The Modules
10 March 2023

Berlin-based Black Swan's research into decentralised approaches to art-making finds them at The Modules, a role playing game. A way of gaining an embodied perspective upon the management of finite resources, it is also a way of practicing organisation and decision making within a fictional context wherein every time a group of players accumulates resources, that group also triggers random events that have an effect on the value of those accumulated resources.

A card game that speaks of applied theatre, it is a chance to experience organisation-building under the direction of the Administration that initiates the terms of resource distribution in the fictional region of Fornica. In this game, role players are invited to propose changes to the rules of play, which are implemented if agreed upon, to varying degrees of consensus depending on the scale of those changes. As invited writer I was asked to observe and mediate the experience as member of the Administration.

During the Art in the Age of the Metaverse conference, The Modules is hosted in a space — apt for the workshop — cross fades between a dance studio and a break room. Most of the players that had been gathered in the reception hall before the role play began stood with necks craned down to smartphones as if intending to keep their co-players as strangers. It didn't seem like anyone, outside of the role play, was interested in

getting to know each other. In a subsequent icebreaker — screenbreaker activity — I joined the players as we walked around the dance-break room with our eyes closed for a short time. After we returned to our seats to begin the game, Calum and Leïth of Black Swan read the premise of this role play: its characters, its mechanisms. I sit on the side of the room taking these notes in efforts to communicate what my impressions were of the workshop.

I think about group Decision making:
'The difference is that while in construction work something can be done, destructive work must incessantly by repeated; ' (Eliot, 1920). This quote I read months ago not at all with intention to quote him here (or anywhere), nonetheless my brain's numerous neural networks are disposed to resonate with his syntax and I have since pulled some, heavily decontextualised, quotes from his literary criticism into a few texts that I am writing now. Each time as an aesthetic syntactical word play and I hope it debases him sufficiently. Anyway:

What about; is decentralising a destructive work?
In my own practice, in pursuit of non-hierarchal models of organising and managing resources in the Arts, I have witnessed : 'interesting' 'things', uncomfortable feelings, moments of dissonance about how decisions get made. Rhetorically, artists manage their resources in a micro-economy that albeit rhetorically, allows us to develop our praxes as a nonhierarchical abundance. Yet, because competition-merit-celebrity — survival modes based on scarcity logic — are placed adjacent to creativity in artists' fields, rhetorical encouragement slips away from practical provision. As familiar as are articulations about the difficulties and the dispossessions of participating (particularly through wage labour) in a corporation which

employs hierarchical models of managing resources, nonhierarchical models of organising also are challenging in different ways including at least through how thoroughly hierarchical relations are ingrained in our daily experience, quickly deading the formation of new muscle memory around new modes of exchange. Creative articulations which reflect on the challenges of non-hierchical models as well as those that enact these models and thus demonstrate or can be indexed to their challenges, well, many of those deploy role play as a thinking tool, as a therapeutic space, as play. Intrigued by this, I had signed up to participate in the workshop before I was asked to write the workshop.

If it is an artwork we are inside, then the format of the role play is decentralised. If decentralisation is destructive work, undoing, is to be incessantly repeated and the work of undoing continues.

The game-world of Fornica is contextualised through the threatened scarcity of its important natural resource, phi. The groups were defined through picking cards and established the group's function as either: a local org, an online community, a platform. They split off to identify the characteristics of their new groups and discuss their strategy to manage a scarce resource.
The administrators take control of the game by initiating random events whereby some lose phi others gain it regardless of their planned strategies. I wonder if anyone will choose to not want phi.

Online Community MaPhi A Just wants to be happy

Platform Evil Dog will Live Forever
Local Org, Oracle backwards seeks Reparative justice

The groups came back together to propose rule changes and question the roles of the administration as a universal proxy that has always existed and does not have to answer for the roles and rules that it puts into play. When the rules were being discussed, no one openly question my role, I had chosen to observe the game rather than to play and write from within it.

At the end of the game, a happy ending with only winners irks my engrained sensibilities which require to know 'who won'. The 'final' distribution of phi at the end of the role play was unequal but in equilibrium: Online community - 'achieved our goal ' while the Platform 'achieved our goal' and the Local Org have 'all we need'.

Some impressions of the group's shared 'insights from the experience'
= focused on having fun and the phi came
= why do we need the phi? (Reflecting on real life current state)
= finding alignment in the conversations was difficult
= abstract understanding of the rules
= people try to find the rules where there aren't any/ there are a lot of places for the designing the game yourself
= all orgs decided what they wanted to feel successful; they didn't agree on what success was, but each were facilitated to achieve success how they wanted
= what speed did in the game,

= collectivity was possible although abstract notions of what phi is differed
= value is defined by belief
= currencies can exist and have value for one group even though they have no value for your group.
= just make what you need or want the most valuable thing and you will do fine.

Play as a way of distributing resources. Anyway feeling preferential towards 'circulation' because distribution recalls a node receiving an allocation from central node, discernment, whereas in circulation all nodes pass on to any other node, an impulse; otherwise maybe re-distribution achieves its goal as an incessant repetition of giving and receiving allocation.

Coming right back around to distribution, central nodes are indeed what dominate the organisations of our material reality now, as hyper-concentrations of wealth are the norm. In the creative industries such as any other, it has taken play and practice to learn to pass resources along, trade resources in a way that indexes motivations other than accumulation. As if to say — People of the internet: dream of an economy based on sharing, not a sharing economy based on accumulation! Digital technologies, robots, -verses are produced to increase the number of transactions as well as a higher yields in those transactions within the accumulation-motivation-complex, and still they also form ways for us to regenerate ecosystems.

It would seem that time is experienced as rapid technological change, giving rise to questions of 'where art is going and what artists will need in the future,' https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JfhdgNazHRo 06"23

while artists are working with technologies which are shifting within their commodity status. This shift vibrates in multiple directions wherein Kodak16mm is no longer a viable commodity and therefore primarily circulating as a medium to make artwork (and some advertising) while also artists have been working with ArtificialIntelligence (AI) been working with it for years while it was, in the mainstream, a myth or an anxiety, and while it still is that, in recent times very rapidly has been widespread consumed as a product, turned into something that is

'economically viable' Micaela Mantegna https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s6chP1BHdWU&list=PLfDRq8tA973LTVqhKD6dnbR01vHCCIF4g&index=24 16"00

Fein no surprise that metaverse is not for everyone^1 but already is built from the position of the most wealthy, savvy or powerful or tech savvy, highlighting 'The dangers that centralisation has inflicted on the internet' https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s6chP1BHdWU&list=PLfDRq8tA973LTVqhKD6dnbR01vHCCIF4g&index=24 16"00 On claims that the Metaverse is going to be a 'Post scarcity utopia' Micaela Mantegna Against the need for certain groups to have greater access to the resources they have generated it seems morally clear though practically difficult (or not) to just give the money away to any group that comes forward seeking resources. In a way it would be good fun. It may happen that a game played this way would end quickly, perhaps 'no fun' to reframe capitalism as a sentient token game that refuses to let itself end, and with such wilful

persistence…!

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Taylor Le Melle has grown to find bio's less cringe through building a practice of describing their activities with present participle phrases ("Taylor is writing") and shedding the practice of categorising states of being ("Taylor is a writer"). Taylor has trained in art history, architectural theory and developmental psychology. In 2018 they became one of the founding directors of not/nowhere in London, an artists' workers cooperative. www.not-nowhere.org/on From 2017 to 2022 they were part of London-based publishing collective, PSS, through which they have edited and produced several collections of science fantasy, theory and one poetry chapbook. This year, they are working their own book-length project for which they are making a series of 'draft objects' which facilitate the production of the text. Taylor is drinking oatstraw, to save their last good nerve.

^1Yet to be addressed here but looming over these considerations is the possibility of reflecting and interpreting the commodity exchange or labour relationship of being hired to write text in these contexts, see mine and Daniella Valz Gen's writing residency at Serpentine Galleries (cur. Amal Khalaf + Lizzie Graham) https://www.serpentinegalleries.org/whats-on/what-are-words-worth-sentient-value-systems/