

Like a Ray in Search of its Mirror

The Future of Demonstration. Season 4. 2024
A mixed-reality art project by Sylvia Eckermann and Gerald Nestler

Immersed in planetary matter a new world is unfolding.
Can you feel the ecstatic sensation of alien copresence?

Like a Ray in Search of its Mirror is about the emergence of a new understanding of interconnectedness. In each of its episodes, the art series **The Future of Demonstration** engages with vectors of mobilization. **Like a Ray in Search of its Mirror** [Season 4] does so by tracing emotions and forms of appreciation that encourage more-than-human awareness and ecological solidarity.

Alienation has become almost planetary. Humans are increasingly like «aliens» in vital environments that are turning hostile to life due to our impact. Not least for this reason we are forced to recognize how closely linked natural processes are. This dichotomy cannot be overcome without a new world view. How else could we transform often abstract and complex insights into concrete and lived reality?

We – diverse species, compositions, and compounds – come together from different strata, continents, and ecosystems to activate sensing and sense-making as modes of resolution. As a more-than-human association we explore the resourceful potency of our myriad ecological, cultural, and technological relationships. What we aim for is an artistic-ecological practice that demonstrates ambivalences as well as synergies between the cosmic dimensions of life and matter.

Among our voices are fungi, microbes, plants, animals, inorganic and synthetic matter, technologies, tools, and humans: **Giuliana Furci** [live from Santiago de Chile] delves into the networks of mycelium ecosystems. **Fahim Amir** pursues cohabitation by following unruly politics of human-animal relations. The becoming wild of **Waldrapp** birds is traced by **Gordan Savičić & Felix Stalder**. **Maggie Roberts** [Orphan Drift, live from London] contemplates the nine brains of the **octopus** and its wildly alien sensing. **Martina De Dominicis** and **Alberto Cissello** [debocs] explore sensations of touch. **Agostino Nickl** prompts abstract neural network constellations that mirror our collective imagery. **Thomas Nail** [live from Denver] reconsiders the motion and swerve of matter and its porous constitution. **Yuka Takahashi** [live from Columbus] performs her point cloud body. **Daniela Gandorfer** [live from London] speculates on more-than-human governance. A different sense of planetary space and inhabitability is imagined by **Patricia Reed**. **Soulcat E-Phife**, **Volkmar Klien** and **Wientaler Dreigesang** compose our sonic atmosphere. **Marian Kaiser** takes up threads to weave a tapestry from all our artistic-discursive encounters. And the **audience** takes part either at Forum Frohner or online.

Like a Ray in Search of its Mirror is composed of different materials and media. An installation by **Sylvia Eckermann** at the rear of the Forum Frohner consists of organic materials whose patterns are found in nature in a wide variety of forms and applications, from microorganisms, mycelia and insect wings to leaf veins, network structures and synapses to cosmic supernovae. Agostino Nickl's constellations, compiled from CLIP, an OpenAI pretraining tool for artificial intelligence, are juxtaposed with a video projection of scientific micro and macro images by **Eckermann** and **Nestler**. Together, they manifest the increasing complexity and significance of the concept of the cosmos.

Performance: April 19, 18:00 | Exhibition: April 20-28
donaufestival, Forum Frohner, Krems, Austria
<https://www.thefutureofdemonstration.net/s4>

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The **contributors** are present in different ways: depending on where they participate, they are **physically present** in the Forum Frohner **or virtually in the form of a point cloud transmission** on pore-shaped projections on site. In addition, contributors appear by means of **video projections on metal spirals** – objects with which we create a holographic effect. These different aesthetic qualities allow us to engage with various forms of performative representation. While this kind of hyperpresence reinforces the immersive live character of our mixed-reality art project, it also makes the consequences of our alienation palpable in their intensity and volatility.

The artistic interplay of **Like a Ray in Search of its Mirror** is based on a techno-ecological format that re-orientates the conception and aesthetics of virtual reality: while conventional VR and metaverse projects are invested in artificial 3D worlds and reality simulation, **we transform the virtual into an osmotic skin to connect physical and virtual spaces**. And we replace VR avatar representation with real-time point cloud streaming of remote contributors. Hence, the virtual becomes a membrane through which people and other beings can interact, talk, and perform with each other from wherever they are. This immersive live experience is technically realized by **Markus Passecker** [head of XR production], **Marek Šimoník** [point cloud live sharing], **Michael Loizenbauer** [livestream], **Alexander Weber** [camera], **Daniel Hüttler** [assistance and set photography] and **Bela Eckermann** [constructions].

After the performance on April 19, 2024, **Like a Ray in Search of its Mirror** will be shown as an exhibition during donaufestival.

ARTISTS – SHORT BIOGRAPHIES

Sylvia Eckermann is an artist based in Vienna. In her work, a discursive engagement with form and media culminates in critical artistic reflections about our entanglement as individuals in current socio-economic situations. Eckermann is considered a pioneer of Game Art and has worked with various media including digital and physical environments, installations, videos, objects, and sculptures. She is a member of the [Technopolitics working group](#), Vienna. Sylvia is the first recipient of the City of Vienna Award for Media Art (2014) and was awarded the Austrian State Prize for Media Art (2018). sylviaeckermann.net

Gerald Nestler is an artist and writer who combines video, installation, performance, objects, lyrics, and speech with theory and conversation. Also, he develops and curates formats for postdisciplinary collaborations between art, theory, science and other fields of knowledge and experience. He is a member of the [Technopolitics working group](#), Vienna. Gerald graduated from the Academy of fine arts, Vienna, and holds a PhD from the [Centre for Research Architecture](#), Goldsmiths, University of London, where he was a researcher at [Forensic Architecture](#). www.geraldnestler.net

The biographies of the contributors can be found [here](#).

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Performance: **April 19, 2024, 18:00 CET** (10:00 MST / 12:00 EST / 17:00 UTC / 01:00+1 KST / 02:00+1 AEST)

Livestream: <https://www.thefutureofdemonstration.net/s4/stream.html>

Exhibition: **April 20-28, 2024**

Sat, 20.04. 15:30 – 19:00

Sun, 21.04. 16:00 – 21:00

Fri, 26.04. 16:00 – 19:00

Sat, 27.04. 15:30 – 18:30

Sun, 28.04. 16:00 – 21:00

Venue: Forum Frohner, Krems, Austria.

Festival: donaufestival 2024. «Community of Aliens»

PARTICIPANTS

Marian Kaiser, media theorist, dramaturge, author. **Fahim Amir**, philosopher. **Martina De Dominicis & Alberto Cissello** [debocs], performers. **Giuliana Furci**, mycologist [live from Santiago de Chile]. **Daniela Gandorfer**, law & governance scholar [live from London]. **Thomas Nail**, philosopher [live from Denver]. **Agostino Nickl**, architect, AI researcher. **Patricia Reed**, artist & theorist. **Maggie Roberts** [Orphan Drift], artist [live from London]. **Yuka Takahashi**, performer [live from Columbus]. A **Waldrapp** bird & **Gordan Savičić**, artist, & **Felix Stalder**, media theorist.

SOUND, MUSIC / VOCALS

Soulcat E-Phife, DJ/MC. **Volkmar Klien**, composer. **Wientaler Dreigesang**, vocal ensemble.

TEAM

Markus Passecker: head of XR production and Unity3D development.

Marek Šimoník: Record3DS3 volumetric video sharing.

Michael Loizenbauer: live streaming.

Alexander Weber: camera.

Bela Eckermann: construction.

Daniel Hüttler: assistance and documentation.

Maximilian Thoman: co-producer.

PARTNERS

donaufestival | <https://www.donaufestival.at/>

medien.kunst.tirol | <https://www.mkt.at>

Latent Spaces. A Zurich University of the Arts research project | <https://latentspaces.zhdk.ch/>

Radical Matter. A PEEK-FWF-funded artistic research project | <https://www.radicalmatter.art/>

.studio3. Institute for Experimental Architecture, University of Innsbruck | <https://www.studio3.me/>

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PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND CONTEXT

Western conceptions of man and nature have reached an impasse. Technological formations appropriate selfhood and relationships, climate and biodiversity crises escalate catastrophic events. As this new condition proves existential for humanity, what could more emphatically demonstrate the urgency of an integrative understanding of planetary diversity and human-non-human nature?

Clearly, a new worldview is to be based on a transition from globalization, and its hegemonic creation of one world, to planetary constellations that create diverse, sometimes seemingly alien but always deeply connected common worlds. The abundance and diversity of life forms becomes increasingly tangible through science and technology, and we begin to realize what it really means that life permeates all of nature. To unlock this potential for imagining our future nested in caring for this enormous wealth, we need to sense and make sense of what the 'mystery' of the planetary teaches us.

Like a Ray in Search of its Mirror explores modes of resolution to tackle the volatilities and contingencies that effect and affect planetary co-creation. And we resist the spread of dystopian forces by countering their repressive alienation with polyphonic assemblages. We embrace reciprocal alienation as concrete reality, for out of conflict arises the potential for symbiotic affiliations that afford our *re-entanglement* with planetary matter and its animate world.

Like a Ray in Search of its Mirror speculates on what we call *re-entanglement*. Not that humans were disconnected from nature; on the contrary, more and more people are becoming aware of humanity's destructive influence and hence the urgency to change course. Sylvia Wynter speaks of a «shared environment», Yuk Hui of «cosmotechnics». When he says that «cosmos does not refer to outer space, but, on the contrary, to locality», we'd like to add that cosmos concerns material abundance and densely interwoven diversity. Can we reconnect with its 'inhuman magic', re-entangle with where we belong?

The art project seeks ways of alienation, a term that not only refers to relations of class and production, but also to man's relationship to nature. Karl Marx identified the «metabolic rift» between man and nature caused by the dynamics of capitalism. Today, the consequences of growth-based globalization and its 'alienation performance' are felt everywhere, from forms of inequality and asymmetric regulatory frameworks to resource exploitation and soil depletion to biodiversity crisis and climate catastrophe.

More alienation is hardly conceivable. Has it become so profound that we are alien to the very habitats we rely on for our survival? In environments that fight back, how can we experience and affirm the inhuman in us as a transformative agency? Gayatri Spivak introduced the concept of «planetary» to negate the globalized alienation produced by capital. Instead, she proposes planetary constellations to create «inhabitable worlds in common» (Patricia Reed) that mitigate the violent effects.

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These questions go beyond what politics and media usually address. Hence, they also shed light on the crisis of dialogue and discourse. How do we converse about these issues, not only as regards the forms and rules of interlocution, but also its techniques and frameworks?

In this context, **Like a Ray in Search of its Mirror** experiments with a different form of connection, a new connectivity. We recast the virtual – against its predominant use for reality simulations or artificial 3D worlds – as a membrane, a connective tissue between (seemingly) distant places and issues. What we aim to initiate is the application of the virtual as a technology of care that assists (seemingly) differing needs and desires; frictions and sympathies; conflicts and resolutions; not merely as regards mankind but the dimensions and networks of life that humans co-inhabit despite our self-centeredness.

Like a Ray in Search of its Mirror explores micro-, meso- and macro-interdependencies that enable, and often determine, life on our planet in biological, ecological, social, and cultural terms. Apart from human participants, plants, fungi, microbes, animals, inorganic and synthetic matter, tools, and technologies take part. We exceed the framework previously reserved for humans to pursue concrete imaginations of how constellations of planetary co-presence can emerge. We engage in hybrid conversations with «planetary beings» (Spivak), rather than global entities. To us, these alien collectives are subjects with their own *po(i)etic agency in time*, shaping and nurturing connections and networks.

Recently, the philosopher Emanuele Coccia put forward the provocation that «to think about the planet, [it is] better to make art, not ecology». Such a perspective has consequences concerning the role and significance of artists. Our aim is to transform the notion from a still ma(i)nly individual figure to one engaging in promiscuous practices – a *re-entangled* polyphony of voices we call *artist-as-collective*. This affords what we call a *postdisciplinary* practice because art can interact with scientific disciplines as well as other forms of cognition, perception, and experience, precisely because it is not a discipline and thus not subject to disciplinary boundaries.

As a mixed-reality art project, **Like a Ray in Search of its Mirror** combines two modes of exploration and experiment: collaboration facilitated by digital media technology – in our case the novel use of the virtual to connect geographically, socially, culturally, and ecologically distant realities in real-time 3D; and the aesthetic-discursive demonstration of complex issues, which gain in complexity – and we in insight – through the interweaving of human and non-human contributions.

Like a Ray in Search of its Mirror responds to the hybridization of presence and the consequences of digitization. We hold that the creation of open-source digital tools and platforms is indispensable for art, discourse, and political participation. Digitalization and AI are cultural techniques that must not be abandoned entirely to profit-driven industries (AI, for instance, is totally in private hands), especially at a time when political, social, economic, and ecological frictions are on the rise.

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THE FUTURE OF DEMONSTRATION | ON THE FORMAT OF THE ART SERIES

[Like a Ray in Search of its Mirror](#) is part of the art series [The Future of Demonstration](#). It builds on [Planetary Skins](#) (Season 3), an art project we realized in May 2023 during the Heart of Noise Festival at the Elisabeth and Klaus Thoman Gallery in Innsbruck.

The Future of Demonstration resolves the conventional and, as we argue, increasingly unproductive separation between art (exhibition), discourse (symposium) and archive (documentation). Instead, it creates a collaborative setting in which digital and physical space, discourse, conversation, performance, installation, visuals, soundscape, film set, and live documentation are brought together in a participatory choreography.

Each of the episodes is streamed live on our website and other online channels and hence makes up the documentation/archive of **The Future of Demonstration** as a web series.

The art series is based on a postdisciplinary practice: human and non-human contributors partake in exploring new forms, intensities, and consequences of collective practice within a performative-discursive framework.

We do not treat art, activism, theory, philosophy, science, or technology as separate fields. Rather, we see them as vital contributions to **demonstration** as a method for reimagining, weaving, and sharing narratives, techniques, and affiliations of resistance.

By intertwining technological, social, cultural, and biological materials, epistemes, and phenomena, we aim for an immersive experience in which the audience becomes part of experiments on technopolitical resolution: how do we achieve the shift to an inclusive socio-ecological paradigm, a cosmic *re-entanglement* with the planetary, a new perception of the world?