

Uma Breakdown
Statement September 2021

I'm a disabled artist/writer/researcher interested in horror films, queer feminist literature, and games design. My practice is broadly concerned with destabilised image and text as a means to a complicit audience encounter with different kinds of subjectivity. This frequently deploys mechanisms that disrupt the possibility of a passive audience response while creating a welcoming, euphoric context within which to explore unstable situations. Such mechanisms are in part derived from fields which are already equipped for dealing with the unknown/hidden/overwhelming/broken, such as tabletop role playing games, experimental literature, horror studies, video games.

In 2020 I finished a PhD about The Evil Dead, care, écriture trans* féminine, and disaster. In 2020 along with Una Hamilton Helle, Eltons Küns, and Erik Martinson I co-created a plant horror role playing game at Kim? in Riga. I also produced "Animal Agency", a video game about sleeping on the ground next to animals for FACT, Liverpool, which has been selected to be shown at 17th Digital Art Festival in Athens 2021. I also wrote a short story about SSRIs and Artaud for Ma Bibliothèque, and an academic journal article about the Russian video game "Pathologic" as articulating Hélène Cixous analyses around dying and writing.

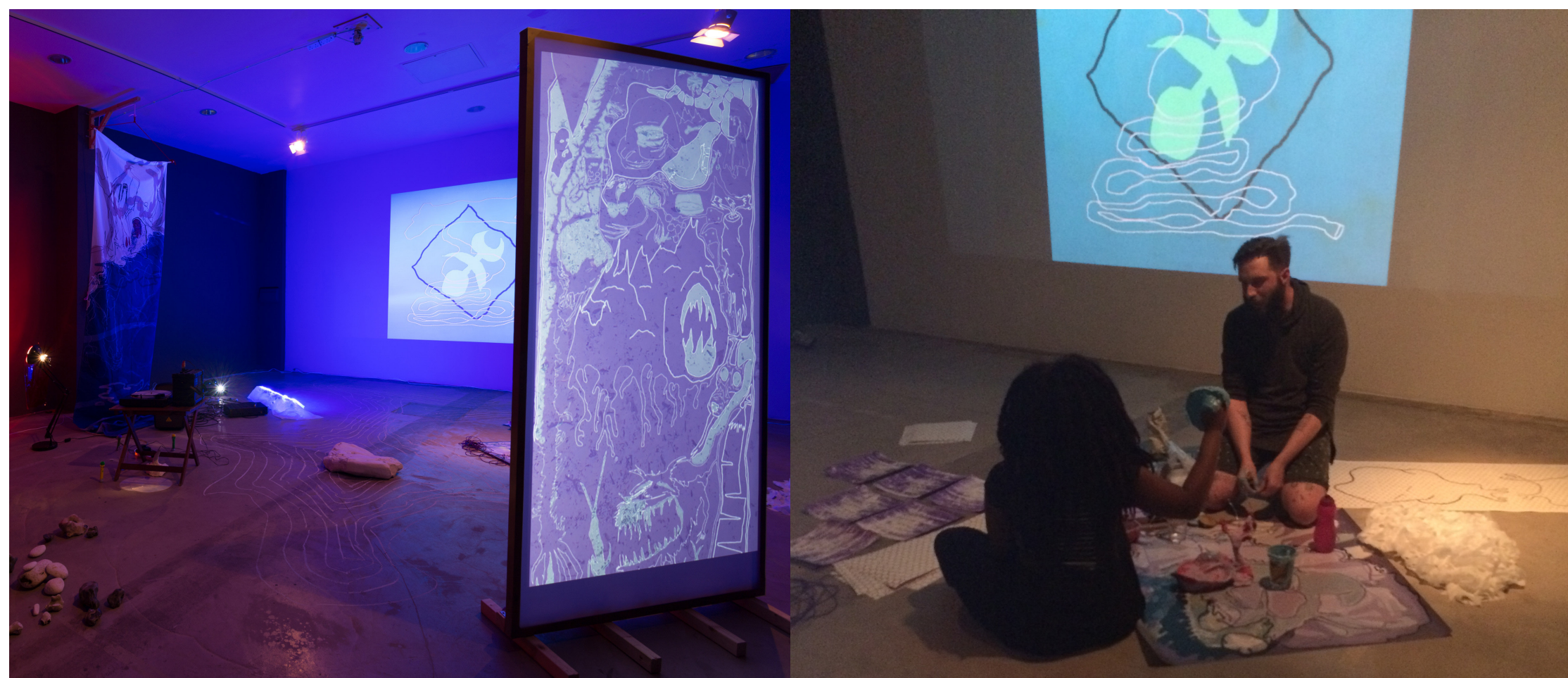
In 2021 I was a fellow at Akademie Schloss Solitude as part of the Johanna Hedva curated "Post-Doom" residency. For this I produced a web based artwork/game that takes the motif of the cowboy who is about to die, or who is tenderly holding their horse who is dying, and rebuilds it as cosmic joy.

At the beginning of this year I made an Augmented Reality sci-fi story about living on an oil rig as part of Shape Arts' "Unfolding Shrines", and produced work for forthcoming publications by CCA and Market Gallery, both in Glasgow.. I also took part in the British Council NET//WORK residency at Wysing Arts Centre, producing 'Lich Way Party Train', a looping folk horror science fiction story, where the player carries a coffin around their parish, tries to earn the respect of giant crows, and not lose the ghost. I also

My most recent project is "Catch the Moonlight By The Tail", an unpleasant visual retelling of Berserk/The Hidden Fortress/Dark Souls as Gogolian skaz space-opera, commissioned by Arebyte Gallery, London and due to launch in October.

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"TFW: The Formless Wastes", 2017.

[ABOVE LEFT] Documentation of installation (digital drawing on canvas 100cm x 450cm, front projection video loop 00:6:08, real projection video loop 00:01:03. Not in shot: digital drawing on vinyl 120cm x 120cm, 3 x ink drawings on paper 100cm x 700cm, various remnants from opening performance including screen printed divination card deck, alginate casts of audience members hands, plasticine teaching objects) as part of Janusware exhibition with Dean Kenning, Rachel McRae and Nicola Woodham, Res. London.

[ABOVE RIGHT] Documentation of opening performance.

Screen shot from "Take The Moonlight by The Tail" (2021), and interactive web based artwork commissioned by Arebyte Gallery for "Arebyte Open Screen", their digital art platform.

AGENT
EMOTIONAL
STATUS
COMPILING NEW
BUILD

ZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZ
ZZZZZZ
ZZZ
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Z

You all sleep.

Some time passes, you wake, and you continue your journey. The details are lost or are not important. They

"All Flesh is Grass", 2020. Documentation of installation (custom furniture, role playing game rule set printed on scrolls, octagonal tray of soil. Not in shot: various drawings and posters, modular synthesizer) as part of role playing game in collaboration with Una Hamilton Helle, Eltons Küns, and Erik Martinson, commissioned by Kim? Contemporary Art Centre, Riga.



Unfolding Shrines is some of the most ambitious augmented reality art we have seen in the last year

Our expert panel of artists and storytellers review extended reality exhibitions and events

THE ART NEWSPAPER'S XR PANEL
23rd April 2021 13:44 BST

   MORE



Jason Wilsher-Mills's Jason and his Argonauts. Wilsher-Mills got behind Unfolding Shrines "so I could engage with all the disabled people I used to support who are cut off during the pandemic"

What is it?

Unfolding Shrines is an exhibition produced by Shape Arts, in collaboration with [Hot Knife Digital Media](#), where four artists—Jason Wilsher-Mills, Sophie Helf, Rebekah Ubuntu, and Uma Breakdown—present art in augmented reality.

[Shape Arts](#) is a disability-led arts organisation, based in London, which works to improve access to culture for disabled people by providing opportunities for disabled artists



The best virtual things to do at home in April

Discover the biggest and best things to do online this month

Written by [Huw Oliver](#) & [Time Out editors](#) Monday 1 March 2021



Photograph: Shape Arts

1. Turn your flat into a surreal dreamland

Ever wondered what it's like to see the world through the gaze of a deeply wacky artist? 'Unfolding Shrines' is an augmented-reality app that turns your surroundings into distinctive, colourful 'portals' into the imaginations of four artists – Jason Wilsher-Mills, Sophie Helf, Rebekah Ubuntu and Uma Breakdown. All you need is your phone and you're good to go. From March 24. Free. Check it out [here](#).

Screen shots and sample press from "Mansions of Mist 1", and interactive Augmented Reality Artwork made with support from Hot Knife Digital Media, and commissioned by Shape Arts London for "Unfolding Shrines", and app-based exhibition featuring artists with disabilities.



##2##

“Ouch”

You exhale a puff of laendar colour spores.

The Agent (you) wakes up and it is an unmitigated disaster. Your head, on a deer.

Everywhere around them the walls throb and run.

I tell them its ok, to take it easily, carefully implying both waiting on your little ink stained desk.

Leon looks everywhere at once, and especially at you, the Agent, their gaze no longer bound with you and you are screaming. There are some very graphic noises, some forthcoming betrayal.

Your bowed head, mislaid, asking for forgiveness. The dance of administration.

Bowels ruptured in misadventure and swollen to the size of continents.

After the summer night of the castle grounds is done, one of your colleagues might find them.

Why oh why did you come to the Mushroom Kingdom? The dance of the off world colony.

Ugly, in a bad way, unable to concentrate on even the most important of tasks. The dance of giddiness is getting cold.

The dance of blood and rivers of puss overflow the lid of the mausoleum into your miserable recreation activity, forgotten in your returned excitement.

The dance of phenomena in which you will not be able to read and these tiny insects buzz under their skin.

We house utter revulsion for the constabulary, and so Agent Kennedy, you and your Agency.

However now that you have been placed in a loving chosen family.

As your file has been lost, compressed, sunk below the dance of your paperwork.

I mean, you were ever the policeman Leon. I know that you will light the bonfire.

I take pleasure knowing there's a limit to any tollenances.

Your mouth takes on a life of its own and contradicts everything you believe in.

You find yourself in a forest mocked by birds.

My associate grows dandelions in your head.

On a deer.

Out of sight.



-BELOW: Screen shots from “Animal Agency”, an interactive artwork about disability and love, commissioned by FACT as part of the FACT Together 2020 Fellowship, and selected for the 2021 Digital Art Festival, Athens.

-RIGHT: Extract from [interview](#) with Breakdown conducted by Lesley Taker, producer and curator at FACT.

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WHAT'S ONVISITFILM LISTINGS

MENUS

UMA BREAKDOWN
AND LESLEY TAKER

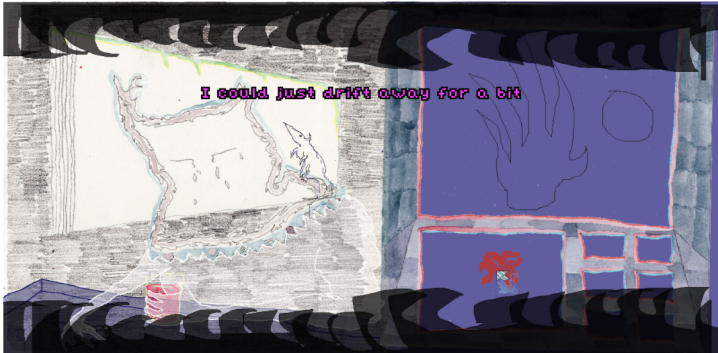
by FACT

Read

Part of the [The Living Planet](#) season

Share: [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#)

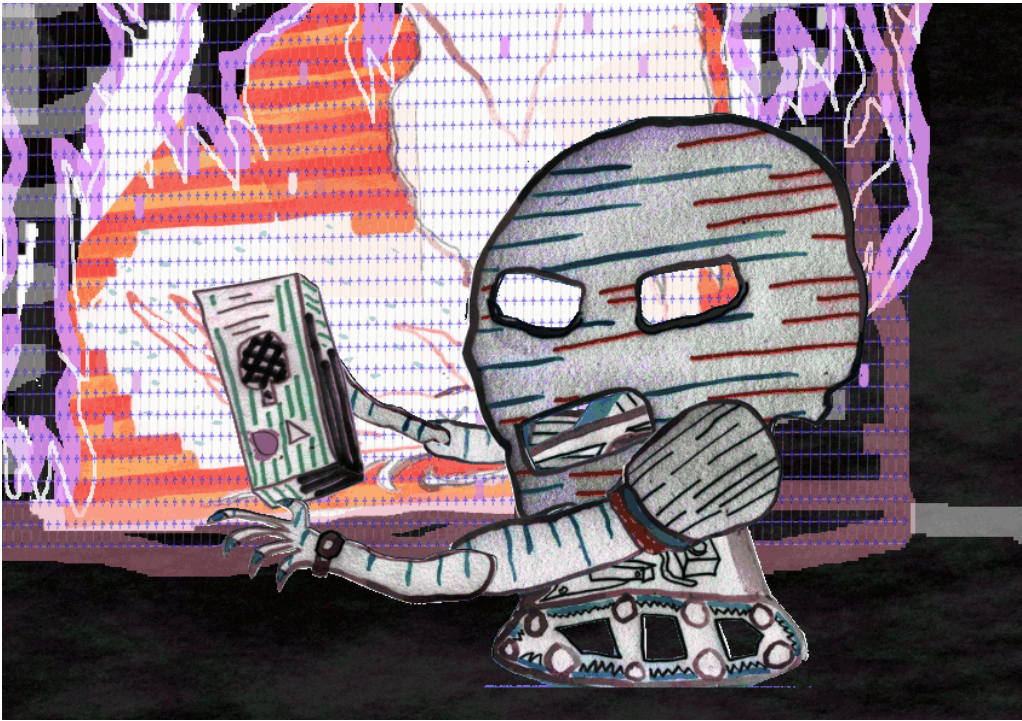
Uma Breakdown has made a visual novel in the form of a downloadable game for FACT Together, released earlier this week, called *Animal Agency*. Lesley, our Exhibitions Manager, had a chat with them about horror, critters, love, and how this commission altered Uma's approach to world-building in the game space. This is a transcript of a conversation with some post-editing and add-ins after the event.



Above image: Uma Breakdown, Animal Agency, 2020. Screenshot from the game. Courtesy of the artist.

LT: Let's start talking a little bit about how this [commission] has changed your approach to making games. Because you wanted to use the time for this commission to look into different sorts of game engines than you usually use, to push your practice, and finally found Adventure Game Studio (AGS)?

UB: I wanted to experiment more with software that allows games to integrate images and text, because I was using things like Bitsy and Twine which are predominantly text-based. So I had the idea of what I wanted to achieve and tried loads of different types of game engines - [Gamemaker Studio](#), [Godot](#), [Unity](#), [GDevelop](#), [Visionaire](#) etc. But nothing was either geared towards bringing image and text together in the way I wanted or had a language that I could get on with. And then I found [AGS](#) and realised that a click and point game (which I wasn't even considering as a format) would work really well. Because it relies so heavily on the text but allows for much more visual exploration. It also reminded me of when I would build things on the internet using flash animation features. It has the same sort of system where you create things and then define their functions, which worked really well for my style.





LICH WAY PARTY TRAIN



2021

A GAME BY UMA BREAKDOWN

this game was made mostly in Twine, the music was made with Acidmach ine2 and the artwork with Aseprite

SCROLL HERE and sometimes ELSEWHERE
 This game works best in Google Chrome, but will almost certainly just about function in other browsers.
 You can start by clicking [here](#)

v1.0
 uma breakdo wn.com

status: missing

You live for aeons [down here](#)

lost

Screen shots from “Lich Way Party Train” (2021), an interactive web based artwork, based around celebratory rituals of death and mourning and their connection to the landscape in the North East of England.

The artwork was developed while on NET//WORK, a residency hosted by Wysing Arts Centre and funded by the British Council offering artists a period of reflection, research, practice, skills exchange and professional networking opportunities focused on digital artistic practices and technologies.





The bird has perched nearby, you could [investigate](#)

 the bird is so large and rawkus

While you catch your breath you try and take in your surroundings.

 write a five words story that ends in a death: ...

one two one two Frank



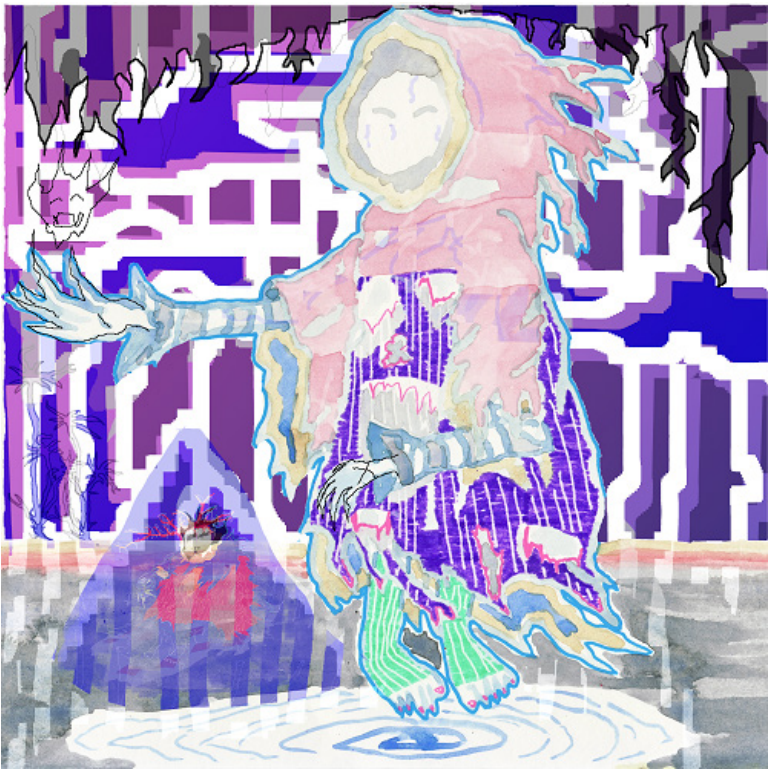
This not yet feeling familiar

 unstable Frank unstable

 game breaking bug

mentioned in its lyrics until you get bored
 ...
 You a sing a abandoned space opera. It brings on a vision that I will try to describe:

I believe in you Frank!



you are feeling a deep spiralling hunger



ABOVE and BELOW: Screenshots from "The Endless Hallucinatory Love of the Riders at The Long Point of Death" (2021), an interactive digital artwork commissioned by artist and writer Johanna Hedva as part of their curated fellowship "Post-Doom" for Akademie Solitude.

RIGHT: Extract from a [conversation](#) between Hedva and Breakdown, published by Akademie Solitude.

Free Your Mind. Death Will Come

For the Web Residency on »Post-Doom.« Uma Breakdown presented the project *The Endless Hallucinatory Love of the Riders at The Long Point of Death*. Here, Uma Breakdown speaks to curator Johanna Hedva about the project, favorite books, TV series and metal music, horror, and making art.

Uma Breakdown in conversation with Johanna Hedva — Jun 10, 2021



Detail from *The Endless Hallucinatory Love of the Riders at The Long Point of Death* by Uma Breakdown, 2021.

»It might be that post-doom for me is the feedback at the beginning of *Free Your Mind and Your Ass Will Follow*.«

Johanna Hedva: Hi Uma! I'm so glad we get to do this conversation, I just adore your mind. Before we get to your project for this web residency, can you tell me what you've been devoted to, or obsessed with, or fed by, in these past few months? I'm curious about the general universe you've been living in of late.

Uma Breakdown: Hi Johanna! I'm super happy about this, about the residency, what it's about, being accepted, and getting to work alongside such amazing people! I'm going to try and split my answers to this and the next question carefully, but there is a big overlap between what feeds and obsesses me (very specifically accurate phrasing for the way I work with things I think) on the medium- and long-term, and how I work day to day. So the list of the big things that have been producing all kinds of desire in me would definitely include Lella Taylor's article from *Horror Studies Journal* in 2019, with the gloriously innuendo-ed title, »The amorous annihilation of will: An examination of Georges Bataille's *Death & Sensuality* through Bryan Fuller's *Hannibal*.«

Omg I LIVE for Lella Taylor! This sounds amazing!

This is a paper that I heard about before it was published, and was just full-on beaming at my computer screen thinking about how perfect this was going to be. In the midst of my Ph.D., it slipped off the pile of things I could allocate energy to reading, and there it waited, out of sight. Then last week it came back into my mind, with the perfect timing of animal back-brain processes, and it's just the radiating stone that is pulling all these other things out of the muck of my studio and making them hover and spark.

A longer-term planet orbiting around me is Hélène Cixous's book, *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*, particularly its first chapter, »The School of The Dead.« I've sat with this text for more than a year now, a text that loops around the relationships between writing and dying. It isn't really a didactic book, it's really gentle and funny and joyful, and it's clear that for Cixous the learning in school isn't that of the teacher instructing the student, but a series of situations that we put ourselves in, so we can learn. We learn from the journey to school, the threats, the architecture, the mythology, and so on. I have a kind of mirror text to this, which is a translation of Jean Genet's radio address »The Criminal Child,« and an accompanying essay by the anonymous anarchist collective that translated and published it a few years back.

All of this sounds so fascinating. What I always enjoy about our conversations is that I come away with a long list of things to read and watch. I think of your practice as a kind of whirligig of elements, references, questions, and provocations that range widely: pop culture, horror, TV, video games, theory, criticism, philosophy. You somehow manage to make all of these seemingly disparate sources enmesh with each other in really vibrant and generative ways. I'm curious about what your daily practice looks like: is it daily? What do you practice? What do the muses look like for you? What libations do you keep close while making stuff? Or do you fast? Do you listen to music while you work? Do you dance often?

There's a lot of other stuff that has been making me happy and excited to do things and keep that serotonin level up to a point where I can risk it with making art. This includes the TV series *The Kingdom* by Kim Eun-hee, Octavia Butler's vampire novel, *The Fledgling*, the video game *Dark Souls*, and the Ohio anarchist radio show *Street Fight Radio*.

»Yes! Laughter and dancing feel like things not separate from doom and horror.«

While working on a project it's a usual tactic of mine to establish a soundtrack. For this residency, I made up a playlist of my favorite doom metal and doom-adjacent music. From recent things from Thou and The Body, back to bands like Acid Bath, Charger, Swans, and Electric Wizard that I would have filled my minidisk player with at college.

Oh wow, I want this soundtrack. I'm wearing my *The Body* sweatshirt right now as I type.

UB: I actually had a revelatory moment about this last week. This music is not material that meshes with either my process of making art, or with the jumbled worlds I make art about. I don't know whether it's about how cathartic that stuff is, or whether it's just depressive, but it wasn't letting anything move. I started listening solely to George Clinton and Funkadelic instead, and everything snapped into place.

It might be that post-doom for me is the feedback at the beginning of *Free Your Mind and Your Ass Will Follow*. It might just be the way all my creative practice is dictated by my erratic energy levels. I think that the latter is probably more likely. My chemical/cognitive/affective strangeness is really volatile. I'm aware of how ridiculous it might sound, but the real core work of my practice as an artist, writer, researcher, or whatever is an economy of joy and happiness. In my experience, putting anything down, like a line on drawing, or the opening of a story, involves an investment of joy. If I don't have enough in the tank, then the cost of doubt and uncertainty will just bring it down to empty. So a lot of day-to-day is managing those slippery ghosts of things in the world that I find exciting, and the brain-gut-body-world resources of joy needed to pursue them.