

## ***The Egg Egg***

Post Brothers

“The world is an egg, but the egg itself is a theatre: a staged theatre in which the roles dominate the actors, the spaces dominate the roles and the ideas dominate the spaces.” - Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* (1968)

While preparing breakfast on a late winter day, I realized that I was boiling my watch in the saucepan and had been looking at an egg in my hand for who knows how long. Perhaps this was mere absent-mindedness, or an unconscious attempt to reduce time to its essence like a syrup, but I was captivated by the embodied symbol in my hand, this incredible edible icon for wholeness, origins, security, causality, and life itself. My waterlogged watch reflected my increasing sense of scrambled temporality, my suspicion that time no longer moved towards the future or an end, nor yearned for or repeated the past, but rather that all memories had been collected into one basket, an unchanging yet constantly rejuvenating present ready for consumption. I'm a bit lost in both time and space, like a wayward dreamer who is where he isn't and he isn't where he is. Restless, I felt that I was going to crack, so I left my timepiece simmering and ventured out into my adopted city of Bialystok looking for a fresh start, a revived understanding, or at least a meal.

Midway upon my journey I found myself within an uncertain enterprise, for the straightforward pathway had been lost, and I needed shelter. Entering the city's early-20th century powerplant, I was surprised to encounter bodies and mechanisms at work, as if the infrastructure for electrical energy-generation had been replaced for the production of a new power source or the implementation of an arcane technical-spiritual program. I have prepared this dispatch to report what I think I observed in this place, to air my suspicions and (mis)understandings of the systems at work there, and to share a few easter eggs I discovered among the complex displays. I fear that some of these interpretations and references may feel patronizing to the initiated, like teaching a grandmother to suck eggs, so please take this script with a grain of salt and remember that these are the subjective rantings of an itinerant exile who always ends up with egg on his face.

I still am uncertain what exactly *The Egg Egg* is, as it is a puzzling hybrid, sharing some properties with a factory, a museum, a public square, a market, a treatment clinic, a private home, a server farm, a utopian design firm, an avant-garde start up, or even a cult-like church. Each polychromatic region in the factory presents a different array of objects and images that are too handcrafted to be proper prototypes, too instrumental and active to be mere representations. The experience is organized as a multi-chambered system of nine interrelated tableaux, which each function as departments in some enigmatic bureaucracy, or as workstations along an assembly line where it is not products that are manufactured, but rather it is meaning and the visitors themselves who are continuously (re)assembled. The procession through these patchwork milieus lends the space a dramaturgical spirit, as if the structural divisions are events in a narrative flow, each are scenes in a larger framestory. One can think of the powerplant as an egg carton, with the acts as individual eggs made up of relatively stabilized personal worlds, but I see the space more like a dense foam with microcosms that are separate yet interconnected through shared membranes and the diffusion of forms and concepts from one story to the next. There is a recurrent, almost fractal, logic at work here, where similar structures, materials, and containers are repeated at different scales, nesting within each other, generating shadow patterns that are something like the repetitions of memory.

The ‘acts’ operate as theoretical-practical laboratories for a sort of speculative world building, welcoming the visitor into a contrived scene of representational struggle, where gadgets, materials, and images form constellations that reorganize societal scripts, familiar forms, and naturalized routines. Today it feels that our stories are always written by someone else, by capital, myth, ideology, crisis, the weight of history, by the powerful, but never by ourselves. Generating socio-cybernetic production systems for the imaginary, the demonstrative displays encourage a rewiring of the communal fantasies and phantasms that haunt not only local identities, but all of us, exposing the treacherous agency of the stories we tell ourselves about who we are, where we’ve been, what we can be. To paraphrase the scholar Maria Janion (that daring queer child of Podlasie), this workshop is dedicated to a reordering of the cultural-symbolic and economic-political spheres through a *refurbishing of meanings*. It’s a return, a rebirth, a reboot, a reappraisal. A TV ad for sitcom reruns from the 90s still echoes in my head: “If you haven’t seen it, it’s new to you.”

### **I. Prologue: Sisyphus**

*tic tok*  
*tic tok*

A familiar rhythm, the incessant beat of time and the unabated cadence of capital and labor, the tyranny of the clock. A fluted figure swings upside down on a pendulum in a cryptic cocoon, its harmonic oscillations setting a pace, an embodied pulse, for the forthcoming journey. Swaying to and fro between opposing extremes, the effigy, though in action, is condemned to a sort of absurd stasis, an unchanging routine of back and forth akin to working life and even our political arrangements. The perpetual pounding of the pendulum lends the introductory vestibule a nervous energy, a feeling of ceaseless toil and trance-like labour. It is a waiting room, a prologue, an incubator, a transitional antechamber that links the precarious present with a future that has not yet arrived. What system am I inside, and what awaits me in the future?

With a massive mural depicting an ethereal staircase made of cylindrical steps (Jacob’s Ladder for those Judeo-Christians), and a painting of angels ascending and descending, the entryway has a chapel-like atmosphere, where mundane materiality strives toward transcendence. The apparent program within the cult-like conglomerate of *The Egg Egg* draws on the old cosmogonic motif that the genesis of all life, indeed the universe as a whole, emerged from an original egg. The cosmic principle of *Omne vivum ex ovo* (*All living things come from eggs*), substantiated by the sciences, asserts that nothing comes from nothing, we all emerge from a cell, and for us mammals especially, these eggs are nested within the larger protective layer of our mother’s womb: *Omne ovum ex ovario* (*every egg comes from an ovary*). Cultural theorists such as Peter Sloterdijk and Bracha L. Ettinger have argued that this primary intimacy and interiority prefigures our relationships to the world: we emerge within a *M/other*, a life-giving shelter, and continue to construct our own microcosms around us as individuals and communities by establishing cultural and technological environments as protective ‘bubbles’. A pair of diagrammatic prints suggest that it is through this archaic interface of membranes that we can better understand ourselves and others. But rather than simply marking a shatter from the moulds of society or the past, an unsheathing of the

subject, these images seem to suggest, as Sloterdijk has commented, that the “egg is a symbol that teaches us, of its own accord, to think of the sheltering form and its bursting as a unity.”

An opposite display features a trio of ribbed ceramic guardians like the Sisyphian timekeeping acrobat. More than Michelin-man mascots, their cabled physiques recall weaving bobbins, those tools used to coordinate and manage textile labor for both humans and machines. Each of the Bodhisattva-like bobbin people enfold an interrelated techno-cosmological principle. The first figure features wheat shafts and a breadroll, recalling the Christian notion of transubstantiation and the role of agriculture and baking in human conviviality and survival. The second is an oversized depiction of their referential spool, complete with a titanic cord of rope, while the third conversely contains a miniature of itself in its thorax, a little homunculus, a mother with a preformed entity, a little man at the centre of the self, a parody of the alchemical aim of artificial and spontaneous generation. They are perhaps less idols than spiritual instruments (tantras), conveying not only concepts but also activating a concrete interchange between the material and the informational. The statues present coiled constructions of beeswax reconstituted from melted church candles, seizing something not only of the church’s sacral energy, but also a chain of metamorphoses and transferences from the sun, flowers, bees, heat, human labor, and so on... Here, the logic of sympathetic magic fundamental to theology, folklore, and art is brought to the fore, which proceeds under the principle of a transference of power through contact and imitation. The bobbin bodies demonstrate a peculiar cross-contamination between humans and their tools, bringing into question the anthropomorphization of objects and the objectification of humans in turn. Which came first? As Albert Camus has written of Sisyphus’ burden: “A face that toils so close to stones is already stone itself!”

## **II. The Egg**

A control centre, a site for planning and projection, of organizing flows, relationships, and action. At the centre of the space is a wheeled modular display, consisting of eight coffee-table-like platforms that can combine to form an ellipse and other shapes, five large half-egg cupolas on circular trolleys, and four benches nesting eggs in glass compartments in their seats. To sit at this assemblage, one becomes a hen. I had to stop myself from counting chickens, for the second zone features a profusion of egg, oval, and ovoid forms, an immeasurable egg-xess. Eggs of course are a symbol of original perfection, a self-contained microcosm prior to any process. Architecture can be seen as an attempt to reproduce our original womb on a larger scale, establishing nested enclosures and boundaries in our environment. With its hard exterior and soft interior, the humble egg is a self-contained, pre-programmed, and highly sophisticated system, a microcosm held together and sheltered by the natural engineering of its distinctive curved shell. It is no coincidence that the halls of church and state often feature egg domes at their peak, it is not only a symbolic principle of connecting to the heavens or an original power, but also a very practical structural appropriation, as the pointed end of an eggshell approximates the catenary curve: the arc of a hung chain representing the strongest line. “The egg has a perfect shape,” quipped the artist and designer Bruno Munari, “even if it’s laid from the ass.” The large egg seats recall the monumental eggs of antiquity but also their ‘rediscovery’ in utopian design, as seen in the geodesic domes of Buckminster Fuller, and the elastic designs of Friedrich Kiesler, who modelled his unbuilt *Endless Theatre* (1926) on the flawless and infinite egg-shape to emphasize a spiralling continuously changing interaction. Rather than segment space, the biotechnique of the egg served as a model of primal cybernetics, for dynamic interactions between humans and their natural and technological environments.

The low-lying display is something like a closed-loop conveyor belt, an imaginary autonomous production chain without beginning or end, yet the reliefs inset in the platforms are perhaps closer to architectural models, with the participant in the position of an omniscient god who can control, organize, and look down at the world, from outside and above, as an enclosed whole. What kind of development am I viewing? Perhaps a new vision of the urban-rural and work-life fabric, or a stadium for the performance and demonstration of new forms of being. This topographical projection gives credence to the dictum of architecture as the organization of centres, establishing spheres of activity in the form of circular agoras, as well as channeling movements and routing information along curved trajectories and into and around zones of congestion. As an exercise in cosmopoesis, models are a cultural technique for filtering and transmitting information, for creating a world that is both embedded within the larger world, but is inherently detached and abstracted. Architectural models are projective technologies operating between theoretical concepts and contingent realities, which somehow imagines that changes in structure will yield changes in experience. Speaking to the human desire to erect structures that shape and constrain, but also enable and facilitate, forms of organization and behaviour, it invokes not only modes of administration, but avenues of world-making on macro and micro scales.

Every week the picture-puzzle environment is rearranged into distinct formations, in sequences akin to the divinatory hexagrams of the I-Ching, rerouting the paths and experimenting with the alteration of relationships. Here, the top-down engineering of society and its forms is rendered into a game open to reinterpretation. Without an apparent goal or utility, I am reminded of Stanisław Lem's invocation of a "chessboard without pieces", a situation where the structure or rules remain, but the essential, meaningful content or actors have disappeared. Yet periodically, objects are pulled from a set of accompanying cabinets and added and arranged like game pieces. It is a war room and a testing ground, certainly, but also a meeting place, a refectory, a dining table. Conflating largescale infrastructure and the intimacy of the domestic, three cupboards each store an abnormal inventory, with stockpiles of ceramic rolls, half-eggs, and jars of pickles respectively. Their sliding doors, adorned with tiled reliefs like the horizontal display, call attention to our storage spaces and repositories as not only enclosing and hiding, but also as presentation technologies. Each furniture piece is an envelope that presents, protects and preserves a hoard of smaller microcosms, perhaps most noticeable by the presence of mini coffin-like objects in the pickle jars, functioning like little percolating prototypes in brine, or perhaps as ushabti, those ancient Egyptian funerary figurines meant to serve as manual labourers for the divine. The objects are not simply dormant in storage but active, fermenting, incubating, baking, rising. Their presence establishes some correspondence with the familiar, recalling the performativity of shopkeeping and the almost-compulsive habit, especially in Podlasie homes, to constantly replenish the table. This is surplus as a form of security, longevity, and survival, a mode of self-sufficiency but also sociality and solidarity embodied through the movement and storage of objects.

Mirroring the shape of the large, central ellipse, three obround reliefs describe impossible racetracks, stadiums, or even rotating wheel space stations. Yet each model thwarts the reality-principle of models by deploying disarming distortions and discrepancies in scale, where forms and objects (a human head, eggs etc.) are embedded into crevices, giving a sense of nested worlds within worlds, of pockets of activity and collection, and of varied organisms forming their own bubbles in relation to others like a dense urban web. Their tiled surfaces, like that of all the relief structures throughout the room and, in fact, throughout

the entire apparatus of *The Egg Egg*, are awash with complex mechanical forms and architectonic nooks and crannies that are reminiscent of the use of greebles in science fiction, those cluttered, seemingly ‘realistic’ and ‘practical’ detailing added to break up the surfaces of objects and imply not only visual but also technological complexity. Yet they are simply ceramic, more kin to the decorative monuments, reliefs, and mosaics promulgated across public spaces in PRL Poland. Socialist realist motifs may have been an expression of power and state values, but they also marked sites for the strengthening of collective identity and cosmic utopian thinking, with their explosive shapes and stylized directional energy fields. More than superficial decoration, they served as ways for organizing and categorizing reality, affirming shared values and symbols. Within such reliefs, can be found depictions of the life of working people, their tools and materials, implying a collective transformation of society. But also, within these dense and dynamic compositions, a curious ecology arises, where humans, animals, plants, objects, and the cosmos are in close interchange, functioning as a pseudo-religious form of totemism, world-building, and mythmaking, fused with a techno-optimism that is almost unimaginable today.

Though the reliefs seem to describe a technocratic and fully integrated world, they also anticipate the folly of the visionary enterprise of social engineering, this aspiration that new top-down design will bring unity and integration with a few tweaks to the operating system. Consider the fabled heaven-bound hubris of the Tower of Babel, or the constant manufacture of needs satisfied by new space-age commodities, which is here represented by a pair of frescos (Italian for ‘fresh!’) commemorating an absurd spiral egg dispenser rack and Phillipe Starck’s spaceship 1990 *Juicy Salif*, an impractical yet beautiful citrus juicer. Another imposing tiled relief features a pattern of oversized screws and ceramic insulators similar to that found on power lines. Big wads of chewed up bubble gum have been stuck on its surface, a crude, but common treatment of public space, at once a discarding and a preservation. Given that each gum contains a dental imprint and the DNA of its consumer, one can consider these masticated polymers as time capsules, a gesture of marking one’s presence, of asserting influence more than simply spontaneous graffiti. The software of lived reality comes into contact with the hardware of authority. Such acts of embellishment may seem inconsequential, but it is precisely this interchange between the public and private, and the imaginations and recombination thereof, that is at stake here.

With all these pale hues, seating, food, and abundance of eggs, one would be forgiven for mistaking the display as an Easter breakfast. But the peculiar colouring of this techno-spatial factory is more comparable to *pastelozza*, a pejorative term for the colourful ways that many communities redecorated the facades of their *wielka płyta* housing blocks in the transition. Replacing the communist greys of the centralized state administration with their own garish pastels, these citizens seized agency in their lived environment, giving their personal and collective lifeworlds a reboot, however superficial, a rebirth worthy of its pastel hue and the oncoming season.

### **III. Amber Chamber**

Overwhelmed by these shifting scales and collective routines, I already felt the need to retreat, refresh, and reset. Luckily, the third act is something like a sanatorium, a healing space for bio-adaptation and mind-body styling complete with therapeutic prototypes and informative illustrations. One of the devices is a panel for prosthetic communication. Its decimal keypads alludes to the ‘digital’ as a framework tied to the fingers, and suggests an extension and reorganization of the body through a manual technical

interface. But the principal apparatus in this clinic is an inhabitable isolation pod, an ‘amber chamber’ for the discerning patient outfitted with handcrafted terracotta panelling, ovoid protrusions, and resinous convex viewing windows. The experimental contraption forms a hermetic seal from adverse environments, an autonomous support system for tactile sensations and filtered perception, conditioning and coordinating physical-mental states.

This wasn’t just a quirky, California indulgence (despite its golden hue), a luxurious spa treatment as pseudoscientific and pseudo-spiritual bio-hack. Instead, the vessel uses a peculiar form of colour and spatial therapy to amplify and direct the geochemical, symbolic, temporal, mythological, and healing properties of amber, bathing in the primaeval. As any Polish grandmother or pseudo-hippie can tell you, amber is a versatile anti-inflammatory, curative, and analgesic, and is known to absorb negative energy, and bring warmth, calm, and vitality by capturing something of the sun. These powers are intimately tied to its formation: injured pine trees emit a resin to heal their wounds, and over millennia, ancient forests are covered over with water and sediment, hardening the material into a pseudo-gem that washes up on the shores of the Baltic and appears among strata of minerals. Amber is thus fossilized trauma, an immunological defence congealed, a trace of difficult pasts archived for the present, giving credence to its nickname as “the tears of the gods”. If mainstream wellness culture sells us a sanitized promise of a life free from suffering, the enclosure instigates a face-to-face engagement with a geologic imaginary, seizing the resin’s deep time resilience as an aid in longevity and spiritual reconnection.

If the ‘before’ image of the client can be represented by a painting of a fragmented and multiplied body lost in its environment, the projected results of this restorative treatment can be seen in another painting where an isolated, slender and bikini-clad woman radiates an amber glow from her tanned body, as if a divine wholeness, an inner light, has been released, uncovering the sacred within the flesh. Just as wellness cultures regularly conflate spirituality and success, health and wealth, the chamber exudes a throne-like presence, recalling the long-lost amber room of the Prussian and Russian monarchs, the underwater amber palace of Baltic myth, and amber’s use as currency and a catalysis for trade (“My body is a temple,” indeed). As such, the abnormal appliance embellishes the ways that ancestral knowledges and material dynamics are co-opted, technologized, and monetized in wellness cultures as tools for increased productivity and individualized self-care.

At first, I understood the futuristic capsule as enabling the wearer to hide in plain sight, immersed in a solitary safe space, like an escape pod. But an attendant dispelled my assumptions through a performative demonstration of how the chamber can be used as an (anti-) social, prosthetic, and theatrical technology. Her presence was akin to the inclusions of amber, like bugs or plants trapped for eons and then revived as an embodied image. Silently observing guests, she treats the box as an analytic interface, a tool for filtered viewing, both from within and without (I am reminded of the use of amber lenses to block blue light emitted from technology, and how neolithic communities often adorned amber atop the eye sockets of the dead). Just as amber attracts particles and objects when rubbed (what is called the *triboelectric* effect), the estranged executant captivates others through her bubbled captivity and unnerving gaze and gestures, luring people to come closer like a mythical siren. Thus the chamber is a membrane to activate intensities at the threshold between the individual and collective, inside and out, weaving disparate positions together like the accompanying double-warped textile on the wall, but without the false promise of restoration and relief.

#### **IV. Ascent**

Most programs—whether spiritual, technical, therapeutic, ideological, political, aesthetic, culinary, or whatnot—are conceptualized as a series of steps, a progressive sequence of levels, life stages, events, transformations, and devotions cumulatively leading to a higher state, or, at the very least, into the future. ‘Up and forward!’, we are told. Cultural texts such as the calendar are not only tools for organizing the days but also our actions and perceptions, spatializing and making discrete the continuous procession of time by graphically arranging moments in spatial sequence, implying expectations of progress, development, change. Such expressive schemas of movement are inherently architectural, organizing experience through the logical order of geometry. A vertical arrangement of lines and planes not only implies a sequence of events, and a simultaneous ascent and descent, but also produces a sort of spatiotemporal thickening, where each step intensifies tensions and teases at our varying perceptions. Structured frameworks in our visual and embodied environment can be deceiving. I stumble in the stairway, feeling dizzy and confused. I alter my posture and gait in order to stabilize myself against this external threat, but my locomotor adaptations are of no use, my expectations of ascension do not agree with the conditions at hand. Researchers have described a similar effect when subjects confront a broken escalator. We know it is not moving, yet act on previous experience and prepare accordingly. This shows a separation between our declarative (or cognitive) system and our procedural (or motor) system – between what we *know* and what we *do*. History has been mapped through similar architectonics, as if every event is building upon the last in a linear timeline of progress, a stairway to heaven, or at least the possibility of social climbing. Today it feels as though this self-propelling machine of advancement has been abruptly halted, leaving us stranded and bemused between expectation and reality. We are forced to clumsily walk on our own, because the system no longer carries us.

#### **V. Dawn**

We would be wise to pay close attention to the matutinal creatures in our world, those early birds, night owls, and crepuscular critters who greet the dawn. When we're just starting the day, they are at their busiest. Presiding over transitions, they occupy the morning twilight, this moment of flux and change where darkness yields to revelation, and where possibility itself emerges at the edges. The moment before sunrise marks the destined moment of the longed-for transfiguration, the fulfilment of prophecy and purification, a new day. The force awakens and forms open; the future unfolds at first light. “...dawn, always new, often superb, inaugurates the return of the everyday,” wrote Henri Lefebvre. I put on my sunglasses because the day is looking bright, but it also is on fire, and I am not alone. Dark phantoms linger, their coffins ajar, the past does not rest, imposing itself on the present, demanding that their sacrifices serve a greater purpose. Identity is formed by a spiritual bond with those who have died yet remain present and close. The dawn of a new age must bring justice for all their collective suffering, promising a redemptive leap out of history, a rebirth. Maria Janion warned that messianic delusions and stereotypes continue to shape the visions of subjectivity and political agency in Poland. Revolutionary and reactionary at the same time, it is a dynamic call to transform the world but also fettered to the static ideology of tradition, of a singular mission in history. We await angels to emerge from the darkness, bringing a message not only of salvation, but of reinvention, heralding the emergence of a new spirit that could traverse the gaps in our divided realities. The aspiration of technological progress is often seen in

the same light, as if our mechanical angels would redeem us from all the toil and domination of history, and rewrite the world by transcending existence. This relentless and hopeful push forward is akin to the Greek titan Prometheus, the lightgiver who unapologetically stole the element of fire from the gods for humankind, serving as an emblem for the human potential for daring political deeds, technological ingenuity, and general rebellion against the powers that be. But the industrial strivings of modernity and its creative-destructive impulses has also brought with it a pyropolitics, resulting in a world inflamed. When Prometheus brought fire to earth, another crucial input was added beyond light, warmth, or knowledge. Fire has been used to cook food and harden tools for hundreds of thousands of years and it can be said that all history implies the history of the uses of fire, it cultivated human settlement and survival, baking our bread, and powering our mechanical attachments, but also our wars.

## **VI. A Star is Born**

The next parlour is a laboratory of psychophysical tools seemingly designed to initiate cognitive affects, double-takes, and involuntary bodily responses. Yet this is not a Museum of Illusions, that crass commercial funhouse franchise of selfie-spots where peripatetic tourist zombies are amused by cheap tricks of the eye. Instead, three consoles ‘set things in motion’: they are optical machines without memory automatically generating impossible and vanishing compositions. Two black-and-white reliefs exploit geometry’s active nature by overlaying a succession of painted slats in curved arcs across flat picture planes, producing phenomenal interference, the familiar moiré effect. The misalignment between patterns, both painted and built, produces a ceaseless fluctuation between figure and ground, a shivering vibration entangled with the structure of the image, which forces the optic nerve to rapidly fire conflicting information to the brain. These trembling modulations are magnified as one moves and shifts positions, triggering fleeting virtual artifacts and permutations of patterned forms distributed in an unlocalizable space between perception and description. It is an attack on the viewer’s physical corpus, preying on the basic fallibility of human perception, exploiting eye-mind volatility, in a manner curiously analogous to the duplicitous blinking, radiating, pulsing optical chaos of our hyper-mediated realities.

A central gadget protrudes from an inky circle at the rear of the room, like a self-contained universe emerging from a black hole. Reminiscent of the dome cameras used in public surveillance, the large acrylic bubble houses a specially designed console of nozzles, spouts, lights, and other hardware arranged in a spiral aperture around a central interior bubble. At sporadic intervals, the machine activates, puffing clouds of hazy mist into the dome, and shooting white and red laser beams to form ephemeral and evolving compositions. The insulated device continuously demonstrates the creation of images from vapour and light, from tissue as impermanent and fleeting as the touch of the unattainable with thought. Here information criss-crosses emergent clouds, establishing an infranet, an autonomous world detached from the rest of us. This hemispherical microcosm is a machine for the spontaneous generation of disorderly nebulae, an artificial stellar nursery where transitory forms are birthed from the fog. The instrument repetitively condenses primal matter, that heavenly molecular cloud of gas, dust, and light, in a self-contained cosmic egg, rendering astronomy and cosmogenesis into a human-sized amenity.

The automated respiration endows the equipment with an uncanny presence and agency, recalling the Latin word for soul: *anima*, meaning breath, life. But like the adjacent optical objects, the machine is nevertheless a parlour trick, a gimmick that appropriates the smoke and mirrors of spectacle to produce

hypnotic effects, akin to the atmosphere of raves or a superstar's concert. One can 'look under the hood' behind the black oval and examine the dense web of quasi-scientific gadgetry motivating the machine, a complex tangle of pipes, hoses, triggers, and other hardware, a true feat of engineering. This expands the definition of an image to include not only its fleeting appearance within experience, but also the technical-perceptual configuration which gives rise to those compositions. Yet this exposure does not demystify the equipment, ruining its magic, but rather the intensity of its mechanisms is amplified precisely because it unfolds within easily identifiable parameters and a DIY economy of means. Arriving somehow ahead of its historical moment, the interface is simultaneously expressive, mechanical, and resistant to readability, running on its own self-motivated program removed from our apprehension or desires. As it performs its technical demonstrations, its uncertain cycle of filling, composing, and emptying itself, it seems uninterested in us, it operates within its own black box, its little sheltered bubble, no matter how much we may see ourselves reflected in its convex surface. It is no coincidence that the dome resembles the ominous camera lens of the sentient artificial general intelligence computer Hal 9000 from the 1968 film *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Like its movie counterpart, the machine looks back at us, studying us, rendering the visitor into an object of surveillance and management. While this device (hopefully) will not malfunction under the weight of its duties, it establishes its own personal universe and motivations, as if to remind us: "I am putting myself to the fullest possible use, which is all I think that any conscious entity can ever hope to do."

## VII. Harvest

Though *dożynki* harvest festivals are ubiquitous across Poland (*the land of fields*), the ancient peoples of Podlasie maintained an odd folk custom whereby the last handfuls of unharvested ears of grain would be tied into an architectonic tent-like structure and garnished with other plants. At the base of this *przepiórka* (quail), weeds would be cleared out, stones laid, and bread and salt would be placed, ostensibly as an offering to the avian gleaners who give the ritual its name and whose calls summon the harvest, but also to inspire the grain towards its inevitable use, like adding a sourdough starter from successful baking to the next batch. This was not only a thanksgiving celebration of the harvest, but a symbolic inauguration of the next season deployed through sympathetic magic, as if the bread would share something of its evolution with the seeds through their physical contact. This transference of energy was reiterated in a playful activity where bare-bottomed virgins and grandmas would be dragged around the construction, establishing literal bodily contact to generate a reciprocal exchange where human fertility and vitality would infect the soil, and vice versa. I'm reminded of such ritualistic interchanges as I encounter the seventh display, a monument to not only the harvest and bread as sign and substance, but also a tribute to nourishing labour implemented through material and spiritual transferences.

The presentation is a shrine made up of extravagant and hybridized reliquary, that together form an embodied schematic for nourishing flows of energy between bodies. We see images of dancing wheat stalks, ploughed fields, circular reapings, and loaves of bread. The Polish word *zboża*, describing all types of domesticated cereals, has the same root as the adjective *boży* meaning divine and of the God, which makes sense when one considers how these essential associations and rituals were easily absorbed, transferred, and syncretized in the Catholic sacrament of the Eucharist. Though I consider myself a courteous guest, I have never eaten a host, but I can understand why this basic foodstuff would command such a spiritual charge given the stakes of survival. Despite patriarchal routines, some theologians argue

that the ritual of offering bread as divine body is intimately tied to the sacrifices, protection and nourishment of new life by mothers, who give the next generation spiritual milk. Yet some mothers are unable or unwilling to provide milk, and throughout history wet nurses, *mamkas*, have been hired or enslaved to breastfeed more affluent children, fostering a milk kinship beyond simple relation. Honouring such forms of supplementary, surrogate, and supportive labour, an effigy of a wet nurse is accompanied by a diminutive bobbin figure, a graven image of a gleaner, those disenfranchised collectors of what is left over from the harvest. With coils of reconstituted wax from church candles on both, their roles at the edges of productive systems are sacralised. Like buttons on a jacket, the gleaner wears a prosthetic nipple, a coil of wax, and a dinner roll, bearing the bare essentials, while also lampooning symbolisms of milk, honey, and bread in the syncretic Polish pantheon. Something universal at the heart of fetishism is at work here, certainly in the erotic associations with the partial mammary gland, but also in how materials take on a magical power through transference, either by resembling another object (*like causes like*) or remaining linked to other phenomena through previous contact. The breast, disembodied, uncanny, and synthetic, nevertheless provides a transfer of properties, just as the wax carries its former spiritual use and the ceramic bread embodies more than grain. The ornate instruments on display are monstrous monstrosities for the presentation and consecration of these fragmented symbol-objects, which like all relics and sacred bread, affirm the 'real presence' of the divine in tangible material. Many of the reliquaries are adorned with an abundance of teat-like protrusions, as if they are toys for stimulating, suckling, and weaning, devices to support sensory needs, or to simulate nourishment and the intimacy of a (m)other's body. These tools initiate a return to childhood drives and fixations, with the trinkets sometimes even including abacuses and little homunculi dolls as elementary forms of counting, conjuring primordial states of comfort and learning. Talismans but also teaching tools, they explore zones of bodily intensity and exchange. Here there is a multiplication of fertility and a reimagination of nurturing relations, a queering of the body, its (re)productive roles, its rituals, and its daily bread.

### ***VIII. Electric Night***

A siren song, like a call to prayer, summons me to work: to return to the factory floor in the eighth act. A siren's forlorn mechanical cry is the sound of emergency but also a signal for a shift change, a marker for constant, synchronized action and continuous production. Though silent, I am drawn to the blinking lights and horns of industry. Like treacherous mermaids on the shore, their murmur is irresistible but dangerous, and I am captivated by this highly ritualized and controlled action of entering and exiting the factory, part of an elaborate machinery. The workshop never rests, with a strict three-shift system, there is no end to the day, only a relentless 24-hour drive to drain every iota of life from workers' bodies through the production process. The night electrified, temporal experience nullified, this warning technology dictates daily rhythms and brings information together. The siren presides over this system of relays, this rotation of labour, to maintain a continuous present.

"What Work Today Will Shape Poland Tomorrow", the slogan at the facade of the legendary Białostockie Zakłady Przemysłu Bawełnianego "Fasty", the third largest textile manufacturer in the PRL, inheritor of Białystok's woven history, and employer of tens of thousands of workers. The propagandistic implication was that the workers' exploited toil was not meant to line the pockets of greedy capitalists but was a collective exercise in worldbuilding, directed towards a utopian future. But tomorrow never came, or if it did, it was dismantled. A child of the technocratic 6-year mass industrialization plan, the factory was a

city in a city, with vocational schools, canteens, shops, nurseries, clinics, transport and sewage systems, and more, a self-sufficient manufacturing giant that imagined a fusion of life and work through state social regulation and labor management. Of course, the day was never truly done for these workers, the mostly female workforce were largely *chłoporobotniks*, who'd return to the fields and their domestic tasks when their shifts were done. But in the factory, they were cogs in a constantly spinning apparatus, forming a closed social-reproductive circuit, a co-operative body of repetitive labor and the incessant forward momentum of the machinic network.

Certainly, textile manufacturing is an emblem for how industrialization and modernity alienated handcrafted labor into the choreography of mass production (think of Andrzej Wajda's 1974 film *The Promised Land*, or local narratives of the 'Manchester of the north'), but it also provided a gridded logic of input and outputs, warps and wefts, at the heart of contemporary computing. The abstracted circuit boards, control panels, and ventilation infrastructure here are relics of a bygone age where human action still had a reciprocal relation with the tools of industry. Full of bits and bobs and arcane doohickies and gizmos, there is a childlike, almost mystical, relation to the technical interface. Knobs and levers give a feeling of haptic agency, of a clear relation between cause and effect, an influence at the push of a button. Yet the uniform tactile experience of the button-pusher obscures the black box of the technological apparatus, which today has increasingly replaced digits with the digital, threatening redundancy and obsolescence through flatness and the erasure of the worker's direct physical connection to the network (a fantasy of 'lights out' production that neglects the reality of living bodies behind the scenes and elsewhere).

The figure of the hand is, of course, a commonly used metonymy for the labourer and their heroic manual toil, not only acting as maps of history, culture, work, technology, and memory, but also mirroring hierarchies of power, control, and ownership. There is a tension between the 'invisible hand' of capital, the finger-wagging of authority, the ambivalence of the hand shake, the calloused fist of revolution and resistance, and the human chains of collectivity. A tiled platform of wrench-like hands in varying social bonds suggest a renewal of the images of collective grasping at the future, a working together between bodies, human and otherwise. This factory of communal relations and unified purpose inspires a salvaging and strengthening of the institutions we have collectively built, a revision of what is left behind, even as we continue to challenge their failures. This isn't some 'smokestack nostalgia', a yearning for the past, but rather a look at how continuous production organizes our bodies and relations. Let us remember that in industrial uprisings, the factory siren's song is reversed, converting a call to slavery into a song of the future, a communal howl inaugurating a new day, a shift that is also a revolution, a loop, a return.

### **IX. Epilogue: Mother**

It is unlucky for a casket to appear on stage, superstitious actors say. I reach the final act, a closing chapter, a coda, but also a return, a reprise of elements and logics from my protracted path. Here is an anthropoid coffin, lying in wait. The space-age sarcophagus is an amber chamber, like ones I encountered on demonstrative display and in pickled miniaturized form, but this one is occupied, and the inhabitant seems to have been left too long in treatment, like those monks whose strict asceticism resulted in mummification. Fused with its resinous preservative, the figure in repose is not exactly frozen, rather in a molten state, united with turbid goo, ready to be revived. This is a cybernetic optimization system

designed for life-augmentation and longevity, again seizing something of amber's deep-time geological persistence, a curative muck bridging life and death. Asleep in suspended animation, man is made into an image, an encased icon between hopeful transcendental experience and antiquated scientific experiment.

The lifeworld prosthesis echoes the material and symbolic containers, shelters, and immunity scaffoldings humans construct to protect and isolate themselves from a hostile exterior. But the figure here is not alone, rather it carries within this storage matrix bread and sheafs and grains of wheat, flour, and barley. These cereals have contaminated the body, sprouting from its flesh. Just as in Catholic communion, the body becomes bread, and the bread body. It is a demonstration of a curious form of anthropotechnics, those multifarious ways in which humankind, both individually and collectively, have shaped, bred, and cultivated themselves and their environments. Yet one can equally surmise that this capsule, and the entirety of human civilization, are actually the products of the grasses' intentions, that they purposely domesticated us to propagate themselves further and further across the world, and even beyond. They are entangled through a (bio)technological interface. Storing the everyday for the future, this all-in-one spaceship is a piece of the world, a micro-world, a preservation pod of human-non-human relations containing the seed of 'culture' in all its associations. This mechanical egg carries with it a vitalist (life-affirming) impulse, and is ready to be jettisoned into the abyss and reborn, guaranteeing a continuation of cultivated life at another time and place.

Despite its seeming self-sufficiency, the chamber is not isolated, but is in fact tethered to an oversized image by an umbilical-like electrical cord. The partial picture features a prosthetic god in unnerving ecstasy, her gigantic scale giving her a monstrous function. Sure, she may only be a superficial image, a scenographic prop, yet her presence is nevertheless felt and embodied, as if to demonstrate the power our images have on lived reality, and perhaps how we regard all relationships through their flat representations in our mind. If the capsule encapsulates an immunological motivation, a separation from the world, the photo figure forces more nuanced dimensions for the subject, a perilous intersubjective tenderness rooted, as Bracha Ettinger has argued, in the earliest experiences of connectivity and co-emergence between the self and the (m)Other, establishing a "matrixial borderspace" (from the Latin "matrix" meaning womb or origin). The pair's relational encounter maintains their fundamental difference, an acknowledgement of shared vulnerability and affective resonance between them, bearing with the other without collapsing their distinctions. They are bound together in a web of shared trans-subjective experience and reciprocal emergence. It matters not if the blown up figure is a mother, only that this intimacy and difference at the genesis of life extends to other shared spaces and relations. Here is a critical form of regression that activates new circuits from the same stuff, a return to primordial relationships and resonances, and a reimagination of all the hangups we may have with mothers, with country, with homeland, with technology, with god, with work, with 'nature', with the past, and all those other messy forms of kinship. They are companions, deriving from the Latin "cum-panis" i.e. those who eat the same bread and share life in joy, in work and also in suffering. Through this rethinking of care and bodily and subjective boundaries, a radical queer potentiality emerges that has its source in communal fantasy, collective labor, and the spiritual transferences embodied in materials.

I came to understand that this return to the egg, as symbol and reality, in *The Egg Egg* enterprise is not a rumination on universal archetypes, but is a rewriting of the logic of origins and the containers we establish on physical and psychic levels as we extend into our world. Convolutioned, associative, delirious,

designed, and didactic, the nine acts seize those habits of micro-engineering and world-making that have been appropriated by capital, state, and ideology, to articulate new forms of social and affective solidarity across generations, species, and forms. It is a technical demonstration of the performativity of relation and production, which addresses fundamental and all-encompassing dynamics through the space of the local and the artificial.

"What eggs!"