trees, slowly unwinding large cotton threads with a partner in the darkening hour of dusk, then pausing and slowly coiling them back together. As a closing, Macro Waves dived deeper into the myth of technological solutionism in their site-specific audio-visual and movement-based performance, poking fun at the notion of "tech will save us."

This long weekend opened many conversations around the campfire, shared meals, sauna sessions and a dance party that offered connections beyond the typical art-world gatherings of exhibition openings and events with small talk. This was so far the largest event I organized, with about 60 campers. It was a great learning experience about facilitation and curation of shared spaces with the implications of different political and world views, it highlighted the need for a mediator when different echo chambers meet. In preparation, I asked Lucas Dewulf for advice, because I am most interested in expanding these gatherings toward an experimental LARP (live-action role-playing) as embodied narrative care offerings. Lucas Dewulf (Nearly Norman) is an artist, educator, and curator exploring and creating immersive experiences, with a practice where "human connection is central. Key to his work is using the affordances of digital technologies to explore the physical world and to question our analog nature within virtual space" (Dewulf, n.d.). We first met in a VR Art Camp session that he visited in May 2023, and connected further after to learn about each other's social VR work, for example, Lucas' *Virtuology* project. In the informal interview[46] before Folding Fields, Lucas shared the importance of the container of the gathering—onboarding and offboarding not as logistics but as rituals of care. His playful prompts and ways of weaving of XR and embodied practices with his insistence on shared intention are good reminders that these temporary constellations need tenderness in their architecture. Much like David Wilson's wisdom, Lucas models that facilitation itself is a form of care, where play becomes a vessel for belonging, and LARP—in person or long distance—can open an empathic, embodied narrative practice to hold us gently together. And this "together" is more influential and urgent than ever. As Timothy M. Waring and Zachary T. Wood's (2025) new theory suggests, cultural evolution has overtaken genetic evolution, becoming the most dominant force in shaping human development—our survival, adaptation and reproduction. Cultural systems are fundamentally shaped by communities, and today we are suffocating under scarcity logics, algorithm traps and alienations of capital.

Folding Fields and its roots, the Szívküldi Lakótelep, are my attempt to prepare for this threshold—getting ready for the new era of AI not by optimizing, but by cultivating post-growth practices of play and care. In ludic, unpredictable constellations, we can grow deeper human connection—even if for moments compared to our ancestors' lifelong commitments to community—connection that is embodied, empathic, and resilient enough to imagine futures together. And in this context, CARE is the connective tissue: what allows HOME and PLAY to endure. It is the essence that can turn sparks of play into infrastructure of support, and dissolve the scarcity mindset into möbius cycles where we have all the time in the world. A communal Long Distance Somersault that gazes in the Eye of the Hurricane.

46 See parts of the transcript in Interview Excerpt #7.

Interview excerpts

#5 Cassie Thornton

Judit Navratil:
It's beautiful to have a tool that actually comes alive, grows beyond you, and becomes something more. In my work, things often stayed momentary. I wonder how it was for you—did the name "Hologram" reveal its meaning only gradually? Were there moments where you realized, "Oh, this is really becoming something?"

Cassie Thornton:
I've always been intuitive about ideas—like getting struck by lightning. But when this one came, I knew it would change my life. I first heard about experiments in Greece, and it really affected me. Later, talking with a friend who had studied community acupuncture, we imagined *The Hologram* as something like community acupuncture: collective, accessible, replicable. For years I hesitated to try it. People told me it was cute but unrealistic. Eventually, I experimented with making it viral. The first attempts didn't work. I realized that for it to spread, people needed to see that those receiving care were also part of producing more care. It wasn't just about being cared for—it was about creating a cycle of care.
The name also came by accident. A Greek psychologist told me she had begun to see her patients as "holograms," not flat pieces of paper. That image blew my mind. Later I learned that holographic photography requires stability to produce a three-dimensional image. Likewise, *The Hologram* practice creates temporary stability—structured time and attention—so a three-dimensional image of a person can emerge.

Judit Navratil:
I love how you translated something so complex into an accessible, practical, and loving tool. That's not easy. My own challenge has been turning art into something that works at depth and nourishes communities. Could you share more about the challenges you faced—times when you thought, "What am I doing?"

Cassie Thornton:
There were many. At first, I was afraid to test it. Coming from critical art, there was always the fear: "Be careful, you might damage someone." I carried that hesitation.
One of the first times I facilitated publicly, during the pandemic, I realized the challenge wasn't only the protocol itself but also how people are invited and who is brought together. If participants came for the wrong reasons—status, impressing colleagues—it didn't work. That early failure taught me that *The Hologram* is not about social climbing. It's about trust and real participation.

Judit Navratil:
That resonates with me. I often feel I should invite everyone to my gatherings, but the group constellation really shapes the essence of the practice. I have two ongoing works—the "blob," a fabric form animated by wind and people, and my practice of doing somersaults together. Both carry risks: fear of injury, difficulty finding participants. But they're about shifting perspective, cycles, and shared awareness.
Your reflections make me think: how can I refine these practices into something that carries forward like *The Hologram*?

Cassie Thornton:
My first question would be: what is the effect you want people to experience? What do *you* get out of somersaulting that you'd like others to feel? Maybe there are other ways to evoke that without requiring the exact physical act. Sometimes finding the essence and stripping away the extra layers reveals the tool. That's hard work, but it's also what I love to do.
[...]

Cassie Thornton:
Yes. At first, some of my friends didn't feel "important enough" to work on a big project. But our lives *were* the project. Over time, they began to see their lives as valuable enough to belong in art and public space. That shift has been powerful.

Judit Navratil:
That's beautiful. And it's also about mobility, isn't it? I move often, always rebuilding community. How do you carry roots without being tied to one land? How do you balance respect for place while moving between cultures?

Cassie Thornton:
It's hard. My own *Hologram* triangle is dispersed—friends in Montreal, Northern Canada, California. That gives me a sense of "air roots."
I also tend to make myself useful wherever I go, sometimes too much. What grounds me is listening deeply: understanding what people are really going through in different places, their inner struggles. That gives me a sense of home and direction.
Patterns emerge across countries—parallels that reveal hidden truths. The longer I live in Germany, the more I understand the U.S., and vice versa. That's part of why I keep moving: it helps me see more clearly.

Judit Navratil:
Yes, and you still carry the bravery to ask difficult questions, to hold up those patterns. That's a form of care too.

Cassie Thornton:
It is. And over time, *The Hologram* has shifted from depending on my energy to being held collectively. In the beginning, all the gravity was mine. Now it comes from many people, in many languages, in ways I don't even fully know. That change has been both intense and liberating.

Judit Navratil:
I'm interested in how you see the Bay with its constant flux of people coming and going. How hard is it, even if you stay here long-term, to sustain or nourish your community? How has that been for you? Did you have a core group, or was it always changing?

David Wilson:
There is definitely a core group I identified early on, people I gravitated toward as friends and collaborators. Yet roots are put down in different ways. It's reciprocal, circumstantial, sometimes about relationships, finances, or personal circumstances. I've known people who left out of frustration with the Bay or for financial reasons, and others who stayed because they found a constellation of factors—creative engagement, support, a partner, family—that allowed them to remain. For me, my experience has been affirming. Each time a chapter ends, people leave, new people enter, and the circulation itself feels healthy. Project work and friendships naturally overlap, and I've found that dynamic sustains me creatively and socially. Even if you've been in the same place, new chapters appear.
[...]
There's still circulation. I choose to participate, to see what's happening. When I see someone putting love and energy into a project, I want to witness their version of it. That has created a micro-generational community—peers in their 40s and older, but also folks in their 30s and 20s. For example, I used to DJ a monthly dance party called *No Say* at Starline Social Club in Oakland, from 2015 to 2020. It connected me with younger people and kept that energy alive. That era was a mix of before and after having children, which made the experience even more striking. The circulation of the community continued through those shifts.

Judit Navratil:
That's beautiful. I think we might have been at those same parties, dancing back-to-back without knowing.

David Wilson:
Probably!

Judit Navratil:
That leads me to ask you about Burning Man. I'm curious about your insights: overlaps or differences with your projects, and how you distinguish them—or not.

David Wilson:
I've never been to Burning Man, but the structure of my projects has a similar logic: creating spaces where the environment adds potency, and participation is voluntary and improvisational. People joke that it's "David's version" of BM. There's a kindredness, but my practice developed more independently, though with some overlaps in spirit. I know many friends who've had positive experiences there, and I hope to attend someday. Its history is deeply tied to the Bay Area. The most rewarding experiences are those where you navigate and discover your own path rather than follow a heavy-handed structure. Communities often ground themselves around an aesthetic or material affinity, similar to Burning Man.

Judit Navratil:
Yes, the 10 principles seem like a good guideline for any gathering. But there's also a distinction—Burning Man has its own aesthetic and hierarchy, while the contemporary art scene operates differently. I feel your work bridges that gap, bringing playfulness into contemporary art.

David Wilson:
Playfulness is key. It prevents us from becoming hardened. I've always followed my instincts, letting projects be porous so others can enter. That openness keeps the community vibrant.
[...]

Judit Navratil:
And how do you navigate different gatherings, whether they're healing ceremonies, art spaces, or parties?

David Wilson:
Each gathering has its own structure and social currency. You participate according to your interests, your relationships, and the energy you want to contribute.

Judit Navratil:
If I were to move further into some of those other things, and if I try to bring the other elements in, then it often feels a bit far from the contemporary art scene.But if I move more into the contemporary scene, then the playfulness is missing. That's why I'm asking you how this was for you.

David Wilson:
Yeah. I think the word you said, playful, is super important—to be playful and not hardened into whatever it is. I think we all have to follow our hearts and listen to what our antennas tell us—what signals are working for us. All those different versions are equal in terms of what we're seeking as humans: an experience that resonates and sends us somewhere. I don't think it needs to be codified into one thing. You kind of know what makes you happy and fulfilled. Some of the community, whichever circle or version of community you have, should feel porous—like someone else could engage with it or find a way in. If it feels like only a closed group gets it, that quality can shut down some of the power of the experience. Personally, I don't get too focused on hierarchy. I started with organizing house shows in high school and college, playing in bands, making music—that kind of embodied, physical work has informed the way I understand deeper experiences, not just sound but the fuller sensory experience. I love to dip into other people's worlds and try things.
[...]
It's a skill to maintain your own goals and experiences in institutional contexts. I had a period of doing many institutional projects, learning the language and medium of organizing, teasing out what can be done creatively, while returning to self-organized, independent ways—which is always the best.

Judit Navratil:
That's where I see play as a way to disrupt and surprise, even within structured systems. How do you engage with tech, then, in this context?

David Wilson:
Yes. That exchange, purely for pleasure and connection, feels best. Even with dance parties or gatherings with a cover charge, I prefer simply inviting people and caring about the experience. As far as tech, I'm analog-focused—not anti-tech, just instinctively so. Flip phone, physical interactions. But I respect creative work in tech—it's just not my spark. I love print work, cultivating care through it. Mailing invitations, giving things in a real way, is expressive and meaningful. Even small gestures are a dedication and creative commitment. Counterpoint to social media or digital interactions. Early on, before smartphones, letters had attention value. People engaged differently—slower, more fully. Physically delivering mail became a performance—walking routes, making maps, taking hours, experiencing the absurdity and care of the act. Culminating in larger-scale invitations to exhibitions like SF MOMA and Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAMPFA), where sending invitations was part of the artistic performance. We basically made these delivery routes—about 30 different routes, all organized to be more efficient with a hundred invitations per route. We had around 30 people, each taking a bundle of a hundred with their little map, and together we hand delivered three thousand invitations.

Judit Navratil:
And it's also about having those 30 friends helping you deliver everything…

David Wilson:
Yes, and even just collating the mail together, which took forever, was a beautiful event in itself. A night of everyone stuffing envelopes—it became its own kind of celebration. I think, again, going back to the Burning Man idea, it's about thinking creatively about everyday tasks, about being alive, about our bodies and relationships, and the functions of our body. It's powerful to become aware of that. That's a good function for art. Something that could feel like a hustle becomes a beautiful, shared experience. There's a mirror in the way you create something—whether it's an artwork, an event, or any object. The process leaves an imprint on the final experience, sometimes overtly, sometimes in subtle, unnameable ways. I think a lot about process.
[...]
And from there, kids figure out who they are and take responsibility. I can model healthy engagement without being too involved. We chose to get a projector and screen for movies, keeping the experience intentional and separate from general computer use. Technology often pulls us into too many activities at once—having a clear, focused setup helps maintain the experience.

#7 Lucas Dewulf

Judit Navratil:
I'd like to ask you about the practicalities. You mentioned sound as one of the hardest parts, but what are the little tools you've found most useful to synchronize participants—ways to help people arrive in the same space, physically, virtually, emotionally? Some things, like "take a deep breath together," feel quite cliché. What are the funny or unexpected things you've discovered that work well?

Lucas Dewulf:
I draw a lot from *The Art of Gathering* (Parker, 2018, pp. 45–46), a book I love. It gives step-by-step approaches to creating meaningful gatherings, and I often apply its principles to VR experiences or any event I organize. One important idea is to prepare your guests before the event. Ask something of them so they're already invested. This is especially crucial for VR gatherings people join from home, where technical issues are inevitable. Yesterday, for instance, I logged in half an hour early, and my friend joined late and immediately crashed. So you need that buffer space—an arrival period, a kind of foyer where people can settle in. In physical gatherings, that's where you take off your coat, go to the bathroom, get a drink. In VR, it's learning how to move your hands, speak, or customize your avatar. That orientation is essential. Theater is a good model: it has strong hosting infrastructures. But traditional theater struggles with giving people agency, while immersive gatherings rely on it. So I think about onboarding and offboarding as integral parts of design. How do you welcome people into a magic circle of experience? And just as importantly, how do you help them leave it softly?
This is something I learned through LARPing. At the end of an intense experience, participants often sit in a circle. Each shares a word or sentence, then reflects on their character—sometimes speaking in third person—to ease back into themselves. It creates a buffer between the character and the self. In one LARP I joined, based on a Greek myth Oedipus, most players had horrible characters and wanted to shed them immediately. But my character was loving and caring, so I wanted to linger. Returning to myself meant facing my own emotional baggage again. That transition—moving back into daily life—was difficult but important. Allowing time for that reflection ensures the experience resonates longer. Without it, people can snap back too quickly to their real-life accountabilities, and the transformative potential fades. Onboarding and offboarding are key to making experiences last.
[...]
For me, rituals are about stepping out of daily life. The most important element is intention-setting. If you set intentions together—with both the facilitator and the participants—it shifts the dynamic. Everyone is on the same page, working toward something shared. People arrive with different mindsets: some join because they're curious, others because they trust the host always creates fun or unusual experiences. Some are drawn to the concept without fully knowing why. Whatever the case, if you begin by collectively shaping an intention—both personal and group—it gives people a sense of agency. That's important, because often participants are looking to give away their agency. They want someone to lead them with care. But when intentions are shared, people can also guide each other, or guide themselves, within the gathering.I've noticed that time is also a crucial factor. For

example, for my birthdays I used to host 24-hour gatherings. They had clear schedules and structured moments for people to enter and leave, which helped. Different participants brought different roles—family, friends, co-workers—and those expectations sometimes clashed. For instance, my partner wanted me to take care of guests with coffee and food, but my focus was on play. I had to say, "Food is over there. Join me in the play if you want." That tension highlighted something important: time and expectations shape rituals profoundly. Some people can step away from their lives for four hours without distraction—others get pulled back much sooner. So the question becomes, how do you design for those differences? How do you support different tolerances for stepping outside of daily life? I don't have all the answers, but I know intention-setting at the beginning creates a strong foundation for navigating when things don't quite "click."

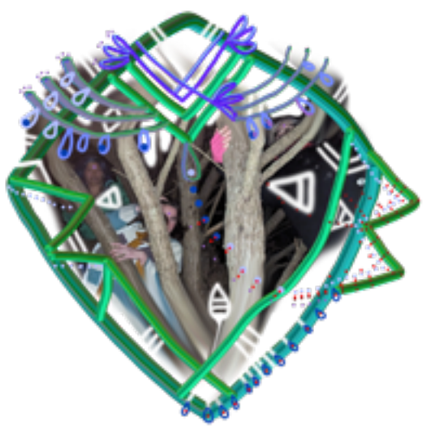
Judit Navratil:
One thing I'm curious about is the borderline between playing and gaming. How do you see the difference?

Lucas Dewulf:
I've been thinking about this a lot, especially while working on an art project about touch and safety—how we connect our bodies physically with others. I found a mentor who creates very playful experiences, and they introduced me to two different types of play. One is rule-based, centered on competition and winning. The other comes from within, a joy of exploring—the kind of play you see in children jumping into puddles. Live-action role-playing (LARP) is rooted in that second type. It's not about winning—it's about creating an enjoyable experience together. In the LARPs I enjoy, you "win" when everyone has a good time. This extends into the world of kink and sexuality too. What's pleasurable for one person might be triggering for another. A heated verbal conflict, for example, can be deeply uncomfortable for some, but thrilling for others. LARPing, kink, and XR all create spaces where those differences can be explored. To me, play is about generating pleasure, curiosity, and connection. It's about leaving behind scarcity thinking—the idea that I need to be better than you, or there won't be enough. Instead, play returns us to a childlike or animal-like state of discovery: exploring the world, ourselves, and each other.
[...]

Judit Navratil:
Some communities seem to understand inclusion and belonging deeper and have a very sensible intentionality to welcome newcomers and integrate them. And I think about temporary communities—what I call "flickering communities." Often, we are in gatherings that might not last long, but for a given moment, they feel real and offer a very strong feeling of belonging. How do you nurture belonging in those temporary spaces? And alongside that, how do you navigate social capital in a world where everything becomes financialized? Thoughts become posts, posts become monetized. On the West Coast especially, people seem to live in calendars, where they schedule 15 minute chats six months in advance. It takes the essence out of encounters. At the same time, the work of gathering and playing with others takes time and energy. How do you frame it in a way that remains sustainable without the soul being sucked out by financial structures?

Lucas Dewulf:
First of all, I want to acknowledge my privilege. I'm a white, cisgender male, educated and, by many measures, socially advantaged. I've had access to capital—financial, but also social. The one area where I sometimes struggle is mental health. But overall, I carry a lot of abundance. That said, I have a strong distrust of authority and capitalism, shaped by trauma growing up. At a certain point, I found community in an open-source makerspace that leaned into cultural and artistic exploration. It was a perfect environment for me after my studies. The community was built on sharing—knowledge, research, skills. I both needed that, and could give back. It's called Nerdlab, and it thrives in a city, Gent with strong social funding, culture, and youth support. That socialist backdrop makes a big difference. Over time, I've realized that needs go far beyond the financial. People want belonging, community, personal development. I use therapeutic worksheets to check in with myself: Do I need rest? Do I need challenge? Am I losing purpose? Communities can help meet those needs. Some people have jobs that pay well but bore them. They're looking for purpose, connection, or playful exploration. Others may have time but not money. So when designing communities, I think less about monetization and more about creating spaces where a range of needs can be met.

Recently, I joined *BridgeMakers*, a U.S.-based community that supports community builders, especially in VRChat. They explore how to create belonging, how to deal with presence and emotion. They've even developed frameworks beyond the classic hero-victim-villain dynamic, adding the "bystander" role, which suddenly made a lot of sense to me. It's an inspiring group, and I'm following their civil discourse program now. I also participate in peer support therapy in VR, which has been really helpful. And I loved that in a recent VR event, they gave out little awards—"this person solved the riddle," things like that. It made the digital social world feel celebratory. Another project I'm excited about is an Erasmus-funded initiative with Nerdlab, focused on long-distance LARPing. The idea is to explore how people can build friendships and community across distance, using tools like VRChat, Discord, and hybrid formats. We'll develop it through a game jam, then present the results at festivals in Belgium and the Netherlands. It's about co-creation and learning by doing. We're also exploring role-playing in VRChat, adapting Scandinavian LARP traditions to digital contexts. It's still early, but there's already a repository of experiments.



Conclusions

NON-FINALITY

This Reflective Document does not aim to close with definitive answers. Instead, it affirms the value of circling and of staying with the questions as they morph. Following Trinh T. Minh-ha, I see storytelling not as means of arriving at fixed conclusions, but as a way of dwelling in continuities, where opposites fold into each other (Trinh, 1989, pp. 119–122): knowledge production can function as sites where dichotomies collapse and binaries lose their grip. My investigation into phygital, ludic communities is not an endpoint but a contribution to a longer continuum of experimentation, where artistic research remains inseparable from processes of unlearning, reorientation, and relational practice. A long distance somersault of learning with and beyond the human. My research has unfolded like a möbius strip: looping across VR headsets, kites, classrooms, and forests—where beginnings reappear as endings, and endings seed new beginnings.

The three research questions that guided this inquiry remain open, but here are the main traces what have been learned through practice:

How do we translate and bring love into our expanded and accelerated digital layers, including AI?
Building the Szívküldi Lakótelep and VR Art Camp taught that love translates through attentiveness: in how digital neighbors are welcomed, how glitches become part of the story, how care circulates even in avatar form. The void of VR helps to enhance our attention to details of social skills that feeds back to animate and fill in this void.

How can these digital layers nurture human connection and phygital communities?
By holding space that are both fragile and resilient—Blob flying on a beach, LDS rolling through landscapes, campfire with Folding Fields Friends—I found that compossible space is less about permanence than about repeated gestures of gathering.

What pedagogical and ludic practices sustain connection and community beyond the human?
Teaching kids art and world-building in VR, or practicing Long Distance Somersaults as collective ritual show that resilience comes from failing softly, from improvisation, and from playful attentiveness to non-human presences that guide us.

These are not final conclusions but provisional offerings, grounded in lived practice.

SYNTHESIS

The threads of this research converge in the recognition that wandering (or long distance somersaulting), hybridity, and syncretism are not deficits but vital conditions for cultivating belonging. As an immigrant artist oscillating between multiple geographies, I inhabit in-between spaces where contradictions coexist. This echoes Joshua Michael Schrei's (2024) reminder that traditions are not closed systems but inherently porous, migratory and continuously rearticulated through displacement and cultural contact. The speculative lens of Octavia Butler's (2005, pp. 197–238) *Amnesty* further underscores this stance: coexistence with radical alterity requires translation, flexibility, and the willingness to inhabit uncomfortable positions between words. Similarly, Wendy Hui Kyong Chun's (2020) notion of "neighborhood" reframes community not as homogeneity, but as proximity that demands engagement across difference, even when such contact generates friction—just as rolling excoriates tailbones and let us smell close-up whatever is on the road. In both frames, care and survival emerge not from withdrawal but from sustained commitment to relational entanglement.

I have described the Szívküldi Lakótelep, VR Art Camp, and related gatherings as attempts to model what Anderwald, Feyertag, and Grond call "compossible spaces": conditions where seemingly incompatible elements can coexist and, through their simultaneity, generate new possibilities for learning and collective orientation (Anderwald, Feyertag and Grond, 2018, pp. 124–132). These practices—whether temporary, small-scale, or dispersed—function as laboratories for inhabiting multiplicity and instability while maintaining a horizon of care.

And finally, the conceptual trajectory of this research circles back to Lygia Clark and Suely Rolnik's interpretation of the möbius strip (Proença, 2019), where subjectivity is folded continuously between the familiar and the strange. Jorge Luis Borges' (1971, pp. 154–165) short story offers an analogous image of The Aleph, the loop contains perspectives at once, and all möbius cycles can dissolve into eternity. *The Aleph*[47] is a mysterious point that contains all other points: all times, all places, all perspectives—eternity. Taken together, these references frame the möbius as an ongoing cycle in which artistic research can host contradictory experiences, non-human agencies, and technological transformations without reducing them to singular narratives. Rolling somersaults, inflating Blob, or weaving stories are ways of inhabiting this paradox: fragile, flickering, yet deeply connective.

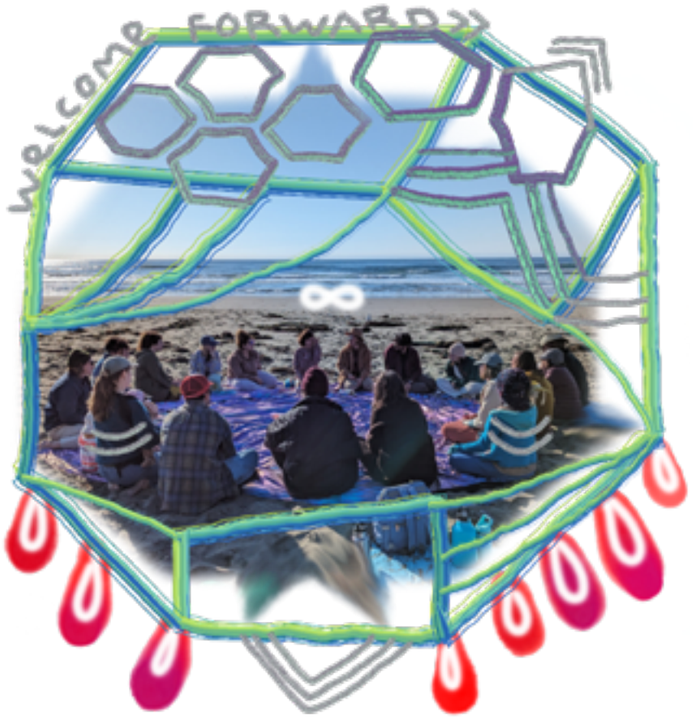
47 *The Aleph* is a mysterious point that contains all other points: all times, all places, all perspectives—eternity (Borges, 1971).

WELCOME TO FASTFORWARD

As we move into a future shaped by AI and accelerated digitization, the urgency is to cultivate phygital care—practices that resist ossification, nurture resilience, and teach how to hold each other. Pedagogically, this means preparing new generations not just to acquire technical fluency, but to collaborate with joy, to dare to fail softly, to dream a future together further than one could alone.

In this sense, Szívküldi Lakótelep is not a finished neighborhood but a rehearsal: a series of gatherings, tent flying, and somersaults that practice how to live with multiplicity. It affirms the importance of cultivating experimental, ludic communities that embrace complexity and interdependence. Rather than stabilizing categories or offering definitive solutions, the contribution of this work lies in demonstrating how phygital artistic practices can foster collective learning environments where human, non-human, digital, and embodied relations are held together—flickering and provisional, yet profound—within the eternal loop of möbius cycles.

Following the eights of the möbius—what inflates must deflate: breathe in, breathe out; what gathers must disperse: Life is Circus, comes and goes—yet gestures of love persist, echoing through each cycle in varied ways. These are not conclusions but invitations—to play, to care, to imagine, to fast forward together into futures that are always unfolding.



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Credits

All images are listed in the order of their appearance.
Page numbers refer to their placement in this thesis.

Cover Judit Navratil, **Trans-sources** (digital collage, 2020). 25 × 21 cm.
Commissioned cover artwork for Quiet Lightning literary journal.
Used as the cover image of this thesis.

19 Judit Navratil, **Szívküldi Lakótelep Guide** (digital collage, 2020). 14 × 10 cm.
Made for the cover of Szívküldi Lakótelep Tour Guide Compilation video.
Exhibited in The Future Emergent, Dream Farm Commons, Oakland, 2020.

21 Judit Navratil, **Flying on kites** (digital collage in virtual reality, 2024). 10 × 7 cm.
Used as a "kite" in the kite field *#maythegoodwindscarryus* in Szívküldi Lakótelep.
Photo: Ferenc Navratil.

23 Judit Navratil, **Primary Mothers** (tour guide video of virtual reality collage with embedded Long Distance Somersault, 2020). VR area: My Hammock is Your Hammock in Szívküldi Lakótelep.
Embedded LDS: Primary Mothers (2020), 26 rolls together with Teyu and Miyu Han,
San Francisco, CA, USA. Video: Abe Han. Duration: 1 min 08 s.

25 Judit Navratil, **BaseBase** (digital collage in virtual reality, 2024). 10 × 10 cm.
Used as a location marker. VR area: Map Room in Szívküldi Lakótelep.

26 Judit Navratil, **Goodbye, Transsaulted Islands, it was a bliss!**
(tour guide video of virtual reality collage, 2022).
VR area: Transsaulted Islands in Szívküldi Lakótelep. Duration: 8 min 38 s.

27 **Festival of the Impossible** (Minnesota Street Project, San Francisco, CA, USA, 2018).
Curated by Joyce Grimm. Installation view. Photo: Judit Navratil.

28 **Digital Doulas Workshop**
(group exhibition Topophilia, SWIM Gallery, San Francisco, CA, USA, 2019).
Workshop documentation. Photo: Yarrow Slaps (curator).

31 Judit Navratil, **Poster for VR Art Camp's Show and Tell event** (collage and design, 2021)
Participating artists: Cate White and Sean Keating;
Association of Mouth and Brain Painting Artists of the World
(AMBPA: Judit Fischer and Miklós Mécs).

32 **Still from VR Art Camp Show and Tell event in Connie Zheng's Planet Greenhouse**
(social VR studio), September 2020. A VR greenhouse (built by Judit Navratil)
populated with speculative seeds made from 2018–2020.

35 Judit Navratil, **Art Camp Commons** (tour guide video of virtual reality collage, 2020).
VR area: Art Camp Commons in Szívküldi Lakótelep. Duration: 8 min 40 s.

37 **Still from Wave Meetings'** exchange—collaboration with Annie Albagli (2021).

39 Judit Navratil, **Connector Roll** (tour guide video of virtual reality collage with embedded Long Distance Somersault, 2022). VR area: Comp–ASS in Szívküldi Lakótelep.
Embedded LDS: Connector Roll (2022), Salt Spring Island, BC, Canada. 11 rolls.
Video: Erin Morris. Duration: 1 min 29 s.

40 Judit Navratil, **Transsaulted Island** (social VR collage in Mozilla Hubs, 2021).
VR area: Judit Navratil's social VR studio space in VR Art Camp.

41 Judit Navratil, **#maythegoodwindscarryus** (mixed media installation of the kite flying field in Szívküldi Lakótelep, 2023). Installation view in Holographic Sky.
Curated by Pete Belkin.
Minnesota Street Project / SFArtsED Gallery, San Francisco, CA, USA, 2023–2024.

47 Judit Navratil, **days of late periods** (tour guide video of virtual reality collage, 2023).
VR area: days of late periods in Szívküldi Lakótelep. Duration: 7 min 20 s.

53 Judit Navratil, **Long Distance Somersault Nest** (tour guide video of virtual realitycollage,2021).
VR area: Long Distance Somersault Nest in Szívküldi Lakótelep. Duration: 7 min 20 s.

55 Judit Navratil, **Life is Circus** (Long Distance Somersault, 2021).
Balaton Felvidék, Hungary. Video: Abe Han. Duration: 19 s.

57 Judit Navratil, **Méta Circle,** Finissage of exhibition My Hammock is Your Hammock
(digital collage, 2020). Created for the finissage of My Hammock is Your Hammock,
Dream Farm Commons, Oakland.

59 Judit Navratil, **Miyu in Blob** (2023). Rodeo Beach, CA, USA.
Video: Judit Navratil. Duration: 4 min 06 s.

61 Judit Navratil, **Flying Tent** (2021). Salt Spring Island, BC, Canada.
Video: Abe Han. Duration: 7 min 02 s.

63 **Velella velella** (by-the-wind sailor jellyfish, photograph, Pacific Ocean, 2023).
Photo: Judit Navratil.

64 Judit Navratil, **Playa** (Long Distance Somersault, 2020). Black Rock Desert, NV, USA.
Video: Abe Han. Duration: 19 s.

64 Judit Navratil, **Gazdagréti Lakótelep** (Long Distance Somersault, 2015).
Budapest, Hungary. Still edited and used as a digital asset.
VR area: Long Distance Somersault Nest in Szívküldi Lakótelep.
Video: Zsuzsanna Vincze. Duration: 4 min 29 s.

69 Judit Navratil, **Circles around kite** (Long Distance Somersault, 2024).
Gray Whale Cove Beach, CA, USA. Video: András Zalavári. Duration: 18 s.

71 **LDS Group Rolling and Protector Making Workshop**
(Headlands Center for the Arts, CA, USA, 2019).
Video: Christoph Steger. Duration: 1 min 12 s.

77 Judit Navratil, **HOME** (Long Distance Somersault, 2016). Berkeley, CA, USA.
Video: Mary Rhodellmeier. Duration: 8 min 17 s.

84 **Second IRL Art Camp, Campfire Session** (Bodega Dunes, CA, USA, 2023).
Photo: Abe Han.

87 **Second IRL Art Camp,** Cultural Commentary Project by Danielle Siembieda
(Bodega Dunes, CA, USA, 2023). Photo: Judit Navratil.

89 **Exhibition Phygital Care** (Root Division, San Francisco, CA, USA, 2024–2025).
Curated by Judit Navratil.

91 **Folding Fields: Tactile Consumption** (participatory performance by Tasya Abbott and
Kiril Bolotnikov, Jug Handle Beach, CA, USA, 2025).
Curated by Judit Navratil. Duration: 60 min. Photo: Judit Navratil.

99 **Second IRL Art Camp, Dancing with Trees** (Bodega Dunes, CA, USA, 2023).
Photo: Judit Navratil. (Digital collage in virtual reality, 2024).
8 × 7 cm. Used as a "kite" in the kite field *#maythegoodwindscarryus* in Szívküldi Lakótelep.

99 **Second IRL Art Camp, Blob Time** (Bodega Dunes, CA, USA, 2023).
Photo: Judit Navratil. (Digital collage in virtual reality, 2024).
10 × 9 cm. Used as a "kite" in the kite field
#maythegoodwindscarryus in Szívküldi Lakótelep.