Lieutenant Butterfly: Exploring Videogames through Ordinary Psychedelic Play.

Phil James

Abstract

Employing a *psychedelic method*[1], a sketched based process has been adopted for developing software artworks that are informed by traditional art practices, videogames and notions of play. This method recalls memories of psychedelic experiences and dreams, as well as drawing on experience of self through poetic writing and metaphor that seeks to look across the range of works produced. Through this process foundations and assumptions regarding the researchers own work, method, and my relationship to videogames is explored.

This practice-based research has been further informed and refigured through a specific ritualistic practices, and readings of philosophical works that expose practice in order to reveal spatiality, and finally collapse and connect selected sketches and artefacts into a single entity.

The starting point for this inquiry was *Lieutenant Butterfly* - a software work that has been developed and expanded. In developing this work, I was able to position this work and the related practice in relation to videogames and culture. The title is kept as a reference to this work, and marks it as the foundation.

Videogames are treated in this research as another world in which ordinary things exist, just like our own. As we cognitively move in relation to them, new places are created - new fertile sites densely populated with emergent things. The conclusions to this research are a series of discussions that relate to the ethics of practice within these subtle environments, acknowledging that transient-selves live there, and that to communicate with those inhabitants we must understand their ecologies in order to go on living and working in relation.

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[1] Discussed in Section 1.1

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Phil James

Acknowledgements

1: Introduction: What is a Lieutenant Butterfly?

Produced in 2013, Lieutenant Butterfly was what I considered at the time to be prototype videogame work, a work that I ultimately 'failed to complete' (images in *Appendix 5*). After completing the prototype, I had no idea 'where to go'. It seemed to have become too unwieldy to work with, there was no audience, nor place to view it, and I gave up pursuing and developing it. Arriving at Colab in 2014, I was hoping to have space to re-make or further develop this prototype. In reflecting on my practice holistically, rethinking this work gave me new space to reconsider how I approach artwork, and allowed me to release the controlled grip I thought I had on the prototype, as I came to understand it's significance.

The thesis describes a particular methodology, and a means of practice in relation to videogames.

The question posed is– What does it mean to "make work" in relation to videogames? - how does one make a living, and live a healthy life when making work that is, and is not, yet surrounds videogames?

1.1: What about the Psychedelic Ordinary?

The psychedelic can be partially described here as a seeing across and into volumes, and a shifting of focus akin to a scuba diving experience - thinking, sensing, and moving, dreams, writing, play, ways of seeing, attention, sexuality and desire - all come to play a part in this practice. Such a psychedelic practice purposefully allows what may be perceived as fantastical, naïve assumptions into the work – in order to interrogate what they might mean for the development of the artist.

1.2: Motivation

There are plenty of burnt out, horrific experiences, and pressure that come with making work in this field of videogames. This has partially to do with assumptions and biases related to surrounding economic and social contexts, let alone the pressures for an artist or developer trying to make work, in deciding where to go. Videogame audiences are not usually presented with critically reflective work, or even work in development – so that when work does arise that attempts to elicit critical discussion or is in a developing state, aggressive responses from subgroups of those audiences can overwhelm interesting productive critical dialogue. General media portrayal of videogames can also be seen as problematising the production of work in this form, and reductive critical language is often used to describe them.

While this research doesn't pretend to understand a solution to this problem, or even attempt an extended discussion of the causes of this problem - it tries to present an accessible method of artistic practice that embraces videogames.

Need for this research is also reflected in the poetic title. Videogames are a paradoxical collision of many things – art, science, culture and poetics. The Lieutenant metaphor used in the title projects a vision of videogames as a combination of the sub-volcanic militaristic forces that initially produced them, and the blue of the deep creative psyche, So formally, the exegesis indirectly acknowledges these issues of historicity and representation, and identifies videogames as a site in a critical state.

1.3: Overview of Research Method

An overview of the research method, which will be further discussed in detail in Section 3.

This is qualitative, relativistic research, adopting a first and third person phenomenological methodology that accommodates the personal nature of the work, and recognises that the research is interested in the phenomena of consciousness that relate to making work with this particular method, and the implications of this method in relation to the type of work being made. This first and third person approach is seen through the approach of Wolff-Michael Roth in his "First Person Methods: Towards an Empirical Phenomenology of Experience" (Roth, 2012) - in particular, through his sections discussion on vision and sense, memory, dreams, and crises and suffering as sources of learning. These are discussed in detail in Section 3.1.

As the lived experience of an artist working with spirituality in relation to videogames, this study of self and consciousness can be considered a local site of work, seeking to establish knowledge of this kind of practice in relation to videogames, so that shared experience may be extrapolated or compared. The subject of Psychedelics - as a way of looking at the world, as well as that which informs creating videogame work in relation to spirituality is an area seldom talked about publically, so making this phenomenological study as part of public discourse intends to be useful as not only self critique, but also a relatable resource, to provoke conversation.

The research is bracketed through what I previously termed "fantastical naïve assumptions" – which can also be looked at as the basis of certain personally held spiritual beliefs that purposefully inform the practice. These spiritual beliefs are detailed as part of the Method section in 3.1.1.

The artefacts of the research are inclusive of work samples, selections from the painting portfolio, academic writing and formal blog (some of which is referenced in appendices), documentation of the work itself, and a Virtual Reality work.

The research has been developed primarily through a sketch-based method combined with an aggregated process of software design in order to construct and develop the work. Digital painting is employed as a method, firstly of navigating and identifying subtle sites that are uncovered when making work, and secondly providing foundations which the work rests on. Painting also provides an everyday sense of time within the work, in the sense that it acts as a marker of moments in daily practice. The writing of this research also engaged in playful practice informed by readings and descriptions of personal psychedelic and dreamlike experiences.

Sketches in this context are taken as inclusive of writing, the Unity3D scenes (a real-time game engine) and other software programs, physical drawing, digital sculpture, and audio manipulation. Once these *sketches* are materialised, methods are employed to collapse them together, and interrogate their order. This interrogation hopes to discuss tangibility in relation to digital works, as well as try to make other connections in the seemingly disconnected diverse range of material that is produced.

Simultaneously, a public design blog (*www.philllllljames.me*) has been maintained engaging with this process. The writing from this both formal and poetic blog, has been necessary in order to keep track of design additions and changes and is not dissimilar to a 'change-log' in software design.

1.4: Research Question and Aims

This research seeks to understand how videogames and their related practices can be informed by sketch-based processes derived from conventional artistic fields as seen through dreams and psychedelic experiences.

It seeks to understand how videogames, informed by such sketched based processes derived from traditional art practice, dreams, psychedelic experiences and through play will change the way videogame practice can be performed, and in what ways this performed sacred will in turn, affect videogames. It also seeks to understand the ways in which this psychedelic ordinary can profanate[2] videogames, in order to make new pathways for them to travel on.

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[2] In terms of Agamben's sense of the profane, that which is left over being separated from the traditional 'divine share'. See 2.3 for further discussion.

2: Literature Review

2.1: From the Psychedelic to the Everyday

Daniel Pinchbeck(2003) is a useful point of entry into the research. His notion of bringing the psychedelic experience back into the everyday has useful parallels in current videogame practices and texts, and his journalistic processes and writing reveal several means of working in relation to videogames.

He begins his book with a description of his experience in a Bwiti initiation ritual - in which participants ingest a substance called Iboga, which has some specific psychedelic properties. Framing this experience includes the travel that led up to it, his trip to Gabon, his traumatic meeting with the King of the tribe, and the experience itself - that was held in a concrete bunker far from safety. At some stages he felt fearful for his wellbeing. He thought of Africa as a continent he never wanted to visit but says of the experience afterwards;

"it seemed as all the difficulties were kind of a test, an ordeal prepared before me before I could even reach the ordeal of the initiation" (p. 13)

He was drawn to this specific experience as he felt he was in a kind of spiritual crisis. This being 'drawn into' a moment reflects that the site for critical change is crucially the self, and that the self forms the foundation of where that transformation occurs. This is seen chemically as well as spiritually.

"…[the ibogaine molecule] has a structure similar to serentonin, which is believed to perform many functions, and helps regulate sensory information — whether sense data trickles, flows, pours, or floods into the brain…" (p. 35)

This flooding of the senses, combined with Iboga in this ritual setting enabled some surreal psychedelic, perceptual changes. He encountered brief moments with disinterested spirits, strange women beckoning him to take strange paths, and windows that opened up before him. He encountered strange phrases forming before him - with certain poetics that held resonance for his own life. In fact, a post analysis of the process gave him the feeling that it was specifically a lens for his own history, his life, upbringing, and potentially future interactions, as opposed to a journey to the 'African Spirit World'. These fantastical elements naturally lend themselves to a videogame context, where a collision between symbolically imagery, text and interaction can occur as part of the natural language. Of course, in the regular consumption of such aspects of videogames this spiritual experience is not experienced consistently. In videogames it is only sometimes, for a certain person at a certain time that a feeling of overwhelming resonance occurs, and of course, it is not the role of videogames to try to consistently recreate these specific experiences necessarily. Videogames can be a site for exploration of similar poetics. This sometimes occurs as a literal exploration of religion. In the

game "Cosmology of Kyoto" (Softedge,1993), an adventure game notoriously enjoyed by Roger Ebert, the player explores 'a visual mindscape of old Japan' as represented by the city of Kyoto around the year 1000 – complete with manifestations of common mythology, with gods (Kami) and supernatural beings (yokai) present. The game also contains karma mechanics that – when the player is killed, enables representative experiences of reincarnation described in Buddhism. There is a literal exploration of an encyclopedic reference here, that tends towards the phenomenological rather than the objective.
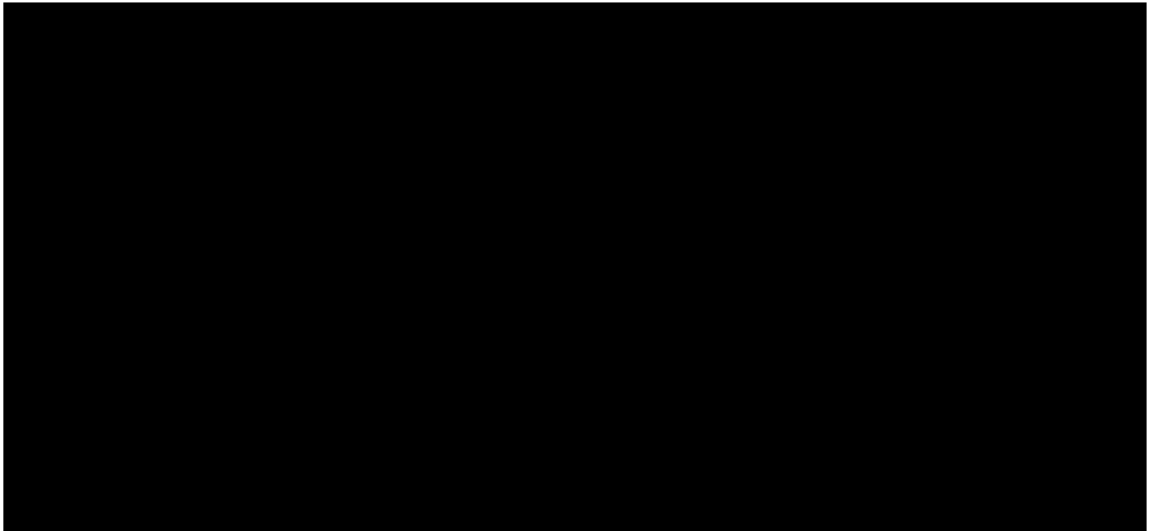
Figure 1: Scene from Cosmology of Kyoto (Softedge, 1993)

Pinchbeck had also engaged in ceremonial experiences to do with Mycology (Fungi). In Huautla, on a trip searching for a mushroom ceremony, he was asked: "What do you do when you take the mushrooms in your country?"(p.52) to which he responded that he often took walks in nature. This is very common practice – and reflects the well-known psychedelic common sense about maintaining a good 'set and setting'[3] when preparing for such an experience. The obvious videogame parallel here is the instructional – 'turn the lights down' moment, seen commonly at the start of survival horror videogames[4], which has the player adjusting brightness (gamma) levels of their monitor in order to best recreate the intended visual experience. Perhaps videogames need to be even more direct and instructive to assist the player in determining an alternative setting, and challenging the existing common public and private spaces in which they are consumed.

In describing the ritual itself, Pinchbeck notes that some of the ritual "borrowed elements from the Catholic Mass" (p.52) as there was some incense that was used during the ceremony. He also notes that there is a suggestion of the decadence of enabling such a ceremony - suggesting that the ceremony has been corrupted through foreign participation. Foreign

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[3] The context in which the psychoactive experience is to take place – 'set' being the mindset and 'setting' being the place.
[4] Such as "Amnesia, The Dark Descent" (Frictional Games, 2010) – See also Figure 1.

popularity with Iboga ceremonies has increased in recent years, such that there is a thriving tourist industry related to it.[5] This research adopts many ready-made objects as part of the method, and those objects have also served as a kind of shorthand into a specific spiritual experience. For videogames, any piece of hardware, symbolic language or icon can be adopted to support a specific experience. This is far from corrupting, but an aggregate – helpful to the player/participant – and sometimes this even plays as critical counterpoint to the experience itself, as in the deliberate practice of using older systems in modern development, such as Bogost's 'game poems' for the Atari VCS. ("A Slow Year," n.d.). Adopting systems that are 'out of date' has many values, one of which is challenging consumer bias to looking for videogames on current available platforms. Development demands have been historically prohibitative - developing for specific game platforms would require extra effort to incorporate peripherals from differently branded systems, whereas picking up an icon of Jesus and using it in a mushroom ceremony is effortless, and perhaps adds dimensions to the experience.

The MAME (Multiple Arcade Machine Emulator) development can be seen as one such multiple-dimension effort, the notion of 'adding more' as essential for cross-pollination, archival reading and experience. MAME allows a computer to become an archive of multiple videogames that were once only available on different, disparate hardware, and together with a complete romset, allows travel and thinking through videogames as a whole.

There are ethical implications here. Some consumers of specific hardware brands hold these in high regard, and would view people from outside communities developing in this way as corruptive aggregations of the brands intellectual property, as well as perhaps even as a loss of purity. In opposition to this, Liz Ryerson's "A 21st Century Digital Art Manifesto" (Ryerson, n.d.) talks about how hip hop culture was amplified by a sudden black out in the Bronx in 1977 that resulted in looting on a large scale. This led to a large amount of DJ equipment being distributed illegally. She describes this as a form of opposition against the ideological or market dominance that was crucial to the development of hip hop.

> ..in systems built around absolute unfairness, it makes sense that a thing piracy becomes the great equalizer.
>
> I think it's more obvious than ever now that things that are put out there in the world are going to be re-appropriated, re-purposed and remixed. in the age of easy access to tools and easy distribution, it's something we can do readily and with ease. regardless of whatever judgment you'd like to put on that, it's something that happens and will continue to happen.
>
> ..but as we've seen, cultural change doesn't come from the top down. it doesn't come from venture capital, or non-profits, or particularly insightful talks at conferences. it doesn't come from a particularly well-built systems (which inevitably reinforce existing power structures). it comes from community. it comes from organization. it comes from reappropriation. it comes from chaos, strife, and struggle. it comes from changing the context, and the way that we

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[5] Travel advertisements for such experiences - (ravevel to Gabon - Iboga || ICEERS - International Center for Ethnobotanical Education, Research & Services," n.d.)

think about and communicate with each other, and how we have discussions. it comes from the bottom up (Ryerson, n.d.).

Videogame, and videogame asset[6] piracy is as widespread as other forms of product piracy. Increasingly, individual assets from stores such as Unity3D's[7] become available throughout torrent and forum sites online. Similarly to the problems encountered by the Bronx's store vendors in the above example, the developers who create these assets bear the burden of this kind of piracy. Larger companies are able distance themselves from this kind of loss, taking a share in what profit there is to make from the sales from the official digital storefront. To what extent these tools are re-appropriated and affect change in videogames remains unclear, due to the obvious legalities of the information involved. Assets can thus be seen as appropriated means to create specific experiences, in a similar 'whatever works' way that the ceremonial usage of combinations of religious items in the mushroom ceremonies are used. With this view, piracy is not seen as an irreverent act, but as an act of a determined 'small guy' in relation to the 'big guy' – perhaps even in the sky. Of course, it would probably be naïve to think that all piracy is conducted with this kind of justification.

Pinchbeck also references Walter Benjamin, and his incomplete "Arcades Project". The Arcades Project (Benjamin, Tiedemann, Eiland, & McLaughlin, 2002) was a piece of writing based on the arcades of Paris in the 19th century, described in it's preface as "the blueprint project for an unimaginably massive and labyrinthine architecture - a dream city, in effect." (p. xi) - this is related to Benjamin's idea of awakening. Pinchbeck explains that "Benjamin thought that visionary intoxication, achieved through drugs or other means, could be a "profane illumination," shattering the hypnotic trance of modern life." (Pinchbeck, p.3)

> On the personal level, awakening is of course, something we do every morning without a thought. We suddenly emerge into ourselves, arriving in our beds from the evanescent dream dimensions. Occasionally we remember vivid narratives and scenes from our unconscious meanderings. At other times we can reconstruct the stories only with an effort, searching inside our minds for clues to patterns that quickly fizzle out and disappear if we don't make the effort to pursue them, if we don't make the effort to retrace our steps through the labyrinth. Most often we don't remember anything at all, and we are happier for it. (Pinchbeck, p.58)

Here Pinchbeck reinforces the necessity for movement - for the importance of meandering through and creating our own complex experience. Wolf-Michael Roth (Roth, 2012) in his chapter on 'memory in context' (p.95-6) also recounts the difference between sitting at a desk reading research notes about an experience, and a specific recollection during an experience, remembering locations just before they presented themselves. He discusses this difference in location and movement as a 'trace', a kind of transient mark on self, that once activated

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[6] A Software component, 3D Model, Texture, Audio, or other data that comprises a videogame.

[7] Unity 3D Asset Store (store.unity3d.com)

triggers additional information at the moment just before or during an experience, before the remembered event or location itself.

Videogames are, and contain systems that are activated and deactivated. Roth expands on his thinking about memory with the idea that the trace contains in itself the concept of erasure, suggesting that it itself is a thing that can "erase it's own presence, constantly threatened by irremediable disappearance."(p.97). We can certainly read that videogames are systems that also threaten their own disappearance through the modernisation of their own technologies, but this also allows us to see that the same complexities in the relationship between writing an experience and the memory of the experience itself becomes inevitably mirrored in the development of videogames and the experiences of the developer.

Videogames mostly become artefacts that recall Walter Benjamin's dream filled sleep – "advertisements, popular entertainment, and public architecture are natural expressions of the dreaming collective." (p. 58) Perhaps in order to allow preservation of these expressive traces, there must be some sort of memorial process or path, an infrastructure we can travel in order to keep what is important close to us, and recognise the fragility of these traces, since surrounding systems and houses of information capital have no ethical responsibility to make those remarkable again.

Pinchbeck implies that the kind of action, or quality of movement we take as we travel through these subtle spaces matters - he regrets the loss of fantastic, performed animist beliefs that were shed around the time of Shakespeare, and that at the same time as 'The Tempest' - trials and witch hunts were going on in order to enact this shedding. He talks about the trance-like movement Shakespeare's characters usually embody, as they don't awaken, but sink into deeper levels of trance. He believes that this could partially allow the audience to cathartically experience those soon-to-be-lost beliefs. (p. 64) There are also descriptions of 'night flights' by people in ritual attire of goddesses, in order to perform divinatory trance sessions. (p.67) He thinks that it has been the job of artists to create "pallid simulations" (p.68) of these lost experiences, in substitution for their actual travel.

He also explores shamanism and it's performative relations. The Burning Man Festival becomes a major feature in the writing - an interesting line from one interviewee, who calls it a "cybernetic pulse engine" (p.82), featuring giant clay phalluses, and other interactive lit-up pornographic body parts suggests that this is a performative site of transformation ritual that literally stands in for bodies within that community. The implicit body is operated on.

The implicit body of videogames is also the communities and subgroups that play them, and how they operate in particular. Live "Let's Play's" – playthroughs of videogames on live

streaming services like Twitch or Youtube, have a relation to this performed shamanism, which in some instances has the potential to transform public perception.

Crypt Worlds: Your Darkest Desires, Come True (Lilith, 2013) is a free, independent game referred to by it's creator Lilith, as 'the piss game'. A fantastic videogame that uses urination as a core mechanic, in it you can explore dreamlike dungeons of the mind, populated by strange alternate versions of MacDonalds, multiple fake Indiana Joneses, and the work-dungeons of Cliff Bezinski. When played by Vinny from the streaming collective 'Vinesauce' ([Vinesauce] Vinny - Crypt Worlds: Your Darkest Desires, Come True (part 1), n.d.), the act of playing also becomes performance, giving the videogame new meaning as Vinny becomes a shamanistic player, portraying characters, and reading dialogue out loud. In performing this experience publicly Vinny enables it's digestion for those who would usually not encounter it themselves. In videogames, the performative site is time independent, non physical, and potentially can be spread across multiple viewpoints, and can be recorded for later experience or archival.
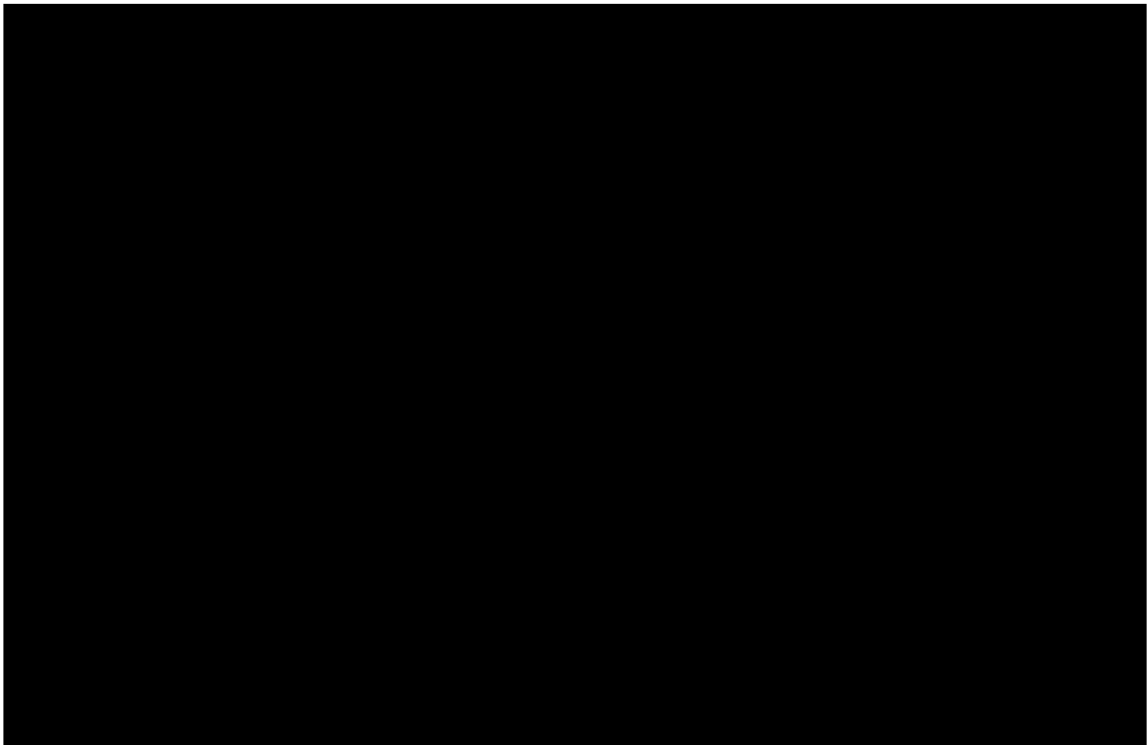
Figure 2: A door activated by urination - Crypt Worlds, Your Darkest Desires Come True! (Lilith, 2013)

Jan Verwoert, an art critic (*discussed further in 2.3*) would refer to this kind of performance in Crypt Worlds as playing a comic – playing "the ham". In this play style, Vinny is situated in a safe zone of comedy/shamanism, as he does not begin to lose his identity and is still seen as the common man, with one arm around the audience, collectively poking fun at the thing the audience finds strange, affords him a distance from the object. Perhaps for works far outside the common digestive realm this is useful. It might be that the reverse is also true – losing identity through roleplay, and playing a shaman in the same diverse way that Andy Kaufman

performed comedy, would work well in relation to popular videogame works in order to break down and interrogate their accepted values, but also to drastically deconstruct self and interrogate it psychedelically.

2.2 Lighting Fires - Poetics and Sensation

I think I know what it means to sit in the sunshine and enjoy it's benefits. Sitting in the sunshine has a long history that you can feel directly by sitting in it. It's self evident what it means to sit in the sunshine for too long, and it's value is not vague nor elusive. It's tangibility is never drawn into question as we feel it.

I also think I intuit what it means to sit in front of a screen and enjoy it's benefits too. The light from a screen is certainly different from the light of the sun – perhaps similar to a fire in that it is vividly visible in darkness, but this light is more commonly referred to as 'glare'. Perhaps we can turn this into an introspective one.

If making work for screens means making works that reflect the activity of fires then perhaps the shared subjects that surround firelight are relevant - communality, shared story hallucinations, playing music and cooking food, and watching the movement of the flames introspectively. In fact, when considering the fire as a means to keep warm before going to sleep, we may imagine that as we cross the waking/sleeping boundary the forms that become illuminated are reaching over from this liminal zone. Screen media helps us to experience and explore these transitory forms, as the overwhelming influence of psychoanalysis and myth being translated into movies remains imminently present.

In relation to these notions, the idea of tangibility in screen-based media remains interesting. Digital Art as a whole perhaps has no concern with tangibility at all, if we assume the tangible to mean assigning monetary value. Digital distribution services are increasingly becoming the norm. I guess my interest in tangibility has something to do with it's paradoxical definitiveness.

 My interest is held by paradoxical objects, absolutely. A fire has a fluid formlessness, and a strong smell. Scientific materialism (in the form of howstuffworks.com) tells us; "atoms in one gaseous compound break their bonds with each other and recombine with available oxygen atoms in the air to form new compounds plus lots more heat" ("How Fire Works," n.d.).
We become aware of how different flammable fuels catch fire at different temperatures, and how the fuel affects the fire's behaviour.

I become very interested in what compositions of metaphysics helps ideas catch, and stay alight. I wonder how the howstuffworks article on metaphysical idea-lighting would describe itself. Perhaps the answer is poetic. Janet Frame (Janet Frame, Stories & Poems, 2004) has a poem that reminds me of this imaginary description. In 'The Spell'; (pg 242)

Into one medium-sized sliced-pineapple tin
left overnight to gather Northeast Valley household
smoke, and fog surrounding the green farm on the valley
slope where each morning sheep bleat and dogs bark,
                                            put one thread
of crocus budded two days, one frost petal from a south-
facing
window pane, one flame from a garden bonfire,
one beam from a peak-hour television programme,
enough light to flood, darkness to fill
the four leaks in the kitchen roof that will never be mended
Then taking as much as a skyful of Swampy Clouds,
a haul that everyone will say is impossible,
geranium-red clouds, tussock-brown, silver and pearl
sea gull colour
bomb-shape, blossom-shape, stir
and over the brew keep watch all night with rain
until the spell erupting into vivid morning
miraculously overflows the pink and white terraces of sky
and light on inspection,
descends
gentle with early daffodils but flashing crude
mirrors to date more precisely the wrinkled
local specimens of human skin
The time drops into history and the history books
Questions are asked
what was the picture of life before the Spell?
Within dying memory was it all so cruel?
Noone wants to remember.
The green and gold lava of spring has set,
                                    completing
                                            the burial.

(Frame, 2004)

In thinking about this poem, I am interested in the lineage of objects described. A pineapple tin[8], and a thread of crocus, a beam from the tv. The beam signals a transformation to the transcendental to me, and the imagery of these objects becoming transcendent leads the reader into gradually into the abstract.

To me, the poem shows how our own histories infuse objects with their suchness's, and cathartically sacrificing them as fuel on the fire could be a crucial activity in digital media making/fire tending. It also talks to the miraculous overflows that come from attending to a work after the right amount of time, and the introspection that follows.

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[8] The first banal object - the pineapple tin - first signals to me the importance of the initial fuel for this metaphysical fire – the tin is paradoxically the fuel and also the container for all these 'impossible' objects.

From whose perspective is 'The Spell' being told? Is it Janet Frame directly to us, or is this a collective wisdom of some kind? This perspective shift, if duplicitous, as well as the cookbook nature of the poem, perhaps suggests that there is a finite spell, but infinite variations.

"Muffins, Infinite Ways" ("Muffin Recipes - Banana Nut, Blueberry, Cranberry or Bran Muffins," n.d.) is in a small section of a vegetarian cookbook I became interested in whilst writing this. We can contemplate creative activity in this particular way – there's a base that's infinitely variable, with ingredients that are also banal and infinite. In this recipe the particular infinite has a precise number, however, a recommended set of muffins that is suggested to be baked. There is a missing infinite subset it seems, a universe of unbaked muffins. This seems to be quite a optimistic notion, and always remains exterior to the recipe.

For making works that utilise light from screens, a poetic calling attention to what is outside of a work can not only be thought of not only through the representation of the subjects on the screen, but also through thinking through poetic questions questioning the nature of the work. If we think through materiality, we might ask 'What is this light not?' or 'What is this light also?', or 'What is outside this light?'. And perhaps, if we can come up with answers to these, provide paths for the creator, participant, viewer or player of these light-works to approach the same poetic.

The sensation of screen light is neither the warmth of the sun or fire, either. It has a restless effect on the body, robbing us of sleep. Stern(2013) reminds us that we are a body when we engage with interactive work, and that our combined movement, thought, and feeling produces a certain embodiment.

> When we move and think and feel, we are, of course, a body. This body is constantly changing, in and through its ongoing relationships. This body is a dynamic form, full of potential. It is not "a body," as thing, but embodiment as incipient activity. Embodiment is a continuously emergent and active relation. It is our materialization and articulation, both as they occur, and about to occur. Embodiment is moving-thinking-feeling, it is the body's potential to vary, it is the body's relations to the outside. And embodiment, I contend, is what is staged in the best interactive art.(Stern, p. 2).

William Kentridge's work is discussed in the first chapter as an example of immediacy in relation to the term sensation. Kentridge is an animator working with charcoal drawings, who uses a "trace and erase method.." that "…emerge through a labor- intensive process, where he adds a mark of charcoal on paper, erases another, walks to his camera a few feet away and shoots a couple of frames, then walks back to his drawing to do some more mark-making and erasing before snapping a few more shots. He incorporates erasure and redrawing, walking, looking, and photographing into his ongoing moving, viewing, thinking, and making." (p. 26)

This method is important to Stern as it shows everything, the mistakes, the gestures, the movement of the artist in the space, but also - in the limited form of the media, " [we as

viewers] imagine that which is not there, yet could be – whether in the past of his narrative, in the present mode of affect, or in the future traces we know they will leave behind." (p. 27) - the work is made present for us in that we "move–think–feel visually, with the material, with the content, and with the artist, as the work occurs." (p.27)

Kentridge's work is not storyboarded, as per the usual production conventions of animation, and he has in his mind a few images before starting the process, but largely it is performed, photographed, performed. This performed process is akin to the embodied movement through screen based works.

For videogames, a certain version of this embodied movement isn't a perfect dance, but a similar work in progress. For videogames to be received as works in progress is discussed in the previous chapter as uncommon, but there are certain large online communities publicly 'at work' making videogames – documenting their progress through hashtags like #screenshotsaturday, competing in public game jams, and posting on other public game forums. In this continuous performance, as opposed to Kentridge, we do not necessarily see much of the erasure, whether it be via data loss in the rapid descent through the social media waterfall, or perhaps even those imperfect moments being seen as a non-desirable inclusive into the 'final build'.

It will almost certainly become possible (and indeed, already is) to make videogames in the same way Kentridge animates with charcoal, as tools become easier to use. The comedic "zero hour game jam" (0hgame.eu) invites us to ask questions about the game jam as performance. Whilst not actually a 'no-time' jam, invites us to consider hyperproductive, instantaneous creation. Videogames, even created at the speed of consciousness, will require attention to the performance, quality of movement and embodiment that will be part of the total process – in order to consider their place in the production of a certain kind of light.

2.3 Verwoert, Frogs and their many divisions, Mimesis, and Ordinary Ways to go on.

In 2013, Art critic Jan Verwoert gave a talk at Comedy Central's OPC Seminar (Verwoert, 2013) in which he discussed frogs – more specifically, the 'Güiro'. The Güiro is an instrument that has notches along it's length, and is played by running a stick over the edges to produce a rhythmic sound, not altogether unlike a frog croak. This entertaining talk relates magic, spiritism and ghosts, and asks what relation mimcry and impersonation have to comedy, and recognises that as comedy as a method is akin to a "crisis management" – dealing with the ambivalence and tension created by unknowable things.

Hopping quickly to a videogame reference, and landing on Jim Crawfords fantastic "Frog Fractions" (Twinbeard Studios, 2012) reveals a unique example of a fourth-wall breaking exercise in mystery. At the start of the game, it looks as if you are playing a typical mathematical 'edutainment' sort of experience, catching flies that represent fractions, but fractions that seem slightly out of order. After diving below your lilypad, you begin to realise that this is just the beginning to a larger adventure, in which your frog travels the extent of the known universe, and the game itself shifts into a surreal combination of many subgenres of videogames – a text adventure, a visual novel, a 2d platformer.
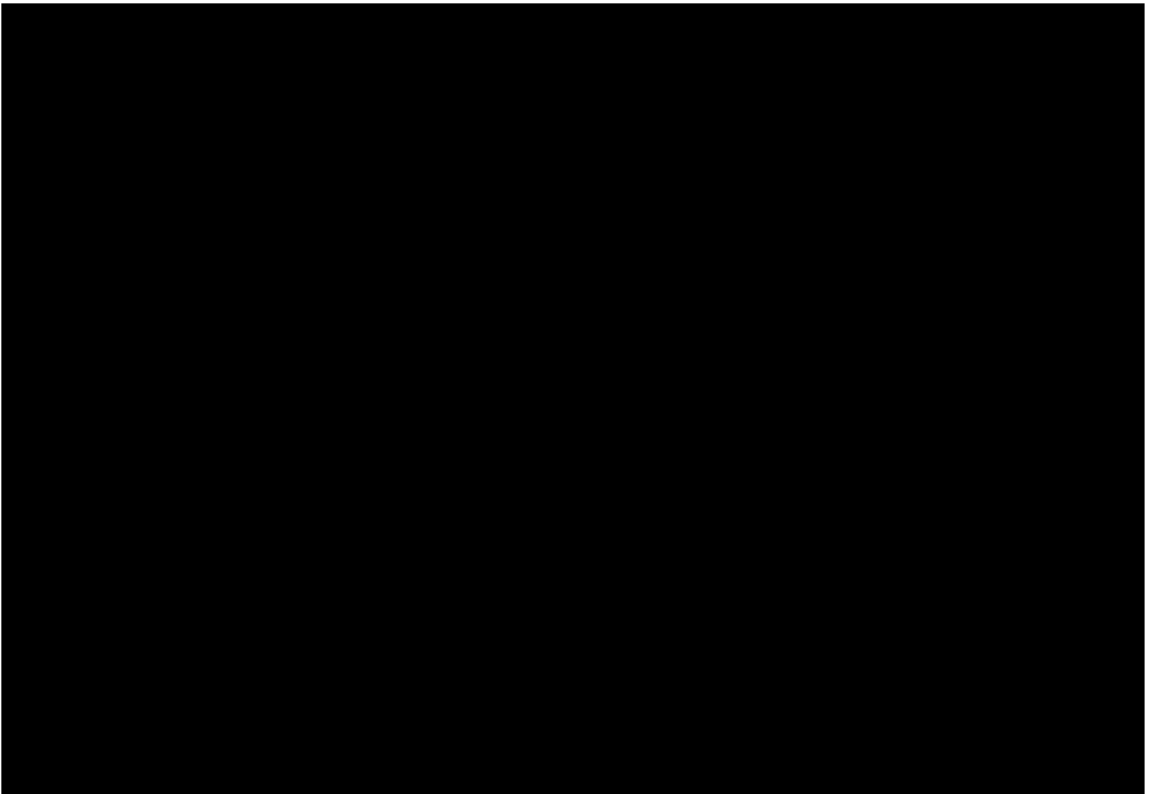

Figure 3: Variations of Genre in Frog Fractions (Twinbeard Studios, 2012)

These shifty frogs turn up in strange places. What is it about frogs? In modern entertainment examples, whether it be Futurama's Hypnotic Hypnotoad, The Frog from Frog Fractions, or the Frog-rain ending sequence in Magnolia, frogs seem to lend a mysterious indecipherability as metaphor, and even poetic relation to their psychedelic biological counterparts. Perhaps this is due to their amphibious tendencies, their drastic bodily transformations, and unspeakable reproductive horrors.

Verwoert would relate this particular connection to comedy. As jokes allow us to relate to things that are most awkward, for which there exists no acceptable protocol of dealing with them, the joke allows us to sidestep the protocol.The Hypnotoad thus deals directly with the overwhelming propaganda society faces in the present, The Frog from Frog Fractions deals with character, and the lack of mystery in singular genre videogames, and the Frog Rain ending sequence in Magnolia provides a certain levity in the face of the madness of life. Life is crazy, emotional and full of suffering, yes – but sometimes frogs also fall from the sky.

 For Verwoert dealing with this animality is the same as dealing with the unknowable. Whilst you deal with the thing you don't know how to deal with (i.e. how can I know what my cat thinks of me?) the way you deal with it is very concrete and practical. (i.e. you can be nice to your cat, give it treats and talk to it.)

Verwoert cites different mimetic degrees of becoming in relation to the animal. The aforementioned Güiro instrument is used here as an example of a 'practical animism', a kind of becoming that you play out, in making the sound of a frog. As play, this is traditionally been related to mimesis.

Mimesis as a pure camoflague instinct is rejected here by Verwoert, instead talking to the idea through Caillois as a 'giving in' to the environment. In "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia" (Caillois, n.d.) Caillois also rejects offensive or defensive mimicry, and talks about mimesis as a dangerous luxury – moth caterpillars that "simulate shoots of shrubbery so well that gardeners cut them with their pruning shears" (Caillois, n.d.) or leaf like animals that eat each other, mistaking each other for leaves.

Videogames have a history of mimetic mask wearing, and certainly hold examples of this particular practical animism, whether it be the player playing as a particular avatar or object[9]. If we recall that the practical animism attempts to deal with the unknowable, what are the unknowable things for videogames? As previously mentioned, playing as the frog in Frog Fractions allows me to reconsider videogames as genre-heavy, and sends them up through a series of videogame genre 'skits'. I certainly become lost in the Frog Fractions world, but I

[9] The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask (Nintendo EAD, 2000) contains many great examples of this. Equally, becoming an avatar in any videogame can be seen as this.

always know how to return to my own. I don't experience the same mortal risk as the leaf-becoming insect, certainly – and if I am receptive to the experience, my identity is transformed through ideology.
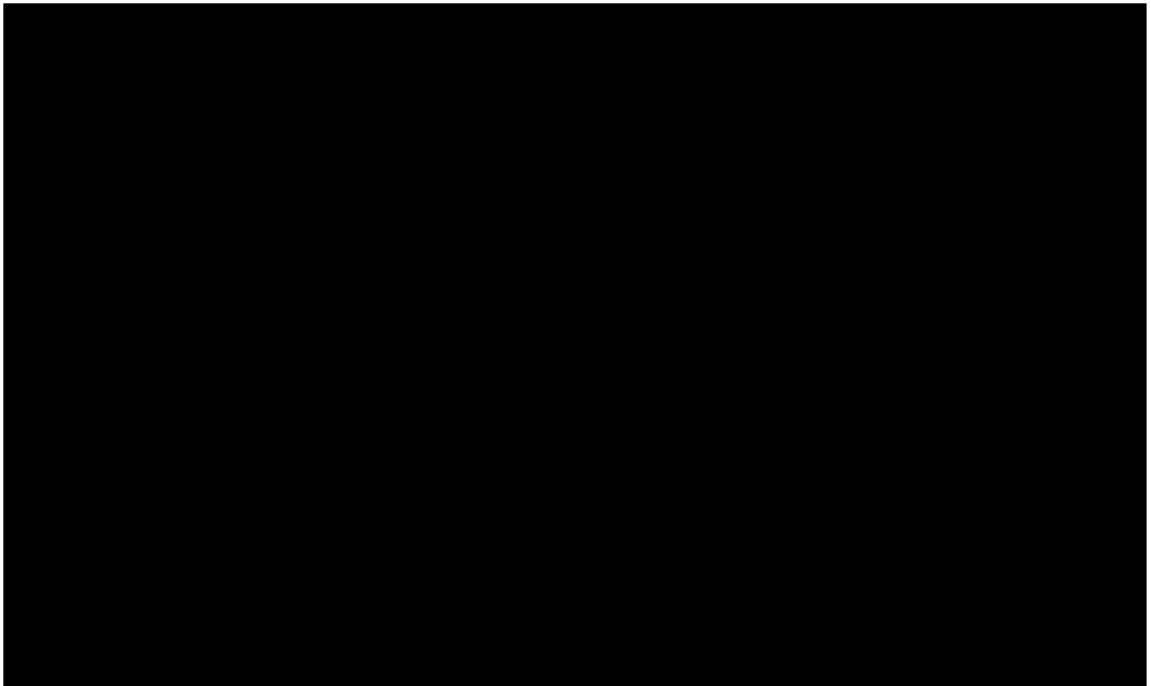

Figure 4: Inventory of Masks in Majora's Mask. (Nintendo EAD, 2000).

The dangerous luxury of becoming, in videogames, is perhaps the danger of too close identification with the actions and entertainment that you enjoy, rather than the absurd literal loss of identity, a bizarre commonplace public assumption for players of roleplaying games like Dungeons and Dragons in the late 1980's. This too close identification can lead to overzealous defense of and lack of criticality, in relation to those videogames you love.

The banal ideological challenge of Frog Fractions, that is, that videogames are genre heavy is only an unapproachable subject for those who consider them sacred. Videogames deal with many weighty subjects, also dealing with themes of war, emotional conflict and abuse, sexuality and gender, the banal evil of bureaucracy, the problems of ideological propaganda and more. It seems as though many topics are talked through. Perhaps because we still have little mimetic risk means that we hold videogames at arms distance, and only a certain kind of embodied movement, play or practice can allow a radical transformative experience. Play could be the thing, not necessarily just the ideological challenge of the topic of play.

As comedians (or even videogame players or creators), Verwoert invites us to consider the role of the shaman in relation to this. As the need to conjure demons out of the body rises, he draws attention to how the shaman gives up their persona, and becomes something other. He illustrates how the 'hysteric' in modern science was in a similar such position – to be able to

exhibit medical symptoms on demand, whilst the doctor could stand next to them and be the 'sane' person, whilst the other was 'freaky'.

Videogames already have a certain relationship to this. As there is a need for art and programming skills in creating them, some stereotypes of the rational individual and the irrational one tend to persist; the irrational, freaky artist and the rational programmer. Perhaps this site of transformation and crisis for videogames is one of identity, and in videogames the radical challenge is partly that of overcoming stereotype in genre and in personal character, losing identity completely through play, giving in to go on, thereby opening up new space to become something new - a means of reconstructing self.

A safer first step of Verwoert was introduced in the last chapter. Verwoert talks about 'the ham' as a common strategy of dealing with the unknowable, and still allowing oneself a way back into the "safe point", the assurance of safety, and not losing your identity. As in the previous section, it has value for those members of the community not willing to participate in works that are outside the common realm, and perhaps works that require radical reconfiguration of identity. However, he suggests that, like the moth, the seduction of blurring into the environmental stimuli is much more pleasurable. His idea is to adopt a "wild becoming, where you stuff your mouth with many spirits, and allow them to drop [from you.]" (Verwoert, 2013)

This stuffing activity is seen by Verwoert as absolutely ordinary. He uses the case of octopi changing their skin texture and color to adapt to changes in the surface of the ocean floor, and considers it part of the regular activity for the octopus. This metaphor allows us to consider our own shifting identities and internal navigation when it comes to videogames and our participation in them, and find means to identify whether our position tends to stabilisation or destabilisation.

If our position causes destabilisation or enables profanity, Verwoert asks to reconsider the original relationship the profane has to ritual. In his example of a chicken sacrifice, Verwoert notes that through Agamben's essay "In Praise of Profanation" (Agamben, 2006, pg.73) that the "profane" is in fact the shared thing,,that which you get back from the gods – in this case the chicken liver, which would be something returned, originally out of reach from the community.

In traditional ball games, Verwoert tells us, was partly about the competition of gods over the sun. He says we retain the profane share of the 'playing ball' – but the divine component still resides in our unconscious. He challenges the notion of a solemn relation to the divine, and of religion as a ground for fixed values, but instead situates it as dynamic ground for production of values, and says this is reflected in religious texts, as in classic accounts of men bartering with the gods using whatever they have on hand.
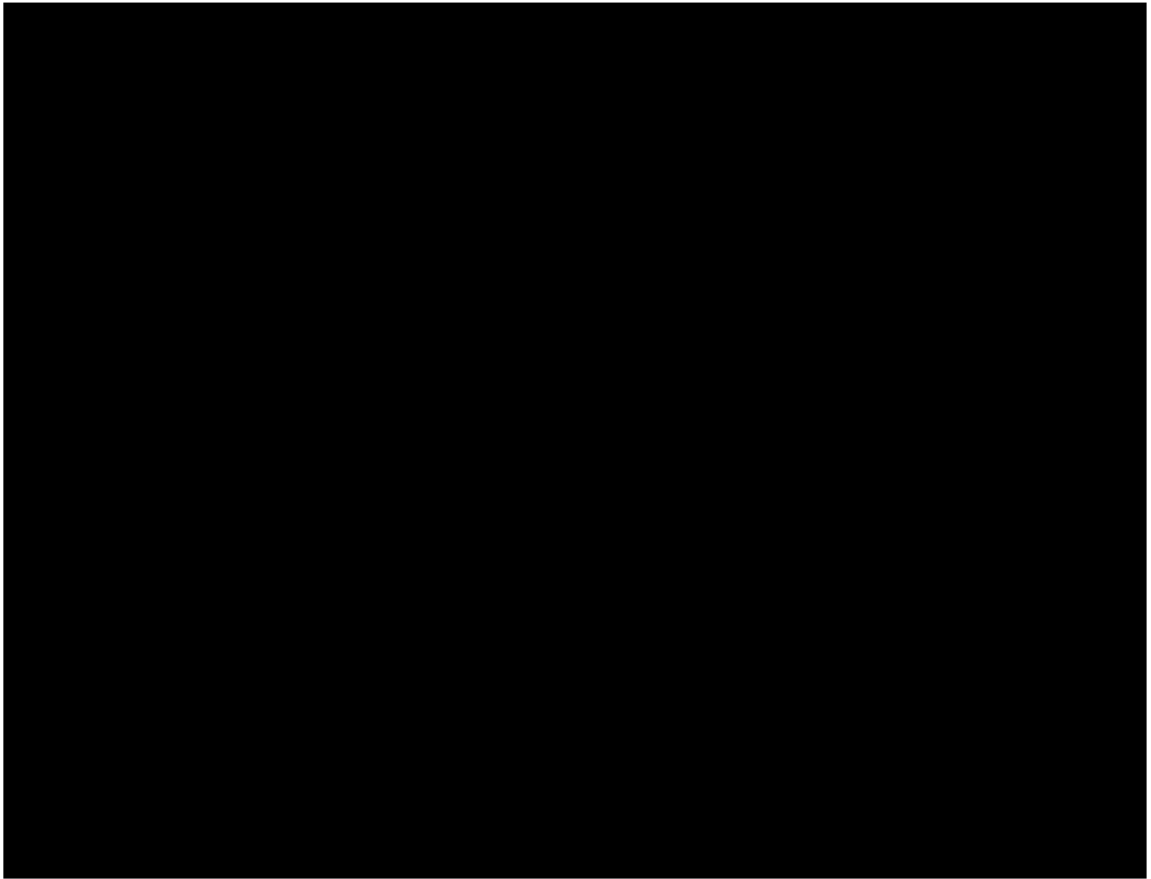
Figure 5: Steam Trading - User Interface

For videogames, the profane share requires reconsideration. We are still left with the ball, the shooter, the sports game, the adventure game, the twin stick shooter, the flight sim, or even perhaps the asset. This research suggests we need a reconnection and reactivation of bartering with those original wild gods that are communicated with in order to have it left over in the first place. Or perhaps, to just talk about it more publically.Brian Moriarty's Loom (Lucasfilm Games, 1990) is a work that doesn't forget this kind of original communication. In a GDC talk in 2015 (Moriarty, n.d.), he directly acknowledges the moment of inspiration that led him to creating the work in the first place – an ordinary moment in which he was awestruck, seeing a magazine advertisement for a circuit board that described itself as a loom, and having a vision for the complete universe of the game. Perhaps we need even greater descriptions about the specific spirituality that videogame creators and players hold in order to reveal the substance of their peculiar universes and identities.

3. Research Method

3.1 Methodology

This is qualitative, relativistic research, adopting a first and third person phenomenological methodology. This accomodates the personal nature of the work, and recognises that the research is interested in the phenomena of consciousness that relate to making work with this particular method, and their implications in relation to the type of work being made. This first and third person approach is seen through the approach of Wolff-Michael Roth in his "First Person Methods: Towards an Empirical Phenomenology of Experience" (Roth, 2012), In particular through his sections on vision and sense, memory, dreams, and crises and suffering as sources of learning.

First person methods via Roth require the experiences of the researcher – the point being to study conscious activity from the perspective of consciousness itself.

> The range of relevant phenomena is vast including 'not only all the ordinary dimensions of human life (perception, motion, memory, imagination, speech, everyday social interactions), as well as cognitive events that can be precisely defined as tasks in laboratory experiments (for example, a protocol for visual attention), but also manifestations of mental life more fraught with meaning (dreaming, intense emotions, social tensions, altered states of consciousness) (Roth, 2012, pg 5).

Roth looks to these experiences of consciousness that manifest themselves in these ordinary dimensions and to understand them in terms that have not yet been interpreted by language – as they appear at the "pre-noetic level, that is, the form of experience that precedes intellectual activity, intellectual intuition, knowledge, and cognitive engagement." (Roth, 2012, pg.6)

He describes phenomenalization as the "process by means of which we experience this or that phenomenon" (Roth, 2012, pg 7) and in his chapter on Seeing and Vision makes distinct this process as the way in which an experience becomes significant – as a kind of figure over ground. Roth uses the Maltese Cross as an example in order to show how figures emerge in vision.
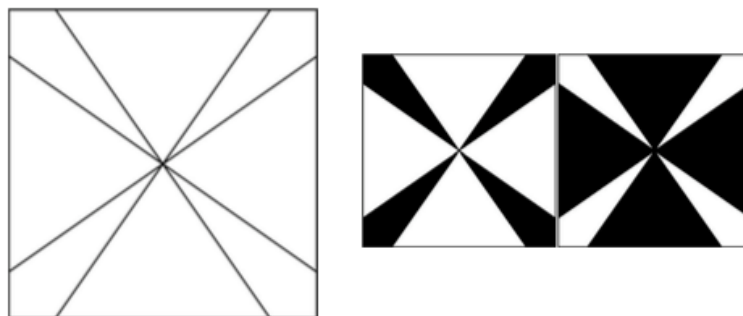

Figure 6: Maltese Cross as used by Roth. The larger figure on the left is the unaltered original, and on the right shows the two crosses that emerge from perception, looking at the first figure. Cover the right hand side to experience the emergent figures for yourself.

As a methodology, he states that there are two steps to learning from experience – bracketing, also known as reduction or *Epoché,* and expression and validation*.*

> *Epoché* (from Gr. ἐποχή [epoché], suspension of judgment) is a systematic method for suspending judgment, a process of stepping outside of our usual, mundane, and preconceived notions about how the world works to gain greater insights and better understandings. There are three stages to *epoché:* (a) an initial phase, during which experiences are systematically produced all the while suspending one's beliefs about them, (b) a conversion phase during which attention is changed from the content of experience to the process of experience, and (c) a phase of accepting experience (no-attention). The first stage requires an unprejudiced openness to the details of experience, whereas the second stage requires analysis of the processes that make experience possible in the first place. The third stage constitutes a systematic approach to a phenomenon that many scientists have experienced: after wrestling long and hard with difficult problems, the solutions come to them while engaging in very different activities (sleeping, exercising) (Roth, 2012, pg 4-5).

Memory and Dreams have value for Roth within this methodology. Memory, as discussed in the previous chapter, is seen as a trace that contains it's own erasure. Dreams are seen from the point of view of consciousness diving into unconsciousness, and require research "as the descriptions and analyses of cycling, weeding, writing, hiking, and falling asleep show, to understand what is happening we require ways of thinking the disappearance and reappearance of consciousness."

Crises are also important to Roth as they emphasise that passions are fundamental to the human experience, and because that experiential quality of these moments is experience before any conceptual development of those experiences, and in turn directly allows us to experience compassion, a participatory experience. (Roth, 2012, pg 137) For Roth, learning is "confronting or subjecting oneself to the unknown." (Roth, 2012, pg 138) and that the only way to learn about suffering and crisis is to actually suffer, else it remains as symbolic knowledge only.

As the lived experience of an artist working with spirituality in relation to videogames, this study of self and consciousness can be considered a local site of work, seeking to establish knowledge of this kind of practice in relation to videogames, so that shared experience may be extrapolated or compared. The subject of psychedelics as a way of looking at the world, and as a function of body chemistry that informs creating videogame work in relation to spirituality is an area that I feel is only privately talked about, so making this phenomenological study a part of public discourse intends to be useful as not only self critique, but also a relatable resource, to provoke conversation.

The research is bracketed through what I previously termed "fantastical naïve assumptions" – which can also be looked at as certain spiritual ideas that I have in place, which purposefully informs my practice. These spiritual ideas are detailed as part of the Method section in 3.3.1.

The data of the research is inclusive of the work samples, the selections from the painting portfolio, the writing and formal blog (some of which is referenced in appendices), any other documentation of the work itself, and also the VR work.

3.2 Method

The research has been developed primarily through a sketch-based method combined with an aggregate process of software design in order to construct and develop the work.

Digital Painting is employed as a process, firstly of navigating those subtle sites that are uncovered when making work, and secondly providing foundations which the work rests on. Painting also provided an everyday sense of time to the work, in the sense that it would be a marker of moments in daily practice.

The research also engaged in playful practice, and readings and descriptions of personal psychedelic and dreamlike experiences.

Sketches in this context are taken as inclusive of writing, the Unity3D scenes (a realtime rendering engine) and other programs, physical drawing, digital sculpture, and audio manipulation. Once these sketches are materialised, methods are employed to collapse them together, and interrogate their order. This interrogation hopes to discuss tangibility in relation to digital works, as well as try to make new connections in the seemingly disconnected diverse range of material that is produced.

Simultaneously, a public design blog (*www.philllllljames.me*) has been maintained engaging with this process. The writing from this formal and poetic blog, has been necessary in order to keep track of design additions and changes and is not dissimilar to a 'change-log' in software design.

3.3: Spiritual Approach

3.3.1: Living with Red and Blue, Butterfly Gods and Ritualistic Practice.

This approach should be introduced through the purposefully, naïve assumptions and beliefs that were in place at the beginning the research - assumptions that have been referred to constantly throughout, as a form of internal navigation. To look at these as religious beliefs is false, but to look at them as thought experiments, or perhaps as a personal mythology doesn't really carry the same weight. Perhaps spiritual practice as a term can be useful, and exist somewhere in between these two ideas. The idea for this kind of thinking first came to me when thinking about the world of Studio Ghibli, and the performed creation by Hayao Miyazaki. What I have come to believe is that to truly create a world, a person can't simply be a virtuoso of their particular form, but they additionally have to think through what they actually believe to be true, removing many of the assumptions of daily life in favour of illustrating perhaps unseen truths. I certainly appreciate looking at this 'world making' through a Zizekian psychoanalytic perspective, and how the those states of psychology become represented in film and videogames, but I think that this analysis does not necessarily benefit the filmmaker, and their particular experience in the moment of creation.

The first belief is related to the title and it's related themes, but is an irreducible metaphor I will make some effort to reduce. The 'Lieutenant' aspect acknowledges the militaristic history of videogames - beginning with SpaceWar! (Steve Russell et. Al, 1962), and continuing that tradition into the modern era of game militarism. This force is treated here as an abstract concept , and was kept in mind whilst painting, making, and playing games. Some of this mindfulness enhanced the visibility of these themes and developed into an appreciation of the ordinary aspects of the military; the realisation that the majority of the military experience is not active, but passive trajectories and banal travel arrangements over long distances, something that is very hard to ignore in the era of the remote drone pilot. Opposing forces within videogames are framed by an explicit abstract polarisation, or by specific objects, representing literal weapons, targets and situations. The moral tension with my relation to these subjects provided motivation for the work.

The colors red and blue are related to this focus. Frequently these colors are used to denote specific polar opposites in these videogames (Red Team vs Blue Team in Team Fortress 2 (Valve Corporation, 2007), BluFor (Blue) vs Opfor (Red) in certain game modes in Arma 2 (Bohemia Interactive, 2009), and those colors became a kind of shorthand for me in referring to the movement of these opposing forces. Red was a more active force, Blue more passive. On days where I required more activity I would literally choose certain clothing colors to wear on that particular day that I felt would help me go on. This wearing, performed aspect did not have a particular constancy, that is, red clothing would not always help in my own vigor, and it almost came to mean something along the lines of 'just keeping afloat' – that is, when blue is

no longer valid, go to red. Blue and Red thus expand into metaphorical characters, and are certainly more than wavelengths in the electromagnetic spectrum.
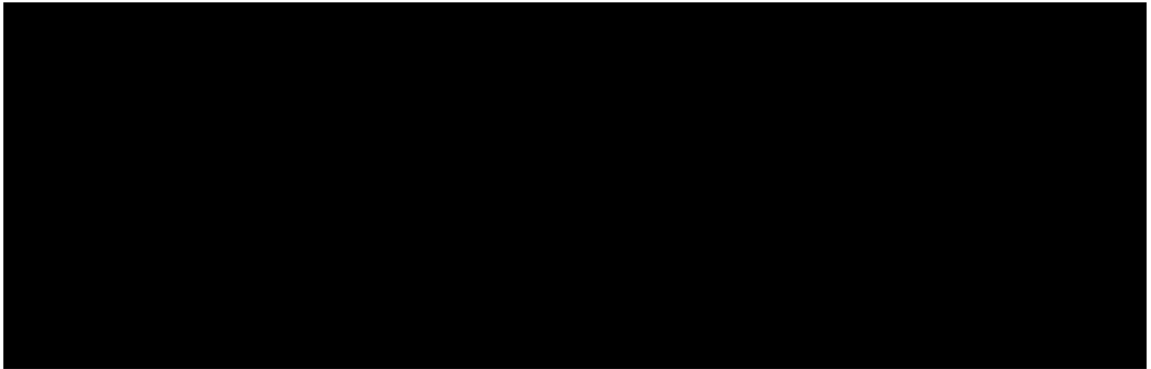

Figure 7: Team Logos from Team Fortress 2 (2007, Valve Corporation)

Changing clothing, and specific videogame play always reflected this. Whilst playing these games, switching to the winning side is easily done. This shifting of sides came to mean performed criticality – literally wearing the clothing of the other.

The Butterfly part of the metaphor acknowledges the psyche, and a deeper creative force largely out of conscious control. This butterfly is also in reference to what I will call here "Butterfly Gods", which is purposeful shorthand for moments when I encountered Butterflies, or what I identified as the abstract symbol of a butterfly, ($\bowtie$[10]) in my daily life. When I did encounter these moments, these gods revealing themselves as 'figure' over the 'ground' of my experience would offer assurances to me that I was on 'the right track'. Writing and making work in this particular way would not be possible without these companions.

These simple daily means of going on were poetics, easily critiqued, they may stand in for an abstract appreciation of animism, and the loss of that sort of mimetic becoming – acknowledging the other through the Verwoertian idea of taking in a part of these spirits into your mouth, and seeing what falls out after you truly take them in.

In 'Form and Object' Tristan Garcia says that, somewhere between the Renaissance and the Enlightenment the relationship between human beings and animals changed. (Garcia, 2014)

> Animals became absent beings onto which humanity projected all of its faults, as if animality were the internalised outside [l'extériorité intériorisée] through which humanity could expound its errors, all that was evil about humanity. Humanity increasingly identified with animals, but at the same time stopped spending time with them. This great distance gave birth to a bad conscience which, for us, increasingly formed an image of animals as expiatory figures of Human Evil. Indeed, animals are both in us (humanity is nothing but an animal species) and outside us (humanity separates itself from animality). For us, animals have become the ideal support for all that we are guilty of. The evil that human beings do to

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[10] (BOWTIE Unicode: U+22C8, UTF-8: E2 8B 88)

themselves is always equivocal, for its meaning can only be decided in a closed channel between humans. The evil that we do to other animal species is both an evil that we do to ourselves (since our species is also an animal species) and an evil that we do to something other than us (since they are species other than our own). Our way of thinking reduces, and our way of life increases, the gap between species, no longer filled by a *societas*, or mutual co-presence." (Garcia, 2014 p. 213)
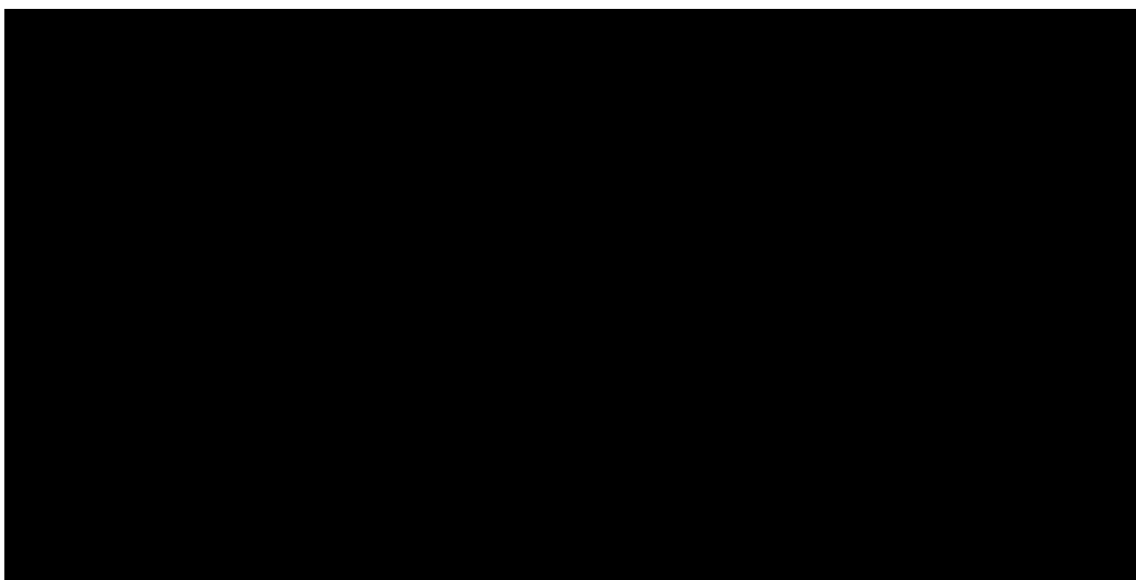

Figure 8: The Deer God from Princess Mononoke (Miyazaki, 1997)

In Miyazaki's work animals certainly have this vessel quality – and one of the best examples is the Deer God in Princess Mononoke (Miyazaki, 1997) literally beheaded, sacrificed to an industrial revolution, and reborn. The Butterfly Gods for me die and are reborn in this way, constantly cocooning, and fluttering, beckoning in change in a similar fashion, perhaps unaffected by and positioning themselves to challenge my perceptions. There is, of course, no 'right place' for them to appear. They were sometimes at the supermarket, on a garish piece of clothing, or on a tv advertorial, as all were equal ground for them to manifest in my perception.

Finally, I think there are certain problems with relating these particular rituals in text. Firstly, they are not reducible to things on the page, and more readily become reduced after writing them down. Translation to linear text in this particular way, will never replicate the particular impact they have.

Humour cannot be easily translated either. One way to ruin a joke is to over-explain it. In a similar way there is a frivolity in combining paradoxical terms (sometimes due to literal translation issues) that videogames consistently and uniquely have: a "Resident" Evil, a series of "Final" Fantasies (1,2,3,4,5,6,7.. etc) a superfast "Sonic" who is a hedgehog, which perhaps is another reason as to why this is a "Lieutenant Butterfly". There are a range of tones that can be generated through artwork, and this title avoids a consistency, as I feel this reflects the nature of human experience.

3.4: Specific Works

3.4.1: Painting

Throughout this process I made a series of digital paintings, which can be seen in it's entirely online through philllllljames.me. These are intended to be viewed on screens, so are not completely presented as a digital portfolio as part of the appendices.

Painting happened as part of the everyday. Whilst creating work, or thinking about creating work –screen captures were taken of the sketch work I was creating, usually as a shot from a specific camera inside a Unity3D scene, but sometimes without any reference entirely. This is an automatic form of painting that seeks to look for emergent artefacts in relation to thinking.

The digital, technical process of creating these paintings varied, but there were some consistencies.

Smaller patches of colour were drawn that form into the 'dumb drawing' - a simplified sketch, or sometimes start with a screen capture from another digital work. They were then distorted and pulled to large dimensions (using Photoshop operations of smear and content aware scale)

After that the image was processed further, simplifying the color levels to a smaller colour depth, (using indexed colour mode, 'Pattern' Dither) - and finally applying a blending/mixing filter in photoshop. ('Oil Paint'). Sometimes this last step was left out.

These extremely large paintings were then color corrected and 'navigated' via zooming and scroll actions, as meditative activity post-painting, to seek out meaningful moments and points that I would intuit. Screenshots were taken at these specific points. These were automatically titled and time-categorised. This painting (as inclusive of the photoshop work, and the screenshots) is the most primary work there is presented in this research, and through Roth's idea of perception it preceeds rational thinking and presents as that moment I would 'click' the camera (take a screenshot). It preceeds the ideas presented in this exegesis, and happened before and during all of the writing, as evidenced in the blog.

Painting allowed me a sense of completion in what activity was being done during the studio day. In that sense, it allowed me a very tangible relation to time, which then allowed interest to develop in my perception of it, and how that related to videogames. Related to this painting activity was an interest in taking direct photographs of screens. This was related to a sense that of trying to preserve something that was lost with the transition from CRT to LCD, a retro-purist desire for the 'liveliness' of those electron guns. This interest led to looking at mobile

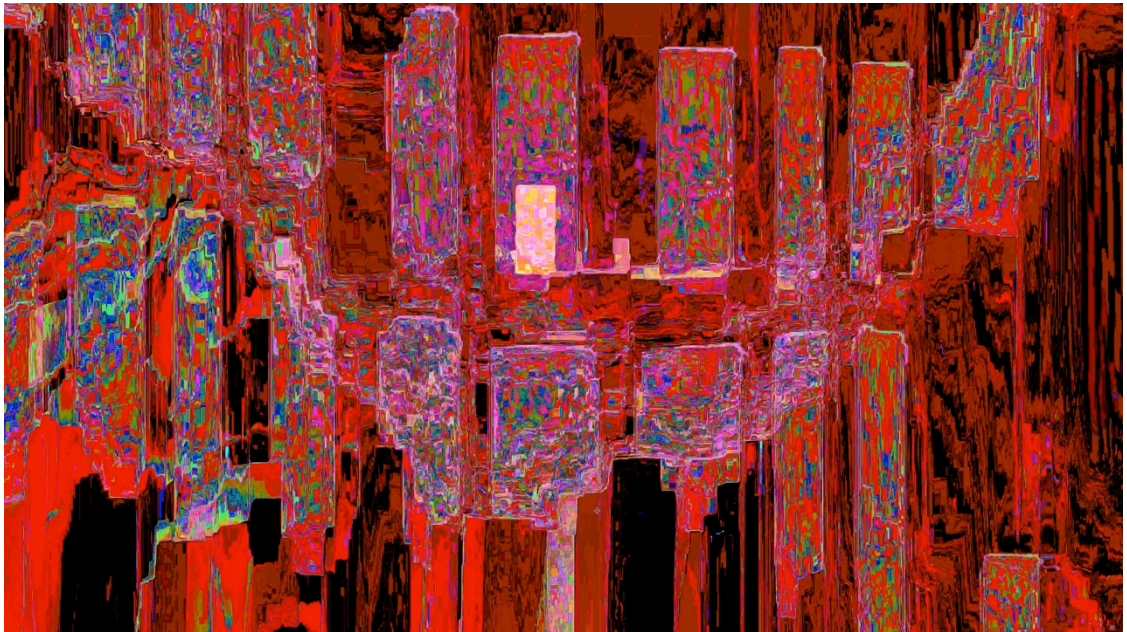phones closely, which then naturally lended to the mobile VR work, presented at the end of this research.

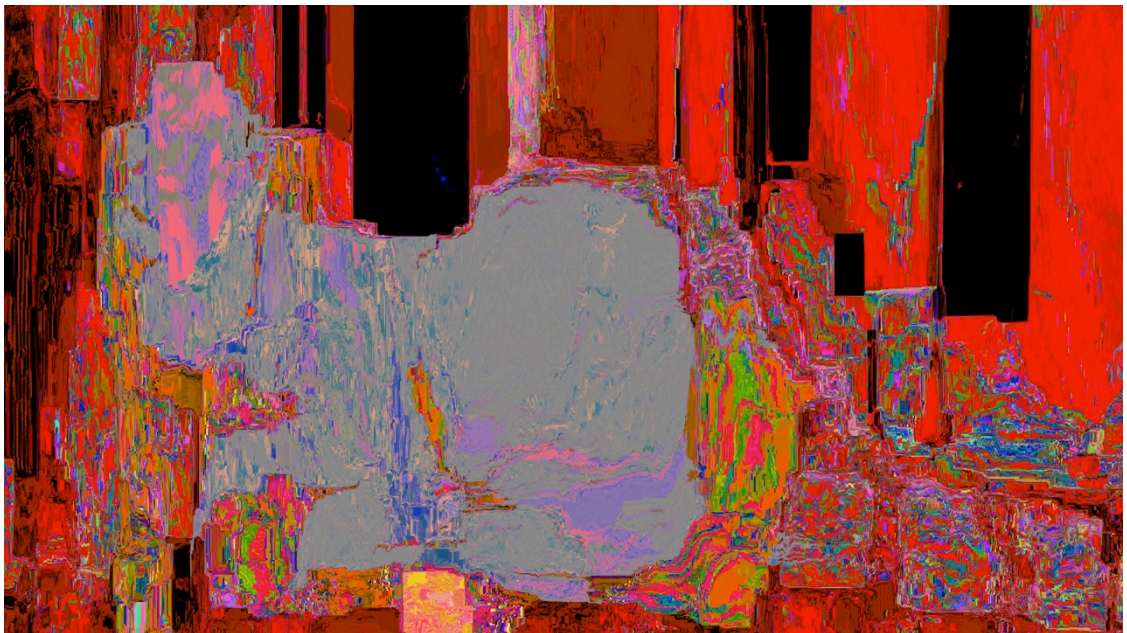*Figure 9: Screen Shot 2014-07-30 at 9.08.16 am*

Figure 10: Screen Shot 2014-07-30 at 10.41.00 am

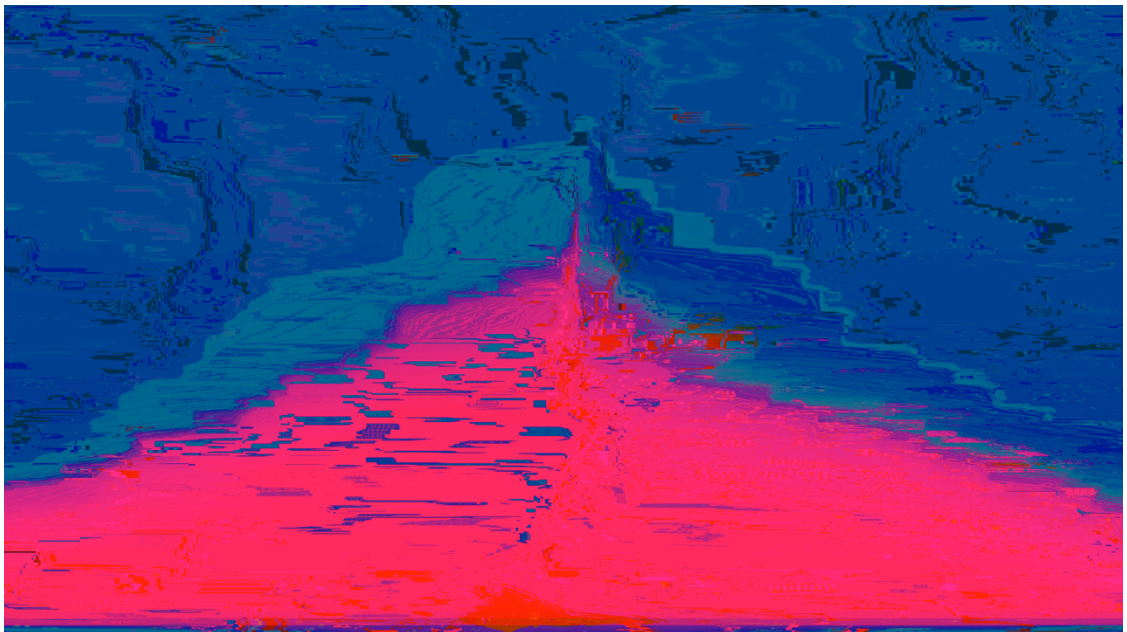*Figure 11: Screen Shot 2014-08-08 at 10.16.49 am*
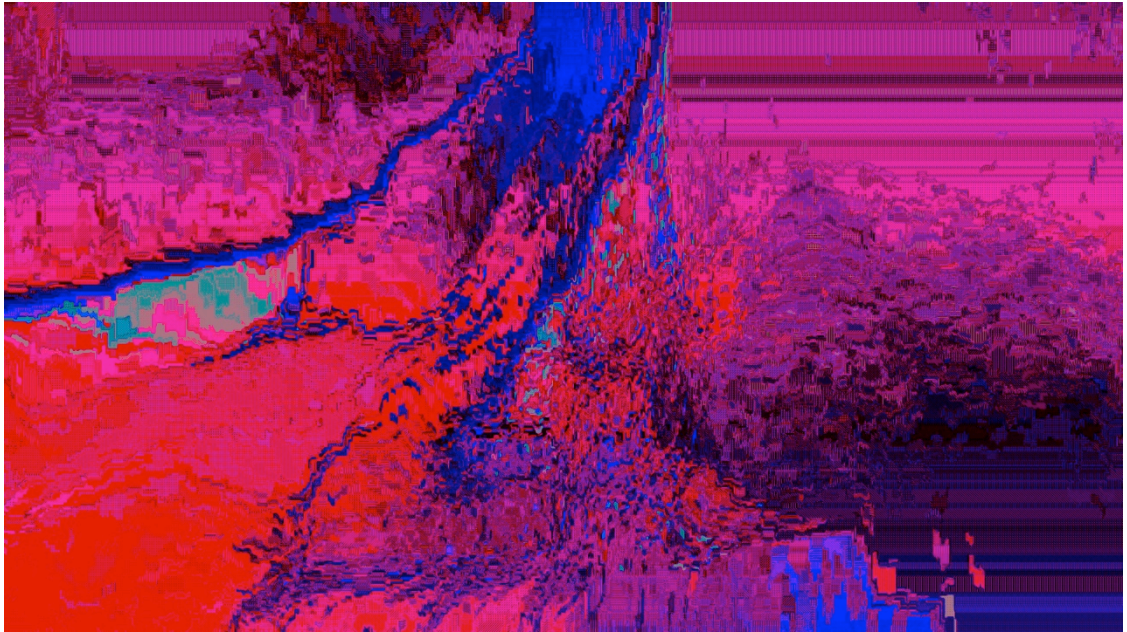

Figure 12: Screen Shot 2014-08-08 at 11.14.40 am
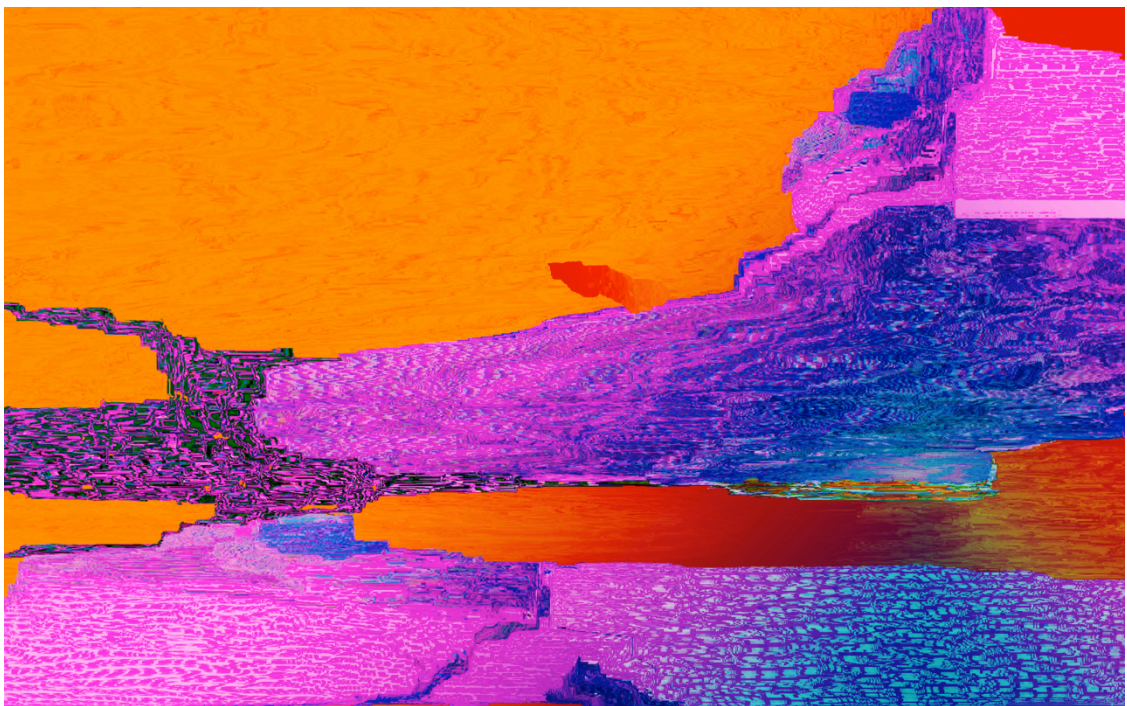
Figure 13: Screen Shot 2014-08-25 at 2.39.38 pm

Figure 14:Screen Shot 2014-12-04 at 12.23.33 am

3.4.2 Writing

Writing took on several forms – as a means of attempting to relate to direct experience, whether it be as notes documenting daily process, recalled dreams *(Appendix 1),* or even whilst the researcher was being mindful of bodily experience on a typical day *(Appendix 2)*, or as a reflective practice in reading self produced or external work.*(Appendix 3)*

These sections help to form the phenomenological picture. They are also similarly direct, and perhaps psychoanalytical – and reflect on thought processes in these specific moments. Other writing on the blog (www.philllllljames.me) is more poetic, and becomes perhaps concerned with describing illustrations.

Writing about dreams and memory is recognised as a secondary activity as separate from the primary experience, and becomes about ordering – of the mind and as a game of divination, of seeking the right way to go.

The academic writing, as is speech for Roth, a gradual emergent process that allowed the research to collide those poetics together with personal experience (most prominently in Appendix 2) in order to construct new meaning. If the abstractions of painting gave the research an ordinary sense of time and emerging subject and figure, then the abstraction of writing gave the research some other cohesive order, and productive tension. This could even be referred to as a linear spatial arrangement. A corridor constructed by writing, with many rooms diverging from it. All the writing is therefore what is interior to the process, not only as personal phenomenological description, but as an interior arrangement. This constant burrowing to the interior, as reflective practice means that when other works are made, they are in effect a kind of letting off of steam - from this part of the process.

3.4.3: Islands

This was work that was constructed in *three.js*, a simplified WebGL interface - as the research investigated drawing in unfamiliar terms. This series of works were constructed as screensavers, designed to be viewing companions over long periods of time. These are an extension of painting too, with the gestures and geometry hidden, moving and rotating very slowly – the screen not clearing so as to produce what would become overlaid drawing. As date/time is introduced as a variable into the software, the specifics of when they were viewed would introduce subtle variations.
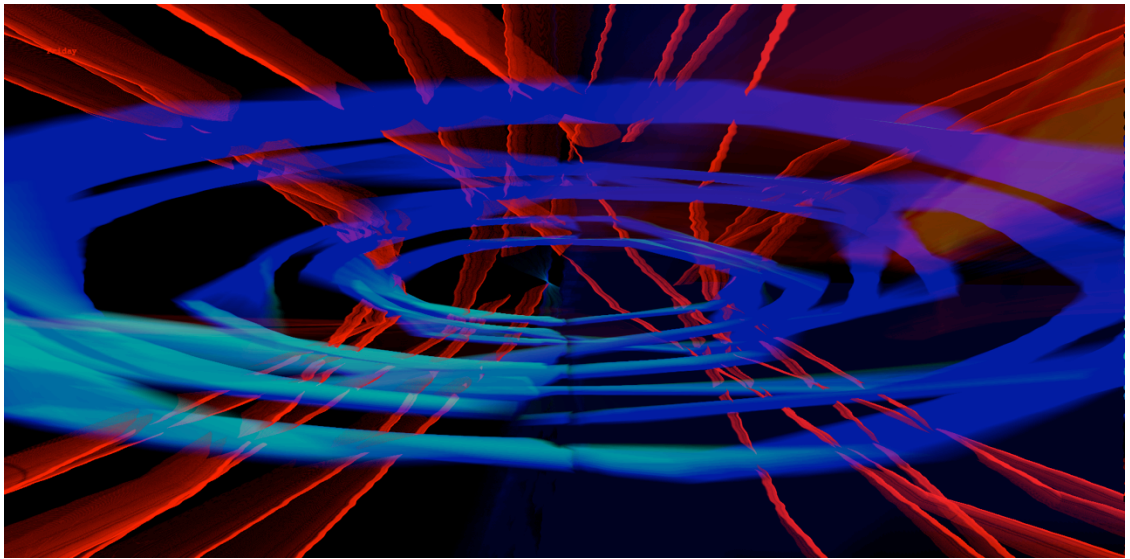

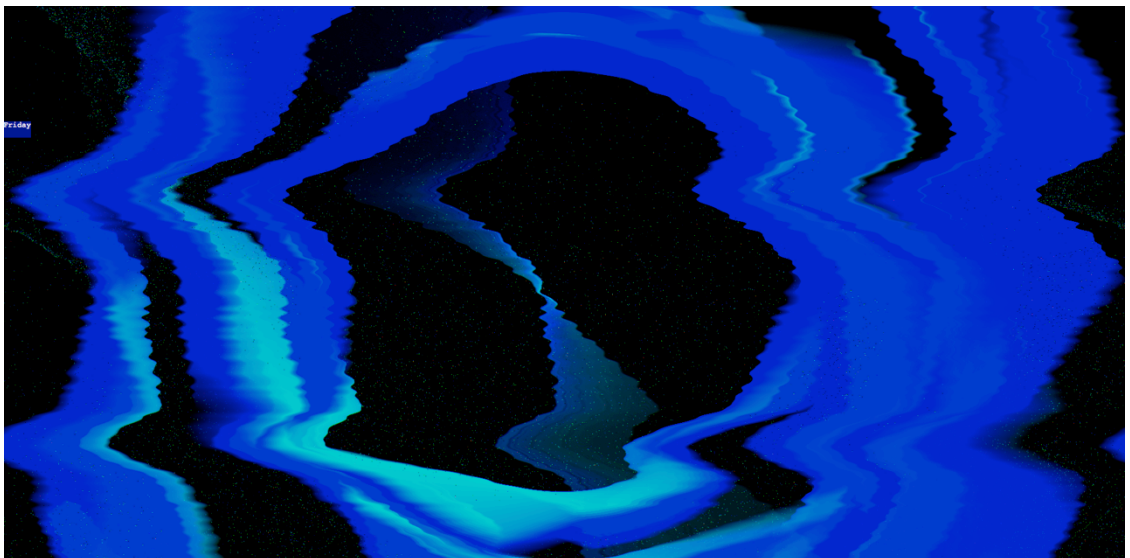
Figure 15: Islands Screenshot

Figure 16: Islands Screenshot (2)

3.4.4: The Table, and what happened there.

The Table was a collective playspace for anyone who came into Colab. It was primarily played with by the students directly surrounding it. It started as a bunch of plastic animals and plastercine on a regular desk. As a daily practice, the researcher would arrange them in specific ways that would encourage play (the animals encircling each other, the plastercine forming abstract patterns and creatures) As the plastercine colors slowly mixed together through play, the surface texture of the plastercine formed an interesting textural relation to the painting.

The researchers self appointed job as table manager was mostly cleaning up, and arranging the plastercine and animals into a particular fashion that would encourage play. This would also involve some group discussion about 'what this thing was', how it related to technology, and I certainly initially saw it as a playful joke, calling it a "videogame", or rather challenging myself to think of it as one.

Donations of plastic animals were received from staff, and several personal ones were brough in, and in addition to plastercine and plastic animals, there were no limits what could be added to the table, and sure enough a chair, an umbrella, paper clips, and whatever junk happened to be lying around the studio became fodder for what could be 'on the table'. The table itself changed tables, as a spare circular table was acquired, moving the entire plastercine/animal work over to the new table.

Each time it felt or grew too unwieldy, a 'collapse' was performed – that is, taking all of the plastercine/animals/junk and then forming them into a ball, or separate smaller balls in order to encourage play again. This was to ensure that it wasn't a 'precious' sculpture that couldn't be touched, and remained a interactive work.

To mention the table without mentioning the "Saga of the Table" would also surely be incomplete. A grand story developed without input, made possible by Ezra Whittaker Powley, another Colab master's student. He created a complete universe through specific storytelling and characters, utilising the plastic animals and cut out paper "speech bubbles" - and to the researcher and other students who played with Table work, that spontaneous saga was something fantastic to witness, and was best experienced as a daily soap opera, and cannot easily be retold through documentation. Photo documentation of this work is available as Appendix 4).

This collective playspace was essential for developing this ideas of the physical conversation, and ideas surrounding my own animist beliefs, comedy, notions of tangibility, and what we take seriously as digital art practice in relation to technology.

The final form of the table was created by Ezra – a sculpted man pulling a sculpted chicken. It still continues to interest the researcher at the time of this writing. Perhaps it relates to ideas about the profane, as mentioned through Verwoert. Perhaps the table was able to give some tangibility to those in the studio, at moments where things seemed intangible. The researchers own job/performance as 'table manager' became a sort of protector of this paradox, much in the same way reverence is held about the spirituality involved.

Figure 17: The Table

3.4.5: Drop! and Drawing Dragons.

3.4.5.1: Drop!

As part of the first semester at Colab I created a playful screen based work – "Drop!"

Drop interrogates a diagram of method that had emerged from the play experience with the craft materials, one in which the researcher had to "drop and catch" bits of plastercine through a rolled up piece of paper. "Drop!" used the same popping bubble component of a previous Unity sketch called "Fun", but included more dropping bubbles that the player could generate by hovering a mouse over a swirling vortex of scanned-plastercine. The title "Drop!" , and even the action itself was informed by reading Richard Serra's verb list (and seeing some of his video work), and seeing that one verb in particular stand out as figure. Games such as Katamari Damacy (Namco, 2004) whose primary verb (in K.D.'s case, "rolling") becomes amplified to produce and experience the verb in a new way, and on a new scale. This was an attempt to resolve an artefact in a similar way.

Figure 18: Drop! (Screenshot)

As a necessary trauma for the 'work-in-progress' the work was demonstrated at the NZ Game Developers monthly meetup. There was a mix of interesting interactions that were partially documented with photography, and whilst also performing an 'antagonistic observer' role (approaching people and pretending to not know what it was, asking them to speculate on what it was, and what parts of it "did") – the researcher enjoyed the played outcome as a kind of performance. The game doesn't conform to usual standards of game design, with no imperatives (save for the poetic verb title) or goals, and so participants offered several different

views of "what was going on" in that limited possibility space. Some thought they were saving cat souls, others thought they should maximise the number of 'catsplosions', and others still were visibly concerned with the physics simulation, and the 'strange fishes' that followed the cursor.

3.4.5.2: Dragons

The idea for Dragons was created as spontaneous unspoken communication – which came from a spontaneous collaborative automatic drawing that myself and another master's student, Alexey Botkov, made during a lecture in the first semester at Colab. This is a playful speechless design communication.

Figure 19: Dragons (Screenshot)

(The following text appears on the blog on the 15 June 2014)

> We were sitting in class trying to construct a diagram of our research. We were encouraged to think through a dissatisfying experience we had with a product or service, and map the separate layers of our experience simultaneously. From our perspective - what happened, our emotional graph, and ruminate on why we felt this way. The presentation was not that immediately engaging, (and vaguely condescending) and certainly not as exciting the array of toys that we had provided in front of us. A massive box was filled with lego pieces, feathers, glue, paper, pens - a craft box of goodness. We were encouraged to use our imagination in which to create an imaginary object that would solve the problems of the negative experience.

Parallel to this experience, we were drawing. Drawing communally, secretively. Between myself and Alexey we had an unspoken design communication that was happening extremely quickly, and very fun. It started with a duck.

Figure 20: Dragons Original Collaborative Drawing

This duck was in danger, and so sprouted arms, then super powers. He was a Super Duck. Therefore, he must have had a Super Vehicle, and a super logo. Since we had only red and green pens, the siren on the top of the Super Vehicle was red and green, therefore it must be located in Italy. Mario was then drawn, but without hands, and his 'fallen off' hands turned into crabs which ran up and got eaten by - a Dragon?

This Dragon seemed to be interesting to me, and so - without talking I inquired of Alexey further - does this dragon equal a Stegosaurus plus a Tunnel? Yes, drew Alexey. Also, he drew that trains would come out of this tunnel. I drew further - can there be two dragons connected to each other with train tracks? Yes, drew Alexey. They can also throw up train tracks at each other.

This I found hilarious, and sticky. Something about this playful drawing inspired me to immediately go and make a preliminary Unity sketch exploring these dragons. In the same week I had been playing and thinking about the game Bubble Bobble, by Taito - and this quick, candy sketch was one I became excited about, and quickly produced.

3.4.5: Post-Fun

Between the VR Work and the sketches previously described, there were several sketches that led to the final collapse. Initially it seemed as if genre based work was a means of aggregating ideas. A shoot-em-up, or shmup – was going to be the vehicle for these, but ultimately was abandoned.

It exists as a sketch called "*Shoot- em-up/Down*" – and can be found on the blog. As well as this, a UI (user interface) investigation called "*Yes, Yes. Sometim*es" and an abstract interactive painting called *"House for not Understanding.*" Moving on from these sketches, desperately trying to move towards a final work, I also began to recreate the first prototype *"Lieutenant Butterfly"* too – as a Unity sketch incorporating a third person avatar navigating an environment – and also attempted to recreate a series of first person flying sketches, again similar to the first prototype. These led me to the final collapse in VR, and in hindsight are useful at reflecting my suspicions that I was in a particular crisis, and these sketches can be seen as attempting to go back to a comfortable place in which to make work, and are necessary failures that nevertheless informed the next work.
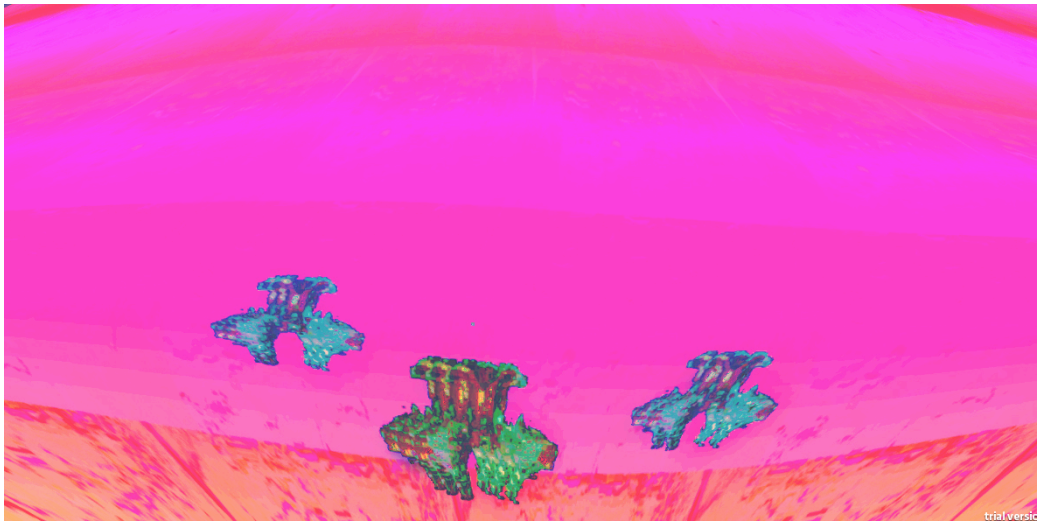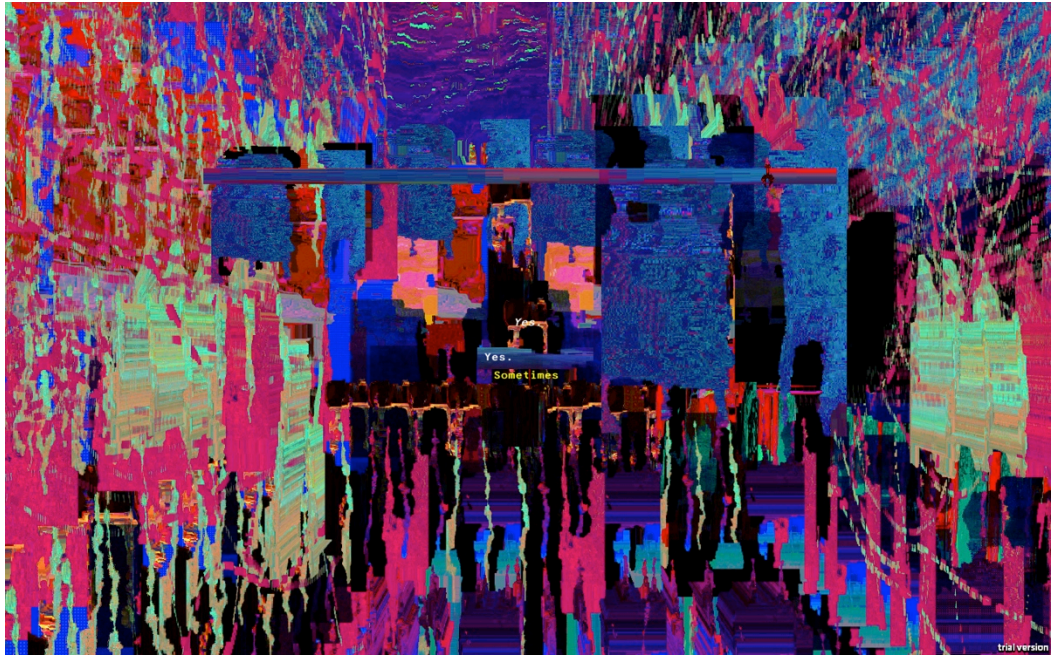

Figure 21: Shoot-em-up/Down (Screenshot)
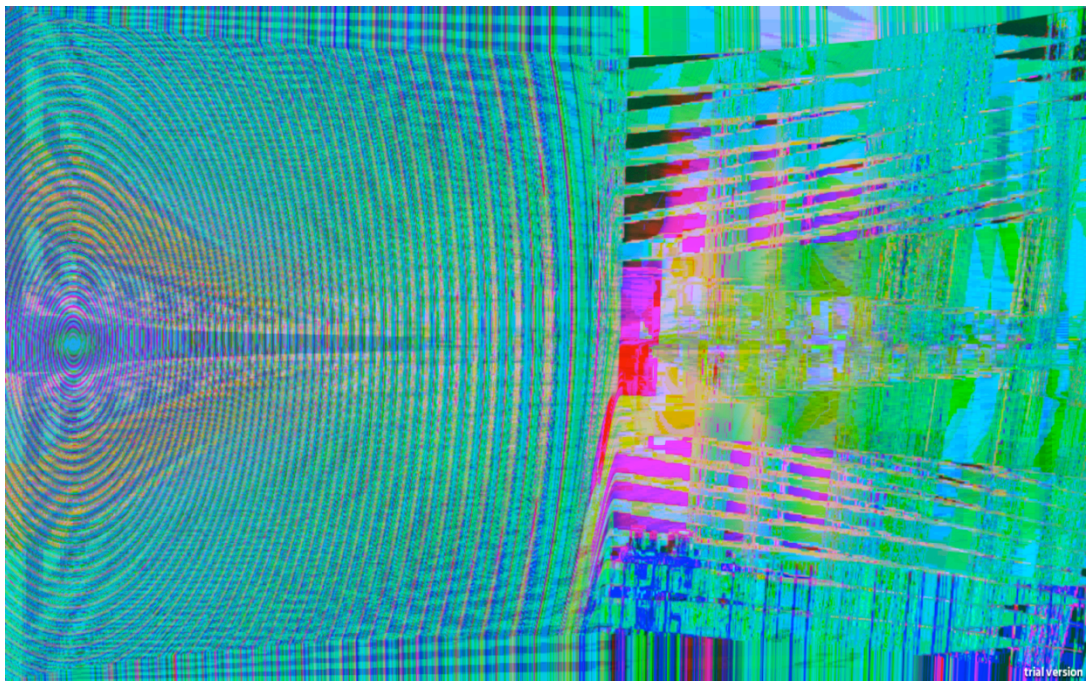
Figure 22: Yes,Yes, Sometimes (Screenshot)

Figure 23: House for not Understanding (Screenshot)

3.4.6 Collapse VR.

As a means of viewing the final work – during the final months of the research, a mobile VR work was created, and parts of the research, treated as separate assets were placed in a collective environment, together. This is, in part after considering how best to show examiners the complete work. There are dream fragments from writing as text, audio from playful conversations, and recreation of the 'dragon logic' inside this space.[11]

The first build, called ((Dragons)) had inside of it a playful conversation about the nature of time and space between the researcher and Alexey Botkov.

The first build, and final work are intended to serve as some sort of "memorial playground" for the time that has been spent working on this project, a playful memorial, and a paradoxical place, and a means to think about the spiritual. A site in which values can be exchanged and developed, not a site of dogma.

This means that the discussion and setting of the VR work is specific, and local. It is best held directly with the player/participant, and then be open for discussion afterwards, and possibly during, even if the player/participant choose not to talk about it. The reason for this is partially phenomenological – understanding the difference between what the researcher sees and what a player does.

In this way the work is also a diagram, much like an optical illusion, to provoke conversation about perception and phenomenology.

Figure 24: Photograph of ((Dragons)) through one of the lenses of the VR glasses

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[11] The first build was presented publicly at an artist's masterclass at Colab in June 2015.

4. General Discussion

4.1 Dealing with the Crab

When creating work in this particular way, abstract ecologies of self and surrounds can be reflected back, mirroring self in peculiar animal reflections. If it's not animal gods we choose to relate to, (if we choose to relate to them at all) but perhaps it's also in how we relate to others. During the time of this research, several other animals started to make their presence felt. Whether it be through Ezra's grand saga at the table, the casual influence of Bubble Bobble's retro videogame dragons, a poetic Jaguar, or the Space Whale, Starfish and Crab that became part of my awareness, I began to wonder about this pantheon of animist gods, and what it meant to interact with them.

It becomes a question of empathy. From my perspective, when I saw animals figuratively 'on the shoulders' of others, through their references, behaviour or conversation, this became the animal gods revealing parts of themselves through them. I would treat these ecologies with the same sensitivity and ethics to how I would treat their physical counterpart.

In the case of the crab, it's complicated and interesting. I eat regular crab (unlike starfish, jaguar and whale, but amongst other crustaceans), and in order to do so I break open it's shell, and eat the meat inside. During this research I began to wonder what it meant to interact with those whom I saw as revealing the crab – and how to interact appropriately and ethically.

Breaking open a shell is violent excess of activity. Crab meat doesn't fill you unless you eat a lot of it. Seen from a certain perspective, the act of shell breaking is also the act of critique – taking anothers notions about the universe and whilst reconfiguring them violently, you in turn assimilate them into self through this dialogue. As opposed to a 'soft' touch in terms of ideology, I know dealing with the crab means the hard approach when it comes to shattering the ideological shell of others. I have a certain realisation that this is trauma, and perhaps is only self indulgent. Sometimes it is best to leave crabs alone. In my scuba diving experience, I never want put my hand into those rocky holes where crayfish reside, gloves or no – as I don't want to become entangled with those robotic spiders. The Crab (or the crayfish) struggle to be extracted. This emerging view means that this research in relation to videogames itself can be partially seen as my own constant questioning with what I perceive as ways of interacting with a very established community, that holds tenaciously to ideals and genres. I think this spiritual approach has made me realise that this subtle animist acknowledgement allows me a particular kind of navigation and movement within these communities.

4.2 On Rigor and Praxis in relation to Phenomenology.

I came to Roth very late in the research, and this has meant that I can only look at what I have done in relation to the phenomenological approach that he has described as a post-analysis. I don't believe that the research suffers greatly in relation to this, but I believe that each element itself, whether it be the painting, the software, the writing – probably deserves more analysis through this specific praxis than I was able to give it. The question is, how does one move effectively from the direct experience to the objective – i.e. first to third person phenomenologically, and at what part of the artistic process should you begin to do that? I know there's even a benefit of an ignorance of this position at certain stages, as it allows me to create work fruitfully even without this perspective on research, but only through that perspective can I begin to locate myself within society and discourse, and as through Verwoert – create a relationship to and a means of going on with my current practice. The realisation that this practice is acceptable is a large step for me in consideration of the ideas discussed in the exegesis, and I feel transformed by this realisation. I feel after looking at this approach that the software I make is more like a phenomenological diagram, a tool that can be used for helping express and relating to the phenomenon of consciousness, and I'm interested in how and what people see in those sketches, at the same time as considering the way I see them, and the animal gods that inevitably play a part in it for me.

4.3 Virtual Reality

A recent critique[12] of my small VR work made me think about the relationship this has to work that is already in VR. A common principle amongst early developers in this recent renewed interest in VR is to manufacturing the idea of 'presence', a qualifier in recognising experiences that some consider well crafted.

It seems that a philosophical inquiry into presence would reveal more relationships that can be explored within virtual reality in relation to this idea, as well as through Roth's trace and erasure.

I'm reminded of Brian Eno's comment on the memorable aspects of technology, in that what we find awkward about a new technology will inevitably become it's signature, and attempts will be made to recreate it in the future. That is, the failure of technology to contain the human soul and how that breaks or surpasses the technology in turn creates new sacred elements of technology.

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[12] At the Colab Masterclass with Jean Dubois – June 2015.

For Virtual Reality we should consider how this soulful expression leaks from the periphery of the technology, and how we can foster thoughtful experimentation in the scaled development experience.

In terms of spirituality, the overwhelming feeling I have after making work in this way is that, as I have been making digital work for some time, and viewing it via a monitor, viewing digital work in this particular way gives it a very particular grounding that definitely has a separate presence, that perhaps is only felt marginally when viewing work through a screen. As well as the screen based work, perhaps the implications of the relationship to the animist spiritual are felt closer to the body using this technology. It's one thing to see the Deer God die on the cinema screen, but another, probably to see him die next to you.

4.4 Capital Systems, Akademeia and Sunsets.

The late interest in Jan Verwoert's talks led me to an interesting one discussing the problematic nature of being in an institution where everyone considers themselves to be "the one". He identifies the politics of capital as the yardstick in which everyone, in turn has their value measured by the market, and good "ones" and bad "ones" will eventually be evaluated by their ability to produce cash. He instead asks for a return to the original notion of the akademeia, which operates in a particular way he would call a "collusion of radical difference" – that instead of functioning as an efficient machine, functions only by a constant short circuiting of it's own self. He uses the Muppet Show and Police Academy as playful examples of this kind of thing, and says that the modern university is only sometimes reflective of an akademia.

If videogames are a similar kind of eclectic collection of muppets or comic police, in thinking through modern digital storefronts like Steam, is almost too easy to see that there could be much more playful interaction between the community and the videogames they play, and even perhaps between the videogames themselves. As the multitude of videogame experiences are reduced to thumbnails and isolated, the perception of the variation in the landscape of videogames is drastically reduced. Considering videogames again as the profane share without memory of the divine could also be useful in order to reevaluate the systems that collect them.

At the time of this writing, Tale of Tales, an independent game studio working on independent games since 2002, are closing their doors and turning their back on videogames, citing the impossibility of creating alternative work in this space. (**"**And the sun sets**…** | SUNSET,**"** n.d.) It seems that Tales of Tales needed their patron, and perhaps even their shaman to emerge into this modern "Let's Play" environment, or perhaps for the large profitable collective of

videogames to recognise that a diverse culture is a beneficial one, and to help sustain a variation in voices, without recompense.

There is hope and potential too, that some of the subtle works of digital architecture, and minimalistic videogames that have been produced and denigrated as "walking simulators" in internet dialogue will have a kind of revitalisation when reproduced in VR, where overwhelming a player/participant is all too easy, and direct adaptations of modern twitch-reflex videogames don't seem to work due to the speeds of motion involved. A new language of VR has to be invented to create new works, and inevitably they will lean on historical media traditions, but should also take into account phenomenological perspectives on vision and memory, and perhaps dreams.

From a phenomenological perspective, personally, VR seems to be a pathway that has opened before me, which will have a certain kind of potential to accommodate the certain kind of work I make, that is and is not, yet surrounds videogames. A real relationship with some form of sustaining capital still needs to be made in relation to this extended research, in order to manage my own constant short circuiting. If I take this research and extend the line of thinking towards the difficult future of my own sustainability, I will have some definite bartering with wild gods to do.

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Appendices

1. Dream of the Flower Man (April 15, 2014)

A recent dream I had began with a lanky man I knew. He wanted to be killed, by arrow, in a public square.

He asked a woman he knew, a competitor of his, to do it.

He arrives, waits patiently in the square, and right before the woman releases the arrow, I snap to his consciousness.

Before I was disembodied, now I'm within his body. Waiting to be shot by an arrow.

So now I wait, on edge. Two arrows, missing their target, shatter on the cobblestones.

I didn't know she had it in her, I feel. My gut twists.

I feel the moment when third arrow hits, and then I leave the man.

I follow along the trajectory of the last arrow, and I see the woman, aiming at the man, bow still raised after the third shot was taken. I am her, and I feel her anguish in shooting.

I see her face contort into bizarre expressions. Strange mouth movements beyond human range.

Incantations of Love, I think.

I leave the woman and am now disembodied, in front of the man's face as a large red flower bursts from his mouth.

(Broken) Relationships in Space.

What value does this dream have for me? I didn't get to choose this degree of trauma, and I felt it was also somehow meaningful. I found it helpful initially to look at the spatial relationships that were contained within it. The dream itself wasn't from one perspective, but from multiple. It varied – from a disembodied observer, to an exact embodiment of the waiting man, with all his tension and feeling, to an outside, but still within, the woman. This gradient of experience has a familiar relationship in media and camera view – an omniscient, but internal perspective, a first person viewpoint and a third person viewpoint. Film and Videogames both extend this relationship beyond the person to the community, and sometimes the universal – a view of a city as an establishing shot for a drama, or alternatively a simulation style videogame's city map. These could be read in similar ways, but are experienced differently. Both are moments in movements through the possibility space of their respective networks.

The subversion of expectations in both mediums is an important part of what makes this movement happen.

Nathaniel Stern describes this spatial embodied movement using the interlinking ideas of – Movement, Sensation, and Thought.

"*When we move and think and feel, we are, of course, a body. This body is constantly changing, in and through its ongoing relationships. This body is a dynamic form, full of potential. It is not "a body," as thing, but* embodiment *as incipient activity. Embodiment is a continuously emergent and active relation. It is our materialization and articulation, both as they occur, and about to occur. Embodiment is moving-thinking-feeling, it is the body's potential to vary, it is the body's relations to the outside. And embodiment, I contend, is what is staged in the best interactive art*. (Stern, 2014)"

In the film *'Enter the Void*" (Noé, 2010), a young man is shot and killed by police, after a confrontation in a Japanese club. In his disembodied state he drifts in and out of his past memories, and his still-alive sister's extremely victimised social situation and relationships. Through this continuous change in disembodied viewpoint we are allowed identification with the actors in this specific network, as well as the city itself, as well as what it represents in fantasy. As the viewer and character, we simultaneously eventually go through a kind of symbolic rebirth – a unique kind of resolution, similar to the final 'starchild' ending sequence of 2001: A Space Odyssey.

There is a similar movement of relation, and pushing through 'tough' spaces – with a drastically lighter tone, happening in the video game *'Frog Fractions'* by Jim Crawford. In this game you are presented as a frog on a lilypad, eating various bugs. It adopts a kind of ludicrous educational game as a facade – and it quickly reveals a 'false ceiling' – where you, as the frog – go on a journey through the bug universe, at first being reviled for your bug killing actions and ending up in bug court, eventually becoming bug president. At each stage of the game, the gameplay adopts drastically different genres, at some times a platformer, sometimes a vertically scrolling shooter, and a text adventure, as well as a few others.

This continuous *breaking* of experience, through the 'false ceiling' Jim Crawford talks about as a necessity for mystery, in the age of video game walkthroughs and the culture of 'looking it up' online. His second version of the game is currently in production, and utilises meta-game elements, such as not revealing the release date, nor under what title it is going to be released – to enable this important element of mystery.

The 'immediate' quality of experience is something that is gained through these breaks, whether they be through subversion of expectations or emotional content tied the experience itself. To me, this gives me the feeling of 'something is finally happening' – and puts me firmly in the presence of the experience.

2. Wednesday (Blog entry July 13, 2014)

I'm sitting here, pissed off - starting to watch Synedoche, a movie I haven't seen in a while. It's been ages since I've been writing, and I feel like the momentum I had at the start of semester is completely gone. **[redacted]** That'll change - I hope.

Right now the last thing I feel like doing is writing about how the many aspects of childlike play I have engaged with this semester have affected process, but I really have to sit down and do it. This is a real problem with me. I leave everything til the last minute.

Fuck.

Philip Seymour Hoffman in Synecdoche is now looking at his own stool. God – I feel like I'm doing that with all this aggregation process. Now he's with his wife - they're in real trouble and they're at a psychologist. His wife wishes he was dead. What a fucking nightmare.

Fuck.

[Overheard]

"I don't know why I make it so complicated."

"That's what you do."

I think I have to read over my last reflective practice statement to make this make sense. I feel like I went off the deep end there. I started singing everything, saying everything poetically, and making promises I can't keep.

A house is on fire. A real estate agent is walking through a prospective tenant.

"I like it, I do - I'm just really concerned about dying in the fire."

Maybe this whole thing is me trying to not concentrate on one thing. Perhaps this fluttering between all the things, all the time, never putting myself down on one thing - that's the thing. Or not. Or it is. Even right now I'm looking at my words and trying to be clever about the things I put down. Like "Flutter." Pick up on that, reader - note it down. Make sense of it. Note it down in your memories of me.

Fuck.

"I don't know what I'm doing. I don't know. We'll talk when I get back. Okay?"

Am I just going to quote this whole film?

"I'm lonely."

"I'm hurt."

"Yes? And?"

"I think Adele's right when she says I'm not doing anything real."

"I'm afraid of dying, and I want to do something important whilst I'm still here."

Edward Caden says it'll change my life. If I come to university. If I come and be part of this Masters programme I can probably change my life.

I've been seeing time strangely too, bout time I told you that. I feel like I'm in a spiral headed upwards. This is my second time round the same time corridor, and I'm seeing people I knew before embodied in those around me. I'm interacting with them differently now, if that matters.

I actually feel like I've lost the most passionate years of my life. Others have found the thermals and popped up above the clouds, and I've collapsed, repeating a cycle of time and living in a house of fire, and maybe all the dreams that circle through the university are false and empty.

"Because I feel - a longing."

Adele in the magazine now. Caden's sick and he sees imagined advertisements for Adele's happier life. Much happier without him.

Now he's getting a grant.

"..finally put my real self into something."

"The idea is to do a massive theatre piece. Uncompromising. Honest."

He's talking now about the possibility of putting this into the play.

The Mikveh.

Perhaps this it for me. The turgid difficulty of the making. Perhaps all these little sketch experiences that I've been building are actually frustrating little anxieties.

"I've been thinking a lot about dying lately…" "…that's what I want to explore. We're all hurtling towards death."

Synecdoche is the story of one man's fight with his health, his family, and his creative spirit. Now he's fighting for his life in Germany. Ugh - That feels so wrong. I'm suddenly reminded of Wolfenstein 3D. He walks around the set now, with hundreds of spinning plates. (I just wrote platers, but corrected it to plates.)

Why did they have to write 3D on the end of everything? - I guess we're about to see that again with VR. I can't wait for the slew of VR titles. Actually I think there'll be a real good thing there. Maybe I'll even make something in VR one day.

"My father died."

Most people consider the role I play to be something along the lines of chaos. Chaotic Neutral. Chaotic Evil. What is wrong with exploring the possibility space outside of definition? Mind you, when it comes to formalities I can't forget the fear. Not too long ago I stared into the eyes of a mother who lost a son - whom I knew, and had no words to say, not even those shitty formalities.

Caden's daughter's diary in Synedoche exists as a beautiful temporality. So many little touches here that resonate with me. Now he's here in..

"I won't settle for anything less than the brutal truth. Brutal."

"When are we getting an audience in here? It's been seventeen years."

All these little post it notes. You keep biting your tongue.

[Snapshot]

Interviewing for participants now. The guy who follows him. Hire me, and you'll see who you truly are. Man as a mirror.

He's the voice, this weird fella - of his own mind. He gives him an address - so he can see him lose even more of himself. For research.

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Now it's the preacher scene, a mock funeral now - saying surprising things that resonate with Caden and us.

"And the truth is - I feel so angry, and I feel so sad."

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"Fuck everybody."

Everyone's disappointing - when you know someone.

Why are we all crying in the dark? It's all disappointing.

I can't even write clearly about the last part of this movie since I'm so invested in it.

"Die."

I uncontrollably let out a singular sob in the fading whiteness and darkness as the word is said and quickly muffle it so that noone hears it.

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Morning now. A peaceful cat is sleeping next to me. I've made my excuses and now have removed this particular abject experience from my throat and now can focus on the rest of the documentation. Hopefully that's enough.

3. Serious Reading – Synecdoche (Blog Entry June 15, 2014)

I'm sitting here, pissed off - starting to watch Synedoche, a movie I haven't seen in a while. It's been ages since I've been writing, and I feel like the momentum I had at the start of semester is completely gone. [redacted] That'll change - I hope.

Right now the last thing I feel like doing is writing about how the many aspects of childlike play I have engaged with this semester have affected process, but I really have to sit down and do it. This is a real problem with me. I leave everything til the last minute.

Fuck.

Philip Seymour Hoffman in Synecdoche is now looking at his own stool. God – I feel like I'm doing that with all this aggregation process. Now he's with his wife - they're in real trouble and they're at a psychologist. His wife wishes he was dead. What a fucking nightmare.

Fuck.

[Overheard]

"I don't know why I make it so complicated."

"That's what you do."

I think I have to read over my last reflective practice statement to make this make sense. I feel like I went off the deep end there. I started singing everything, saying everything poetically, and making promises I can't keep.

A house is on fire. A real estate agent is walking through a prospective tenant.

"I like it, I do - I'm just really concerned about dying in the fire."

Maybe this whole thing is me trying to not concentrate on one thing. Perhaps this fluttering between all the things, all the time, never putting myself down on one thing - that's the thing. Or not. Or it is. Even right now I'm looking at my words and trying to be clever about the things I put down. Like "Flutter." Pick up on that, reader - note it down. Make sense of it. Note it down in your memories of me.

Fuck.

"I don't know what I'm doing. I don't know. We'll talk when I get back. Okay?"

Am I just going to quote this whole film?

"I'm lonely."

"I'm hurt."

"Yes? And?"

"I think Adele's right when she says I'm not doing anything real."

"I'm afraid of dying, and I want to do something important whilst I'm still here."

Edward Caden says it'll change my life. If I come to university. If I come and be part of this Masters programme I can probably change my life.

I've been seeing time strangely too, bout time I told you that. I feel like I'm in a spiral headed upwards. This is my second time round the same time corridor, and I'm seeing people I knew before embodied in those around me. I'm interacting with them differently now, if that matters.

I actually feel like I've lost the most passionate years of my life. Others have found the thermals and popped up above the clouds, and I've collapsed, repeating a cycle of time and living in a house of fire, and maybe all the dreams that circle through the university are false and empty.

"Because I feel - a longing."

Adele in the magazine now. Caden's sick and he sees imagined advertisements for Adele's happier life. Much happier without him.

Now he's getting a grant.

"..finally put my real self into something."

"The idea is to do a massive theatre piece. Uncompromising. Honest."

He's talking now about the possibility of putting this into the play.

The Mikveh.

Perhaps this it for me. The turgid difficulty of the making. Perhaps all these little sketch experiences that I've been building are actually frustrating little anxieties.

"I've been thinking a lot about dying lately..." "...that's what I want to explore. We're all hurtling towards death."

Synecdoche is the story of one man's fight with his health, his family, and his creative spirit. Now he's fighting for his life in Germany. Ugh - That feels so wrong. I'm suddenly reminded of Wolfenstein 3D. He walks around the set now, with hundreds of spinning plates. (I just wrote platers, but corrected it to plates.)

Why did they have to write 3D on the end of everything? - I guess we're about to see that again with VR. I can't wait for the slew of VR titles. Actually I think there'll be a real good thing there. Maybe I'll even make something in VR one day.

"My father died."

Most people consider the role I play to be something along the lines of chaos. Chaotic Neutral. Chaotic Evil. What is wrong with exploring the possibility space outside of definition? Mind you, when it comes to formalities I can't forget the fear. Not too long ago I stared into the eyes of a mother who lost a son - whom I knew, and had no words to say, not even those shitty formalities.

Caden's daughter's diary in Synedoche exists as a beautiful temporality. So many little touches here that resonate with me. Now he's here in..

"I won't settle for anything less than the brutal truth. Brutal."

"When are we getting an audience in here? It's been seventeen years."

All these little post it notes. You keep biting your tongue.

[Snapshot]

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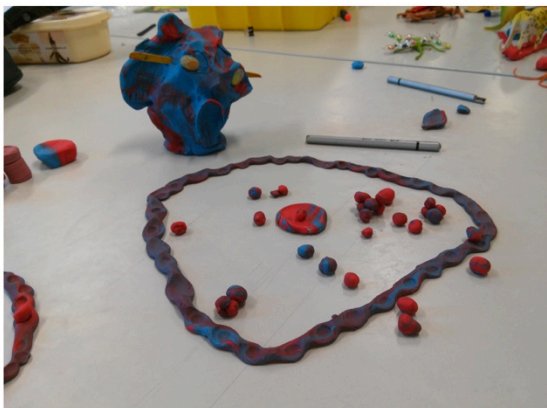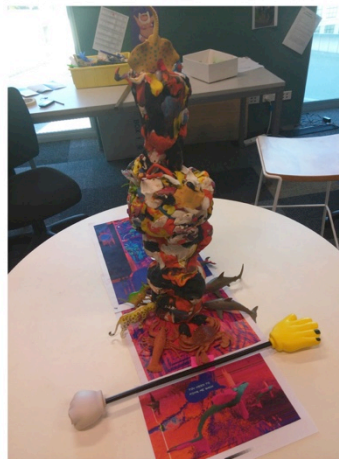
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4. The Table

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