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Hex : Cikara Di Barakata (ਚਕਿੜ ਦੀ ਬਰਕਤ)

A creature long since submerged in the swamp seeps out from beneath the veil of shadows and settles into a ritual interface, commencing an altered rite of passage ceremony. It aims not to grant its audience passage into a new way of life but instead highlight the power of brief moments in liminality. Mangled breakbeats collide with delayed raven calls, harsh noise fuses with melancholic folk song, algorithmic arpeggiators align with dissonant harp melody, dubstep wubs unsoil swamp filth. Throughout the duration of the performance the playing field is levelled: omens and SD cards, basilisks and ALDI security guards, fairy paths and Hot Wheels cars, in Hex, all hold equal credence.

Concept

Hex is an audiovisual performance which aims to suspend its audience in liminality. It takes the form of an intentionally incomplete rite of passage ceremony. Rite of Passage ceremonies have existed since the earliest of human societies, used to signify an individual or group passing into a new way of life, from childhood into adulthood, marriage rites or passage into the spirit world.

Derived in the early twentieth century by folklorist Arnold van Gennep, Rites of Passage are traditionally comprised of 3 phases: separation, liminality and incorporation. "I propose to call the rites of separation from a previous world, preliminal rites, those executed during the transitional stage liminal (or threshold) rites, and the ceremonies of incorporation into the new world postliminal rites." [1] Hex excludes a defined incorporation stage, granting its audience passage into liminality but no further (submerged in the mud, find your own way out).

> liminality is the quality of ambiguity or disorientation that occurs in the middle stage of a rite of passage, when participants no longer hold their pre-ritual status but have not yet begun the transition to the status they will hold when the rite is complete. During a rite's liminal stage, participants stand at the threshold between their previous way of structuring their identity, time, or community, and a new way (which completing the rite usually establishes).

> More recently, usage of the term has broadened to describe political and cultural change as well as rites. During liminal periods of all kinds, social hierarchies may be reversed or temporarily dissolved, continuity of tradition may become uncertain, and future outcomes once taken for granted may be thrown into doubt. The dissolution of order during liminality creates a fluid, malleable situation that enables new institutions and customs to become established. [2]
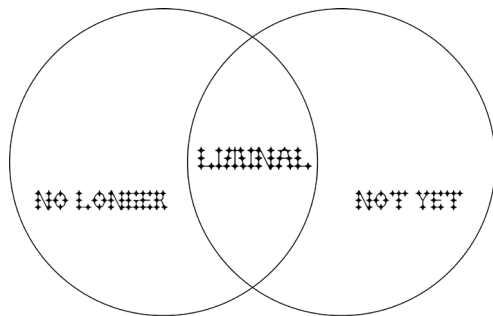
[1] A. van Gennep, The Rites of Passage, Routledge, London, 1977, p.21
[2] Various Authors, 'Liminality', Wikipedia, last update 2023, accessed 8 May 2023, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liminality

Form

A creature long since submerged in the swamp seeps out from beneath the veil of shadows and settles into its ritual interface, which consists of several acoustic folk instruments and technological components outlined by a circular projection (resemblant of magic circles utilised for protection by practitioners of ritual magic).

The performance is comprised of 4 pieces that signify a departure from Enlightenment rationality and western modernity, extricating its audience from the disenchanted world and self presented to us by modern science, they feature an entangled array of typically adverse sonics which "combine and superpose fact and fiction, nature and culture, technology and the occult, past and future, authentic and synthetic, … science and mysticism," [3]. Mangled breakbeats collide with delayed raven calls, harsh noise fuses with melancholic folk song, algorithmic arpeggiators align with dissonant harp melody, dubstep wub bass interpolates swamp filth. Throughout the duration of the performance the playing field is levelled: omens and SD cards, basilisks and ALDI security guards, fairy paths and Hot Wheels cars, in Hex, all hold equal credence.

The performance opens with a corrupted version of the Punjabi folk song 'Madhaniyan' originally written by Surinder Kaur. Traditionally this song is played when the bride leaves her family home to move in with her partner, the lyrics reflect upon the sadness of being born to a set of parents but destined to be taken away to by another and the feeling of becoming estranged in your own home. this piece echoes the theme of separation and incites the first stage of the rite of passage ceremony.

In the final moments of Hex, after ascending into a raging trance-like song the piece unfurls even further into a granulated version of itself, swathes of red light fill the room, exponential grooves take over, rhythms on the verge of incomprehensibility sprawl and compress in an unfulfilling manner, signifying the shift onto the threshold the audience are now caught between the exponential and the logarithmic, the ritual is complete and the creature slithers back into the shelter of the darkness.

Context

My final research essay 'Mystic Turn, Sonic Alliance' assessed the emergence of a Mystic Turn (MT) in contemporary art and sound, its specific resonance with the sonic medium and its potential for combatting contemporary capitalism. The MT can be understood as a growing resurgence of medieval mystics, wyrd modes of existence and residual culture within contemporary art. As defined by Raymond Williams, residual cultures encompass the vestiges of previous hegemonies that "still seem to have significance because they represent areas of human experience, aspiration, and achievement which the dominant culture neglects, undervalues, opposes, represses, or even cannot recognize." [4] The

[3] D. Sutherland, 'The Dank Enlightenment', accessed 8 May 2023, https://www.arebyte.com/text-immense-gothic-value-model-by-rumi-josephs
[4] R. Williams, Marxism and Literature, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1977, pp.121-128

dominant culture of the contemporary being, capitalism, western rationality. This often but not always ties in with elements of magic and spirituality, for example, folklore, ghost stories, spells, talismans, rituals, etc.

In concordance with my final research essay, Hex is an archetypal work of the MT. Often disenchanted and poorly contained by modernity, rite of passage ceremonies are continually allocated diminishing levels of power and importance within western societies. However, this power is never entirely lost, only pushed to the fringes, where it persists in cultures less inundated by Enlightenment rationality. Hex aims to utilise the destabilising residual power of ancient rite of passage rituals, while also altering its traditional purpose, aiming to highlight the importance of the liminality stage and its efficacy as a hybrid intensifier, capable of altering the habitual laws and utilitarian principles instilled in us by modernity.

Technical Specifications

∵ PA Speakers (Subs + Tannoy)
∵ 2 Mackies
∵ 1 Shotgun Mic
∵ 2 Piezo Pickups
∵ Mixing Desk
∵ 5 Long XLR cables
∵ 2 Guitar Leads
∵ 1 Mic Stand
∵ Projector + Mounting Equipment / Mirror / Projector capable of facing downward
∵ Media Player + Remote
∵ Lever Harp
∵ Harmonium
∵ KORG nanoKontrol 2
∵ Novation Launchkey Mini
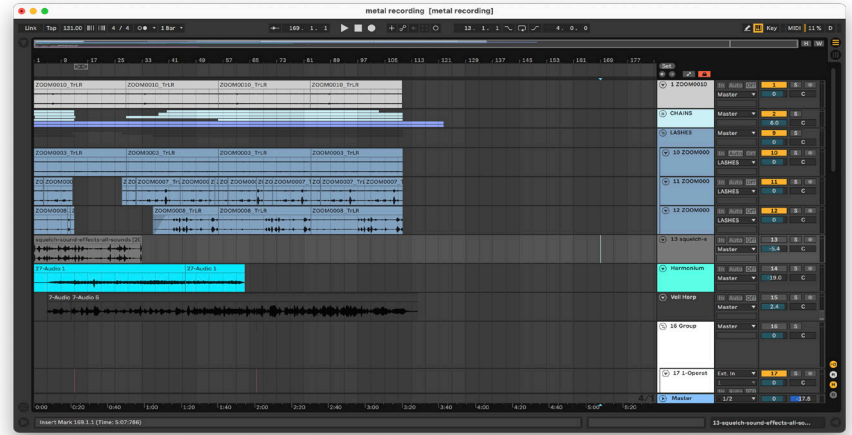∵ Incense
∵ Stool
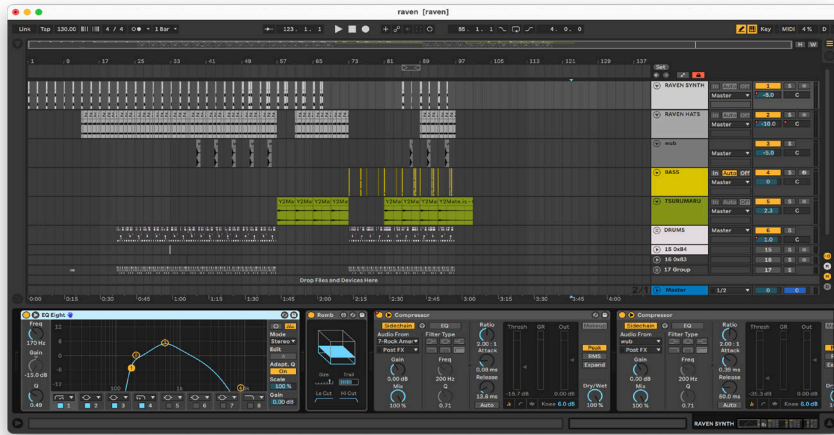∵ Pillow
∵ Laptop
∵ Large Metal Chain

Ableton Projects
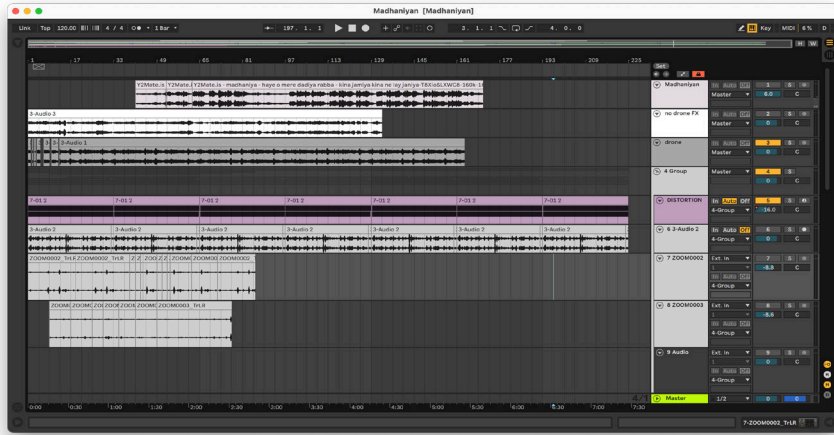
The opening track 'madhaniyan' features a layered 'swampscape' of field recordings mangled and granulated, with a vicious drone that later fights the lo-fi sample of the traditional folk song for space in the master through a drum buss. An unfiltered low end of wind recording remains persistent throughout the track routed via a separate master.

The second piece, 'fray' consists of a recurring main 'synth' which is derived from an EQ'd raven call with a long reverb tail. This lead sound collides with a heavy, almost-satisfactory drum beat comprised of chopped jungle drum loops, dubstep one shots and raven caws morphed into hi hats.

Layers of chains thrashing and unwinding with various delays and reverbs form the backdrop of 'veil', which is predominantly performed on acoustic instruments. A dissonant and clumsy harp melody emerges from a fervent drone of the harmonium.
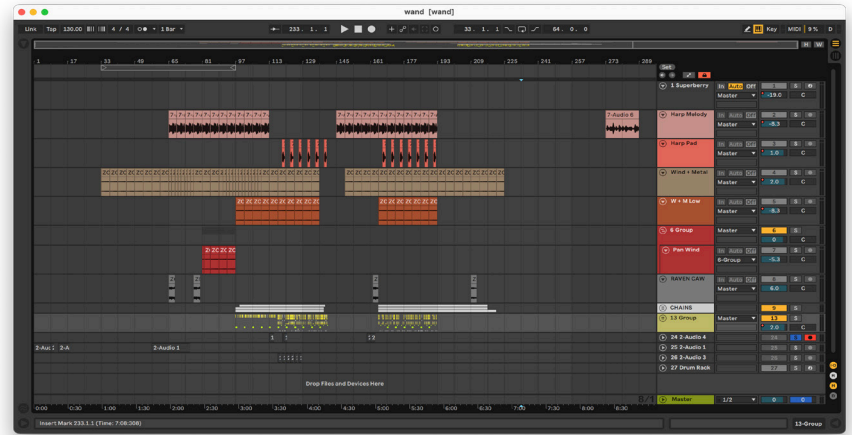
The most digitally detailed track 'wand' combines all elements of field recordings found in previous tracks, heavy stumbling break beats, PS2 sound effects and harp melodies which later unfurl into a roaring trance climax. This signifies the beginning of the end of Hex and transition into the Liminal.

Exponential Rhythm

In the final moments of the performance the track 'wand' is deconstructed into its individual elements to create a vaguely recognisable, exponentially granulated version of itself. My intention was to create a more fluid and experimental closing to the performance that was better suited to a live setting. By consolidating and dividing each component of 'wand' into one shots and placing them into a drum rack of Ableton's simpler instrument, I was able to map the sample length, sample start time and crossfade of each element to corresponding dials on my MIDI controller. After implementing a simple midi pattern I was then able to stretch and compress elements of the track in an exponential manner, from slow perceptible loops to incomprehensibly fast sample rates creating piercing screeches and artefacts from pushing Ableton to its limits. This final section is still in the process of being fine-tuned to the performance and is proving difficult to assemble in a way that is capable of providing unexpected excitable moments. Potentially combining this final section with randomised variations of distortion and saturation could increase the fluidity and power of these final moments of the piece.

Field Recording

All field recordings throughout Hex bar the buzzing flies in 'madhaniyan' were recorded by me throughout the final year of the course. Most raven caws, crows and bird recordings were recorded at Seven Sisters near Beachy Head. Seven Sisters proved an optimal location for field recording birds, up on the cliffs far from road noise pollution and within certain areas sheltered from wind by the curvature of hills it was possible to record a range of birds with few disruptions to their calls.

Other recordings such as, wind noise, chains and various metal clashes were recorded from within the unused decaying buildings of a farm near Rottingdean. The location gave the recordings interesting acoustic properties and reverberations, while also sheltering them from unwanted city noise.

All visual designs, sketches and animation in this section by Eddie Binnie aka ANGA (unless specified)

Brief

To design a cyclical tapestry/banner-like animation comprised of entwined pre-modern, natural and human cultural elements suitable for projection.

Visual References

Ico is a action-puzzle game designed and developed by Fumito Ueda, released in 2001 for the Playstation 2. Ico is a young boy who was sent and locked away in a fortress due to his horns being considered as a bad omen. Throughout the game Ico explores the abandoned fortress with Yorda having to complete various puzzles in order to attempt an escape. The fortress is comprised of many details from a fictional pre-modern era, combining gothic castle elements, beautiful natural landscape and magical gates and artefacts. Due to its release on the Playstation 2 and subtractive design elements implemented by the development team to ensure a high levels of immersion, Ico has a very minimalist, low resolution digital design. This nostalgic, simple and effective portrayal of a mystical pre-modern landscape ties in appropriately with the setting Hex intends to radiate throughout its duration. Therefore, making it a strongly influential reference when initially conceptualising the visual design with ANGA.


Unknown Artist, *Screenshot of Ico*, 2010 [5]

Unknown Artist, *Screenshot of Ico*, 2010 [6]

Another key visual reference established between ANGA and myself was the mysterious language scroll used on the cover of Heith's 'X, Wheel'. It "features a digital manuscript covered in glyphs and sigils. Inspired by the automatic drawings of occultist Austin Spare, the Milan-based artist teamed up with his friend and collaborator Pietro Agostoni to create an asemic alphabet made entirely of

[5] Unknown Author, 2010, accessed 8 May 2023 https://www.noobfeed.com/reviews/412/ico
[6] ibid.

unknown letters and ideograms. "It's made in a way that's impossible to translate," he says. "You write it and it's impossible to read back what you wrote." This process of automation can enable individuals to record subconscious expressions in the mind, like dreaming. "The idea was to somehow break the semiotic barrier and find ways to detach from the meaning."" [7] The scripture used throughout Heith's work integrates well with Hex's theme of liminality, Heith's cover art forces language into a mutational state where its perception and meaning are no longer its focal point, incoherent inscriptions could be used throughout Hex's visuals in order to signify a transitional threshold state.
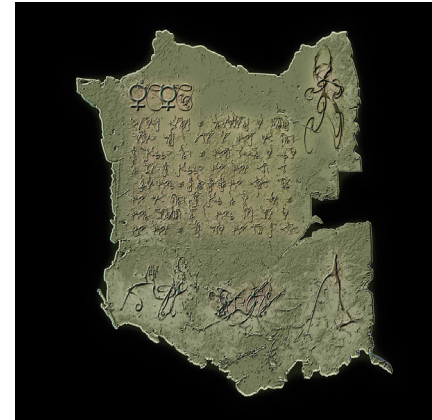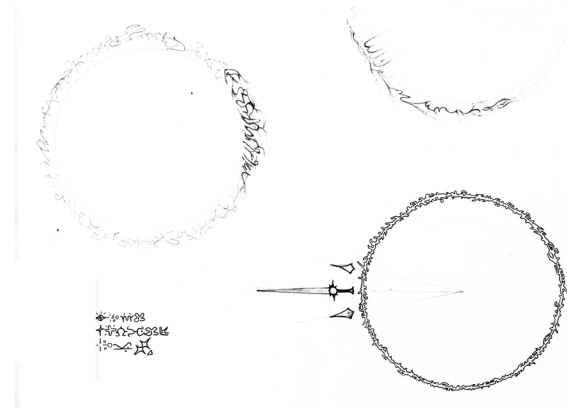

Heith, *X, Wheel*, 2022 [8]
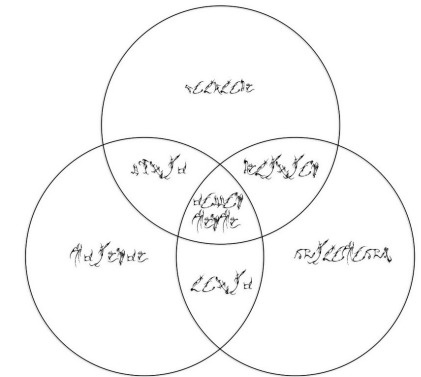

Heith, *Untitled*, 2022 [9]

Initial Sketches

[7] G. Yalcinkaya, 'Heith's wyrd debut merges occult practices and ritualistic raving', accessed 8 May 2023,
https://www.dazeddigital.com/music/article/57274/1/heiths-wyrd-debut-merges-occult-practices-and-ritualistic-raving
[8] Nicola Tirabasso, X, Wheel, 2022, accessed 8 May 2023, https://heith.bandcamp.com/album/x-wheel
[9] Pietro Agostoni, Untitled, 2022, accessed 8 May 2023, https://heith.bandcamp.com/album/x-wheel
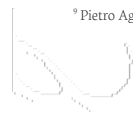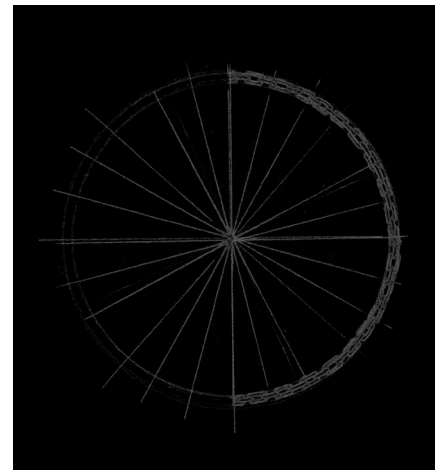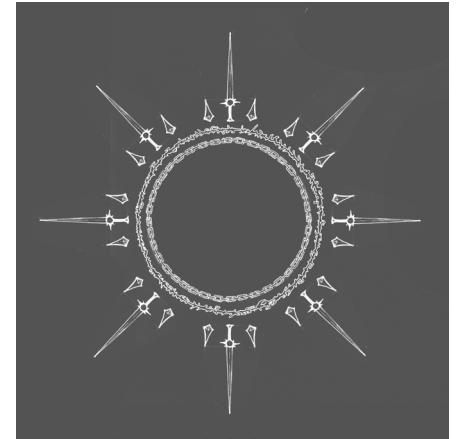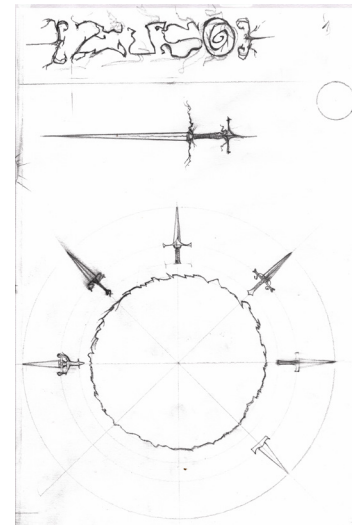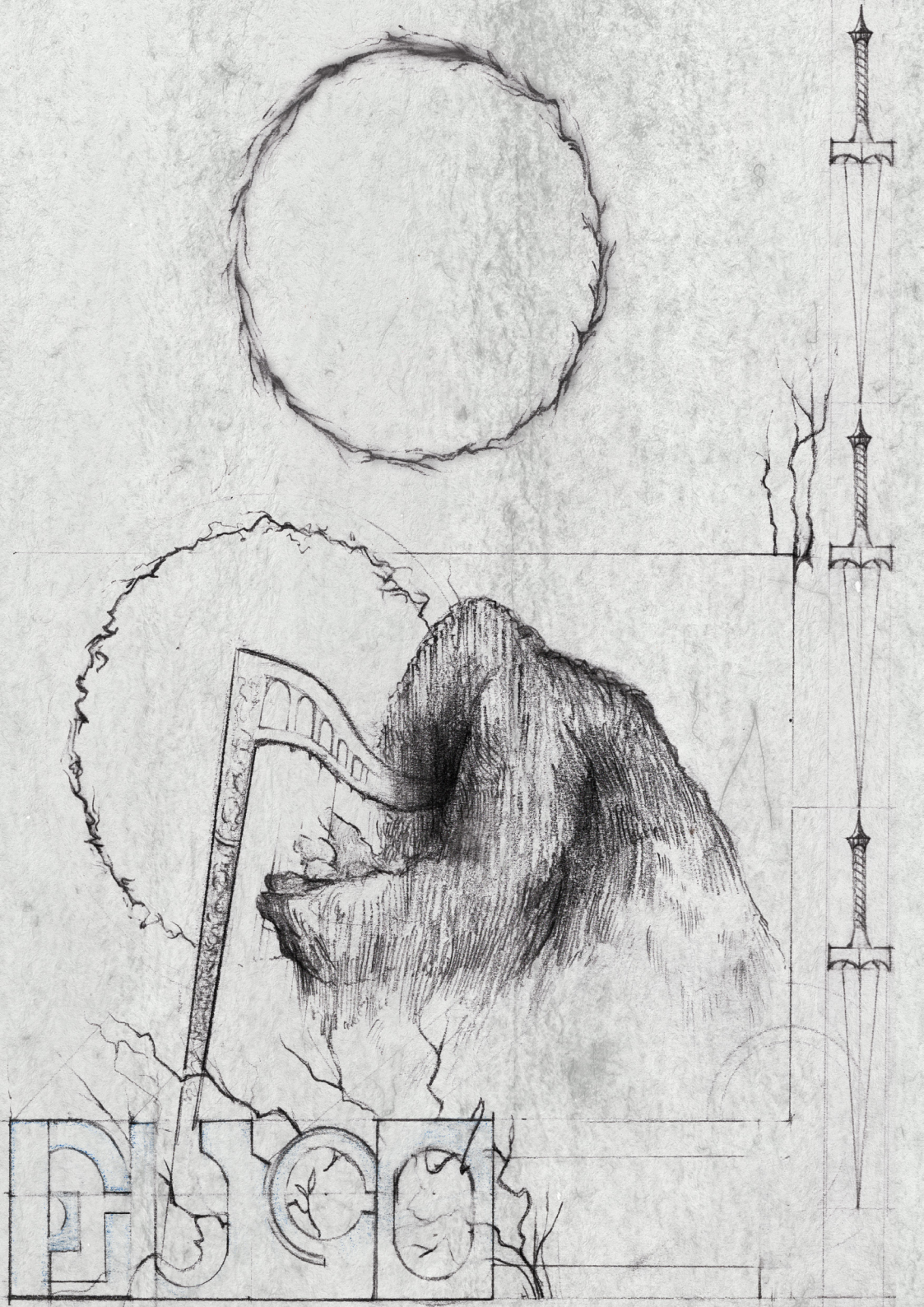
Final Prototype

This final prototype (pictured in the following pages) is comprised of 3 rings, one organic branch-like inscription ring, one chainlink ring and one sword ring. Each ring will rotate in different directions and at different speeds. The organic ring is derived from the shapes of raven calls on a spectrogram.

Layout

REVISED SET-UP FLOOR PLAN

PA

PROJECTOR

CIRCULAR PROJECTION

MACKIES

LIGHTING   ENTRANCE

ਚਿਕੜ → Cikaṛa = the mud
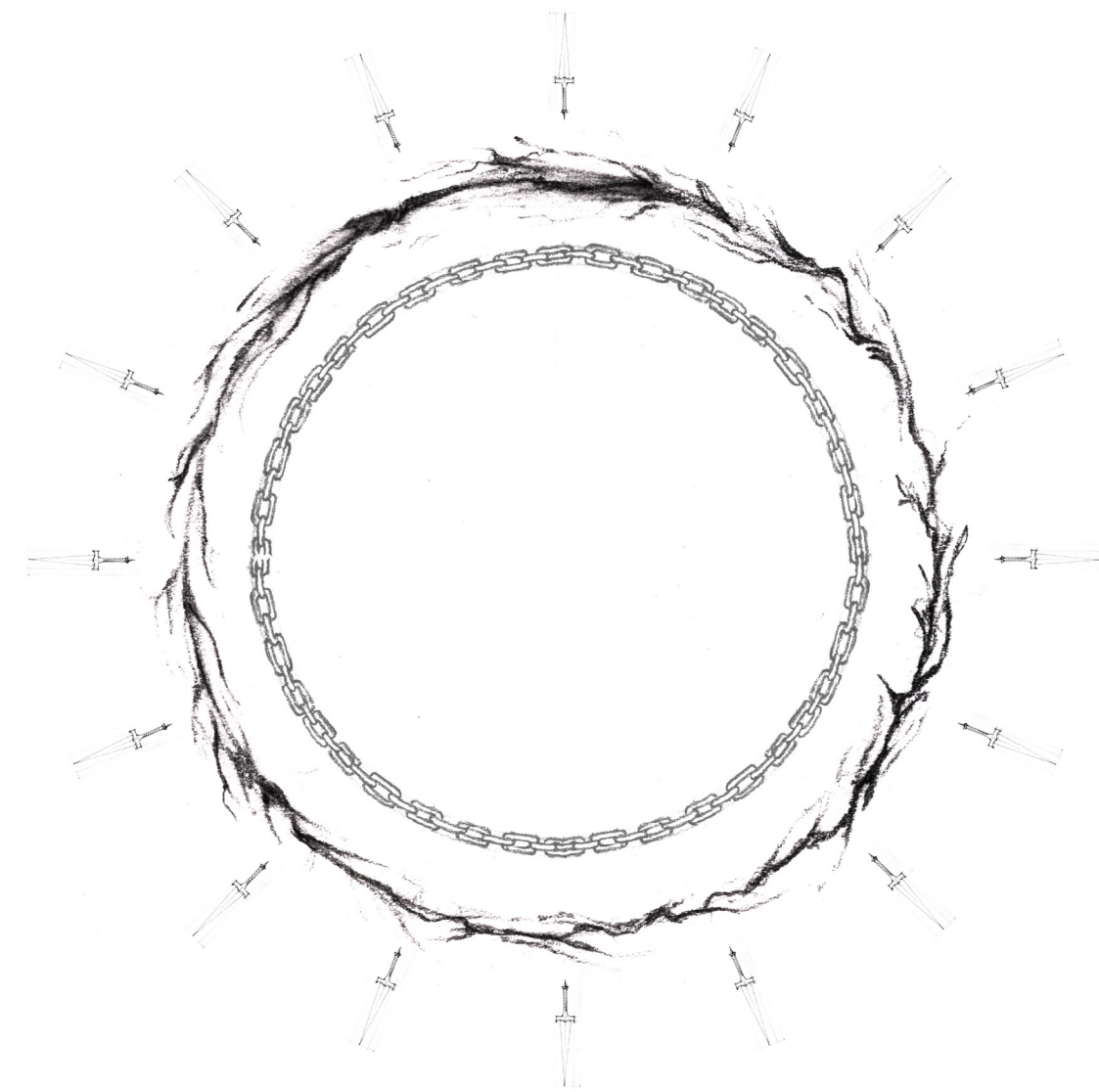
Punjabi Experimental [Chikhurr] ceremony of the mud the mud ritual
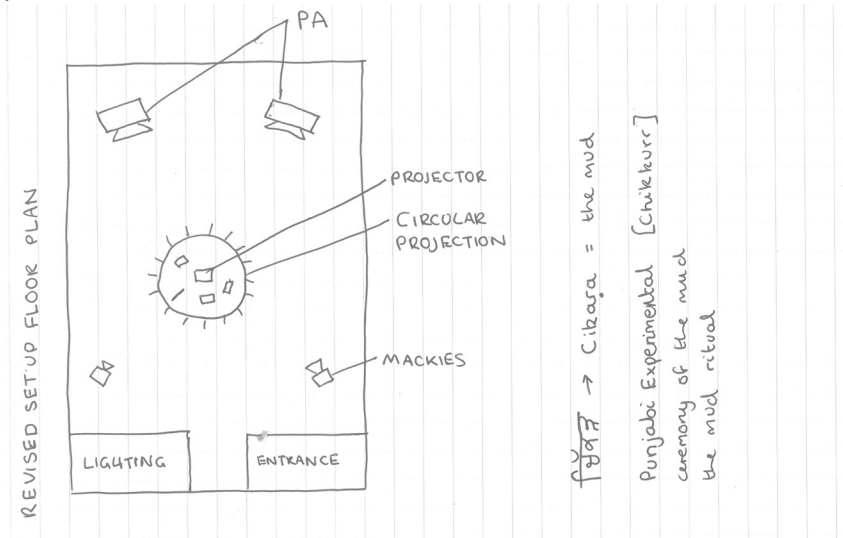
Costume

The costume worn throughout the performance is intended to mimic a humanoid creature that was long ago submerged into the swamp (liminal). Concealed with long grassy reeds, the creature emerges as a master of ceremony or shaman to conduct a Hex that aims to also submerge its audience into the liminal. The costume consists of a military ghillie suit, synthetic flowers and a large metal chain entangled with various charms and talismans. The chain sharing connotations with Mala prayer beads (in Sikhism) used during naam simran to focus on or keep count of, repetitions of: Gur mantar - "Waheguru".

Personal Stool Design

Stool design, craft and sketches by Adam Stinson aka Doug T
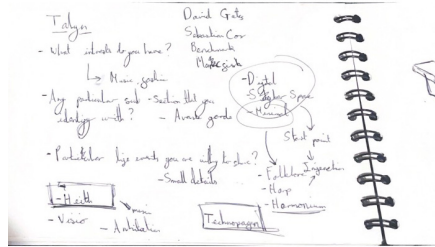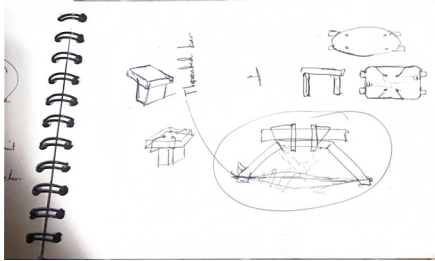
Hand-crafted stool features 'insect' style legs and a collision between metal and raw branches.

Will potentially be engraved with design similar to the projection artwork.

The Swampscape

Hex can be categorised as a contemporary mystic work (CMW), the amalgamation of all CMWs forms the Mystic Turn (MT) in contemporary art and sound. In order to understand the relevance of a Mystic Turn and the power of individual CMWs, it is important to first recognise the vast entanglement of our present. This entanglement comes in response to the speculative opportunity presented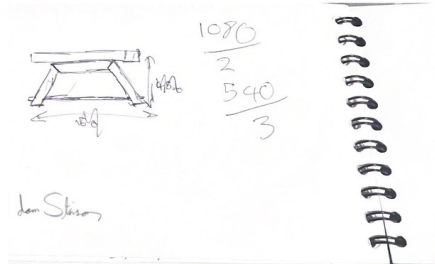 by science's disenchantment of the world and the self, it births a long tail of new Enlightenments/speculative theories that attempt to form new meaning from the ruinous modern, in turn the present is riddled with neologisms, revised concepts, heresies, memetic battles, alien theories and other speculations.

One model in particular that has facilitated the conceptualisation and recognition of the MT and is especially proficient in elucidating the vast polyvocality of the present is Dane Sutherlands text 'The Dank Enlightenment'. Sutherland advocates for the 'swampscape' as a suitable analogy for the contemporary.

> An essential characteristic, key to swampscapes, is their anomalous constitution 'in a classificatory order predicated on a hard and fast distinction between land and water, time and space'. Simultaneously solid land and fluid water yet also neither, swampscapes embody a topology of muddy indistinction, and a taxonomic heresy that disallows the easy separation and parsing of solid forms. This is relevant for understanding a contemporary condition that has supplanted the teleology of modernity and the fragmentation of postmodernity with the entangled simultaneity of multiple, nested logics: a quantum ecology that blurs, combines and superposes fact and fiction, nature and culture, technology and the occult, past and future, authentic and synthetic, work and play, science and mysticism, self and other, dry silicon and wet biology, online and offline, human and nonhuman. [10]

It becomes apparent that the present is suspended in a limbo of manifold logics, an overwhelming unknowability of in-between space pervades. To interpret this unknowability, it becomes clear that current human cognition is no longer viable. A new language, to account for a "plurality of ontologies" [11] must be established. In order to seek this new language, we must scour the gaps in knowledge, explore the alien theories, amateur heresies and new terms that attempt to interpret the unknown. The MT is the exploration of human practice from the past that previously worked alongside the unknown and wyrd, reimagined alongside contemporary speculative epistemologies that consider the unknown, expressed through the medium of contemporary art. CMWs are directly working with formulating a new "teratological language" [12] that is capable of parsing the multidimensional present and forming new reason from the bleak ruins of the modern. Hex and its pursuit of the liminal experiments directly with altering the mindset of its audience, creating for a brief moment an extensive fluidity, a hybrid intensification in which the unknowability of our contemporary appears less impenetrable.

[10] D. Sutherland, 'The Dank Enlightenment', accessed 8 May 2023, https://www.arebyte.com/text-immense-gothic-value-model-by-rumi-josephs
[11] A. Henare, M. Holbraad, S Wastell, Thinking Through Things, Routledge, London, 2006, p.7
[12] D. Sutherland, 'The Dank Enlightenment', accessed 8 May 2023, https://www.arebyte.com/text-immense-gothic-value-model-by-rumi-josephs

Mark Leckey, *Under Under In Record Sleeve (with Henry Fuseli's Cobweb 1785-6), 2019* [13]

Case Study 1 : UNDER UNDER IN

In his recent show 'O' Magic Power of Bleakness' Mark Leckey previewed a new work, 'Under Under In', an audio-play accompanied by visuals displayed across five screens, presented beneath a to-scale replica of an M53 flyover that passes close to his childhood home. Through this piece, Leckey re-

envisages an encounter he had when he was nine, with a fairy that appeared to him while hanging around under the bridge with his friends. The play follows five teenagers being haunted beneath the bridge, one of them with a desire to leave his home town, is abducted and transported to a fairy world, far below the bridge and replaced with a changeling, a clone of himself entwined with the knowledge of fairies. The changeling begins to speak in riddle and repeated words, warning them of trespassing on an old fairy path. Pervaded by hysteria, the others huff inhalants and begin to see visions, glimpses of fairies until they are all collectively plummeted into the supernatural that exists beneath them. They are pulled out for a brief moment until the play reaches its climax, in which the four teenagers all fold over into pose resembling that of the bridge, plastered with rapturous expression.

Despite being accompanied by distinctly clever visuals, in which the viewpoint of each teenager in the film is portrayed by snapchat videos laced with digital 3D models and ghostly renders of ancient bridges and fairy paths, the most remarkable feat of the play is unquestionably the audio. Leckey effortlessly interweaves a soundscape that fuses, 808 drums, folkloristic humming, descending bass drones, rich layered synthetic pads, bird calls, cars and sirens. The voices of the scouse protagonists and the whispering fairies lie amidst this soundscape. Their vocals are fractured and contorted, slang phrases littered throughout, twisted, recycled, repeated over and over, creating loops that disorientate the audience and their concept of time. As Leckey puts it, "You enter into a loop that has the potential to take you out of your body – into this state of ecstasy – but then you yourself are on repeat, you're stuck." [14] Leckey goes on to discuss how this coincides with fairy folklore tales in which they would entrance people into never-ending dances, a wild delirium impossible to escape until their body crumbled. The audio is successful in ensnaring the audience but must also be noted for its excellence at interlacing the contemporary and the past. Leckey uses language, timbre and recognisable samples to portray an environment that undoubtedly considers the in-between. The protagonists discuss, Greggs steak bakes, Galaxy Mcflurry's, Audi driverless cars and Stone Island atop a bed of fairy chants, metallic chimes, iPhone Alerts and Roblox 'Oof' sounds. Leckey utilises the apophenia of pre-Enlightenment assemblage via the sonic, he summons objects so vastly different in their physical forms and carefully crafts them into a soundscape that is CMW that displays the sonic's fluency in composing the past into present, fiction into fact.

"The bridge is this state of in-between, like a sense of limbo: I have recently heard this state called 'cusping'. For me there's an energy, a power in that. It is a manifestation of being suspended between contradictory positions – becoming and belonging, belief and disbelief – states within myself that I cannot resolve. The bridge is this entity that both summons and repulses me." [15] Leckey, points to his work being an expression of an in-between space, an unknown that he is unable to comprehend or resolve, but nonetheless attempts to harness its power, or elevate the gaps much like Hex. Once again, he alludes to the necessity of a new language or mode of cognition that can host the multiple and the unknown, but by expressing an artwork amidst a state of limbo he is also contributing its formation "And with this re-figured and 'teratological language' a new form of reason is emerging, for such a language is a system for thinking with the world; parsing it and acting upon it." [16]

[13] Mark Leckey, Under Under In Record Sleeve (with Henry Fuseli's Cobweb 1785-6), 2019, accessed 8 May 2023
https://www.spikeartmagazine.com/?q=articles/mark-leckey-o-magic-power-of-bleakness

[14] C. Wallis and E. Coustou (eds.), O' Magic Power of Bleakness, Tate Publishing, London, 2019, p.15
[15] ibid.
[16] D. Sutherland, 'The Dank Enlightenment', accessed 10 January 2023

Case Study 2 : Heith LIVE

In his recent performance at Iklectik, Milan-based artist Heith showcased a new live performance cohesive with but separate to his newly released debut album 'X, Wheel'. The artist performed with friend and collaborator, VISIO (Nicola Tirabasso) before a monochromatic visual that displayed the view from a caged window of a medieval carriage, that lurched and rattled along a cobbled track, where lightning frequently illuminated the silhouettes of church spires and gravestones on the horizon. Tirabasso donned beast claws and lit incense before initiating the performance, digital rhythms emerged from an amassing of processed vocals, Heith muttered enchanting lyrics atop thumping drums and gongs, both artists fluctuating between acoustic and electronic instruments, interweaving fragile wind instruments with strident noise. Throughout, there is a consistent arrangement of devouring climaxes and delicate sounds borne of their dispersal. In an interview Heith stated "For me, it's more about the alchemy of the process than the sound itself…to see the death of a sound and what comes after it". [17] Midway through the performance, Tirabasso transitioned to playing the hurdy-gurdy, a medieval string instrument renowned for its ability to form multi-tonal dissonant evolving drones. As this engulfing drone fused with rampaging digital artefacts and swelled, an unease built as the sounds became raucous, Heith began aggressively huffing through a flute, Tirabasso violently wound the wheel of the hurdy-gurdy, the two bedevilled by the rapturous cacophony, hunting for a collective clairvoyance. As the performance reached its zenith, the audience imbued with the discomfort of a forceful come up, gained a glimpse into the artists delusion, granted the ability to embrace an altered perspective.

Heith's wyrd practices assuredly employ the power of sonic fiction, from his neomedieval visuals, arcane instruments and mystic chants that pervade his performances to the asemic alphabet that features on his album cover, Heith fictions a hypnagogic world "untethered to linear notions of time and space." [18] Heith uses the possibility space, facilitated by sonic fiction to create a parallel world in which technology and the occult are irreversibly infused, he conceptualises a new human that uses an impossible language and inhabits a Middle Age teeming with electricity. "From Marconi to Tesla to Moog to Ra, electrification opens up a discontinuum between technology and magic. Why a discontinuum instead of a continuum? Because alternating current transmits across gaps and intervals, and not by lineage or inheritance. From now on, Electronic Music becomes a technology-myth discontinuum. Traditional Culture works hard to polarize this discontinuum. Music wilfully collapses it, flagrantly confusing machines with mysticism, systematizing this critical delirium into information mysteries." [19] This quote from Eshun shares similarity with Heith's practice, particularly his interest for his performance to be recognised as a ritualistic rave. These ritualistic raves act as a laboratory for a synaesthesia that uses pagan mysticism as a method for interpreting computer algorithm, occult spells for scientific research and localised folklore as state law. Within the tentative ritualistic rave, he incites new thought patterns, "It's part of the process of development of technology and rituals, like

how symbols change their meaning and new symbols come up in every age." [20] Heith uses his rituals to tease out a new language from within himself and the audience by interpolating the swamp, he summons a new ritualistic language that is well suited to the multidimensional contemporary, wilfully invoking others to join him in doing so.


GVN, *Coach for Heith @ Unsound*, 2022 [21]

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[17] G. Yalcinkaya, 'Heith's wyrd debut merges occult practices and ritualistic raving', accessed 8 May 2023
https://www.dazeddigital.com/music/article/57274/1/heiths-wyrd-debut-merges-occult-practices-and-ritualistic-raving
[18] ibid.
[19] K. Eshun, More Brilliant than the Sun, Quartet Books, London, 1998, p.164

[20] G. Yalcinkaya, 'Heith's wyrd debut merges occult practices and ritualistic raving', accessed 8 May 2023
https://www.dazeddigital.com/music/article/57274/1/heiths-wyrd-debut-merges-occult-practices-and-ritualistic-raving
[21] GVN, Coach for Heith @ Unsound, 2022, accessed 8 May 2023
https://www.instagram.com/p/Cob6VnDIMq-/
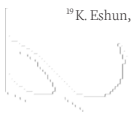
Ascent of Beinn A'Chrulaiste

In August 2022, my group of friends and I wild camped in and around the Glen Coe area for five days. Deeply immersed in the bog lands of western Scotland, I became infatuated with the mystic heritage and energy of the Highlands. After ascending the slopes of Beinn A'Chrulaiste into the clouds and encountering large groups of deer and feral goats in the mist (pictured on the right), it became an experience I was determined to entwine with my work.

The intentions of this project which aims to usurp the clean, algorithmic and the sterile with the mystic, grimy and the weird in an attempt to counteract the disenchanted world and self. Therefore, run parallel on a more personal scale with my aesthetics and expression of self, which previously has often steered toward clean aesthetics and strictly digital sonics, my final practice signifying its demise and transition into the enchanted laboratory of mystics.

REFLECTION

Project Reflection (8 May 2023)

Reflecting on this project so far, I am content with its conceptual backing and optimistic about the performance and the sound. Collaboration, especially with the visuals has been extremely helpful, had I had more time, I would have developed the visual aspects into a more detailed project, incorporating more of my own visual style and working with ANGA more collaboratively. I would have also preferred to have developed my research into further specifics of ancient rituals and the occult, honing in the nature of the project further and attuning and curating the sonics to fitting their objective better. However, I do believe the project lays good foundations in order for further exploration of this subject and lends itself well for future re-interpretations and further performances. A good stepping stone.

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