

The way we once understood the future, a future that was supposed to mould our world, is now staring back at us in the form of a ruin. Today NASA funds scientists to study seeds and crops that can survive the voyage to, and the terraforming of, Mars. Chernobyl's ecology is unearthly, similar to the landscape on Mars. A piece of Space on Earth. Outer Space translating into Inner Space, via an irradiated interplanetary journey. One of the most radioactive places on Earth, inside a so-called sarcophagus, the dome covering the exploded nuclear reactor in the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone, grows a radiotrophic fungus. *Cladosporium sphaerospermum* performs radiosynthesis: using melanin it converts gamma radiation into chemical energy for growth. Life seems to wander through walls, space, constrictions. Reshaping and reinventing itself with every step.

What is a fertile ground?

Mycelium—a non-animal, non-vegetal, non-human form of life—is often considered the immune system of Earth. It's a connective tissue and a communication medium: trafficking, contaminating, filtering, detoxifying, decomposing and thriving on our waste. Both academics and self-taught mycologists are experimenting with mycelium as a future construction material: a biodegradable, insulating, resistant and lightweight brick. Mycelium, in the form of mycorrhiza, a symbiotic association between a fungus and a plant, made life on Earth possible. In today's time lag, future and past seem to merge. Mycological technology may become a guiding metaphor for social and digital technologies.

What is the role art can play in all this? What are the implications of working with living cultures as a metaphor and as a matter in live arts? While feeding and monitoring them to keep them alive, how are we tamed by this process? Which technologies bring us together and which ones separate us? What is our range of movement in all this? How is the world making us and how are we making worlds?

Considering art as a form of life, a form of transition, *how do we assemble, but also how do we decompose? How are we affected, contaminated and infected?* Art as a viral transmission to which we are certainly not immune, *how do we intimate with its rotting, decaying and dying?* In order to rethink growth, we shift our attention from the monumentality of art history to its ruination. *What is a creative act in this context? Can we think of an art of life and death?*

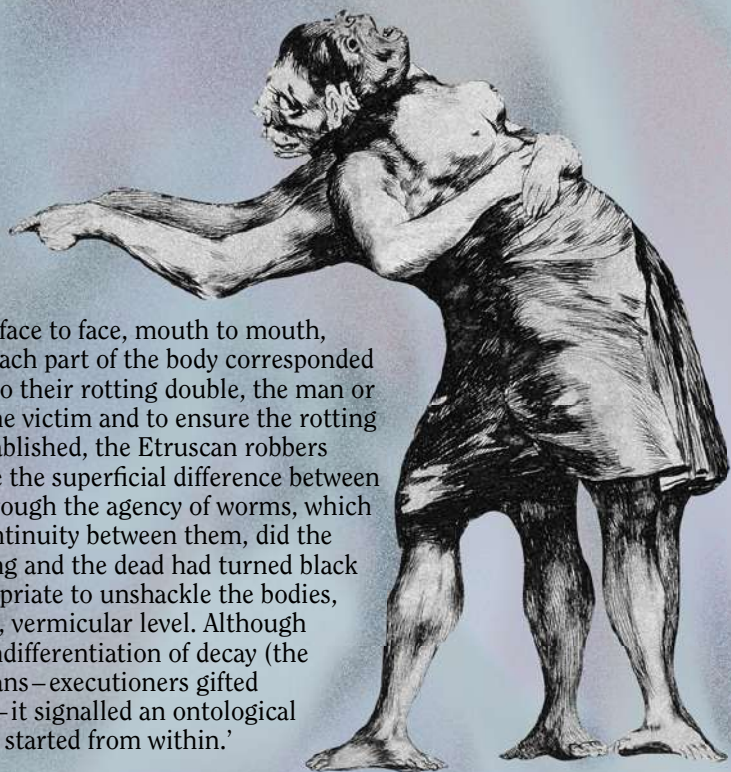
We evoke the figure of the ruined monument. We build fertile ruins in collaboration with fungi. We imagine a monument of finitude, in a metabolic cycle of composition and decomposition. We engage in mushrooming as a methodology, a way of looking at things and a way of working. We build the ruins of a theatre to come.

In a multilayered scenario that embraces dark ecology, ecofeminism and local anthropology, we foster aesthetic gestures that resonate with the furry complexity of moulds and their alienness. We engage in practices that are both conceptual and somatic. We imagine spaces that are gardens tuning into different colours, moods, calendars and ecosystems.

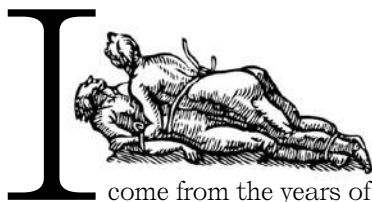
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'A living man or woman was tied to a rotting corpse, face to face, mouth to mouth, limb to limb, with an obsessive exactitude in which each part of the body corresponded with its matching putrefying counterpart. Shackled to their rotting double, the man or woman was left to decay. To avoid the starvation of the victim and to ensure the rotting bonds between the living and the dead were fully established, the Etruscan robbers continued to feed the victim appropriately. Only once the superficial difference between the corpse and the living body started to rot away through the agency of worms, which bridged the two bodies, establishing a differential continuity between them, did the Etruscans stop feeding the living. Once both the living and the dead had turned black through putrefaction, the Etruscans deemed it appropriate to unshackle the bodies, by now combined together, albeit on an infinitesimal, vermicular level. Although the blackening of the skin indicated the superficial indifferenciation of decay (the merging of bodies into a black slime), for the Etruscans—executioners gifted with metaphysical literacy and alchemical ingenuity—it signalled an ontological exposition of the decaying process which had already started from within.'

Reza Negarestani, *The Corpse Bride*



Cut-out from Francisco Goya, *She Who Is Ill*, *Med*
Never Misses a Chance to Say So [Disorderly Roll], ca. 1813-20



I come from the years of AIDS and Chernobyl: fear of sex, acid rain, monstrous nature. I learned to be afraid of the outside, of things entering my body, contaminating me, filling me with decay and disease. Sexual education at school consisted mainly in creating an abysmal fear of the other: liquids becoming weapons that could enter even the smallest breach in your defence system. A small wound in your mouth while kissing, keeping safe, prophylaxis: keep at least a minimal distance between bodies in the measure of a thin layer of latex. 1986, Chernobyl as *hyperobject*, an invisible toxicity moving through the clouds, raining down on us, growing out of the ground: don't leave the house, don't play in the garden—above all, don't eat mushrooms. Radiation is everywhere, but nowhere to be seen. Borderless. Stay home. Uncontrollable infections. Anticipatory paranoia creates anxieties and paranoia tends to be contagious. And then Covid-19, in all its variations, mutations and ungovernable transits. And then Russia's invasion of Ukraine. On 24 February 2022 the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone was captured by the Russian Armed Forces who seized the entire nuclear power plant, only to withdraw at the end of March of the same year.

In 2013 I got diagnosed with SLE, *systemic lupus erythematosus*. 'Lupus' is Latin for 'wolf': the disease was so named in the thirteenth century as the rash was thought to look like a wolf's bite. One of the medications that is most commonly used is Plaquenil, or hydroxychloroquine. Originally used to prevent and treat malaria, Plaquenil may cause colour blindness. For a while it was said it could prevent and treat Covid-19.

An autoimmune disease is a condition arising from an abnormal immune response to a functioning body part: the body's immune system mistakenly attacks healthy tissue in many parts of the body. If it's not cured, the disease will take over organ by organ. There's probably more than a hundred variations and while treatment usually improves the symptoms, it doesn't typically cure the disease. There are flares and remission periods and common symptoms are malaise, fatigue, pain and rashes. Often the disease resists diagnosis, since the causes are not clear, involving probably a combination of both genetics and environmental factors. Today, autoimmune diseases are more and more common and still little known. They seem to be the embodiment of a communication breakdown, a problem of synchronicity, or a self-management miscalculation. The body needs rest because it carries a corpse within.

But what is the immune system and why is it important to talk about it today? When did the discourse around it mark the way we think about it today? As I revisit older texts, I realize how the discourse on immunity has changed over the years.

'From embryonic life to adulthood, the immune system is sited in several relatively amorphous tissues and organs, including the thymus, bone marrow, spleen, and lymph nodes. A large fraction of its cells are in the blood and circulatory systems and in body fluids and spaces.' (Donna Haraway) Considering that receptors and antibodies have high rates of somatic mutations and rearrangements, we could say that the immune system is everywhere and nowhere, making of the body a network.

The immune system is a myth, a narrational genre that plays a central role in explaining social, natural and supernatural phenomena. It is a potent and polymorphous object of beliefs, knowledge and practice where myth, laboratory and clinic are intimately interwoven. As a regulating system, it distinguishes an inside from an outside, a body and its environment. It guides recognition and misrecognition of self and other in a dialectics, dissecting the normal and the pathological, a community and its borders. With feedback and other complex control system mechanisms, it is no surprise that one image used to represent it is a polyphonic orchestra, with multiple centres and peripheries, each with prompters urging their own interpretation.

Immunology and semiotics are not so far from one another, especially if we consider self, body, individual, organism as artefacts. Interpretation is key. The concept of immunity affects language itself, provoking continual lexical slippage between fields and showing their interdependency: for instance, when medical vocabulary is adopted in the battle against computer viruses or military terminology is used in the scientific world to describe responses to environmental threat.

With the trope of space invaders, outer space and inner space, Western medical discourse has been obsessed with the notion of contagion and the hostile penetration of a healthy body. Likewise, in colonial history, that approach to disease involves a stunning reversal: the colonized is perceived as the invader and the one bringing diseases. The logics of this inversion are still present in the discourse around parasitical diseases and AIDS.

Being a mother in the Western First World, I witness how often conversations about immunity burgeon and quickly steer into politics, offending the fragile architecture of 'degrees of freedom', obligations, exemptions or privileges in relation to a community. Roberto Esposito explains how with the birth of medical bacteriology, between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Jenner, Pasteur, Koch), a crucial change happened in the passage from natural to acquired, actively induced immunity. The inoculation of an attenuated form of infection stimulates the formation of antibodies able to neutralize pathogenic effects. In other words, a certain degree of toxicity activates the immune system: an inoculation, like a *pharmakon*, is cure and poison. The immunity paradigm presents itself as a form of reaction. It protects life while negating life itself because it presupposes and uses what it opposes. Enforcing the law to protect a community is, similarly, anticipating violence against violence.

For some theories, the immune system is capable of self-regulation: it regulates itself using only itself, with a system of interior mirroring. In a constant state of dynamic internal responding, it is never passive or at rest, awaiting an activating stimulus from a hostile outside, because there would be no invader that it had not already seen and mirrored internally. Self and other, inside and outside, lose their oppositional quality. We seemed invaded not just by threatening 'non-selves' that the immune system guards against, but more fundamentally by our own strange parts. No wonder autoimmune diseases carry such an awful significance, termed, from the first suspicion of their existence in 1901 by Morgenroth and Ehrlich's term, *horror autotoxicus*.

What if autoimmunity becomes a general societal condition? A blind spot in the hypertrophy of the security apparatuses, when a self-protective syndrome creates the opposite of what it desires. The system will adapt the perception of risk to the growing need for protection, making protection itself one of the major risks. The system then misrecognizes the enemy and starts to attack what it is meant to protect.

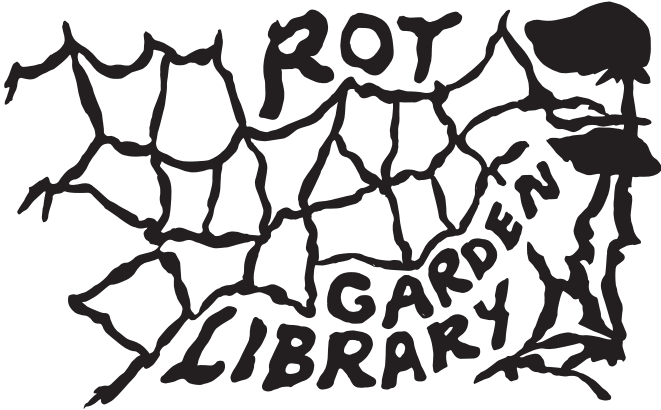
In a world in which everything is marketable, self-care has become an obsession. We are addicted to work and to other substances that help us to regulate our nervous system. Our bodies are overwhelmed by a regime in which, paradoxically, movement and freedom of movement—intended as a primary vector of subjectivation—is also policed, controlled, managed, surveilled and colonized. The kinetic of the domestic confinement reduced it to our fingers impulsively clicking and swiping, liking, buying, consuming for the sake of consuming. Life and its ungovernability seems to be the enemy. Speaking with Lauren Berlant, who died in 2021 during the pandemic, this mechanism can be described as a 'cruel optimism': self-delusional and toxic. We hold on to something familiar as a way to avoid the overwhelming character of having to step out of order. We risk burnout.

Autoimmunity is often taken as the symptom of a system going mad, a communication breakdown that can reveal what was going wrong in the network of moulds, tools and habits that we are normally engaged in. A breakdown is also a situation of non-obviousness, of crisis, which opens up the possibility to look closely at the dynamics between order and disorder, both necessarily engaged in the making of the world. This situation of crisis gives us room to turn the attention on those elements and dimensions that we normally discard because they fall out of order.

ROT magazine fosters a diversity of artistic gestures that, in order to keep on thinking, doing and dancing, gravitate around two main vectors: one related to noise, the other to rest. Noise on its parasitic and symbiotic relationship to sound, the guest and the host, interference and confusion. Rest as leftovers and remnants, as ruins, as a support and a place to lie on, but also rest as in to rest, pause, cease. Working with living cultures and live arts provokes a certain disorder, a sense of self-estrangement and a change of pace. Weird, disorienting rhythms and matters. Which ghosts, unseen elements and forgotten ruinations can be reactivated and made fertile?

SOURCES

The editorial and para-editorial were largely written keeping at hand some of the books that are part of the ROT GARDEN LIBRARY and growing alongside several conversations and encounters that happened in the last couple of years.



Anna Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*, with huge gratitude to Deborah Robbiano and Sébastien Tripod for thinking and making RUINED with me.

Merlin Sheldrake, *Entangled Life: How Fungi Make Our Worlds, Change Our Minds & Shape Our Futures*, and admiring the oyster mushroom mycelium as a troublemaker as much as an artistic collaborator in the making of sculptures and communities during the different steps of the project.

Donna Haraway, 'The Biopolitics of Postmodern Bodies: Constitutions of Self in Immune System Discourse', in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*.

Roberto Esposito, *Immunitas: The Protection and Negation of Life*.

Jeroen Peeters, 'All over the place, but not quite there: Notes on choreographic assemblages and expanded writing as material literacy', in Sabina Holzer and Elisabeth Schärer, *which dances - which writes: Aluminium Assemblagen*, and many conversations that supported the coming together of ROT: from Chernobyl as hyperobject to writing these editorials from a situated, more personal perspective — always adding a pinch of salt.

Michael Marder and Anaïs Tondeur, *The Chernobyl Herbarium: Fragments of an Exploded Consciousness*.

Jonathon Turnbull, 'Weird', in *Environmental Humanities*.

John L. Hall and Lynn Margulis, 'From Movement to Sensation', in *Chimeras and Consciousness: Evolution of the Sensory Self*, with thanks to Jaime Llopis for thinking with me the concept of chimera in dance and for the unapologetic sharpness of his perspective during the making of MOLD.

Michel Serres, *The Parasite*.

André Lepecki, *Movement in the Pause*, thanks to Alix Eynaudi who talked to me about her *Institute of Rest(s)*.

Santiago Alba Rico, *Sobre lo inconsistente y lo incompleto*, with thanks to Paz Rojo for giving me another perspective on ruins by sharing the beginning of her research project to die well.

Alina Popa and Florin Flueraș, *Unsorcery*.

Alina Popa, *Square of Will in Square of Love: Texts, Notes, Drawings*.

Laurent Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, thanks to Adrijana Gvozdenović for thinking with me manicure and theory as weird processes of beautification for our *Nail Art Affects Theory*.

Eve Kosofski Sedgwick, 'Paranoid reading and reparative reading, or, you're so paranoid, you probably think this essay is about you', in *Touching Feeling*.

Lili Reynaud Dewar, *My Epidemics*, thanks to Michael Van den Abeele.

Elsa Dorlin, *Self Defense: A Philosophy of Violence*, thanks to Carolina Mendonça.

Maggie Nelson, *On Freedom: Four Songs of Care and Constraint*.

Jamieson Webster, *Disorganization and Sex*.

Reza Negarestani, *The Corpse Bride*, thanks to Cristina Caprioli.

Thanks to Jeroen Peeters, Jaime Llopis, Elke van Campenhout and Lucia Palladino for their precious comments on the multiple versions of this text.

I am grateful to the collaborators, performers and accomplices with who MOLD was generated: Marcos Simoes, Gitte Hendriks, Christophe Albertijn, Estelle Gaultier, Sofie Durnez, Deborah Robbiano, Edurne Rubio, Günbike Erdemir, the kombucha skin collage, and the dried and living oyster mushroom mycelium performing with us. I am thankful to the institutional partners that supported the different phases of the project: BUDA, Kaaitheater, far° festival des arts vivants, WIELS, C-TAKT, upZimmer, Kunst/Werk, XING and the Flemish Government. In particular: Agnes Quackels, Mathilde Villeneuve, Bram Coeman, Cristina Grande, Pedro Rocha, Véronique Ferrero Delacoste, Nathalie Garbely, Anne-Christine Liske, Marc Vanrunxt, Silvia Fanti and the whole team of Hiros.

Thanks to the fellow artists, the visitors, the mentors, the cement, the fruit flies and the studio that accompanied me during the nineteenth session of the WIELS residency programme.

In the last year, I am happy to have been in contact with Anne Kerzerho, the team and the students of the Master eerce, Montpellier; Jennifer Lacey and the students of the Master in Choreography at SKH, Stockholm; Véronique Mauron Layaz, Juan Carlos Floyd Sarria and the participants of the RUINED workshop, Lausanne in May 2023.

Never forgetting the influence of a pass and all the dear artists, researchers and questions that I have encountered in that context since 2008.

In memory of Kobe Matthys, who was one of the first people I invited to contribute to this issue and who passed away too early. He is an inspiration.

Dedicated to Anton and Christophe, who are there all along.