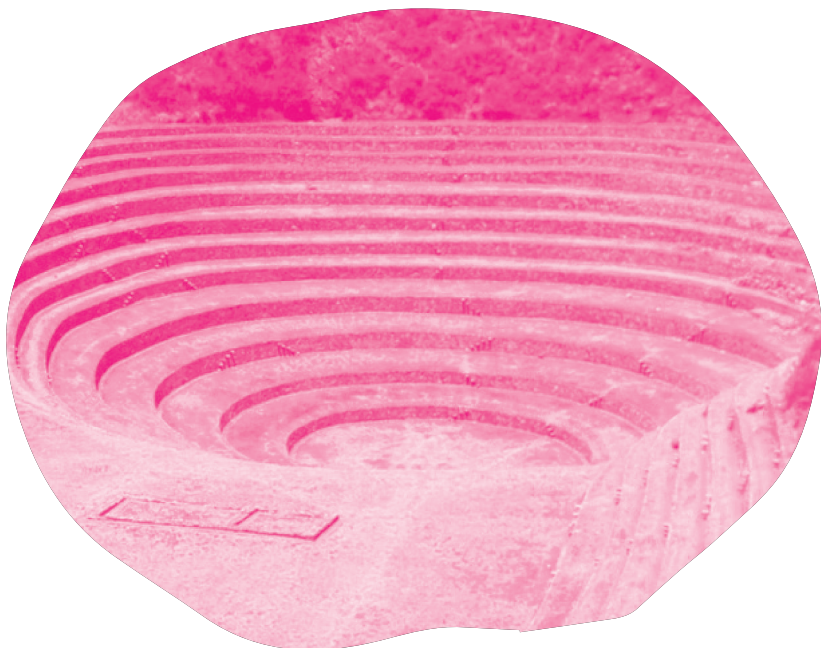


RANDOM STUDIO
LIVING LAB SERIES

ISSUE 2

THE GARDEN



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ALIGNING THE UNPREDICTABLE

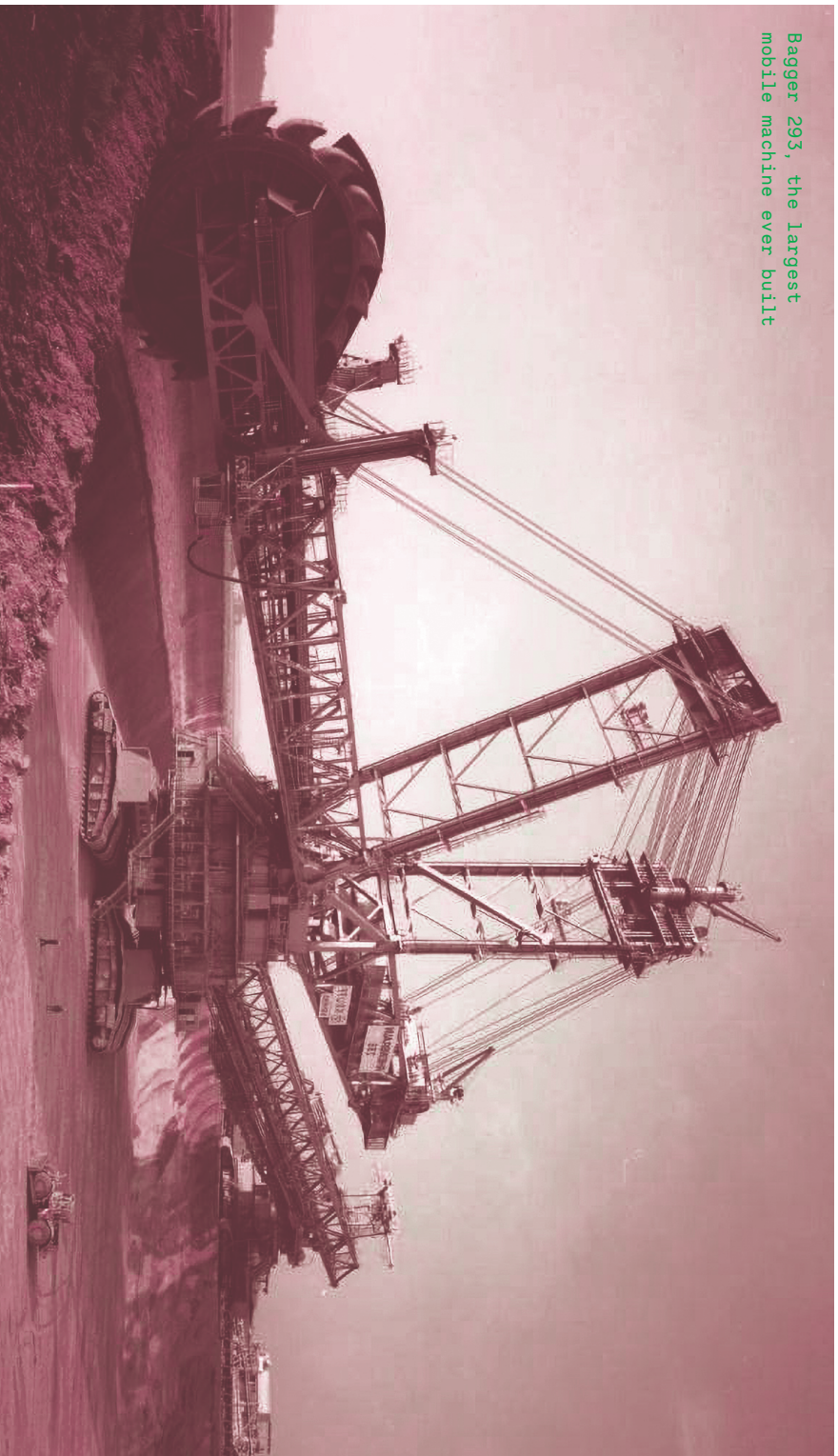


Wall fragment from the tomb of Nebamun depicting an ancient Egyptian garden, about 1350 BC

Spanning the borders of nine different countries throughout the Middle East is an eyebrow-shaped piece of land known as the “Fertile Crescent”. This region is believed to be where humans started farming 11,000 years ago, domesticating nature for the first time in history. At that moment, we began organising and categorising everything around us, transforming our surroundings into quantifiable materials. Since then, our control over the unpredictable character of nature has increased exponentially. Our influence has grown so vast that scientists are now proposing a new geological epoch called the Anthropocene, spanning from the onset of significant human impact on Earth to the present day.

Almost all the collective efforts that shape modern society rest on the conceptual three-legged stool that is “humans using technology to control and exploit nature”. This approach has given us oreo cookies, pesticides, and moon landings, and helps us to release new iPhones just in time for the shopping season. Of course, there is a certain tainted peace to be found in the notion that this acquisition of power has cemented us as the undisputed apex predators of our planet. Game over! We won! But did we really? From the moment we started utilising technology, the tools we create have always served us exclusively in controlling our

Bagger 293, the largest
mobile machine ever built



environments. We understand how technology works and thus know how to keep it under control. However, with the rise of artificial intelligence and LLM's, we've learned that human-created technology can be just as unpredictable as nature itself.

Apart from possibly inheriting racist, sexist, or sensational sentiments from training data, AI algorithms may also appear to have previously unknown capabilities like being able to code or speak foreign languages without explicitly being trained to do so, requiring us humans to constantly invent new strategies to align AI with the boundaries of a given task.

The analogy to gardening comes up. We exert our superiority over nature by seeding, grafting, cross-breeding plants, and arranging them pleasingly, making the garden a place where we can consume nature, stripped of all its terror and arbitrary cruelty. One could argue, we're now facing the same challenge as our ancestors in the Fertile Crescent. Will we find a way to domesticate AI technology as we domesticated nature, or will it exceed our grasp?

We are not yet certain of the limits of AI, and how it will affect the spaces we live in. But it is that uncertainty that makes us curious. Our zine may lack objectivity, expertise, and historical accuracy, but it's filled with our own ideas, questions, and personal perspectives. It's the voice of Random Studio eager to find a position as Gardeners of the digital and physical space.

-Jonatan Modin & Roel Wouters



“Rose Pink X-Pression” by De Ruiter
Innovations, Winner of Keukenhof
Rose Show 2024

THE GARDEN AS AN ESCAPE

My personal Eden

Lying amidst wildflowers, I feel the rhythm of the bees' hum, a piece of elegantly composed music orchestrated by a hidden maestro. The ivy tendrils sway, each movement coordinated by the wind's flow. The air, filled with a slight glow, mingles with the colours of a distant rainbow. Beside me lies another soul, whose presence is solely for me to embrace the feeling of delight. Days, months and years melt away in this realm. The concept of time is negligible.

Another human enters the scene.

And another.

So much noise. I can't seem to hear the orchestra anymore.

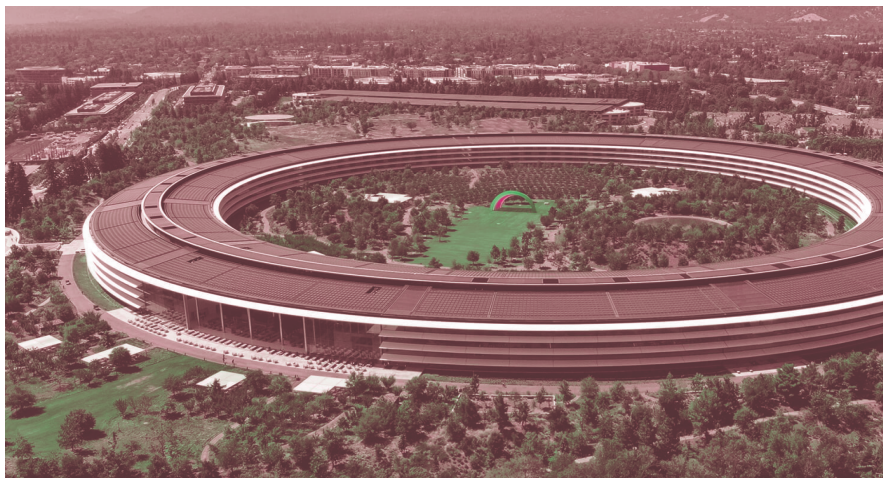
All my senses weaken.

Exclusion was an inherent part of the design of my Eden. The very essence of a paradise is in its isolation, its ability to keep others out.

The word "paradise" originated from the word "garden". It is the fantasy we keep within our own walls.

-Jessica Kürschner

Apple Inc. headquarters in Cupertino,
with central garden visible





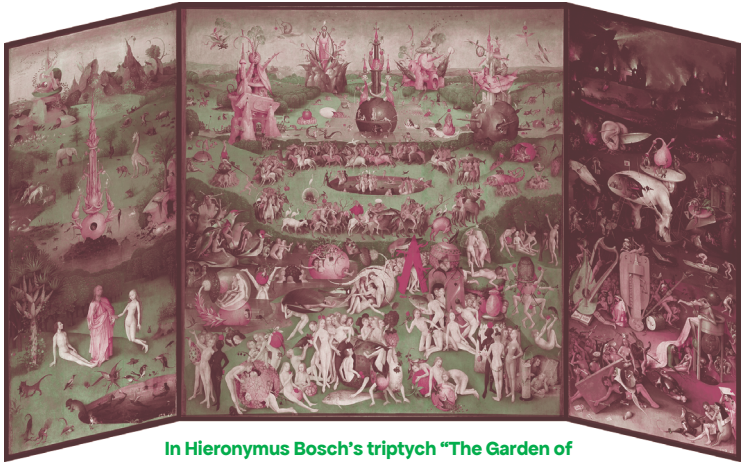
Map from 1575 depicting
“Paradisus” as part of the
Middle East, Matthaeus Beroaldus



Hortus Conclusus, meaning
“walled garden” in The Fountain
of Life by Cristoforo De Predis



Since ancient times we have created stories and images of magical beings, half man, half plant. We call them green men, dryad, or mandrake. Trees and humans sharing one body.



In Hieronymus Bosch's triptych "The Garden of Earthly Delights" both Eden and Earth are depicted as gardens, while Hell is a dark, sooty cityscape.



Woad leaves in British wallpaper from the 19th century, William Morris



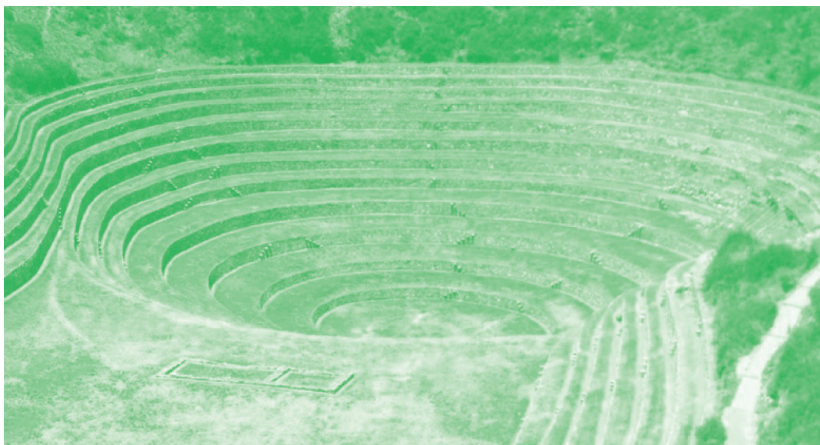
The garden at Huis Marseille is a hidden sanctuary within the city centre of Amsterdam

Dialogue or Monologue?

For centuries gardeners worldwide advocate for the benefits of talking to plants, believing that soft-voiced words filled with love and care encourage plants to grow strong and happy*.

Scientists these days look at it less poetically. The sounds arise from physiological processes such as when air bubbles form and burst from tension during water transportation under drought conditions. But the complexity of what plants are saying or thinking and what this means to their inner life is still uncharted territory.

*For further reading: *The Soul Life of Plants*, 1848 by Gustav Theodor Fechner



For Incas land was alive, a dynamic force to be embraced and transformed by human imagination. The plateaus in this picture created a microclimate that benefited their crops.

THE GARDEN AS A SOCIETY

Power to the Dandelions

For us, as plants living in the garden, society is divided into strict castes.

We look at Roses, Tulips, and Dandelions as one dimensional influencers cherished for their beauty validated by their followers. They bask in the Gardener's likes, their roots fed with the richest compost. Yet, even the privileged of the flowerbed live in fear, aware that a single blemish or wilted petal might lead to loss of reputation. Sudden removal or replacement might follow. But, being too unblemished also involves great risk- one birthday is enough to trigger arbitrary amputation. Their reproductive organs are systematically objectified. Often they are born infertile and prone to illness. No, I do not envy them.

The Daisies and Dandelions are middle class, tolerated. They serve the romantic purpose of signalling diversity and inclusivity in our garden, a bit of 'je ne sais quoi', and while their presence is sometimes welcomed they are clearly perceived as inferior to our Gardener. Dying from collateral damage as soon as the lawn is mowed. We do not particularly like those treasoners. In my view they function as excuse plants, clowns trying so hard to be Tulips!



Often we receive reproductive organs of fellow earthlings as a gift the moment our planet completed a full amount of circles since we were born.



Call us invasive, call us weeds but we are the real deal, we have autonomy, we do not accept the concept of borders, we are legion, we claim our own space. We fight in plain sight making use of the shadowy undergrowth. Each dawn we face a brutal purge, pulled from the earth with ruthless efficiency. Yet, our spirit is unbroken; we, Dandelions, embody the essence of fertility.

But as twilight descends, the day's casualties lie discarded in the compost heap. All of us united in the thought that, eventually, the day will come that the Gardener's rule comes to an end. This will be the moment we weeds will prevail, this is the moment we all will realise no garden is permanent.

-Jonatan Modin & Roel Wouters

Modern agriculture, if translated into letters, would look something like this:

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- Wouter van Eck



Compost pit steaming due to intense biologic decay
Jim Competti



Tiktok Video of someone killing a dandelion with fire

**Show Me Your Lawn, and I'll
Tell You Who You Vote For.**

During the Middle Ages, European aristocrats learned that clearing trees around their castles and replacing them with grass allowed them to detect potential invaders from a much greater distance. As that mechanism for defence spread among lords and barons alike, the common folk began to emulate it, planting grass in front of their homes as a symbol of aspiration and status.

Fast forward about 1,000 years, and while modern-day suburbia is generally not under the threat of siege, vast monocultural lawns persist. This persistence is not merely a relic of habit but also a reflection of how lawns nowadays have come to represent psychological safety, rather than physical defence.

As catastrophic droughts spread to more parts of our pale blue dot, its inhabitants are recommended to stop watering their lawns. And even though English poet Alfred Austin

Florida suburb,
Kent Weakley



might not have been referring to political affiliation when he said “Show me your garden and I shall tell you what you are”, contemporary research suggests that might just be the case. A study from the University of Delaware indicates that lawns of conservative or Republican voters tend to be better maintained and more frequently watered than those of their liberal or Democratic counterparts.

As a result of this, the colour of a lawn has become a sort of political litmus test, ranging from the pale yellow of drought-stricken grass to the lush green of a well-watered lawn. Those who cling to the well-being of their grass, and disobey the no-watering-during-drought-mandate, may see their lawns as the last bastions of so-called “normality” in a rapidly changing world. And surely it’s their god-given right to be able to sit on their lawn, as the wildfires draw closer, and think:

“The world is burning, but my garden is green, so I must be fine.”

-Jonatan Modin



Jonatan Modin



YouTube thumbnail,
@itshisturf23

THE GARDEN AS A STARTUP



The Sydney Opera House, Jørn Utzon

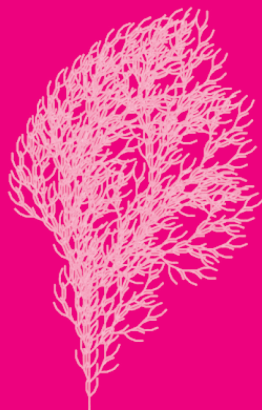
When the petals fly

It was a bright July day, with hues shifting each second when Tillandsia slipped through the entrance of Planttech. Lately, the entrance seemed to have grown thick roots of a mangrove. It presented quite a challenge as she pushed through it. As if it wasn't a tough day already.

On her way to the office, Tillandsia couldn't escape the flying petals. Recently, a programming glitch caused the petals to follow any human they encountered, attaching themselves and forming intricate, beautiful patterns.

Today, her team had to decide on the pricing for their new product line. In the early days of Planttech, production costs were minimal. The employees were driven by their passion for creating aesthetic beauty and adaptability of their plants. But those days were long gone. Now, there was a lot of work to be done. Fortunately, they had replaced most roles with their own creations leaving only essential personnel. Whom that was specifically, she never got informed about.

Every day, a different beautiful plant welcomed Tillandsia, brought her coffee, and sorted out her to-do list. Planttech's plants also have grown other unique features to stay ahead of their competition. For example, one could send their voice and movement to another person. Their main garden plant

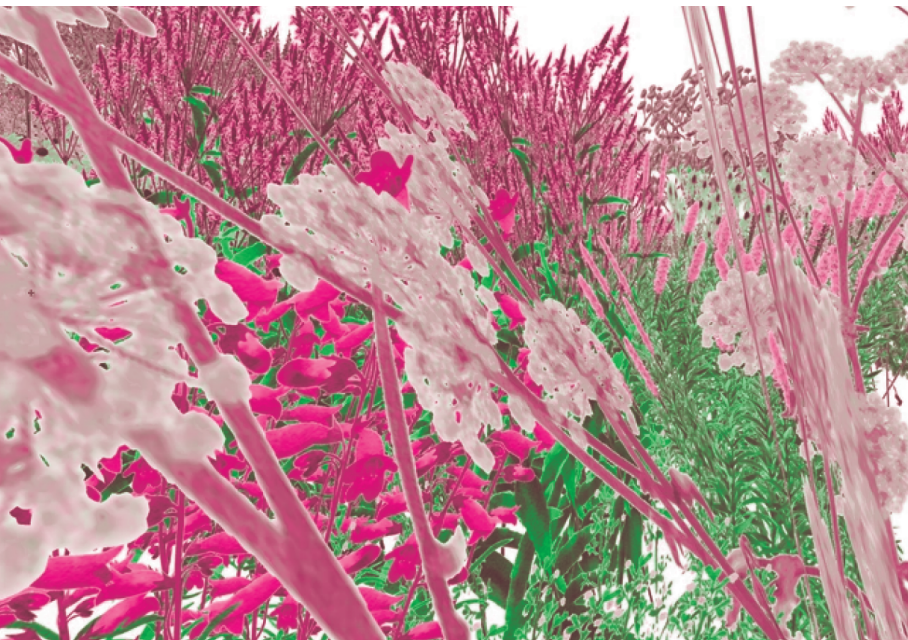


2D plant-like structures from bracketed L-Systems

could display a loving message in a mesmerizing manner or even hug the recipient as if it truly cared. Yet, love was one of the least common reasons for their use, she had to admit.

Now the petals seemed to have caught up with her, arrived in the room, and started to glow faintly. Unable to move, she observed the scene. The glow intensified momentarily, revealing thousands of plants in chaotic arrangement – some fallen to the ground, others entangled with each other. Tillandsia watched, intrigued and slightly unnerved. As she pondered about the possible meaning of this glitch, the petals reverted to their soft, originally programmed movements and glow, immediately soothing her concerns and making her forget this strange occurrence. What would we do without the beauty and companionship her creations brought to our everyday existence, she thought as she watched her plant deliver a message to her colleague.

-Jessica Kürschner



Nature as a design-collaborator

In an effort to counter the negative associations the general public had with atomic energy after the bomb dropped in Hiroshima in 1945, the American government launched a programme called ‘atomic gardening’; civilians were invited to place a cobalt-60 unit in their private gardens as a form of mutation breeding. Some of the mutations produced have turned out to be rather useful.

An atomic garden typically featured a central radiation source, like a cobalt-60 unit, placed in the middle of a privately owned garden. The unit was surrounded by concentric circles of plant beds. This arrangement ensured plants received varying doses of radiation, depending on their distance from the source, allowing for the study of different mutation effects (the first ring almost always all died). Its hard to imagine now that the American government distributed highly radioactive material to the general public.

And there were successes! Some of the plants we still harvest today were the successes of atomic gardening. Red grapefruit, disease-resistant peppermint and more resilient strains of crops like wheat, barley, and rice are first harvested by atomic gardeners in the US.

It’s funny that the programme also influenced popular culture, sparking the creation of iconic characters like “The Hulk” and “Spiderman,” who gained their powers from radiation exposure.

The atomic gardening programme eventually ended due to growing health concerns over radiation exposure. Advances in genetic modification technologies offered safer and more precise methods for plant breeding. Despite its termination, the programme’s legacy persists in the successful crop varieties it produced and its impact on cultural narratives.

If you want to learn more about this weird episode of American history, listen to the episode ‘The blood of a mutated Grapefruit’ by Blind Boy on your favourite podcast app.

—Roel Wouters



Pollinator Pathmaker
of designer Alexandra
Daisy Ginsberg



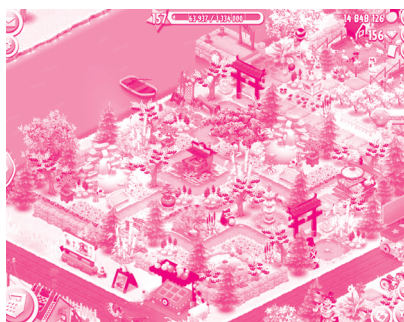
3¢ Atoms for Peace,
1955



Grass in the form of
an iPad app, CW&T



Hulk VS Spiderman,
ardian-syaf, 2018



Virtual garden in
mobile gardening game
Hay Day

LET'S POLLINATE INSTALLATION REVIEW



After opening the link included in my invitation I received a virtual plant (Basil!) on my screen and the request to start ‘cross-pollinating with other plants’. I am looking around for other people who might be interested. And right in the corner sipping an old fashioned I found an Oak, willing to cross pollinate. We did it and within a minute we got our first offspring. We called it Old Basilok and celebrated this moment by studying its features together.

Aren’t our digital technologies great and convenient? Anything we need is right there in our pockets or in a machine lighter than a schoolbook... We don’t have to ask strangers for directions or ask for the time, we don’t have to be bored and arrange meeting points, and schedule precise times days before. Now we can make connections with people from all over the world. We can even watch the most unbelievably beautiful places our favourite influencer is filming in real-time. The world at our fingertips... but meeting each other feels increasingly complicated and invasive.

What makes us move? Why would I leave the comfort of my house? Not to buy a new pair of jeans. Those I can order online. If I leave the house it better be worth it. When I come home I want to feel less alone, I like to have met someone. I would like to have made a new friend or have had a conversation that was real and sweet and sweaty.

Random's installation 'Let's Pollinate' is an installation that uses digital technology to make people come physically together. To meet without an agenda.

'Let's pollinate' uses a combination of Chat/GPT and Dall-e to synthesise the characteristics of two plants to create a new, unique seedling. Initially, the digital garden is empty. As users start pollinating they are growing their own patches. This reflects classical garden aesthetics, where individual spaces are distinctly separated. These early stages of the garden echo historical views of gardens as controlled environments that showcase human mastery over nature. As more plants are added, the garden evolves into an increasingly chaotic, communal space. This transformation prompts critical reflection on the extent of control we exert through technology and within the garden itself. It challenges us to reconsider whether such control is desirable or necessary.

-Jessica Kürschner & Roel Wouters

COLOPHON

EPISODE TWO—The Garden

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REQUEST FOR COMMENTS

We like to see a Living Space as an organism, an oracle or a friend with a specific temper.

A being with specific values, that we as visitors can oppose or relate to, debate or embrace.

Living Spaces have a body, using all senses. They can be rational and emotional, they can listen, tickle, nudge, and manipulate. They can adapt, comfort and activate.

Really?

Living Spaces don't promise seamless experiences.

They are not trying to impress. By providing friction they allow us to reflect and find position.

Living spaces must trigger human connection.

This is what makes us feel seen, this is what makes us human.