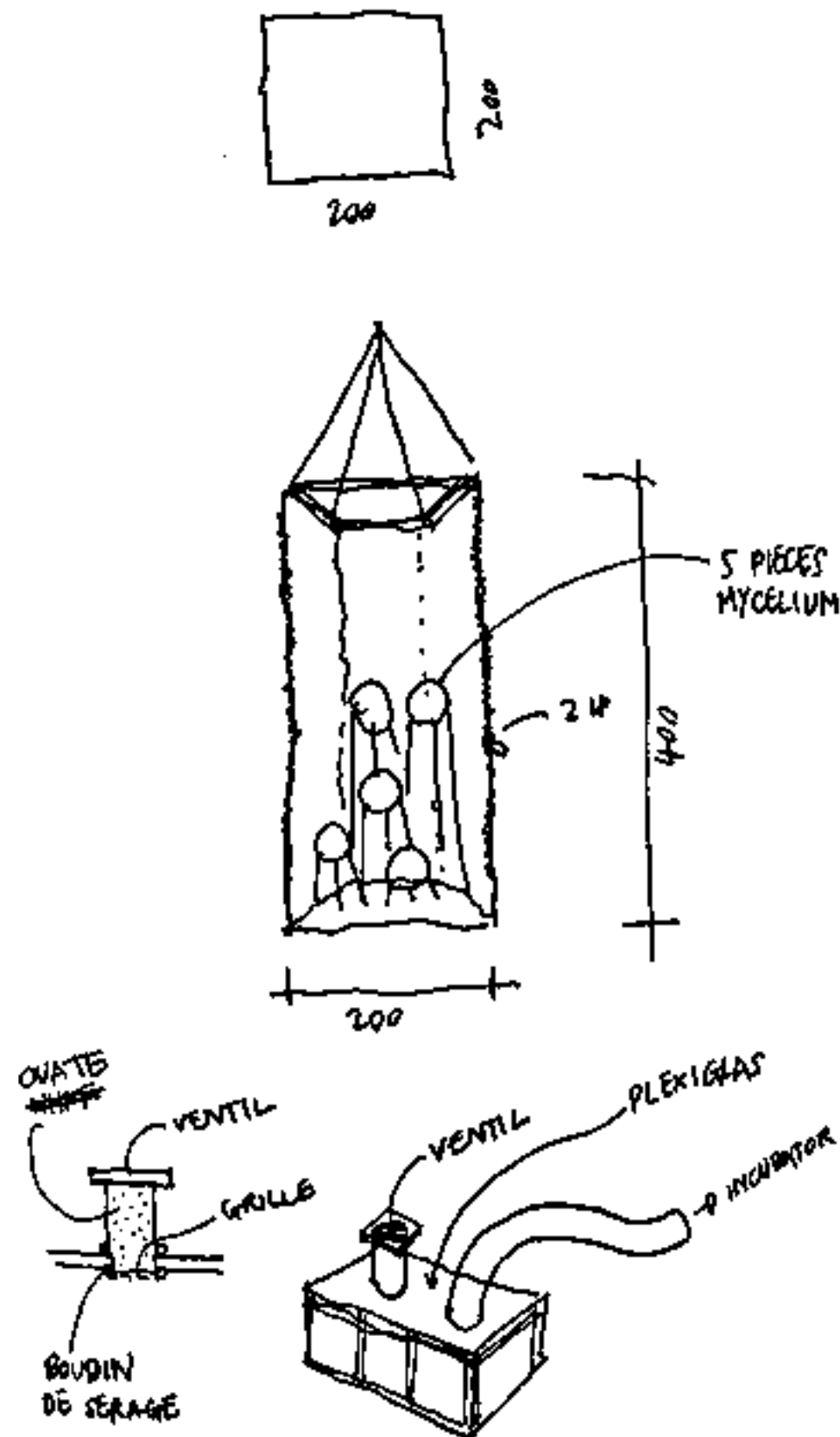


RUINED MuSa at n0dine

18/10/2023 - 11/11/2023

Sara Manente, Deborah Robbiano, Sébastien Tripod, Muna Mussie, Christophe Albertijn, Agnese Krivade



Sara Manente is bringing her current research within three collective projects together in Brussels. With a team of artists and practitioners, she is setting up an exhibition at n0dine, which will 'grow' in October and November 2023. This presentation fuses different aspects of her work: the potential of mycelium as a building material, the concept of autoimmunity, the relationship between old and new technologies, and the performative aspect.

RUINED, a project in collaboration with Deborah Robbiano and Sébastien Tripod, involves building with mycelium on an architectural scale, embracing experimentation, curiosity and chance. The archetype of the Greek column with capitals is taken as a starting point for a modular construction that grows in various contexts. After a construction episode in Lausanne and an exhibition in the ROT GARDEN at far° Nyon, the columns travel to n0dine in Brussels and become part of a growing exhibition. With the help of Zoé Aymon, they constructed a transparent chamber, as an incubator to inoculate with mycelium 6 new molds that will continue to grow over the duration of the exhibition. The growing components are the prototype for a future iteration of the project at Kunstmuseum Bochum.

The installation and exhibition take further shape by adding two elements - A.I. and basket weaving - a confrontation between old and new technologies which Manente explores with MuSa. For this, Manente is collaborating with Muna Mussie and Christophe Albertijn. As a whole, the installation will form a temple with a kind of oracle: visitors can enter and interact with the installation.

Each week, different elements and materials will be added to the exhibition, synchronised with the slow rhythm of the mycelium.

By the end of this period, edible mushrooms might have sprouted and could be eaten.

On the 11th of November, people will be invited for a closing ritual and chaga drink especially made by Agnese Krivade. We will then walk on to rile*, where issue one of the magazine ROT - IMMUNITY - will be launched, followed by an evening with a performance by Natasha Papadopolou, cocktails made by Michelle Anay Woods and a DJ-set by Roberta Miss.

ROT is a magazine that encourages research and reflection around a community of artists and of practices around the theme of "immunity" and "autoimmunity". Mycelium and ruins are also central to the project. ROT is both an editorial and performative project.

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?

editorial & para-editorial written by

Sara Manente

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.

