

ZIP-SCENE

Conference

ART * VR

FESTIVAL OF VIRTUAL REALITY AND OTHER IMMERSIVE ART

ZIP-SCENE

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Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design

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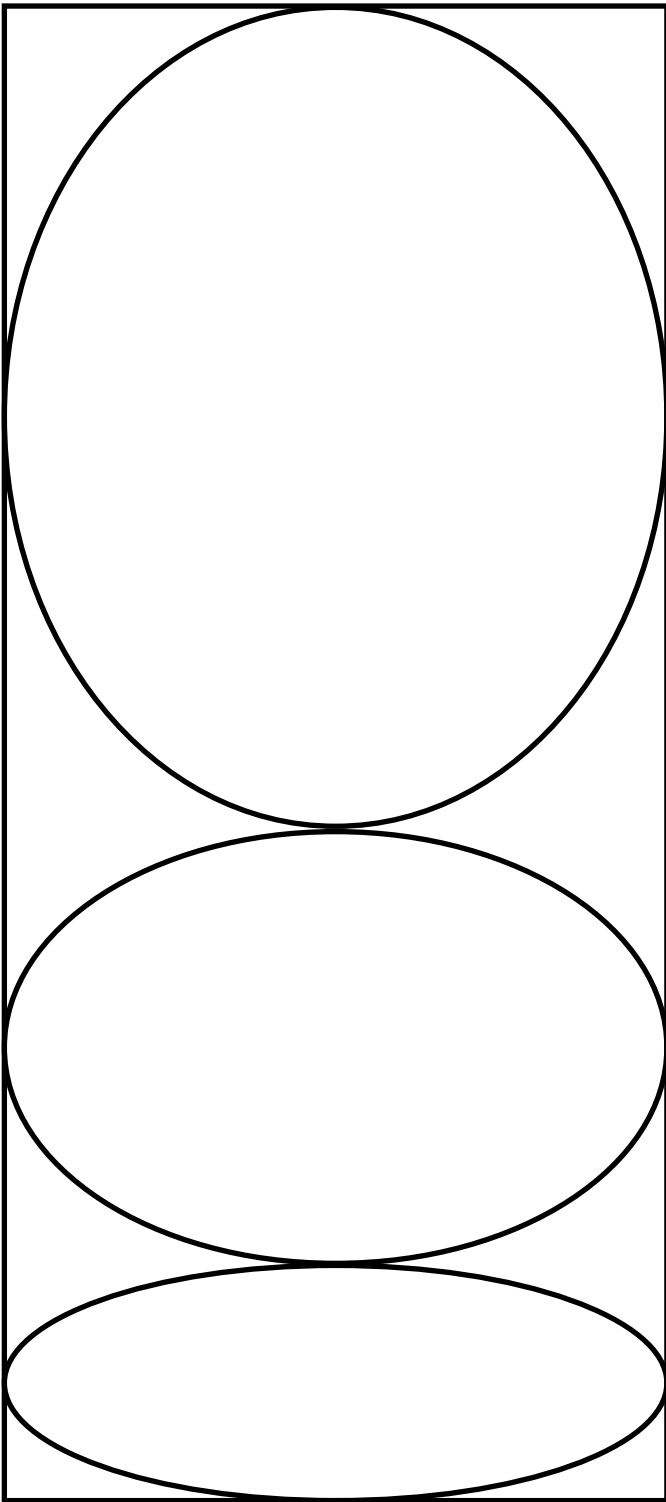
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Foreword

Welcome to the 6th edition of Zip-Scene Conference!

In 2018, this event began as a modest, half-underground conference at Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design and has since grown, with Prague becoming its second home thanks to the Art*VR Festival. The conference has evolved into a unique meeting place for researchers and creatives, fostering both regional and international collaborations among participants.

Throughout the six editions of Zip-Scene, one of the most prevalent concepts discussed, alongside 'immersion,' has been 'narrative.' This focus has prompted a re-examination of what narrative means in contemporary contexts. It aligns with Byung-Chul Han's thoughts on the narrative crisis we are currently experiencing. While this perspective may be controversial, it encourages us to rethink our treatment of narrative today: Do we employ it whenever possible to describe accessible content (in contrast to highly visual and abstract productions), or do we view it as an identity-communicating story that reveals something profound about ourselves? I hope that during this conference, we will have the opportunity to discuss this topic in greater depth from the perspective of various media types. Hopefully we can also develop various approaches that help us to assess interactive digital narrative artworks and which enable us in the future to establish a critical but accurate language to discuss it and to create a dialogue about them.

Ágnes Karolina Bakk,
conference founder
01.10.2024. Budapest

Unveiling the Crisis of Stories: Can Interactive Digital Storytelling Lead to Deep Listening?

In 2024 Byung-Chul Han's latest book was published in which he stated that we live in the era of a narrative crisis (Han 2024). According to him, the stories became "inflated", "they have lost their original power" and the story consumers might be lonely beings as they do not experience the stories within a community. One of the main reasons for this is that we experience these stories via technological means: „The loss of empathy in the age of the smartphone is a clear sign that this technology is not a medium for telling stories.“ While Byung-Chul Han's work is heavily debated (see Chayka 2017), the philosopher's work is influential and based on his latest work one could also interpret that the format of interactive digital storytelling is also in crisis as it takes place by using technological means and we often experience it alone - physically. As creators in this field use digital media formats (video games, visual novels, XR formats) to communicate their stories, statements questioning the capacity of technologies can be heavily debated and we would also like to bring them to table at the Zip-Scene Conference vol. 6. We invite authors, designers and researchers dealing with interactive digital storytelling to reflect on the possibility of this crisis, and share what they embed into their practice to not objectify their audiences (Westling 2020, 5), but to design for meaningful participation. We also aim to question whether the audiences are still eager to participate in these formats or do they choose more passive observation and delegate their agency rather to nonhuman entities, NPCs, etc (Chia and Ruffino 2022), this way emphasizing the need for interpassivity (Fizek 2018)?

Sandboxes for immersive aspects and participation

The information society can perceive that stories should be interactive to propagate active participation, which could be transferred into real life (and hopefully into real-life citizen relationship taking). Is it just the wildest dream of designers and researchers of these experiences, that the interactive digital narratives can have a long-term transformative effect? Can contemporary interactive digital stories offer us – besides information – directions and interpretation

possibilities? These various sandbox experiences could be suitable for designers – with the help of the participants they can try out novel ways of communicating, interacting, and expressing themselves in the sense of "Playful Utopias". This notion connects interactive digital storytelling to the long tradition of literary and cinematic utopias and their effect on reality (cf Shedroff et. al. 2012) and positions them as a more democratic, participatory form of speculative narratives, especially in the realm of Metaverse-like environments. Also, this needs to be fostered by creating more awareness of interactive digital storytelling formats and literacy on IDN's (Interactive Digital Narratives) (Koenitz 2023).

If the act of storytelling is in crisis, then do the new technologies and media dim even more the genuine capacities of stories or do they just respond to our contemporary needs of bringing magical experiences (Bakk 2020) and enchantment to our everyday life to arm's length away? While many active citizens – as members of our current information society – try to promote their values and call for action on social media, the apathy towards some of these platforms is growing (Shen 2022). Can one state though that even social media is not made for telling stories as it does not allow close listening, although it can offer the sense of wide accessibility and the illusion of agency as one can interact with the story.

But does it offer the possibility for deep listening? Or our society – as Gerhard Schulze defined – as the experience society (Schulze 2008) – is not in need anymore for deep listening, but rather lost its „careful listener“ capacity (Han 2024) and aims more for fast experiences? Therefore, can we state that we also experience the crisis of perception? Can this crisis and the lack of careful listening be reasoned and linked intrinsically to the prevalence of power structures? Can for example feminist technology perspectives or other marginalized cultures and societies offer new ways of storytelling? Should regions also aim for cultivating local (interactive) storytelling practices (that is a mission of Zip-Scene Conference in the Visegrad area as well)?

Key questions

- 1. How are new technology tools used to shape the stories told with them and how do they add or question the crisis mentioned above? How can we uncover new layers of the history of interactive digital storytelling by taking into perspective social cultural aspects and their creators' backgrounds?**
- 2. How do creators working with immersive analog/physical media (e.g. with immersive theatre, installations, printed formats, etc.) define their position towards the technological media and its capacities of storytelling?**
- 3. How do creators aim to tackle the question of lack of time for reflection and sensory overload that results in heightened mental tension in the audiences? How do audiences deal with their overstimulation?**

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PROGRAM
October 17-19

DAY1

OCTOBER 17

Section: Who is out there?

Moderator: **Ágnes Karolina Bakk**

10:00:00 - 10:15:00 | **Sam Chovanec**

(Slovakia/Hungary)

AR and Connectedness to Nature

10:15:00 - 10:30:00 | **Sofie Mønster, Maja Friis**

(Denmark)

Breathing Coral: Slow Stories For a Fast-paced World

10:30:00 - 10:45:00 | **Samar Nahas** (Canada)

Liminal Design: Crafting Embodied Experiences for Self-reflection and Awe

10:45 - 10:55 | Q&A | 10:55 - 11:10 | Break

Section: Games and narrative trends

Moderator: **Sam Chovanec**

11:10:00 - 11:25:00 | **Selen Çalık Bedir** (Turkey)

Slowing Down Fast: New Trends in Online Narrative Engagement

11:25:00 - 11:40:00 | **Mauro Colarieti** (Italy)

"I wanted to live. I fought for that" - Social Justice and Branching Narratives in "Detroit: Become Human", "Road 96", and "Life is Strange"

11:40:00 - 11:55:00 | **Amen Shan** (India)

AI in Stories, Golems, and What They Can Teach Us About AI In Our Lives

11:55:00 - 12:10:00 | **Giorgio Chiappa** (Italy)

Of Cats, Ghosts, and Grammar. "The Game of Errors" as an experiment in game-based language and culture didactics

12:10 - 12:20 | Q&A | 12:20 - 13:45 | Break

13:45 - 14:45 | **Authors' roundtable:**

"Searching for Lost Peace"

Participants: **Wen-Yee Hsieh** (Limbophobia),

Dime Gjorgjievski (Lost and Found), **Rebecca Evans**

(Hinterlands), **Ping-Ying Yen** (A Simple Silence),

Tara Baath Mooney (Mammary Mountain)

14:45 - 15:00 | Break

Section: Communities of immersion

Moderator: **Mauro Colarieti**

15:00 - 15:15 | **Rabia Özgü Kılınçarslan & Beril Toper** (Turkey)

Revisiting Egofugal: Unveiling the Crisis of Narration in the Digital Age

15:15 - 15:30 | **Máté Barkóczi** (Hungary)

Peek The Unseen. Helping better use of existing infrastructures through the portals

15:30 - 15:45 | **Sophia Reiterer** (Italy)

Exploring AR Communities through Mars Mission at Kinderstadt Mini-Salzburg

15:45 - 16:00 | **Julia Bruton** (Germany)

Virtual Reality - The First Matriarchal Medium?

16:00 - 16:10 | Q&A | 16:10 - 16:25 | Break

Liveness in the machine

Moderator: **Sofie Mønster**

16:25:00 - 16:40:00 | **Alžběta Šašinková** (Czechia)

Teaching VR Theatre

16:40:00 - 16:55:00 | **Puneet Jain** (India)

Hand to Mouth: Challenging (ableist) biases in 'Metaverse' narratives of XR with disabled bodies through criptastic-hacking

16:55:00 - 17:10:00 | **Sana Akram** (Pakistan)

The Enchantment of Immersive Storytelling and the Efficacious Powers of XR

17:10 - 17:20 | Q&A | 17:20 - 17:35 | Break

18:00 - 18:45 | Keynote: **Kata Szita** (Ireland)

Neurodiversity-friendly Immersive Storytelling

DAY 2

OCTOBER 18

Section: Feeling together

Moderator: **Puneet Jain**

10:00 - 10:15 | **Krzysztof Pijarski** (Poland)
"Sunsetting" As Mass Extinction Event. Migrant digital communities in the case of Academia Eletronica and BRCVR

10:15 - 10:30 | **Ludovica Galleani d'Agliano** (Italy / Switzerland)
The Syntia_cam Project: Re-imagining sex work through co-creation and digital storytelling.

10:30 - 10:45 | **Sophia Bulgakova** (Ukraine/The Netherlands)
Expanding OTHERWORLDS

10:45 - 10:55 | Q&A | 10:55 - 11:10 | Break

Section: Provoking the boundaries

Moderator: **Agnieszka Przybyszewska**

11:10 - 11:25 | **Du Zhang** (Germany)
Metamorphosis: Redo with nature, a micro-utopia in virtual reality.

11:25 - 11:40 | **Eleonora D'Ascenzi** (Italy)
Empathy in the Digital age: immersive shifting perspectives

11:40 - 11:55 | **Ash Eliza Smith** (USA)
Deep Time, Heavy Listening: A Performance Lecture

11:55 - 12:10 | Q&A | 12:10 - 13:30 | Break

13:30 - 14:50 | **Authors' roundtable: Virtual Motherhood or How to Talk About Discomfort**

Participants: **Johanna Courtney** (HeartBeat), **Yvette Granata** (I Took a Lethal Dose of Herbs), **Isabelle Andreani** (Nana Lou), **Fabienne Giezendanner** (Bloom)

13.30-17.30 | (PARALLEL PROGRAM)
Workshop with **Tibor Udvari** Spatial p5
4 hours workshop (max. 3 participants)

14:50 - 15:20 | Break

Section: N(ew n)arratives In Interaction?

Moderator: **Dimitar Uzunov**

15:20:00 - 15:35:00 | **Monika Górska-Olesińska & Agnieszka Przybyszewska** (Poland)
Narrativising and Embodying Aphasia Through VR

15:35:00 - 15:50:00 | **Florian Mundhenke** (Germany)
Co-Creation as Crisis Intervention – New Collaborative Means in Non-Fictional VR

15:50:00 - 16:05:00 | **Christopher Morrison** (USA)
New Narrative Forms: Everything You Know About Story is Now Wrong

16:05 - 16:15 | Q&A | 16:15 - 16:45 | Break

16:45:00 - 18:00:00 **Authors' roundtable: Magic in Mixed Reality**

Participants: **Ben Andrews** (Turbulence: Jamais Vu), **Sophia Bulgakova** (Otherworlds), **Lucas Rizzotto** (A Dream of Fish: Prologue), **Eliza McNitt** (Astra)

DAY 3

OCTOBER 19

Pitching session

Moderator: **Ondřej Moravec**

10:00 - 10:15 | **Philipp Wenning** (Germany)
Translating a Book Into an Immersive Game

10:15-10:30 | **Malgorzata Wabińska** (Poland)
ECHO PROJECT 9

10:30-10:45 | **Yesica Duarte** (Argentina)
Pinch to Awaken XR

10:45-11:00 | **Wiktor Filip Gacparsi & Alexander Mettin**
Scratching the Surface (Germany and Poland)

11:00 - 11:15 | **Laurien Michiels** (Belgium)
The Room of Resonance: A Poetic AR Fable

12:45 - 14:00 | Break

11:30:00 - 11:45:00 | **Jiří Pecinovský & Markéta Magidová**
(Czechia) The Mermaid Project

11:45:00 - 12:00:00 | **Wen-Yee Hsieh & Sebox Hong** (Taiwan)
Oblivion

12:00:00 - 12:15:00 | **Selma Rizvic**
(Bosnia and Herzegovina) StecakLand

12:15:00 - 12:30:00 | **Marta Szarzyńska** (Poland) Aquatia

12:30:00 - 12:45:00 | **Lucas Dewulf & Justine Russchaert**
(Belgium) Oei

12:45 - 14:00 | Break

14:00 - 14:15 | **Kristof Timmerman** (Belgium)
The Portal As a Key Element to Embodied Storytelling

14:15 - 14:30 | **Mariam Natroshvili** (Georgia)
Memory Palace - unveiling hidden history through
interactive storytelling

14:30 - 15:30 | **Authors' roundtable: Playful
or Serious? Bringing Light into the Darkness**

Participants: **Jowita Guja & Adam Źądło** (The Cave),
François Vautier (Battlefield), **Anna Firbank** (Soul Paint),
Roman Rappak & Anne McKinnon (Detachment.EXE)

15:30 - 16:00 | Break

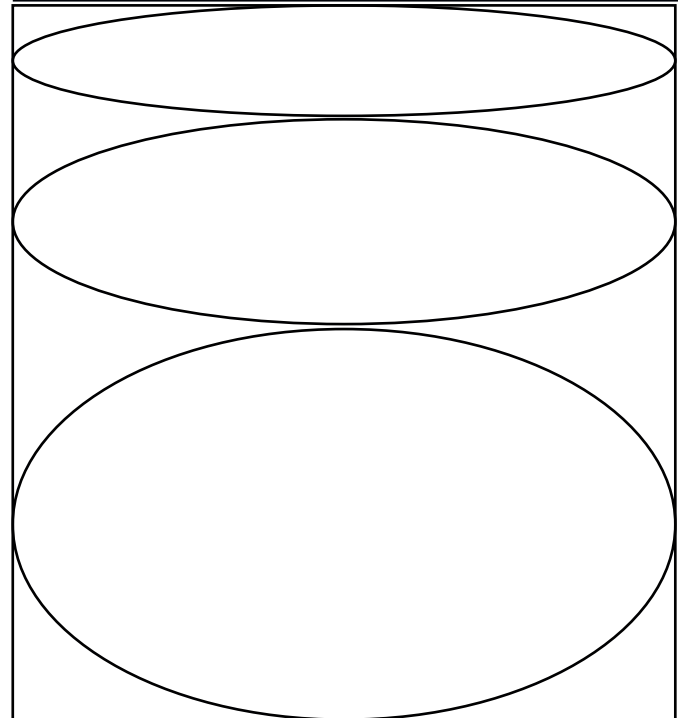
16:00 - 17:00 | **Authors' roundtable:
Virtual (Women's) Bodies: Ascending, Flourishing**

16:00:00 - 16:15:00 | **Introductory talk:**
Julie Šislerová (CZ): Breaking the Glass Ceiling:
Empowering Women in XR

Participants: **Caroline Laurin-Beaucage** (Bodies of Water),
Lilian Hess (Duchampiana), **Hana Chen** (Sister Lin-Tou),
Fabienne Giezendanner (Bloom), **Rebecca Evans**
(Hinterlands)

13.30-17.00 | **Workshops | Evan Neiden & Wren Mack**

The Tether: Accountability in Remote Experiences
(Max 12 participants)



1st Section: Who is out there?

10:00 - 10:15 | **Sam Chovanec** (SK-HU):

Can Plants Tell Stories? Exploring Nature with AR

Our project explores whether immersive technologies can enable nonhuman entities, such as plants and ecosystems, to tell their stories, challenging the idea that technology distances us from nature. We question whether the perceived decline in storytelling's power might be due to human-centered narratives becoming less compelling. Could it be that human stories are now seen as limited or even boring, while the stories of non-human actors—plants, animals, and ecosystems—hold the potential for more engaging and relevant narratives?

In one of our case studies, we used the extinct Hungarian plant *Puccinellia pannonica* in an AR application. While participants showed only modest improvements in their overall connection to nature, they formed a significantly stronger connection to specific natural elements like this plant. This suggests AR's potential to foster focused, targeted connections rather than broad engagement.

Our next project will explore how AR can highlight the ecosystemic services of forests around Budapest, focusing on air purification. Conducted in collaboration with the Hungarian forest management institution Pilisi, the study will take place in natural settings, offering a direct encounter with nonhuman narratives.

By integrating speculative philosophy and nonhuman perspectives, we aim to explore whether AR can shift storytelling beyond human narratives and bring the stories of nature to the forefront. This research seeks to show how AR can be used as a tool for conservation, education, and meaningful engagement with the natural world, possibly revealing that it is perhaps the nonhuman stories that offer fresh and important ways of connecting with the world around us.

10:15 - 10:30 | **Sofie Mønster and Maja Friis** (DK)

Breathing Coral: Slow stories for a fast-paced world

This proposal suggests a case study from the Art-Science Studio Visual Science. In 2021, Visual Science began a collaboration with the Section of Marine Biology, at the University of Copenhagen. Working closely with international coral researchers, visual artist and documentary filmmaker Maja Friis has used macro optics to discover distinctive personas in coral species and to pass on stories about slow life, transformation and extinction from a place, which the naked eye can't reach. This has resulted in the immersive audiovisual installation *Breathing Coral* where the small coral individuals are projected in 3 m large video portraits placed in an immersive reef-like structure. *Breathing Coral* offers an experience deeply rooted in science and aesthetics, addressing one of the most pressing and difficult issues of our time: the climate crisis. The piece presents a slow, intimate encounter with individual corals, encouraging viewers to connect and identify with these animals. The installation communicates through sounds and images. Without words. Without humans in the center. With video examples from *Breathing Coral* we will show an alternative narrative that contrasts with the fast paced experiences of daily lives. According to Hartmut Rosa's arguments in *Acceleration* (2005), the pace is of essence. We see it everywhere: the increased tempo in talking, in the terms fast food, power napping, speed dating, and also media eg. the high-speed film editing. Rosa argues that this high-paced society puts modern humans under pressure. Simultaneously we experience that there is a growing interest in the slow-life. Maybe as a resistance to the overload of visual images and fast pace in the society. We propose that this immersive, slow experience, portraying corals as individuals enables audiences to identify with the more-than-human world in a new way. This allows for deep listening and connection with the more-than-human world, and through that, a connection to the self. The slowness and pace can provide one of the keys to addressing the lack of connectedness many people feel. However, pace alone is not enough. In May 2024, a study conducted by the University of Copenhagen examined *Breathing Coral* using Rosa's concept of Resonance. Preliminary findings indicate bodily resonance: "That complete sensory

experience—I could feel it in my heart rhythm and my breath—when I entered the room. The darkness and the slow, calm movements.” - Audience member at Breathing Coral. Breathing Coral illustrates how immersive, slow-paced narratives, conveyed through audiovisual immersive media, can profoundly connect with audiences, pushing beyond the human-centric perspective and contrasting with the superficial interactions often found in modern technological media and society. But on what terms can this kind of narrative exist? And is it really possible to integrate slow experiences into a fast-paced digital world?

10:30 - 10:45 | **Samar Nahas** (CA):

Liminal Design: Crafting Embodied Experiences for Self-reflection and Awe

Liminality refers to the transitional state or “threshold” between two distinct phases (van Gennep, 1909/1960; Turner, 1967). This in-between state has significant implications for personal transformation and societal dynamics. In design and user experience, liminality presents a unique opportunity to create profound and transformative experiences (Liedgren et al., 2023). Liminal spaces inherently foster awe, a complex emotion characterized by perceived vastness and a need for accommodation (Keltner & Haidt, 2003). These spaces, at the boundaries of familiar states, challenge our mental frameworks and open us to new perspectives. Thomassen (2015) notes that liminality can temporarily suspend societal structures, creating an environment ripe for transformative experiences.

Awe is crucial in human experience, offering benefits such as improved well-being, increased prosocial behavior, and enhanced critical thinking (Piff et al., 2015; Rudd et al., 2012). It can expand our perception of time, increase life satisfaction, and reduce inflammation (Stellar et al., 2015). Additionally, awe fosters a sense of connectedness to others and the natural world, potentially promoting more environmentally conscious behaviors (Zhao et al., 2018). Embodied experiences are vital in fostering awe, especially in liminal design. Engaging the sensory apparatus creates powerful moments of awe that bypass skepticism and leave lasting impres-

sions (Chirico et al., 2018). This is particularly relevant in extended reality (XR) technologies, which offer unprecedented opportunities to create immersive, awe-inspiring experiences (Liedgren et al., 2023).

Beyond the Noise (www.beyondthenoise.art) is an interactive multi-sensory installation structured on the stages of a rite of passage—separation, liminality, and reintegration—that explores the profound impacts of societal standards on personal identity. It confronts, challenges, and redefines perceptions of beauty, aging, and self, inspiring personal reflection and connection. The development and prototyping of Beyond the Noise enabled the exploration of the intersection of liminality, awe, and embodied experiences, suggesting a promising avenue for creating transformative user experiences. This presentation shares the findings of this research-creation MA project and contributes to current research on leveraging the power of liminal spaces to foster awe through embodied experiences.

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2nd Section: Games and narrative trends

11:10 - 11:25 | **Selen Çalık Bedir** (TR) Slowing Down Fast: New Trends in Online Narrative Engagement

All sorts of narrative engagement (consumption and production practices) are expanded across media by audiences as well as official channels on both pre-digital and digital platforms. As extensively discussed by Henry Jenkins in the first decade of the 2000s, official channels strive for maximizing audience reaction while invested audiences keep making the most of narratives by actively seeking them out and creating their own.

Digitalization has increased the forms that such narratives can take, and a great example is *Sword Art Online*. Originating as a web novel in 2002 and quickly followed by its light novels, manga, anime, and games, SAO is a media mix project that is quite expansive. Furthermore, as the story it tells across media is of a boy who gets trapped in a Virtual Reality game, it is not surprising that VR games are also recently added to its scope.

In the case of fan productions, storytelling practices come into contact with easily accessible streaming platforms to different effects. Being the most established platform among its peers, Youtube has its own affordances and trends that come into play with fan attempts to keep engaging with SAO. Affordance in this case can be storytelling with the platform's available features, including its relatively recent compatibility with 360 degree videos (since 2015), while trend being sharing popular content in certain popular ways, such as the retelling/repurposing of stories in affective or relaxing ways thanks to the popularity of ASMR. ASMR, or "autonomous sensory meridian response," is a pleasurable tingling sensation caused by visual and auditory stimuli, and as an increasingly sought-after Youtube genre since the 2010s, it algorithmically merges with all sorts of Youtuber practices.

Fans freely bring together the official narrative of SAO with ASMR, and ASMR with forms of VR. These acts arguably boost the potential of ASMR and create new

grounds for storytelling. The aim of ASMR oriented storytelling to give comfort to its audiences may not fulfill the grounding function of storytelling that Byung Chul-Han yearns for today. Still, as a contagious trend that has been shaping storytelling in the recent years, it works in conflict with Youtubers' binge watching and fast-forwarding habits, and it does reflect a need for fast "slow experiences."

11:25 - 11:40 | **Mauro Colarieti** (IT) "I wanted to live. I fought for that" - Social Justice and Branching Narratives in "Detroit: Become Human", "Road 96", and "Life is Strange"

This paper delves into the relationship between branching narratives and political theory in contemporary videogames, focusing on three distinct case studies: "Detroit: Become Human", "Road 96", and the "Life is Strange" franchise. After an introduction of specific game studies' terms (ludic subjectivity, branching narratives, player agency) and studies that demonstrate a correlation between gaming and social bias, this research explores how these interactive narratives serve as an innovative tool for critiquing and resonating on political ideologies and beliefs. In "Detroit: Become Human", androids rebel against humans after developing free will. Players' choices influence the direction of the androids' fight for equality and autonomy, providing a lens to scrutinise themes of civil rights, social exclusion, and the injustices of oppressive legislations. Branching narratives allow the player to experience the intricacies of decision-making and moral dilemmas, as demonstrated by a script that is over 2000 pages long with around 80 possible endings.

Similarly, "Road 96" immerses players in an authoritarian state, a perilous journey works as an exploration of social unrest and resistance: we follow numerous teenagers who are rebelling against their country. The game's procedural storytelling investigates the impact of government policies and the struggles of youngsters within a restrictive society.

In the "Life is Strange" instalments, players embody teenagers with superpowers. Although these narratives

focus on supernatural events, the way they are depicted puts them in the background: Max time-travels, Daniel is telekinetic, and Alex senses people's emotions just by touching them, but the representation of superheroes as epic fighters on dangerous battlefields is lacking. The underlying concept is the social representation of minorities, focusing on the challenges that these communities face on a daily basis: Max is a lower-class female student of an elite art school; Sean and Daniel are second-generation Mexicans during Trump's presidency; Alex is an orphan of Asian origins. By taking examples from these case studies and by analysing their narrative structures, the objective of this presentation is highlighting how contemporary videoludic experiences are aiming to change people's perspectives on social justice and political responsibility, while defining the thin line between inclusion in videogames and woke-washing.

11:40 - 11:55 | **Amen Shan** (IN): AI in Stories, Golems, and what they can teach us about AI in our Lives

While there is no shortage of media that can educate us on the workings and ethics of AI, there is little discourse about how humans respond to, and make assumptions about AI; about what emotionally makes its development such an interesting and anxiety-inducing affair in public discourse today. The author argues that this is because our perception of AI is still limited to, and influenced by what AI has been portrayed as in fiction through literature and cinema alike. We prescribe a humanity and personality to what are effectively large scale number crunching algorithms, and judge them on moral and existential grounds that would befit fictional characters like HAL 9000 (2001: A Space Odyssey) and Ava (Ex Machina) but not the advanced number crunchers that we today call AI.

To this end, the author also discusses his process of discovery and a prototype concept for a virtual museum, inspired by Roguelike Video Games, a genre that famously uses repetition and personal intervention to tell stories that only the medium of video games can allow for. This virtual museum, that houses gamified interpretations of such fictional characters as Frankenstein and the Golem, gives each of them a chance to rewrite the

ending of their individual stories, in which the audience, a player, gets to play a critical role. Each character's story speaks to individual tropes about AI enforced by fiction and what they can teach us about our inherent anxieties, stereotypes, and the lawmaking needed to better integrate AI into the social and professional space. Further, the audience is able to get a glimpse of what the speculative future for each character's happy ending, and its metaphorical counterpart in the real world could look like, in keeping with each story's individual lesson. Ideologically, this project is built on the intertextuality of the Golem myth as proved by the works of Elizabeth R. Baer (*The Golem Redux*) and Ted Chiang (*72 Letters*), and is grounded in application by the New Laws of Robotics proposed by Frank Pasquale.

11:55 - 12:10 | **Giorgio Chiappa** (IT): Of Cats, Ghosts, and Grammar. "The Game of Errors" as an experiment in game-based language and culture didactics

Il gioco degli errori (*The Game of Errors*) is a series of video game puzzles designed for learners of Italian as a foreign language, currently being developed by Berlin-based researcher and educator Giorgio Chiappa. The game draws inspiration from the short stories and writings of Italian author and pedagogue Gianni Rodari (1920-1980), particularly his collection *Il libro degli errori* (*The Book of Errors*, 1964). In *Il libro degli errori*, linguistic mishaps such as dropping a letter or accent, making a grammar mistake, or engaging in political sophistry lead to reality morphing and going awry until linguistic order is restored. Similarly, in this game, players control a cat (an homage to Rodari's character "gato" – a "gatto" with only one "t" and one whisker) and encounter people, animals, and ghosts disrupted by language accidents. Players must find the words, letters, or objects needed to resolve these issues. Sometimes, success in the game comes from combining language with kindness, mirroring the themes in Rodari's stories. Aside from being a game-based didacting experience, *Il gioco degli errori* also poses the added advantage of empowering learners by creating a space in which mistakes are a fun-laden stepping stone towards knowledge and proficiency instead of a cause for embarrassment and sanction.

Currently, the game is in a barebones state. A small demo was produced using Bitsy Game Maker, and I am exploring other tools (e.g., Godot) to expand and diversify player agency, including potential VR/AR applications. By presenting my project, I hope to gain insights from the Zip-Scene community regarding design and development avenues. Based on last year's edition, I am confident the conference's positive climate of reciprocal feedback and assistance will be invaluable.

13:45 - 14:45 | **Authors' roundtable:**
Searching for Lost Peace.

Participants: **Wen-Yee Hsieh** (Limbophobia, Dime Gjorgjievski (*Lost and Found*), **Rebecca Evans** (*Hinterlands*), **Ping-Ying Yen** (*A Simple Silence*), **Tara Baoth Mooney** (*Mammary Mountain*)

3rd Section: Communities of immersion

15:00 - 15:15 | **Beril Toper & Rabia Özgül Kılınçarslan** (TR)
Revisiting Egofugal: Unveiling the Crisis of Narration in the Digital Age

Our research question is how do artworks from two distinct periods (early 2000s vs. 2023) reflect the crisis of narration, considering shifts in narrative techniques and artistic expression?

The digital age has significantly transformed how we perceive and interact with images. This change is particularly noticeable in contemporary media art, which challenges traditional ideas of storytelling and depiction. In "Crisis of Narration," Byung-Chul Han brings those changes to our attention by offering a framework. While his analysis is insightful, it seems limited to social media, news, etc. Richard Kearney's (1997) critique of the crisis of narration in contemporary culture hunts through the complex interplay between narrative, poetic imagination, and ethical responsibility.

This presentation aims to investigate how artworks from the early 2000s and 2023 reflect the crisis of narration through shifts in narrative techniques and artistic expression. Selected works from the Istanbul Biennial (2001) and BFI Expanded (2023) will be discussed around Chul-Han and Kearney's critics and also terms like immersion and illusions according to media art history. Oliver Grau (2003) traces the evolution of visual spaces from antiquity to the present day, highlighting the transformative impact of new technologies on art and image culture. Grau reconstructs the relationship between art history and media history.

Agnes Karolina Bakk's (2020) framework about the experience of immersion in VR and magic tricks also provides a valuable lens for understanding how contemporary artworks engage viewers on a sensory and emotional level. By examining immersion's psychological and perceptual dimensions, we can gain insights into how narratives are constructed and experienced in the digital age.

By examining these artworks through the lens of narrative crisis, illusion, immersion, and media history, we can better understand how contemporary art is responding to the challenges and opportunities of the digital age and opening up new possibilities for narrative techniques.

15:15 - 15:30 | **Máté Barkóczy** (HU): Peek the unseen: helping better use of existing infrastructures through the portals

In my study, I explore the intersection of digital medium and the built environment, focusing on the crisis of vacant properties in the context of polycrisis. By examining how technological means can address the alienation from empty urban spaces and help people and businesses recover from crises (Zeitlin, Nicoli, and Laffan 2019). I'm looking at good practices that use technology to build new, appropriate features for the built environment, fostering people's connection to their surroundings. My research includes interviews that shed light on both the strengths and challenges of spatial organisation in Budapest. These interviews reveal how problems in physical space can be solved through online platforms and digital solutions manifest in physical space. This approach emphasises the need to increase the awareness of residents and their perception of their built environment, looking beyond aesthetic and architectural considerations to include perceptual processes and social attitudes. The project addresses the common sight of empty, abandoned properties and challenges the urban planning processes that determine the livability and quality of streets. Focusing on the old post office buildings in Budapest in Népszínház street, the project aims to empower potential tenants and buyers by exploring the needs of the local community. Through augmented reality (AR) portals, the project will allow users to visualise and explore hidden urban spaces, fostering a deeper connection between individuals and their environment.

The AR technology used in the project creates immersive experiences that bridge the gap between conceptualisation and user experience. Using unique GPT

interpretations from interviews and research by urban planners, the project acts as a place agency. It simulates and provides insights through textual and visual content, offering a novel way to engage with and understand the urban landscape.

This work aims to contribute to the discourse on technology and our built environment in the age of polycrisis, asking whether new media reduce or increase the resilience of cities. By fostering interactive and participatory experiences, the project aims to offset the tendency towards passive observation and promote active engagement with urban spaces. The project will explore the potential of interactive digital narratives to transform our perceptions and interactions with the built environment, ultimately contributing to more inclusive and empathetic urban experiences.

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15:30 - 15:45 **Sophia Reiterer** (IT): Exploring AR Communities through Mars Mission at Kinderstadt Mini-Salzburg

In the face of an ever-growing global crisis, we grapple with the question: "How do we want to live together?" As urban spaces become increasingly congested and climate change escalates, issues such as lack of space, global warming, and rising urban temperatures demand urgent attention. Traditional narratives and methods of addressing these crises often fall short. Hence, there is a pressing need to explore innovative approaches that foster deep listening and communal engagement.

I propose a 20-minute talk titled "Unveiling the Crisis of Stories: Can Interactive Digital Storytelling foster Cooperation?" centered around our transdisciplinary research project, "AR Communities," with a focus on our case study "Mars Mission" conducted at Kinder-

stadt Mini-Salzburg. "AR Communities" bridges Artistic Research and Cultural Studies to delve into participatory digital technology usage in public spaces, aiming to generate critical knowledge and cultural participation through games.

The presentation will commence with a concise overview of the "AR Communities" project, highlighting its objectives and methodologies. I will then delve into the "Mars Mission" case study, detailing our involvement in Kinderstadt Mini-Salzburg, where children aged 8-14 are invited to work and learn. At our station, participants design their dream cities on Mars using AI and AR/XR tools. This interactive setup not only stimulates creativity but also serves as a research platform to examine whether technology aids or impedes the conception of utopias.

Through this case study, I aim to demonstrate the potential of interactive digital storytelling in fostering deep listening and communal dialogue. By engaging children in the process of city-building on Mars, we provide them with a canvas to project their ideal societies, thus eliciting their perspectives on future living environments. This participatory approach underscores the power of digital narratives in evolving utopian visions and nurturing community bonds.

I believe this presentation will contribute valuable insights into the role of digital storytelling in addressing contemporary crises and shaping communal aspirations for the future.

15:45 - 16:00 | **Julia Bruton** (DE):
Virtual reality – the first matriarchal medium?

We have been wondering when the one "killer app" is going to spread the VR world, creating a market, that will work as eDicient as a market for flat screen content. And we are still waiting. What might be the reasons for that – besides the issues with the hard ware? What if we look at the medium itself. Are we approaching this new medium on false expectations? And what if this medium longs for a diDerent approach, one that goes back to our societal roots. A matriarchal approach?

In my presentation I like to show what matriarchal actually means as it is often mistaken, as a situation with "women who rule". But matriarchal means a distinct and

diDerent system, to name a few: a matriarchal society is organized in flat hierarchies, not like in our system in steep hierarchies. It is based on the idea of responsibility division, not power division, violence is not accepted generally by the society and they act accordingly. Because it is consent that is sought, not power, decisions take longer but at the same time the societal structures do not require force to keep structures, but communication. And above all: The need for control is very little in matriarchal structures as ownership has diDerent meaning in those societies. I will show how these matriarchal structures can be applied to the medium of VR and how it functions there. Diving into the changes of how we create and perceive within the medium of VR.

Followed by a direct comparison of the flat medium versus the medium of VR. How do structures like ours take advantage of the flat medium and how does it serve a hierarchal system? And what changes in VR – the medium itself. How does it function and how does the experiencer create awareness within the medium?

Finally I want to talk about the importance of why we should open up our minds to this possibility of VR being a matriarchal medium. There is an importance of using language and now, with a new medium, we need to invent a new language and this can already start changing the way people think, create and produce in VR. As VR is such a diDerent medium to the flat medium, we'll need a new kind of creator. The experience is built around the experiencer more than it is a simple expression of art from the artist – the way it was in the flat medium. Our control as creators shifts and something other than our vision becomes important: the person experiencing it.

What if this approach – this “human” has such an impact on the field of VR that by applying it and turning it into new ideas of trading and developing we can actually push an industry forward, but with a sustainable basis and this new and diDerent approach? Imagine a matriarchal metaverse and an impact this can have.

4th Section: Liveness in the machine

16:25 - 16:40 | **Alžběta Šašinková, Čeněk Šašinka (CZ):**
Virtual Drama: How VR Theatre Might Promote Cultural Awareness

In 2023, we completed a research project on education in collaborative VR by answering some and raising many more questions. Among others, we explored how a truly efficient use of VR instruction affects learning a foreign language. In a follow-up project, we went beyond the language. Putting the affective experience into focus, we aimed at teaching and learning about foreign cultures through performing art in VR. Thus, our VR-theatre-based project came to being, bringing many challenges and re-defining theatre. Each rehearsal as well as each performance becomes a part of a design process and we'll be happy to present the status quo of its progress.

16:40 - 16:55 | **Puneet Jain (IN):** Hand to Mouth:
Challenging (ableist) biases in 'Metaverse' narratives of XR with disabled bodies through criptastic-hacking

This proposal critically reflects on a recent close co-collaboration and experience of working as a non-disabled Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) researcher/artist with my two collaborators Eric Desrosiers and Christian Bayerlein (who are quadriplegic and identify themselves as disabled artists) for a VR/AR artwork exhibited as a part of FOUNDING LAB program at IT:U and Ars Electronica in Linz, Austria. Through this proposal, we aim to share the experience of adopting the approach of 'criptastic hacking' (Yergeau, 2014) from disability studies to hack, modify, and reverse the current generation of XR technologies during the creation of the art-work – adapting the VR/AR technologies for bodies of Christian and Eric. Criptastic hacking as a methodological approach critiques technoableism (Shew, 2023) and instead harnesses and draws on the long history of hacking and tinkering performed by disabled people to navigate in an inaccessible world. Concretely, this work exposes how collaborations between different bodily embodiments and technologies can playfully shift power

dynamics and ableist narratives by corporations such as Apple and Meta on newly emerging XR technologies. Moreover, asking how such a contrasting approach of criptastic hacking (uncommon in HCI) and collaboration challenges the pre-dominant narratives in the discipline of Human-Computer Interaction – where disability is often treated as a “problem” assumed to be easily solved and eradicated using “assistive” technologies.

16:55 - 17:10 | **Sana Akram** (PAK): The Enchantment of Immersive Storytelling and the Efficacious Powers of XR

Technologies exercise powers and artists, creators, storytellers, designers, and researchers hold the means to direct these to efficacious or detrimental means. Activating technologies based on oppositional binaries that perpetuate uneven power structures and disconnections results in crises, such as that of stories suggested by Han. However, situating technologies as conduits for relational thinking could promote deep attunement with(in) the cosmos and a sense of community for pluriversal worlding. Works by artists and scholars in the fields of Afrofuturism and Indigenous Futurism are a testament to this approach rooted in decolonial praxes.

Following suit, in my response for ‘unveiling’ the crisis of stories lies an invitation to practice what Laura Marks (2010) terms as *adab* i.e., to reach into the deep history of human knowledge and reconnect with the living storytelling traditions and practices that are shared across cultures yet are informed by unique worldviews. Hence, in this presentation, I will discuss storytelling traditions of wonder and enchantment from the Islamicate world along with theories of magic and the position of talismans as occult technologies to highlight distinct modes of creative production and experiences that engage emotive, affective and cognitive sensibilities across a continuum, from personal capacities to communal settings. Guided by this, I will present a reading of the efficacious powers vested in contemporary XR works which manifest transformations directed by will and agency. In doing so, I suggest we reinstate the enchantment of immersive storytelling that had been broken in the course of modernity and colonization to activate our shared creative imaginations with emergent media technologies, offering worlds of potentialities.

Keynote:

18:00 - 18:45 | **Kata Szita** (IR): Neurodiversity-friendly Immersive Storytelling

Extended reality devices and platforms are marketed as tools with endless possibilities for everyone. However, they often seem to privilege white, able-bodied men (Harley, 2020). For example, equipment design often disregards female physiology (e.g., interpupillary distance, hormonal cycle), which increases the chance of cybersickness for female users (Stanney et al., 2020). Race, ethnicity, and age-related characteristics are often excluded from avatar design in VR spaces (Szita, 2022). As with any disability-friendly system, neurodiversity-centered VR must consider hardware, software, and content. This presentation focuses on the latter: how can system functions (affordances) and audiovisual narrative apparatus account for neurodivergent users in VR-based interactive experiences? It presents the preliminary findings and future undertakings of a project that (1) analyses storytelling formulas and interaction mechanisms in terms of sensory and cognitive load and (2) establishes ways of real-time adjustment of these.

5th Section: Provoking the Boundaries

10:00 - 10:15 | **Krzysztof Pijarski (PL):** "Sunsetting" as Mass Extinction Event. Migrant digital communities in the case of Academia Eletronica and BRCVR

In the context of the recent "sunsetting" of AltspaceVR and Mozilla Hubs, two large online VR platforms, I would like to think about the implications of the closure of such platforms on the communities that have come into being thanks to them. On the one hand it is clear that tech tends to have a short life cycle, on the other – the euphemism adopted by tech companies to shutter services that are no longer viable for whatever reason hardly gives justice to the scale of the effects these decisions have on the users. I would like to focus on two initiatives that have built vibrant communities using Altspace as online platform, and look at the experiences of their creators around the sunsetting of the platform. Can the necessity to find another habitat compared to that of migration? Can we think of online platforms and communities in ecological terms (not only as regards carbon footprints and infrastructure, but also in terms of ecosystems?). This is planned as first presentation of an exploratory ethnography of digital migration of such communities understood as the "playful utopias" of this year's Zip-scene.

11:25 - 11:40 | **Ludovica Galleani d'Agliano (IT/CH):**
The syntia_cam project: Re-imagining sex work through co-creation and digital storytelling.

The Internet has opened the door into our most private spaces and virtuality has infiltrated our bodies, merging reality and fiction. The first cam-girls of the 90s were important early examples of how the internet could create a cyborg subject by integrating human images with the internet, setting the conversation regarding the relationship between technology, gender and digital performance. However, with the advent of the 21st century, the cyberfeminist view of the Internet as a space of liberation for women and marginalized communities has

resumed the oppressive structures of the offline space. In this context sex workers have found new spaces and possibilities for interactions and business, developing creative strategies to survive and thrive. Starting from a research about online sex work in relation with the cyber-feminist movement, the presentation will explore the rise of the the online sex work industry in the 90's, and how this industry became a trend setter and early adopter concerning digital tech. For the second stage of the research, a more practice- based approach has been applied for the creation of a workshop series for sex workers about co-creation and digital storytelling as a way of subversion and healing. This second part employed the use of extended realities such as motion capture performances and avatar creation to implement and expand the experience of the sex workers participants while creating a new space for imagination and creativity. At the end this process lead to the creation of a collaborative XR artwork.

11:40 - 11:55 | **Sophia Bulgakova (NL/UA):**
Expanding OTHERWORLDS

Join us for "Expanding OTHERWORLDS," a talk offering an in-depth exploration of a multidimensional participatory performance that combines XR technologies and folk traditions created by Ukrainian media artist Sophia Bulgakova. This innovative project bridges virtual and physical realities, merging Bulgakova's artistic research on Ukrainian traditions, pagan rituals, and magical practices with contemporary visual culture and technology. The talk will delve into the background of "OTHERWORLDS," highlighting its conceptual foundation, the intricacies of exploring Ukrainian culture and traditions, and the technological integration that makes this project a unique and transformative experience. This talk offers a comprehensive exploration of the background and development of "OTHERWORLDS," showcasing how the fusion of tradition and technology can create participatory, immersive pieces and expand the use of VR technology within an artistic context.

The talk will touch upon the artistic research & conceptual foundation and delve into the investigation of Ukrainian traditions and pagan rituals, which form the

project's background and references. Understand the process of abstracting these ancient practices to retain their essence while creating a new visual and experiential language. Innovative Use of Technology: Discover how MR (Mixed Reality) and VR (Virtual Reality) environments are utilized to craft abstract color-based spaces and interactive soundscapes. Learn about integrating spatial interactive soundscapes and collective choreographic elements performed by participants.

Sensory Overload, Interaction, and Immersive Experiences: Examine how participants' experiences within the piece are designed to encourage introspection and change through ritualistic and technological elements. Reflect on the project's potential to deepen the discourse on visual culture and technology by proposing new modes of interaction and transformation. Attendees will gain insights into the innovative processes behind the project and the transformative potential of immersive ritual experiences. This talk is ideal for artists, researchers, technologists, and anyone interested in the intersection of cultural practices and contemporary technology within the realm of immersive art.

6th Section: Feeling together

11:10 - 11:25 | **Du Zhang** (DE): Metamorphosis: Redo with nature, a micro-utopia in virtual reality.

The proposed paper for presentation explores the potential of virtual reality as a design tool for creating alternative narratives and micro-utopias in spatial production, challenging conventional anthropocentric design philosophies. Analysing and applying the concept of "third landscape" through the case study of Haus 3, an abandoned building in Kiel, Germany, it starts with an investigation of how uncontrolled spaces can foster biological diversity and provide new perspectives on the relationship between nature and culture. It led to critiques on the dominant paradigm of controlled environments in modern urban design and architecture, which often seeks to tame or exclude natural forces. Instead, it proposes a shift towards designing "with" nature rather than against it. Drawing on theories such as Donna Haraway's Chthulucene and Le Guin's Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction, it advocates for alternative storytelling methods that embrace multispecies narratives and challenge the traditional dichotomy between nature and culture. Followed up by examination of the production of the VR Project "Metamorphosis" on site (Haus 3) as an example of this approach, using virtual reality to speculate on how natural forces could nurture and transform built environments. This VR project serves as both a design experiment and a thinking tool, questioning modern design methodologies and exploring new relationships between humans, machines, and nature. By proposing virtual architecture as a means of creating micro-utopias, the author suggests that digital spaces can offer opportunities for reimagining spatial production and fostering more symbiotic relationships with the natural world, emphasizing the need for alternative narratives in design that move beyond anthropocentric perspectives and embrace the complexity and interconnectedness of all beings on Earth.

11:25 - 11:40 | **Eleonora D'Ascenzi** (IT):
Empathy in the Digital Age: immersive
shifting perspectives

Faced with the contemporary narrative crisis and the challenge of effectively conveying messages that raise awareness within the community, this paper aims to investigate the potential of immersive storytelling to explore perspective-taking and stimulate empathy towards current and future major challenges (environmental, social, and economic). The paper defines a new field of action: Transformative & Immersive Storytelling Design, which is envisioned as advanced digital communication capable of generating long-term positive behavioral changes by recombining existing cultural norms and factors in response to current challenges. To achieve this, the research includes a comprehensive analysis of the state of the art and a collection of best practices that highlight the potential of immersive realities. When used effectively, immersive realities can emerge as excellent candidates for developing transformative experiences by stimulating imaginative capabilities. The ability of immersive storytelling to convey a strong sense of presence (Barfield and Weghorst, 1993; Riva et al., 2004, 2011) and "awe" (Shaffer et al., 2023) promotes positive qualities and experiences within a cognitive-behavioral framework. This immersive engagement can lead to "narrative transportation," where participants feel "transported" to another world, facilitating greater attitude change and persuasion as they are more receptive to the messages conveyed in the story (Van Laer et al., 2014). The innovation of immersive storytelling lies not merely in advanced technology, which should support meaningful content. Specifically, 3DoF VR (particularly 360-degree videos) is emerging as one of the most interesting and rapidly growing technologies for this purpose (Shafi et al., 2020). Although not the most technologically advanced, it is highly effective in fostering empathy in viewers (Wojdecka et al., 2021). This enables participants to encounter new ideas, alternative perspectives, or unfamiliar situations, thereby encouraging critical thinking and challenging assumptions, beliefs, and perspectives overall (Mitra & Sameer, 2022). In conclusion, through a series of case studies, this contribution aim not only to explore the potential of immersion to stimulate empathy through unconventional, innovative,

and transdisciplinary communication but also to identify new areas of investigation that can enrich and diversify the current use of immersive technologies.

11:40 - 11:55 | **Ash Eliza Smith** (USA): Deep Time,
Heavy Listening: A Performance Lecture

In a time when we consider the Anthropocene and embrace deep-time thinking, story generation accelerates like content flashing by in the night. Do collaboratively created stories echo the traditions of bards and griots, bringing us back to more of an oral storytelling tradition? Does co-creation culture's and LLM's rising popularity get us closer to this idea of collective futures where the socio-cultural hopes and dreams are entangled in our stories and futures? Performance and embodiment play crucial roles in this process, inviting us to consider how stories differ from mere content and why this distinction is so important.

Does the rise of interactive audio narratives, which reduce visual elements, foster more profound listening? With the popularity of podcasts, sound baths, ASMR culture, and audio as augmented reality, audio has become a powerful route to "presence." As Ian Sinclair notes in "Pariah Genius": "All I know is that place dictates the story. The petty interventions of humans are of no account. We raid the past to make the present bearable. But there is no present." What is the link between story and place and the spatial possibilities of narratives as digital layers over the present, creating a locative cinema? "Deep Time, Heavy Listening" is a performance lecture that immerses the audience in an audio journey, part sound bath of poetry, speculative design, and provocations on the conference and storytelling themes. This experiential design uses the conference community site as a stage for deep listening. Drawing from my recent work, which has increasingly focused on audio and listening, and my lab's research, we explore how storytelling shapes reality.

We are also investigating the edges of storytelling, sound, and therapeutics. What happens when storytelling intertwines with the biogeochemical, using narratives in healing systems? My lab explores the future of narrative and AI in the space where play, gaming, partic-

ipatory co-creation, and role play intersect with theater and emerging technology. These elements converge in the contingent possibilities of real-time performance, pushing the boundaries of how we understand and experience stories. Through this exploration, we aim to uncover new ways deep listening and interactive audio experiences can enhance our connection to time, place, and collective futures.

13:30:00 - 14:50:00 **Authors' roundtable:**
Virtual Motherhood or How to Talk About Discomfort

Participants: **Johanna Courtney** (HeartBeat), **Yvette Granata** (I Took a Lethal Dose of Herbs), **Isabelle Andreani** (Nana Lou)

7th Section: (New n)arratives in interaction?

15:20 - 15:35 | **Monika Górska-Olesińska & Agnieszka Przybyszewska** (PL): Narrativising and Embodying Aphasia Through VR

"Empereur" (2023), an interactive virtual reality experience created by Marion Burger and Ilan Cohen, tells a true, personal, yet universal story about aphasia. The experience begins with a narrative capturing the perspective of a daughter – Marion Burger, and then shifts to the perspective of her father, who has been suffering from aphasia resulting from a stroke. His struggle with language impairment is presented to the user as an interactive, embodied experience, transforming the condition of being unable to communicate effectively with others into "a poetic journey through a mysterious, faraway land full of shared memories" [Burger, Cohen]. Using "Empereur" (2023) as a case study, we will explore the "[hidden] healing powers" [Han, 2024] of VR tactile narratives, focusing in particular on: narrative devices, environmental design, interactive features and how interactivity relates to the narrative, user positioning vis-à-vis the VR experience, and the implications of offering them more direct access to others' subjective experiences. To better nuance the issue under consideration, we will introduce a transmedial perspective and propose a brief comparative analysis by juxtaposing "Empereur" (2023) with "Wołga przez Afazję"/Down the Wołga Through Aphasia", a library project by Polish visual artist Karolina Wiktor. Wiktor's project consists of a book that she wrote during her rehabilitation, artistic installations, and an 'alphabet of the missing font' - a new typeface that was designed to visually represent an aspect of her experience of aphasia.

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15:35 - 15:50 | **Florian Mundhenke** (DE): Co-Creation as Crisis Intervention – New Collaborative Means in Non-Fictional VR

Quite often non-fictional VR projects have been discussed in terms of their immersive and interactive offerings, which have fused cinematic elements with playful aspects. One shortcoming was always emphasized: Like other digital media such as computer games and smartphone apps, VR promotes shielding from the outside through the individual use of the head-mounted display, thus making it difficult to experience or even to shape reality together.

With regard to other forms of interactive storytelling (e.g. Web Docs or AR projects), the aspects of the joint, temporizing creation of media constructions have been discussed again and again. This gave rise to considerations as to where there is something like collaborative work in VR (e.g. in product simulations or in games) and how this can also be made fruitful for documentary work. At the end, three very different projects are presented that propose diverse aspects of co-creation, either on site together, or together in a virtual location, but from different places in the world, or through an emerging overall phenomenon that does not require direct simultaneous collaboration. Examples will be the CocoVerse project at the MIT (<https://www.media.mit.edu/projects/cocoverse/overview/>) and the Holoware project at the Center for Programming Systems at University Erlangen-Nuremberg (<https://www.ps.tf.fau.de/forschung/projekte/holoware/>) and a surprise project just in the making. Most of these projects have something utopian about them, in that the virtual world can be seen as a

space of possibility for trying out alternative ways of communitarisation. Especially in a world of permanent crisis, not only the view and experience of virtual realities seems important, but also the aspect of combined possible actions. The talk wants to make meaning of co-creation in non-fiction VR in shedding light on the projects and show how they establish new ways of offering shared and collaborative efforts of world building and crisis management.

15:50 - 16:05 | **Christopher Morrison** (US): New Narrative Forms: Everything You Know About Story is Now Wrong

Since immersive storytelling and immersive forms now dominate the market and all story expectations, we must adjust narrative structures themselves to stay relevant. This talk identifies why traditional structures are no longer as relevant and defines new, some non-Western, tangible, structures for storytelling by learning from real use-cases. Immersive stories like XR, video games (and any entertainment that offers agency to the player/spectator) require different approaches to story structure in order to deliver meaning. The fundamental paradigm between audience/author/work is forever shifted along with audience expectations. It's time writers had more tools in the chest besides the 3/5-act structure and the problematic Hero's Journey. We will look at Jane Alison's work using structures from nature to shape stories. Shapes such as: the wave, cells, fractals, spirals, and radials. We will also draw from non-Western structures like nested storytelling, Bollywood, and the Japanese Kishotenketsu. Along with different structures, this talk also challenges the long-held Western belief in conflict as the only story driver. The talk will propose other options for creators and writers to work with different story "engines" that aren't based in conflict. We also challenge the Western paradigm of Western 'immersion', the over reliance on psychological 'realism', and that inner conflict leads to character growth. The newest science states that conflict leads to trauma; so how can we reflect a true character change/arc within the understanding of trauma. Target audiences are anyone that wants to evolve their narratives: XR creatives, brand managers, creative agencies, writers, narrative designers, all creatives at large.

19th of October

Pitching session

10:00 - 10:15 | **Philipp Wenning** (DE):

The Towers of February - Prolog

You wake up at the beach without having a clue how you got there. A mysterious narrative exploratory Game-series based on Tonke Dragt's The Towers of February.

In my latest VR development project "The Towers of February" I'm adapting the youth novel of the same title, by Tonke Dragt, into a full interactive action-adventure game in VR (mobile). As a creator I want to develop a "slow-game" that doesn't rely on solely one game mechanic (e.g. puzzling, fighting, racing) but rather let the audience dive deep into the story universe and give time and space for true explorational and environmental storytelling. It is a cross-over of a first-person action-adventure-game and an interactive-story. With situational problems to be solved by the player in order to progress in the storyline. I believe that in today's overstimulated media landscape there's a space opening up for these kind of story/worldly driven games/stories, that might be the next true step of cinematic storytelling. It engages the audience in being part of the story thus having a clear storytelling/narrative structure. In this particular case I worked a lot on translating the general feeling of the book into an experiential adventure in VR without literally translating the original novel. This prototype is a single player proof-of-concept for the basic gameplay and visual style. In the next phase I want to develop the full game as a mini-series with a multiplayer option so that users don't necessarily know if they are interacting with an NPC or a true humanoid co-player.

In previous years I've developed multiplayer immersive platforms for festivals & art shows, creating digital worlds that had both a purely functional role as well as a storytelling-through environment aspect. Spending time and building worlds in Social VR platforms (e.g. VRChat, Recroom, etc) showed me the huge potential of these spaces and the resonance as well as relevance amongst its ever-growing user base. I would love to discuss with

others (e.g. creators, curators), where we can take these formats and how we can bridge the gap of the postulated narrative crisis. As we can see more and more clearly some big changes on the horizon through the AI-revolution, the question is up, what it means to tell a digital story in these times.

Director: **Philipp Wenning**

10:15-10:30 | **Małgorzata Wabińska** (PL): ECHO Project 9
If you could return to where it all started, would you be ready to be born again?

ECHO PROJECT 9 is an art project inspired by science. A POV narrative virtual reality experience that combines aspects of biology, physics and neuropsychology. It creatively explores the journey of self-development. Starting in an undefined space, users immerse themselves in a unique meditation-like experience, seeking the connection between body and mind through visualizations, sounds and perception play.

The whole 9-minutes experience is a metaphor for birth and taking action to reprogram the unfavorable and unconsciously built-in memories of our body and mind. Memories from prenatal life but also from the predecessors' lives. Hidden in the genotype and the way of perceiving oneself. Optical illusions lead the users to change the way they perceive the world around them. By escaping to the digital world, users return to exploring the potential of their own mind. In the experience, the growth of a human is freely compared to the growth of a tree. The root system is the nervous system, the formation of the bark is the overgrowth of events experienced by our ancestors. The project aims to evoke a sense of belonging and care, leading users from isolation towards a deeper sense of acceptance and admiration for the human being as he or she is, rooted and connected to nature.

Director: **Małgorzata Wabińska**

10:30 - 10:45 | **Yesica Duarte** (ARG): Pinch to Awaken XR

“Pinch to awaken XR” is an immersive VR art game that uses intuitive physical movements and breathing to engage interactors in dynamic dialogues with virtual environments. It integrates live performance and experimental wearable interfaces into a playful exploration of conscious breathing, creating embodied interactions in a mixed-reality experience.

“Pinch to awaken XR” is a VR art game driven by natural body gestures and breathing, showcased as an eXtended Reality performance. Featuring a first-person perspective, full-body tracking, and a self-avatar, the interactor will prompt a dynamic dialogue with the virtual environment by engaging in intentional breathing.

The performance unfolds within a staged space where a virtual/tangible performer guides the interactant through a hybrid interpretation. It helps to wear the on-body interface and engage with the interactant from outside/inside the virtual space at key moments throughout the journey. The interface is experimental controllers crafted with stretch conductive yarn, that captures subtle movements of the user’s body volume corresponding to their breathing patterns. Data gathering from the e-textiles is handled by a voltage divider circuit and sent to Unity game engine. The system provides users with real-time feedback, rendering their breathing through immersive audio-visual and haptic responses. A close feedback loop emerges when the user is stimulated by the pleasure of synchronizing their breath with the environment —what Krueger describes as “responsive environments, (which) involve the computer perceiving users’ actions and intelligently responding through immersive audio-visual displays”.

The aim is to integrate playful wearable interfaces into VR gaming with live performance, thereby constructing narratives that foster a connection with one’s own body, as well as between the user’s body and the performer’s. Can technology truly grasp the subtleties of breath gestures as effectively as the touch of a hand on the chest? The project is part of my research-creation master’s thesis in Technology and Aesthetics of Electronic Arts entitled: Pinch to Awaken. Breathing as a technology of

self-knowledge. The body as a didactic material. Virtual Reality as a language and scenario.

Director: **Yesica Duarte**

10:45 - 11:00 | **Wiktor Filip Gacparski & Alexander Mettin** (PL): Scratching the Surface

Can the human soul be digitalized? After the loss of her father, Line Hoven embarks on a personal journey into the world of digital and generative art. She seeks the essence of creativity, navigating the emotional depths of life and death in an immersive VR experience.

The modern landscape of our reality is changing faster than we can grasp it and the magical future is as close as never before. Yet being in the present, here and now, seems to be further and further away. “Scratching the Surface” is an innovative VR project that immerses viewers in the realms of analog and digital art through the eyes of acclaimed artist and illustrator Line Hoven. This hybrid experience, combining formats of 180° documentary film and an interactive 3D-360° environment, delves into profound questions about life, technology and arts. The story begins in the Hamburgian fine art gallery where we meet Line questioning the impact of art on society. She is emotionally struck by the statue of “Arcangelo II” depicting weight of the human existential struggle in the time of turmoil. It inspires Line to create her first digital artwork, guided by an AI named Archie III. Their dialogues explore the role of imperfection in the nature of art as well as the concept of the human soul revealing Line’s personal experiences with birth and death. From analog hand-scratched artwork into digital simulation and branching narratives. Line’s creative process confronts us with two contrasting art worlds: one driven by AI’s generated “imagination”, and the other deeply rooted in human memory and emotion. Both worlds reflect on the authenticity of art, as well as expression of the emotional depth. However, which will speak to us more? The choice the viewers make will lead to different endings of the story. Emphasizing either the soul of human creativity or the undiscovered potential of intelligent technology.

“Scratching the Surface” poses key questions: What is today’s avant-garde? Can technology enhance our understanding of humanity? Will AI replace artists making a better picture of humanity than old-masters did? How will the post-human image look like? It uses advanced VR technology to create an emotionally engaging and thought-provoking experience. With build-in interactive elements, the boundaries of a cinematic storytelling are pushed into new, hybrid realms. Premiering at major film festivals and VR platforms, “Scratching the Surface” aims to invite a global audience to explore the future of art in a digital age.

Scratching the Surface is an interactive XR project that explores the intersection of analog and digital art through the eyes of Hamburg artist Line Hoven. As she creates her first digital artwork, she argues with an antagonist AI. The viewers are drawn into a journey that questions the role of technology, creativity, and the human soul in the future of art and will subconsciously interact and influence the storyline.

Director: **Wiktor Filip Gacparski**

11:00 - 11:15 | **Laurien Michiels** (BE):

The Room of Resonance: A Poetic AR Fable

The Room of Resonance is a poetic AR fable that conveys a story of questioning biases and media consumption behavior which are frequently affected by non-neutral algorithms present on social media platforms, thus contributing to the proliferation of echo chambers. The Room of Resonance conveys the story of 3 animals living in a fictional kingdom which is left in complete and utter disharmony due to tainted source water. There is Reyn the fox, Eugene the peacock and Clancy the sardine whose rooms are presented for further investigation. The story unravels by the witty words of the jester, spinning rhyming tattletales about the objects in each animal’s room that reinforce certain negative beliefs about the animal while also metaphorically criticizing modern elements of media consumption behavior and online social presence. The work is experienced through the use of a book and an AR projection in the vicinity of the book that is triggered by image tracking and inter-

acting (tapping) on objects in the AR scene. The prototype starts with a prologue after scanning the first image in the book which paints the fictional world for the user. In the prologue the user learns about the “plot issue” – animals disagreeing incessantly and a general unrest in the kingdom – and is urged to explore the animals’ rooms in order to know more. After the prologue the user is introduced to three echo chambers, which all appear individually, one after the other. Each echo chamber has its intro, outro and three virtual objects to interact with which are related to the animal and the biases we might have about them.

The more the user interacts with the object, the more distorted the output becomes, concretizing the echoes of an echo chamber. Not only does the audio distort, the script also changes, adding information to the previous interaction. This distortion is an element that occurs in each echo chamber. Once all rooms have been explored, the epilogue is triggered which reveals an unresolved ending (for now). The very last spread in the book contains splats of “water” (created with mirror foil), which is a recurring theme throughout the existing prototype. These water splashes are meant to reflect the user’s face back and if the pages are held in a certain angle it creates this “infinity room” effect that mirrors tend to do, further embodying the echo chamber as a physical concept.

Director: **Laurien Michiels**

11:30-11:45 | **Markéta Magidová & Jiří Pecinovský** (CZ):

The Mermaid Effect

What if mermaids don’t feel like being sexy anymore? The Mermaid Effect takes place in underwater film studios, with mythological sea creatures and humans working in unequal status. Their livelihood is based on the production of mainstream films of mermaids that reduce the diversity of their bodies and stories.

Director: **Markéta Magidová**

11:45- 12:00 | **Wen-Yee Hsieh & Sebox Hong** (TW):
Oblivion

The clarity of the self, like a camera's focus, fades into a soft blur, stretched in stillness between the pull of past and present. The past, the present tug us both way. Gazing upon two overlapping layers of reality, in two moments of time.

At the beginning of the experience, the audience finds themselves trapped in a seemingly normal, yet maze-like world. The three-dimensional reality feels as if it has glitches, much like our digitized world, with space and architecture intertwined. We turn inward, confronting the hollowness of our hearts, entering a world pieced together from layers of fragmented spaces—subconsciousness and dreams. Traversing through different levels of dreams, we seek the truth and the exit that connects us to reality. Once we finally understand the nature of our character's affliction, the architecture opens up, and we escape the infinitely nested dimensions, returning to the real world.

Director: **Wen-Yee Hsieh**

12:00 - 12:15 | **Selma Rizvic** (BH): Presenting cultural heritage through VR, AR and theater play

Stecakland is an imagined place where ornaments from stecaks live. Enter and get to know them through VR and AR.

STEĆAK is the name for monumental medieval tombstones, that lie scattered across Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the border parts of Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia. They date from the 12th to 16th centuries CE, are laid out in rows, as was the common custom in Europe from the Middle Ages. The stećci are mostly carved from limestone. They feature a wide range of decorative motifs and inscriptions that represent iconographic continuities within medieval Europe as well as locally distinctive traditions. Since 2016 they are listed as UNESCO World Heritage.

Creative Europe project StećakLand aims to take us to the world where the symbols from the stećak "live" and

introduce us to their meaning. Experts from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro will choose the most representative stećaks whose ornaments will populate the digital environment – StećakLand. We will be able to visit it through a Virtual Reality application that will be installed in Mak Dizdar's House in Stolac, Dubrovnik Museums, the National Museum of Montenegro in Cetinje, and in the archaeological park Viminacium in Serbia. Through this application, museum visitors will learn the meanings of the symbols from the stećaks and get to know their stories. Visitors of necropolises where stecaks can be seen will be able to read the meanings of decorations and decorative ornaments through the Augmented Reality application. StećakLand will also be available through a theatrical performance. Kamerni teatar 55 will put on stage actors with VR headsets. Through the presentation of the digital content seen by the actor, the audience will have the opportunity to observe two realities: the physical scene and the play of characters in the digital environment StećakLand through the actor's view through VR headset.

Director: **Bojan Mijatovic**

12:15 - 12:30 | **Marta Szarzyńska** (PL): Aquatia

Take a deep breath and dive into the vast underwater depths of planet Aquatia, where you discover the visually stunning world of underwater civilization. Surround yourself with blooming mechanical life forms out of your wildest imagination, and use your whole body to freely swim, navigate, explore and engage, all while being drawn into a political intrigue out-of-this-world.

Aquatia is an adaptation of a novel written by Stanisław Lem: "The Advisors of King Hydrops," it is a political drama set in an underwater kingdom, which is a reflection of modern democratic systems.

Aquatia is an animated, 6-DoF, interactive, VR experience, based on the open world concept and multi-threaded, non-linear narrative. Designed for a single player, it tracks the movement of the user's body and turns it into the underwater swimming/diving expe-

rience. By turning the user's body into one large controller, we can present a world that is more responsive to the participant and therefore more organic and pleasant to explore.

Director: **Paweł Szarzyński**

12:30 - 12:45 | **Lucas Dewulf & Justine Ruyschaert**: Oei

Oei is an immersive VR ritual for 5 participants, where the participants become the main character in a journey to rediscover safety in expressing their emotions through their body and touch.

Oei is an immersive VR ritual for 5 participants going on a journey to rediscover the safety and power of expressing emotions through body and touch. Our society often fears touch, we are disconnected from our bodies. Oei challenges this by inviting participants to reconnect with their fundamental ability to use the body as a compass. Have you heard of oxytocin? This is a hormone essential for trust and attachment. Physical contact, like hugging or holding hands, boosts its release. Oei is Inspired by touch-based and body-oriented practices, which use touch for expansion and healing of traumas. In the ritual the audience explores the profound impact of touch, learning to express their emotions and listen to their bodies, ultimately gaining insight into the essential nature of physical contact.

Director: **Lucas Dewulf & Neoza Goffin**

11:30 - 11:45 | **Kristof Timmerman** (BE): The portal as a key element to embodied storytelling

Unlike most artistic performances in traditional Western settings, virtual performances place the audience at the center of the artistic creation - they put the spectator in the driver's seat for their own, unique experience. By putting the viewer at the center of the narrative, XR creators strive to create an environment where the distinction between observer and actor becomes blurred. In VR, the viewer is not merely an onlooker but an integral part of the unfolding story. The immersive nature of XR technologies allows users to interact with and influence

their surroundings, forging a more profound connection with the content. My research endeavors to enhance the audience's immersion from the moment they step into a virtual realm, aiming to evoke a profound sense of wonder. The focus extends beyond the auditory or visual aspects of my work; storytelling, interaction, presence and immersion are of great importance. The objective is to dismantle the perceptible barriers between the audience and the performers/artists within these virtual landscapes.

In my research, this is achieved by developing experiments where the portal plays a central role. The portal serves as a metaphor for the transition an audience can experience when stepping into a virtual world, as an indispensable element to achieve a truly immersive feeling that goes far beyond just being surrounded by video. It's about being in different realities at the same time, it's about being confused, about losing your sense of time and space. During my presentation I will dive deeper into the concept of the portal, using the art installation Glasshouse, which was developed as a proof of concept within my research. It provides a multisensory experience at the interface between the real and the virtual. The installation uses virtual reality and engages the visitor's senses as it combines analogue and digital media. It is based on the 'experiment with the rubber hand', a psychological and neuroscientific study that explores the concept of body ownership and how our brain integrates sensory information to create a sense of self. I will explain how I build on this phenomenon in my research.

14:15 - 14:30 | **Mariam Natroshvili** (GA):

Memory Palace - unveiling

hidden history through interactive storytelling

Memory Palace is a work in progress by artist duo Mariam Natroshvili and Detu Jincharadze.

The video and the game experience explore how people in Georgia lost their homes over the past century, shedding light on forgotten political history. The work highlights Soviet repressions, the shadow economy, independence, crises, deregulation policies, and scams, all told through the lens of the apartment.

How and why did people get and lose apartments in Soviet and post-Soviet Georgia? What are the social and cultural dimensions of an apartment and what memories are stored within their rooms?

Memory Palace recalls untold, unseen, and forgotten stories and facts, while also inviting the viewer to understand the reasons behind losing an apartment by placing them in the shoes of those who lost their homes. The stories and memory associated with apartments represent a new history of Georgia. The reasons for losing an apartment illustrate the social and political issues that have occurred over the century. This memory encompasses not only housing issues but also reflects the broader narrative of the country's recent past. The complexities embedded within these apartment stories are often unexamined, ignored, and forgotten. The apartment serves as a key to memory, unlocking the door to a forgotten time.

Using Memory Palace as an example, Mariam Natroshvili explores the significance of digital technologies in creating social impact, addressing urgent social issues, and shifting perspectives on complex topics.

11:45 - 12:45 **Authors' roundtable: Playful or Serious? Bringing Light into the Darkness**

Participants: **Jowita Guja & Adam Źądło** (The Cave), **François Vautier** (Battlefield), **Caroline Laurin-Beaucage** (Bodies of Water), **Anna Firbank** (Soul Paint), **Roman Rappak & Anne McKinnon** (Detachment)

13:30 - 14:30 **Authors' roundtable: Virtual (Women's) Bodies: Ascending, Flourishing**

Participants: **Hana Umeda** (Close), **Hana Chen** (Sister Lin-Tou), **Natalie Paneng** (Natalie's Trifecta), **Fabienne Giezendanner** (Bloom), **Poulomi Basu** (Maya: The Birth of a Superhero), **Lilian Hess** (Duchampiana)

Workshops:

OCTOBER 18

13:30-17:30 Spatial p5 by **Tibor Udvari** (CH)

Spatial p5 is a toolkit for rapid prototyping and sketching in immersive environments. This submission proposes holding a workshop (or multiple workshops) utilizing the Spatial p5 tool, where participants will engage in live coding within a Mixed Reality environment, fostering an interactive and collaborative learning experience.

For max 3 participants.

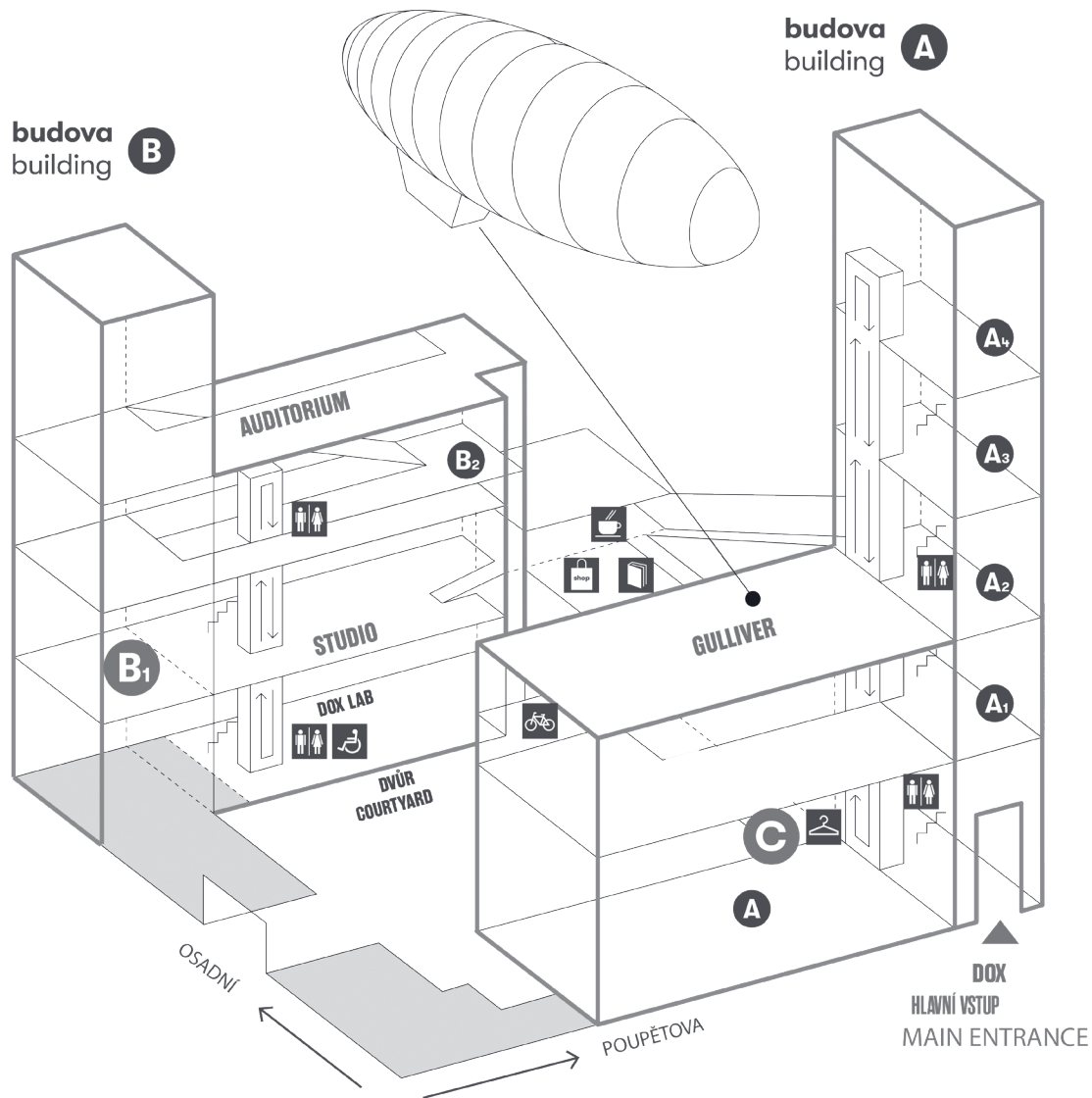
OCTOBER 19

13.30-17.00 by **Evan Neiden, Wren Mack, Jacob Leaf** (US)

The Tether: Accountability in Remote Experiences
This workshop can accommodate up to 15 people. We open with a crash course on Candle House Collective's approach to alternate reality experiences- superimposing our created reality via technologies onto the participant's real life experience to create scenarios in which the participant feels the stakes are the same in-experience as in the real world. We will use two of our most popular productions, Lennox Mutual and CLAWS, to demonstrate ways to employ accountability- the scaffolding on which all technical elements are built, the tether of trust between the facilitator and participant. This section can also be converted into a standalone talk or panel discussion.

In the first half, each group develops a 3-5 minute experience using only live voice and Foley sound. Their prompt will be from a bank of folk tales (distinct from myth or parables; folklore is a pre-government way to organize society. We posit that folktales are a feminist technology: gossip about people who don't exist as survival manual. At the halfway point, these experiences are presented (either as an experience or a pitch). In the second half, group 1 will take group 2's concept and flesh it out with a technical element of their choice (projection, sound effects board, haptic controls, etc.), group 2 will flesh out group 3's concept, and so on, so that no group is adding technical elements to their original concept. The point is to create stories and concepts that are durable and strengthened by technological elements, to maintain the tether between participant and facilitator. We close with short presentation-pitches from each group and reflections.

budova
building **B**



budova
building **A**

AUDITORIUM
MEZINÁRODNÍ SOUTĚŽ
INTERNATIONAL COMPETITION

C

VR INSTALACE: ZA SKLENĚNÝ STROP
VR EXHIBITION: BEYOND THE GLASS
CEILING

STUDIO
ZIP-SCENE CONFERENCE

B1

HINTERLANDS (TAJEMNÁ ZÁKOUTÍ)
+ EAST DOC INTERACTIVE

GULLIVER
SPECIAL PROGRAM: ASTRA,
DETACHMENT (ODPOUTÁNÍ)

DOX
HLAVNÍ VSTUP
MAIN ENTRANCE

POUPĚTOVA

OSADNÍ