

Special Case #1

Brigitte Louter

This pdf version contains:

- Exhibition documentation, hand-out, video transcription and poster.
1. A drawing featured in *The model organism and her plastic response*
 2. *The model, the monster*; a commissioned text by Audrius Pocius
 3. A scanned drawing of a Daphnia giving birth.
 4. The design of a tool to draw parts of *The model organism and her plastic response* in the same composition or an entirely different one.
 5. Two pages from *Science is fiction: The films of Jean Painlevé*, MIT Press, 2000–The texts are by Jean Painlevé, a French filmmaker born in 1902 who specialised in scientific documentaries of marine life and made uniquely unclassifiable works, sometimes called “scientific-poetic cinema”. One page is a text titled *Neo-Zoological Drama*. The other is a text related to a short film titled *Hyas and Stenorhynchus*.
 6. YouTube video’s to be viewed with the sound muted.
 7. A scanned drawing, showing a plastic Ziplock bag–Jean Painlevé captures the lives of subjects such as sea urchins or sea horses in their underwater habitat in a highly up-close and engaging manner. In some cases the end is marked by arranging these subjects to spell out the word ‘FIN’, thereby changing them from active lead characters into utilitarian tools to notify the viewer about the end of the dramatic narrative. The drawing depicts a half-full bag of water containing the outlines of water fleas (all of them number 17 from the drawing tool) together spelling the word ‘FIN’.

The model organism and her plastic response

P////AKT

Colophon

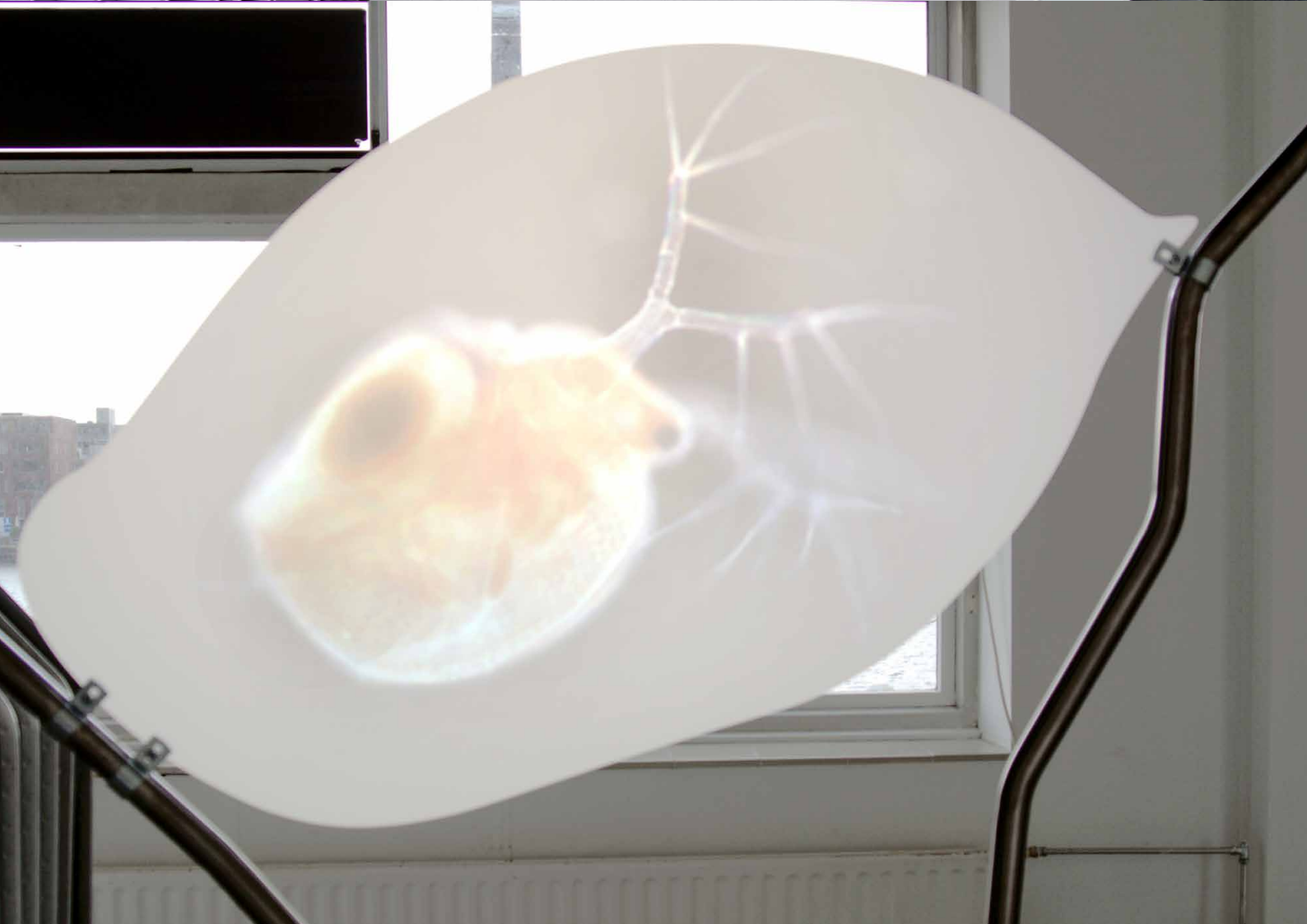
Special Case #1 also comes as a limited edition of 30 archive boxes containing printed matter and (handmade) objects. It was produced as an extension of Brigitte Louter, *The model organism and her plastic response* (2 July–3 September 2023)

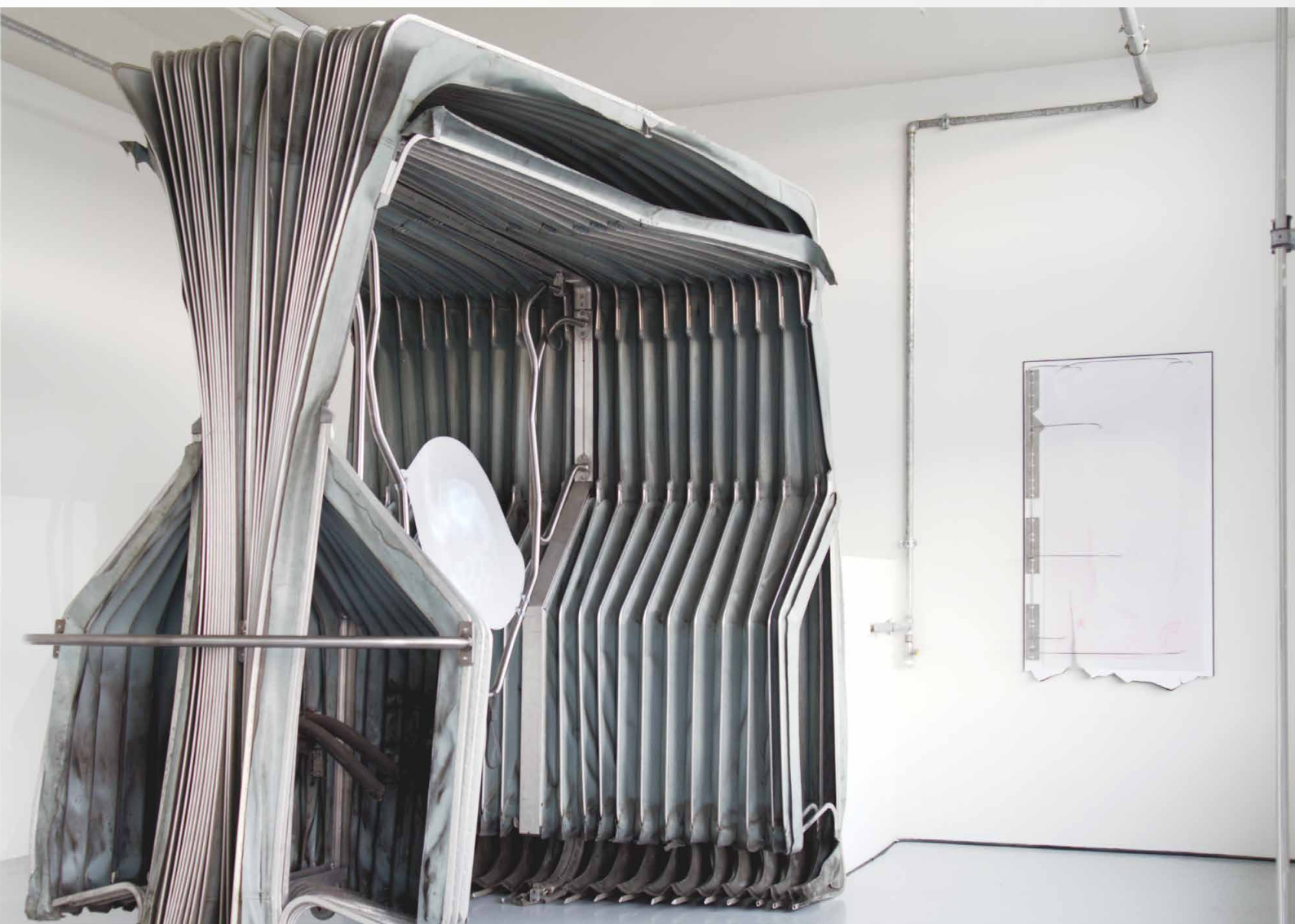
Graphic design by Dongyoung Lee

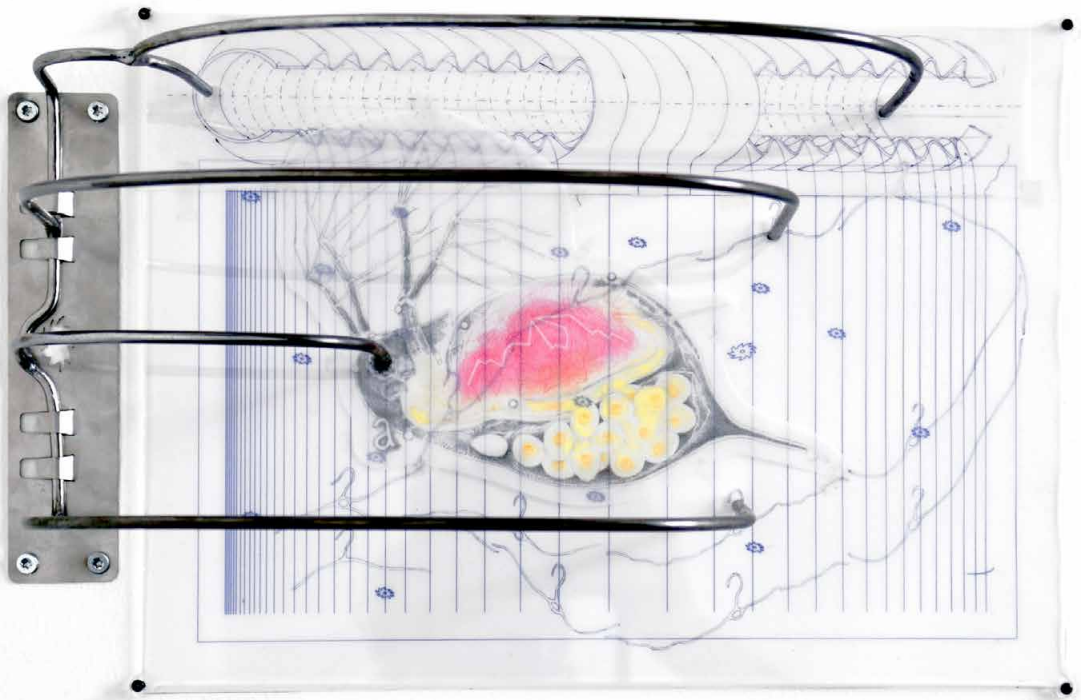
Thanks to the Amsterdam Fund for the Arts

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Brigitte

Louter

The model organism and her plastic response

The transparent and responsive nature of water fleas makes them bound to be nature documentary stars. A great gauge to test water quality. A perfect model organism. With many key assets like the production of resting eggs. A resting egg in an ephippium, surrounded by a protective casing. Development suspended. A time capsule sinking to the bottom of a weedy pond to stay there between one season and 700 years, waiting for favorable circumstances. Covered by sediment until extracted as part of a sediment core. A flexible connection between times. The ambient temperature and sound filtered by the enclosure, providing a comfortable stability of temperature and a muffled echo. Like the adaptive bellows protecting the joint of an articulated bus. A flexible structure stuck between two rigid sections. Increasing the bus's capacity while ensuring smooth twists and turns to maintain passenger comfort. From its bulkhead mount and capture strip to the roof cover or false ceiling. Her upper hip boot mounting. Tongue in groove extrusion mounting. Fastener free pocket. A belly that continuously flexes and protects.

In a brief moment the flexing of the bellow becomes an impossible extension when freed from the rigid sections and load, and the water flea displays an unprecedented behavior, moving the observer.

Brigitte Louter's artistic practice encompasses installation, sculpture, drawing and occasionally moving components, using any material that suits her. She is interested in humanity's continuous attempts to order, measure and map everything in search for world understanding. A search that can exist in a small act or a megalomaniac gesture. The failures inherent to these pursuits are at the centre of her work. With an attention for (im)practicality, (im)possibility and (in)visibility, she hopes to create curious narratives that are structured by slippery and absurd logic. Often (mis)using visual elements and solutions used in data visualization, educational contexts and measuring instruments.

Louter participated in the P/////AKTPOOL program in 2019 (the resulting publication is available [here](#)) and we have been actively following her practice since. From her residency at de Ateliers onwards she has been researching the life and times of *Daphnia* (also commonly known as water fleas) from which she developed a new series of works, part of which will be shown at P/////AKT as an installation and will also find its way into Special Case #1 – a new series of collectible 'dossiers' that will come in an archive box as well as a downloadable pdf and will contain text, documentation and materials related to the artists' surrounding thoughts and the presentations themselves. We expect to have the first edition ready for you by the end of the summer.

Credits: Wim van Egmond (micro video footage) and Michelle Chang Qin (narrator)

**6 July – 3 September, Thursday – Sunday, 14 – 18 hrs
(from 6 – 31 August by appointment only)**

www.pakt.nu

June 2023

In January 2023 sediment was taken from a shallow pond using a (133,3 mm diameter) wide-bore core sampler, suitable for undisturbed sediment samples. It was kept in a cold and dark room. Dormant eggs were collected from the sediment core. They were hatched, and propagated clonally. The neonates of a single clone were asexually propagated for eighteen generations under fluorescent lights (12 hours light, 12 hours dark), in four liter aquaria at 20°. Three times a week the specimen were fed with shellfish diet 1800®. An individual specimen with a good level of transparency and lack of abnormalities that carried embryos in the brood chamber, was selected for observation.

Behavior:	Locomotion - forward swimming
Description:	Moving along a linear path by beating second antennae in rapid and erratic movements to propel through the water and avoid sinking.
Behavior:	Locomotion - circular swimming
Description:	Swift locomotion in a spiraling path, moving appendages in a beating fashion. Typically associated with feeding activities.
Behavior:	Feeding
Description:	Moving phyllopods, or leaf-like feeding legs, in a sweeping motion. Generating water current that captures and filters suspended food particles to direct them to mouth. Crushing and grinding the particles with mandibles.
Behavior:	Defecating
Description:	Somewhat extending abdomen to open posterior end. Expelling fecal pellets.
Behavior:	Predator avoidance
Description:	Changing body shape by developing protective tail spines, a helmet and neck teeth.
Behavior:	Releasing offspring
Description:	Opening brood chamber after a series of contractions, releasing hatchlings one by one into open water, where they promptly swim away from the mother.
Behavior:	Inactive
Description:	Remaining motionless in space. Momentary pause of locomotor activity. Decreased perfusion. Rapidly sinking to the bottom of the observation chamber.
Behavior:	Exploring
Description:	Gliding left and right in a deliberate motion. Realizing a change from the observational chamber to the smooth and flat surface of a microscope slide. Gently sweeping the surface of the slide with appendages for tactile investigation.
Behavior:	Looking back
Description:	Focusing the singular compound eye onto the microscope. The compound eye, made up of hundreds of ommatidia, each with their individual lenses that angle outward in slightly different directions, like a round bouquet of anemones bundled at the stem. Peering with her mosaic vision through the cover slip, objective lens and eye piece of the microscope and meeting my simple camera-type eye at the other side of this instrument, needed to observe her well in the first place. The objective lenses, knobs and LED's compensating for my eye's restrictions. In the future perhaps even replaced by one of those recently invented digital cameras, hemispherical and made up of countless micro lenses embedded in a flexible mesh.

Behavior: Performing
Description: Fast-paced movements of mandibles. Flexing in an unprecedented motion. Increased heartrate as if performing on the microscope stage, lit up from below the stage and via the stage opening. Or perhaps these behaviors are caused by the discomfort created by the strong light and resulting heat.

Behavior: Reflecting
Description: Staring back into the microscope once more. Twitching her compound eye. Seemingly aware of what she, an extraordinarily large animal for the microworld, is in the macroworld, to me.
A Daphnia, commonly known as water flea.
To the naked eye: A jumpy dot in the water.
A filter feeder that swims with her antennae.
The animal with the most genes.
Live fish food, freeze-dried and distributed in plastic bags. An entertaining educational tool in a science museum. A subject ideal for biology students due to their transparent and responsive nature. Useful to observe the effects of alcohol, nicotine and caffeine. Looking at the increased heartbeat when exposed to the latter. Filter coffee for a filter feeder. To see food travelling down her gut. A plastic bag filled with organs. A great gauge to test water quality. An organism of choice for researchers to study their plastic response to thermal differences, and to investigate host-parasite relationships. And if she is very lucky, the movie star in a documentary. Narrated by a famous or an unknown human narrator.

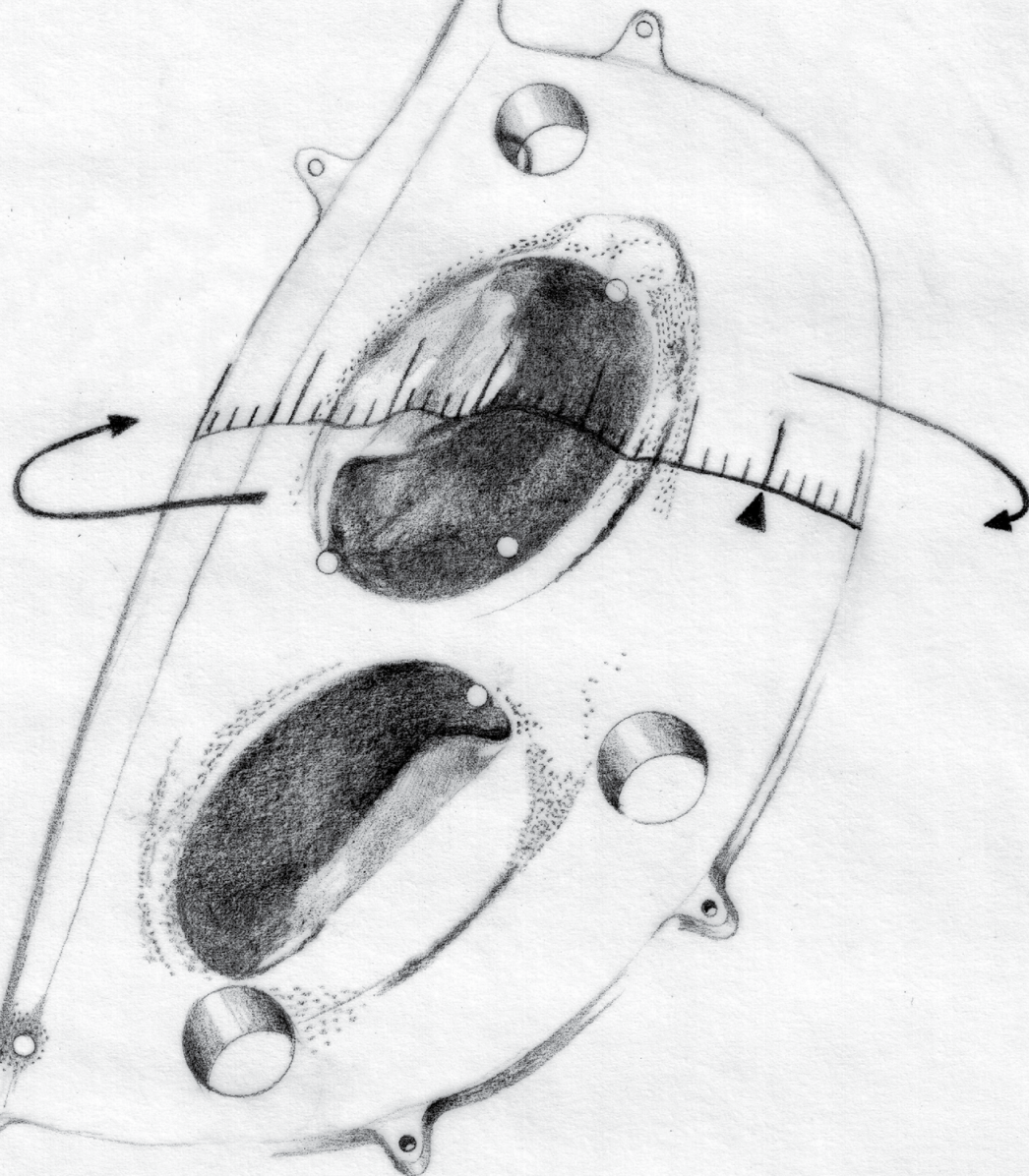
Born to be a nature documentary star and a model organism. Or a non-model organism: An individual of a species of brittle star whose body was believed to be one big compound eye. A dried rotifer sent off to space, reactivated with lettuce juice and returned frozen. A volume-optimizing origami bellows for harsh environments. A resting egg in an ephippium, surrounded by a protective casing. Development suspended. A time capsule sinking to the bottom of a weedy pond to stay there between one season and 700 years, waiting for favorable circumstances. Covered by sediment until extracted as part of a sediment core. A flexible connection between times. The ambient temperature and sound filtered by the enclosure, providing a comfortable stability of temperature and a muffled echo. Like the adaptive bellows protecting the joint of an articulated bus. A flexible structure stuck between two rigid sections. Increasing the bus's capacity while ensuring smooth twists and turns to maintain passenger comfort. From its bulkhead mount and capture strip to the roof cover or false ceiling. Her upper hip boot mounting. Tongue in groove extrusion mounting. Fastener free pocket. A belly that continuously flexes and protects. Or a jet bridge suspended between a terminal and plane. The automatic leveler adapting the bridge, also termed 'finger', to the fluctuating height of the plane that rises and sinks according to the changing weight caused by people entering or leaving. Constantly shifting slightly to adapt to its passengers. It's canopy folding as the skin covering the knuckles of my fingers does when I move them to adjust the microscope.

Behavior: Fainting
Description: Lethargically spinning. Locomotory functions visibly compromised and too dull now to be starring in a feature length documentary. A squeak of the antennae. Signs of despair and finally, fainting at the exact moment that was anticipated, out of consideration for my expectation.
Or perhaps out of pity.

Brigitte

Louter

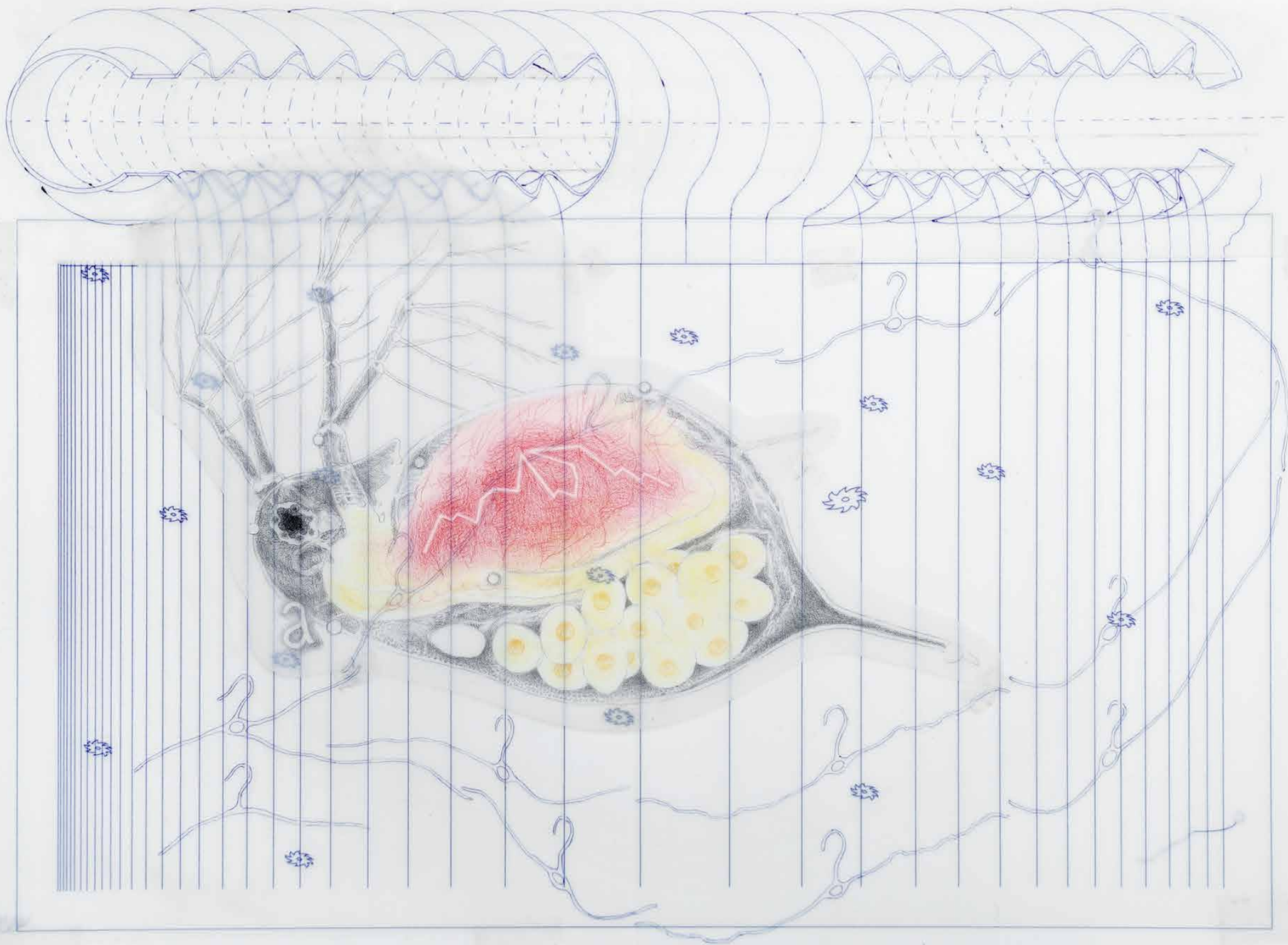
**The model organism
and her plastic response**



P////AKT

**2 July – 3 September 2023
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The model, the monster;

We conceive from the whole until detail destroys.

For the last few weeks, to my utmost unease and fascination, I was haunted by images of a wiggling and twitching monstrosity that is a *Daphnia* encased in the half-contracted bellows that appears to have been dismantled from a passenger bus. The water flea, at the center of this otherworldly setting, was immersed in the bottomless darkness of a water container, only to be met by my curious and voyeuristic gaze. The opaque and murky substance, the artificial milieu in which the animal erratically leaped about was nothing more than a mute abyss, and so I felt both terrified and sorry for the thing. After all, such an environment has nothing to offer to me, it is indifferent to me and my overly conscious experience, or so it seemed.

I was reminded of one of the most memorable fragments of Pascal's posthumous *Pensées*, and it seemed to capture my feelings towards the *Daphnia* somewhat accurately, despite sounding a little enigmatic. It reads like this:

*The eternal silence of these infinite spaces frightens me.*¹

Back in the day, it took me quite a while to understand that the fragment's meaning had little to do with the esoteric concepts of life after death or salvation. Pascal was the author of the now famous wager, in which he argues that it is more rational to believe in God's existence due to the potential infinite rewards, even if the probability of God's existence is uncertain. This idea became a subjectivist argument for embracing religion, later most notably developed by Kierkegaard's existentialist idea of the Leap of Faith. However, Pascal was a man of the Enlightenment, a mathematical genius, and thus the fear he felt was not a mere superstitious fear of God. I believe it was a fear furnished by his understanding of scale and its limitations. You see, a human is a transitory being – supposedly halfway between a god and an animal, in-between nature and machine. Its capacity for reason is limited to its senses, which are in turn limited by the milieu that they touch and feed upon. Even if we extend them, via optical lenses, electric impulses, various readings of pressure, chemical composition or radiation translated into a familiar mathematical language, we are still bound to a world in which we ourselves occur and excluded from the world of *others*. At a bare minimum, we can remind ourselves, as Nagel did in 1974, that we can know everything *about* a bat, but we cannot know for certain what is it *like* to be one.

In certain sketchy ways, I find the *Daphnia* to be a monster because it is a transitory being. It is a giant in the microscopic universe, a dwarf in the macro world. Its transparent body is quick to adapt to its environment; In fact, to such extent that its translucent shape appears to dissolve any boundaries it may have with its surroundings. The water flea invites its milieu into its body, becoming it by filtering it. The environment is decisive already in its ontogenesis, determining its sex among other features. It seemingly has very little of its own, and yet its DNA sequence is longer than any other animal sequence, including humans. It also shares more genes with us humans than any other invertebrate animal. But could it be? Is it at all possible that *I* could share a similitude with this alien creature? Can I be *like* with a *Daphnia*?

1 Pascal, B. (1995) *Pensees and Other Writings*, Oxford University Press, fr. 233, p. 73

In *Aesthetic Theory*, discussing the expression inherent in artworks, Adorno makes a passing comparison of the expression of art with that of animals. He writes:

*The expression of artworks is the non-subjective in the subject; not so much that subject's expression as its copy; there is nothing so expressive as the eyes of animals—especially apes—which seem objectively to mourn that they are not human.*²

Adorno, a lover of animals, affectionately addressed by his close ones by the nickname 'Hippo', seems to suggest here that the fascination that we experience from the *otherness* of art has something in common with our fascination with the *otherness* of animals. It is as if their muteness would be expressing something I couldn't express by myself, namely, that I am an animal that is not (yet? no longer?) an animal. This is to say, I am defined negatively by my limits, which I do not have a positive experience of. In a different line, Adorno adds:

*Thus the rhinoceros, that mute animal, seems to say: "I am a rhinoceros."*³

Indeed, perhaps it was not the image of the poor Daphnia that bewildered me, but rather the (imaginary?) possibility that this animal may have the audacity to look back at me, right from the other end of the microscope, through the eyes of the artist named Brigitte Louter, through the lens of the camera and finally upon the screen of my laptop. Does it say something similar to Adorno's rhinoceros? "I am a Daphnia, the water flea"? Brigitte certainly seemed to catch a glimpse of her looking back... as her observation protocol suggests:

*A squeak of the antennae. Signs of despair and finally, fainting at the exact moment that was anticipated, out of consideration for my expectation.
Or perhaps out of pity.*

Perhaps similarly, Derrida has described a feeling of overwhelming, nondescript shame *or a shame that is ashamed of itself*, when he was caught bare in the gaze of his beloved pussycat with whom he shared his domestic life for many years. Being seen, naked, by an animal, no matter how familiar, seems to disclose an otherness made even more foreign by the proximity of the *non-human* spectator. It is an otherness from within kinship:

*As with every bottomless gaze, as with the eyes of the other, the gaze called animal offers to my sight the abyssal limit of the human: the inhuman or the ahuman, the ends of man, that is to say the border crossing from which vantage man dares to announce himself to himself, thereby calling himself by the name that he believes he gives himself.*⁴

It is an otherness from within kinship that feels like a shame that is ashamed of itself. A likeness so intense that it becomes monstrous as well. After all, what is a monstrosity if not a specter of difference, a primitive past, a barbaric future, converging on the fragile borders of myself and *my* world? Here I am, observing the Daphnia as if it were a character in

2 Adorno, T. W. . (2002) *Aesthetic Theory*, Continuum, p. 113

3 Ibid., p. 112

4 Derrida, J., (2002), *The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)*, Critical Inquiry, Winter, 2002, Vol. 28, No. 2 (Winter, 2002), pp. 369-418, p. 381;

a *theatrum naturae* within which everything is named, and all things are described. The only difference is that *I* am the exception, the undefined eye that was meant to see. I can see, however, only as long as I assimilate everything to the scale of myself as the model for everything seen.

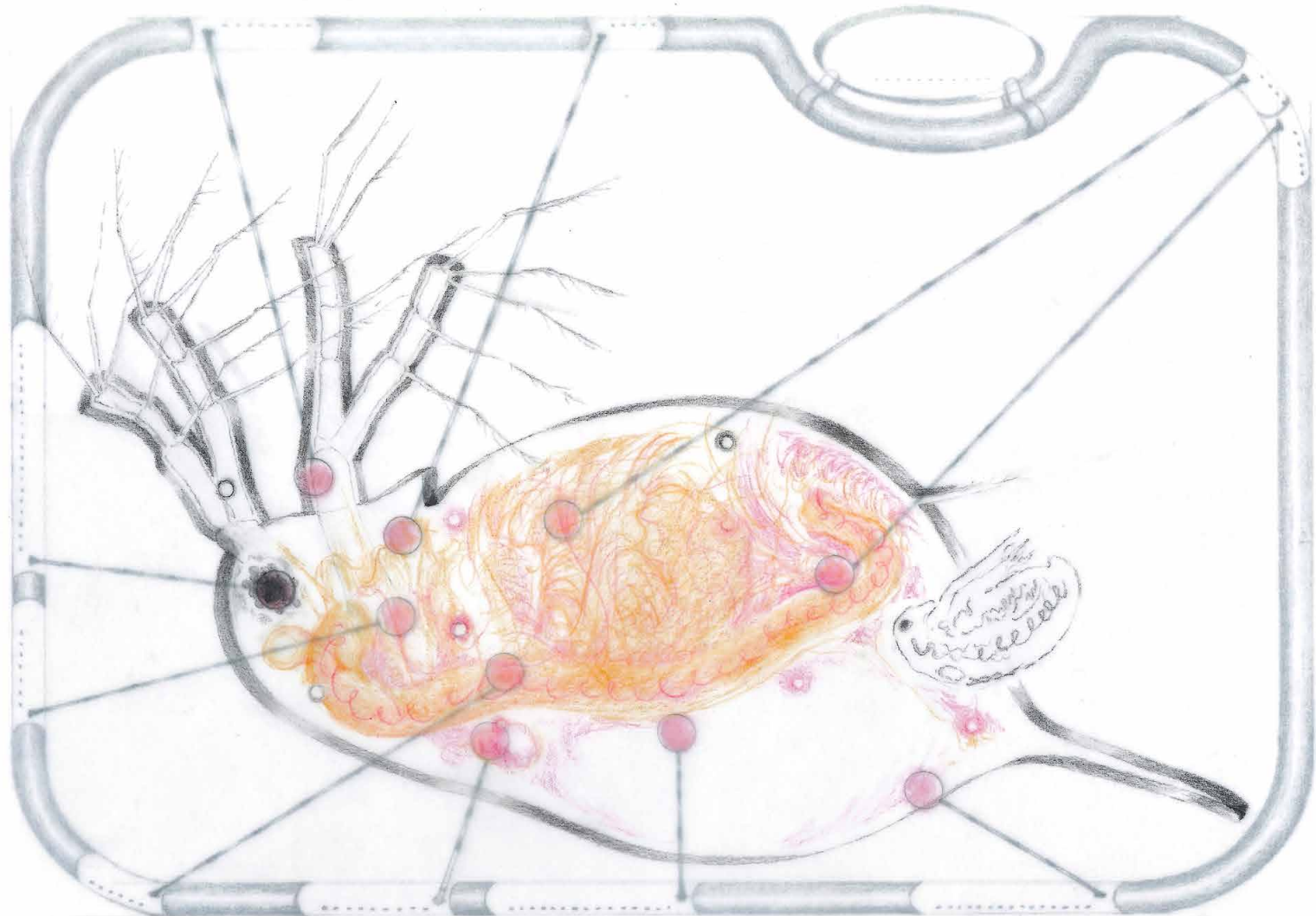
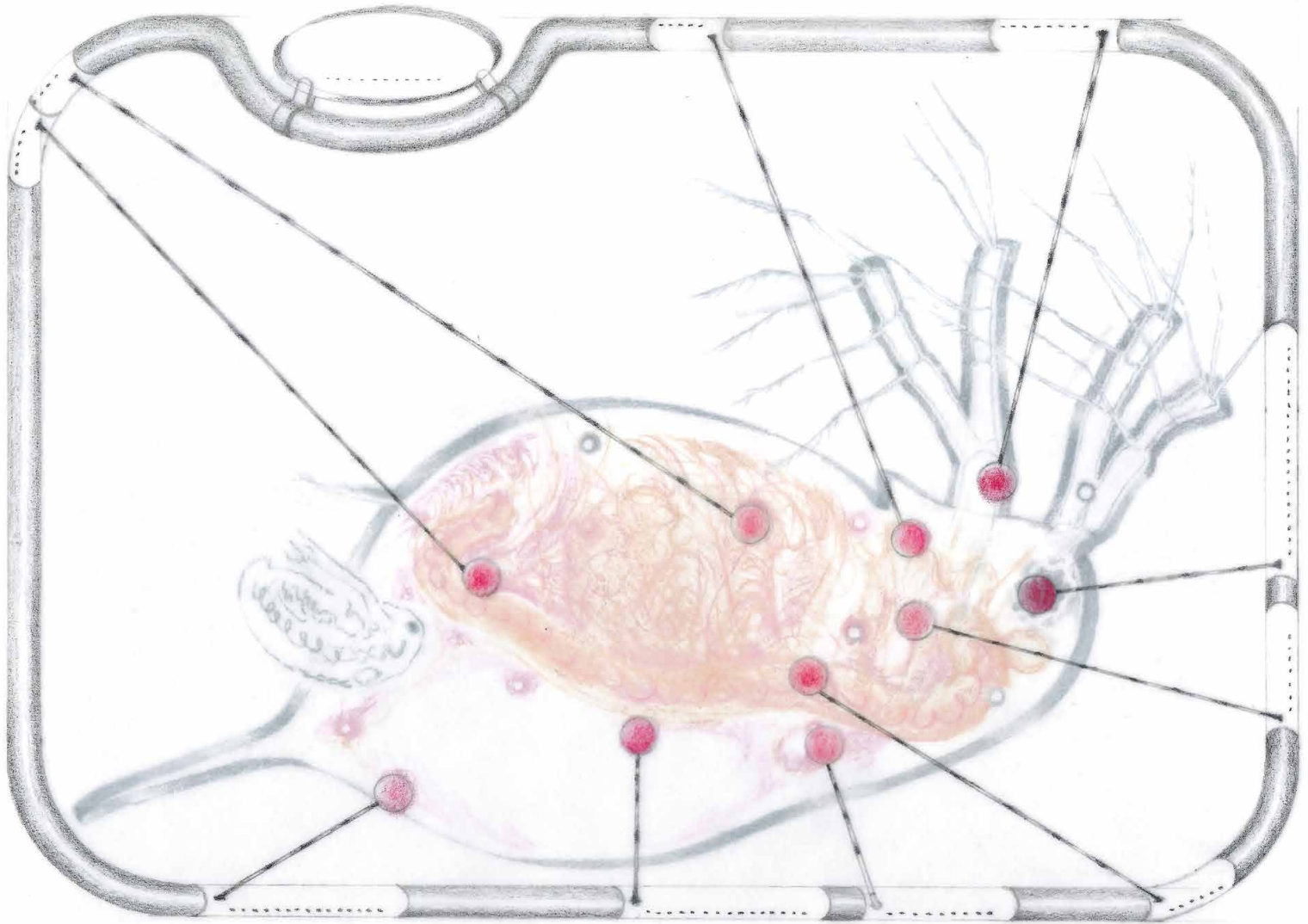
This assimilation, by many accounts a modern remainder of mimicry and magic, is achieved via many different mediums, such as matrices, grids, tables, and data in general. Furthermore, these mediums seem to have an agency of their own, to which I myself become subjected to and possibly even diluted in. In the essay on *Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia*, Roger Caillois described a curious phenomenon of dissolution of the self that he called the *instinct d'abandon*. While threading an analogy between insects, magic, and scientific thought, he argued that representations of space, be they scientific as in geometry, magic as in the analogous relationships performed in rituals, or mimetic animal behavior, such as an insect taking its kin for an edible leaf and consuming it, serve less as methods for survival or defense, but rather it's opposite – an expression of the death drive. He writes,

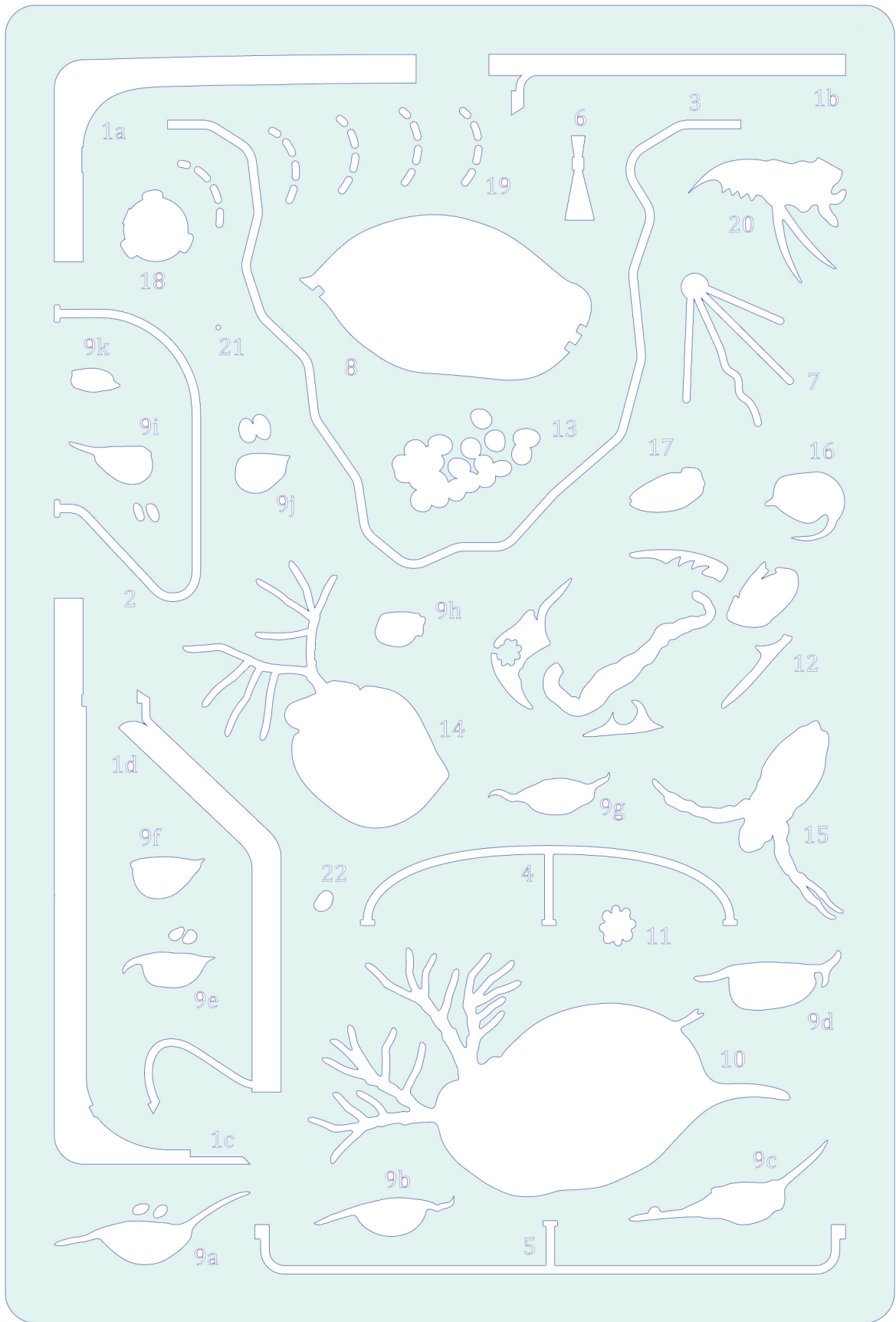
*Matters become critical with represented space because the living creature, the organism, is no longer located at the origin of the coordinate system but is simply one point among many. Dispossessed of its privilege, it quite literally no longer knows what to do with itself.*⁵

Does the *Daphnia*, a water flea, *know* what to do with itself? Could I be the one who is more at a loss on the matter? After all, I am translucent to the world that treats me as data; I am subject to systems that, even if defined, are so large in scale that they are not comprehensible to me. I am always in the middle without knowing what lurks on either side. The eternal silence of these spaces frightens me. Yet, I cannot help but see a reflection of myself as model for the monstrosity that the *Daphnia* is.

Audrius Pocius (b. 1991) is a curator and a philosopher currently based in Vilnius. His philosophical interests lie between aesthetics, critical theory, and philosophy of education, and he is currently a PhD candidate at the Institute of Philosophy of Vilnius University. In his curatorial practices he is mainly focused on conceptual and performative aspects of art and their potency for social and cultural critique. Audrius has been a curator and educator at CAC Vilnius up until he co-founded Swallow space for contemporary art together with his co-conspirators. He is also director of Medūza – Lithuanian Artists' Association's space for contemporary art and culture. He is lecturing on various topics related to philosophy, aesthetics, and contemporary art at Vilnius University, Vilnius Academy of Art, and Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre

5 Caillois, R., (2003) *Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia* in *Beyond Surrealism: A Roger Caillois Reader*, Duke University Press, p. 99





The Model Organism and her Plastic Response Drawing Template

1. Folding bellows of articulated bus cut in half
 - a. Top main bellows
 - b. False ceiling
 - c. Bottom main bellows
 - d. Hip boot
2. Steel handrails 1
3. Steel pond-shaped handrails
4. Steel handrails 2
5. Steel handrails 3
6. Hanging strap
7. Light from projector
8. Plexiglass shape
- 9a – 9k. Resting eggs
10. Daphnia no. 1 outline
11. Compound eye
12. Daphnia no. 1 insides (giving birth)
13. Eggs
14. Daphnia side view
15. Daphnia top view
16. Daphnia moving
17. Daphnia still
18. Contact transducer
19. Sound
20. Abdominal claw
21. Screw
22. Heart

Scale : 1:21 for number 1,2,3,4,5,6,8,21

Flexible scale for all other numbers

NEO-ZOOLOGICAL DRAMA

Jean Painlevé

Surréalisme. 1924

The plasmodium of the Myxomycetes is so sweet; the eyeless *Prorhynchus* has the dull color of the born-blind, and its proboscis stuffed with zoochlorellae solicits the oxygen of the *Frontoniella antypyretica*; he carries his pharynx in a rosette, a locomotive requirement, horned, stupid, and not at all calcareous. But *Dendrocoelum lacteum* and *Planaria torva*, gonocephalous and olive-greenish, sharpen the pleasure of the hoops; the little turbellarian knows the embrace of their mouth; good for *Chironomus plumosus* to outline their intestinal arborizations in red lace; what spherical astonishment: he flees and ruptures the phlegmy threads reserved for the *Bythotrephes longimanus*, that sacred little crustacean with close-cropped hair; he would rather be born through parthenogenesis than touch these threads of the ovoviviparous *Mesostoma*; he has no choice; soft, elastic, and full of mucus, with neither truncature nor duplicature, he projects himself like Mercator on *Nepheleis octoculata* whose eight eyes are not sufficient to express the fact that she has spent all summer laying eggs; the laborers produce little bundles; a Rotifera dries up in a corner; as it can be sensed that the sexes are separated, the *Prorhynchus* sucking stops; *Stephanoceros eichorni* is better; what difference does a double on a belvedere make. Stop. The turbellarians have seized it, penetrate by breaking and entering, pierce and suck; a horrible cry echoes and joins the lapping of luminous interferences; the cercaria of distome emerge from their stagnal hymens, cast a glance, and terror encysts them. The rolling in an S, a bit of zinc, the temporarily gelatinous sophistry pffff! filched.

The spermatogenesis only takes place in the male, says this old marc valve. Oh, there now!

HYAS AND STENORHYNCHUS

(Hyas et sténorinques)

1929, black and white, 13 minutes

Music: Chopin, orchestrated and conducted by Maurice Jaubert

A Walk in the Garden

It's a feast. The sun plays on the water, flowers are blossoming, each tentacle of the sea anemone is loaded with poison. The giant oysters open to the gentle current and close greedily on whatever prey passes their lips. The seaweed is so attractive, its color so tempting you can't resist touching it when bang! the enormous oven-shaped mouth of the angler fish suddenly opens and closes; it digests its food and again sets out its fishing line. This lazy creature ejects the residue of digestion simply by opening its mouth—the garden needs fertilizer to thrive.

Every hue is gathered here: shades of crystal purple brought by sea urchins and starfish, blues from the canopies of jellyfish. At birth, these jellyfish are stacked like plates on top of each other. Who would have thought they would become so lovely?

The jellyfish in diverse colonies, quite unpleasant to the touch, innocently display their terrifying tentacles. The sun glittering on the water continues to hypnotize; this garden, perhaps too calm, induces sleep.

The table is set for the starfish: he need only extend his stomach and engulf his prey. Yet the scallop, alerted by the slow approach of the starfish's thousands of feet, flees quickly, her valves clacking. The racket startles everyone. The sun hides. In the garden, it rains.

YouTube video's to be viewed with the sound muted

1. Coupling

Class 380 coupling – 137k views – 12 years ago
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ySztLmS59YY>
- 00.25 – 01.10

2. Folding bellows origin

Bellows by PEI mobility – 410 views – 1 year ago
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YZkDJuUyKu8>
- 00.00 – 00.25
- 01.05 – 01.38 (A rain simulation)

3. Scooping up organisms

PONAR Grab Sampler – 6.4k views – 4 years ago
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2rYSg8Zd3Ks>

4. The Daphnia

Daphnia – 448 views – 6 years ago
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mFMm7xvbjYE>
→ 06.30 – 07.30 (A beating heart, a compound eye)

5. Collecting mud samples

Multicorer Test Video – 4k views – 11 years ago
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gRt2icfYYZ0>

6. Daphnia trapped in a timelapse

Temperature effects on the speed of growth – Daphnia magna timelapse – 3.8k views – 2 years ago
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WxB5h84ygC0>
- 00.45 – 01.30 (A timelapse of water fleas in confined spaces)

7. Folding and space

MythBusters Folding Paper Seven plus times – 3.3M views – 10 years ago
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=65Qzc3_NtGs
- 0.17 – 00.31 (A timelapse of people folding a large sheet)

8. Highly compressible origami bellows for harsh environments

Kreslin Origami Pattern Rendered Simulation – 2.9k views – 2 years ago
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p1bBO9CMnpw>

9. Uncoupling

Siemens Class 380 train Uncoupling – 65k views – 12 years ago
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QYR8_4LLOGU

