

Sudden hell bell

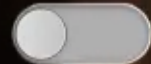
Slider #454



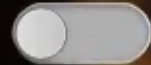
NGIO



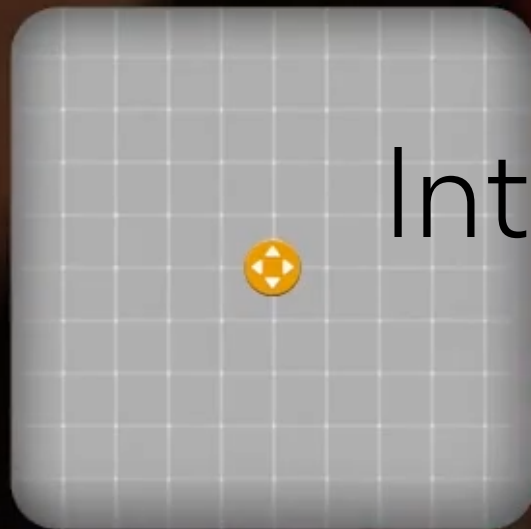
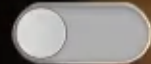
Railroad tea for you



Dancing Queen is dead



Emit anxiety



Mikhail Maksimov  
*The New Game Is Over*  
July 28 - August 10 2023  
Introduced by Matteo Bittanti





For the best viewing experience, we recommend watching the video in full screen mode.

*The New Game Is Over*

video walkthrough (1920 x 1080), color, sound, 10' 15", Russia

Created by Mikhail Maksimov

VRAL is delighted to present an artist walkthrough based on Mikhail Maksimov's latest project, *The New Game Is Over*, an interactive experience which revolves around a remarkable machine that generates emotions and desires, allowing players to take on the role of a demiurge. In this position of power, players can develop, preserve or even destroy self-sustainable systems. *The New Game Is Over* is a commentary on the intricate interplay between creation and destruction, growth and decay.

*Mikhail Maksimov is a Moscow-based artist and filmmaker whose multimedia practice bridges architecture, technology, and moving image. After receiving degrees in Architecture and Photography, Maksimov began exhibiting experimental films and installations that investigate game aesthetics, 3D graphics, algorithms, and neural networks. His works have been featured internationally at Manifesta 10 (2014), Locarno Film Festival (2018), Hamburg KurzFilmFestival (2019), Riga Biennial (2020), Venice Architecture Biennale (2021), Art for the Future Biennale (2022), and DA Z festival in Zurich (2022), among others. Blurring the real and virtual, Maksimov's practice contemplates emerging technologies and their role in shaping our social environments and collective imagination.*

**Matteo Bittanti:** When we last conversed (<https://milanmachinimafestival.org/vral-mikhail-maksimov>) , a pandemic was causing some hiccups to the established neoliberal order and you had just introduced an endless simulator of graveyards, which I deemed very timely. Presently, a major conflict unfolds in Europe, underscoring once again the contradictions inherent in Francis Fukuyama's eulogy otherwise known as "The End of History". Considering that artists are perceptive radars, as Marshall McLuhan famously suggested (<https://mcluhangalaxy.wordpress.com/2018/03/18/artists-as-radar-or-the-antennae-of-the-race/>) , I am curious to know: What do you discern on the horizon? As you remember, Richard Grusin (<https://irh.wisc.edu/staff/grusin-richard-a/>) compares premediation to game design, thus your point of view deserves special attention. In other words, you possess all the necessary tools to effectively decipher what's next. For the record, premediation extends well beyond the traditional notion of forecasting or predicting the future. It involves a deliberate and strategic approach to designing and shaping the future by preemptively preparing for various potential scenarios. As a game designer/artist acting as a radar, what are you premediating these days? What situations should we expect? Which stocks should I buy?

Mikhail Maksimov: You use the term “premediation” but, going back to our last conversation (<https://milanmachinimafestival.org/vral-mikhail-maksimov>) , I found the variation “premedication (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Premedication>) ” , which refers to a kind of medical preparation for radical changes. Within the context of premedication, humanity is given a preliminary portion of the same experience (substance), before the main surgery. A smaller scale version, so to speak. I find this idea very interesting. In my view, premedication does not contradict the beautiful concept of radical premediation by Richard Grusin, but complements it. A complex of influences – including artistic influence – works as a prediction as well as preparation. And the game is closely related to this meaning, because it functions as a system of influence and response to influence. In general, this idea works like predictive neural networks, but no one would ever think about a single neural network node as an artist, everyone works as a swarm. *A swarm of premediation.*

Matteo Bittanti: You raise an excellent point in connecting premediation and premedication. With premedication referring to medicating in anticipation of something, integrating this concept metaphorically with art and culture feels oddly poignant. In an increasingly anxious world, we all need some kind of soothing relief, be it literal or figurative. Artistic works that provide a sense of preemptive consolation could serve as a form of emotional premedication, helping inoculate audiences against the stressors we collectively face. By thoughtfully processing uncertainties through creative expression before they fully emerge, artists can potentially help society avoid hypersensitivity reactions you aptly describe. Dexamethasone, diphenhydramine, omeprazole, midazolam... This reminds me of Damien Hirst (<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/hirst-pharmacy-t07187>) . His *Last Supper* (<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/hirst-the-last-supper-66089/9>) series is especially hilarious. At the same time, we must be careful not to let art become a way to anesthetize ourselves from harsh realities. The Sackler family’s aggressive and misleading marketing of Oxycontin, and the ensuing opioid crisis that ended America’s War Against Drugs (*the call is from inside the house!*), serves as a cautionary tale. Their prolific art philanthropy also prompts difficult questions about the ethical entanglements of money and the artworld. Is Oxycontin an example of art premedication? Sounds to me more like art prevarication, if not premeditated murder. You have been investigating the relationship between art and drugs through video games. Games are often dismissed as addictive diversions, yet perhaps they reveal something deeper about our almost pathological attraction to virtual gratifications and symbolic rewards. What longings or voids are we trying to fill by escaping into gaming?

Mikhail Maksimov: I like our dangerous turn to medicine. I would also like to mention a work by Damien Hirst. In his installation *Pharmacy* (<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/hirst-pharmacy-t07187/explore-damien-hirsts-pharmacy>) , Hirst shows how pharmacy stores have metamorphosed since the Middle Ages, but they are still the same quack stores as the entire Sackler empire. The link takes you to the Tate Modern website, which has an escalator named Sackler's escalator, although their name has been removed now. Perhaps this preserves the democratic principle of allowing all sides to have their opinions. Jokes aside, marketing Oxycontin is criminal activity, not premedication. Oxycontin therapy is about approaching death. Art, on the other hand, is about preparing for death. So art is closer to premedication. Art is preparation for future events. I'd like to add that a couple years ago I did an exhibition (*Abortive Archaeology* (<https://dying.fun/2022/01/03/abortive-archaeology-losless-archaeology/>) ) opposing the criminal direct invasion of archaeological sites, where I also played with the theme of medical intervention (<https://dying.fun/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/F7A8193-scaled.jpg>) .

In addition to the tedious, but indisputable idea that games are safe simulators of any kind of human activity, associated with the pleasure of control and confirmation of the right choice at every level, I would like to add something else. As a child, I crawled into the cover of my grandmother's sewing machine and dreamt that there was a large space inside it, rooms and cabinets where favorite and inaccessible toys and goodies were stored. The virtual world is an accessible belief that, in addition to our world, there is another world, a special and beautiful world. The happy game successfully debunks this fairy tale, gloatingly and prophetically asserts that horror is everywhere.

**Matteo Bittanti: Horror is indeed everywhere. But we must wish for an alternative to the status quo to survive. In his 2017 book *The PlayStation Dreamworld* (<https://www.wiley.com/en-us/The+PlayStation+Dreamworld-p-9781509518029>) , Alfie Bown (<https://pure.royalholloway.ac.uk/en/persons/alfie-bown>) posits that video games primarily function as desire-generating machines. According to the British scholar, gamers are not autonomous individuals playing games. Instead, gamers are played by the games they consume, as their subjectivity is actively molded by the algorithmic imaginary constructed by corporations. In your most recent project, *The New Game Is Over*, you explore the concept of a simulation machine that generates emotions, feelings, and desires. In your game, ordinary individuals are elevated to the status of all-powerful demigods, possibly as a compensative measure for their lack of agency in IRL. My question is: What kind of desires do video games engender?**

Mikhail Maksimov: Games played by players that are created by corporations that are played by developers – the scary picture of the present must be enhanced by the fact that it's all about a redistribution of attention. Corporations are buying players' life time with their money, only to give that time to developers who will spend it creating a sequel to the game, only for the process to start over. In the wet corporate dreams of game company executives, game development should last as many years as their preceding games are destined to be played. A lot of attention is given to replayability, and the idea that a good game should be long is implanted in the minds of players. Although triple A games are an important subject of game studies – which is rather frustrating for me personally –, I would say that I don't find this topic particularly interesting. And some games, like *Animal Crossing*, are downright frightening. An important feature of *The New Game Is Over* is the opportunity to reveal the need/desire to command, to dominate, to control. In the installation version of the game, the viewer is even given the option to control the humanity-puppet using a Leap Motion controller. In general, this game looks like a traditional creche or a public-driven Grand Guignol ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grand\\_Guignol](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grand_Guignol)) telling on the local fair how things are now in the province, state, district, country. As a game designer, I deal with a player's desire, and try to tinker with that desire using it only as a tool to deliver the overall statement in the piece. If we talk about understanding the domain of video games via Lacanian dream analysis, I have nothing to say here. I am not familiar with the book by Alfie Bown you mention, although the book synopsis makes some sense to me.

**Matteo Bittanti:** You raise an excellent point: there is a certain unsettling nature to the world of *Animal Crossing* that lingers below the surface. I feel your interactive art piece, *The New Game Is Over*, elicits a similarly nuanced sense of quiet unease in the viewer. By subverting the expectations of gaming and play, your work deftly conveys an underlying creepiness that resonates long after experiencing the artwork. Your game, which is also available for virtual reality displays, reminds me of Brent Watanabe's recent VR project, *MINE* (<https://milanmachinimafestival.org/vral-brent-watanabe>). It came to my mind perhaps because Watanabe previously tackled *Animal Crossing* ([https://bwatanabe.com/ACNH\\_2020.html](https://bwatanabe.com/ACNH_2020.html)): after all, the association of ideas is a popular psychoanalytic pursuit, as Bown reminds us. At any rate, both *The New Game Is Over* and *MINE* showcase a diverse array of objects, artifacts, and references to popular culture. The latter (<https://www.mine-vr.com>) embraces elements like theme parks, trucks, clowns – a smorgasbord of Americana – while your project intertwines marionettes, shooting axes, Brueghelian demonology, futuristic dystopia, and early 20th-century circus aesthetics. It's like staring at the abyss, but from two different angles. Could you

share the main inspiration behind *The New Game Is Over* and provide insight into your creative process? Would you expound upon the intricate iconography and shed light on the multitude of influences that have shaped its creation?

Mikhail Maksimov: In Brent Watanabe's *MINE* we see an endless graveyard of consumerism values, but I can only watch the trailer because Horizon Worlds is not available: Meta is considered an extremist organization in Russia...

**Matteo Bittanti: Well, it's hard to dispute that Meta is an extreme organization if you consider the amount of damage it has inflicted upon the world thus far...**

Mikhail Maksimov: ...and so, indeed consumerism is buried and it gives way to ideological angels – although I would like to bury ideologies. My sources of inspiration are Bruegel, Bosch, icons like Our Lady the consolation to all the afflicted ([https://drive.google.com/file/d/1-\\_3ouVzmxHBvJiq5SMa8ur1ld457fytN/view?usp=drive\\_link](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1-_3ouVzmxHBvJiq5SMa8ur1ld457fytN/view?usp=drive_link)) . I developed the game using Dante Alighieri's architecture of hell from *The Divine Comedy*. Take a look at this diagram, Sideview of the Inferno, from the Marc Musa translation in the Penguin Classics (<https://drive.google.com/file/d/18UcvulCFU98KmZl7y-Q4ymNP0JzaeEhe/view?usp=sharing>) , and then compare it to the structure of *The New Game Is Over* ([https://drive.google.com/file/d/1cDNsj8y\\_1tiuru8y0oC6Nu4n9\\_K-86u6/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1cDNsj8y_1tiuru8y0oC6Nu4n9_K-86u6/view?usp=sharing)) . Regarding additional sources of inspiration, I would like to mention that my past work *Crowd Sign: Emission* ([http://dying.fun/2022/01/01/cse\\_eng/](http://dying.fun/2022/01/01/cse_eng/)) was the cause of some anxiety about my freedom, and I spent more than half a year outside Russia, specifically in Armenia and France, so I was very inspired by the architecture in Yerevan and Marseille. Originally, I developed the game in the Armenian language. Now I am in Moscow and my ability to speak out is limited, but I can say that in general, the idea of NGIO is a question of responsibility for actions. The game tries to foster a dialogue exploring whether it is possible to sustain curiosity and education amidst endless horror and disaster of perpetual magnitude. That's why it features the idea of the anxiety pipeline. If you succeed in closing such a pipeline from Afterlife to Utopia you can finally leave the space of the game and win. In short, the commodification of anxiety is the key message of the work. This commodification accompanies other goods in the attention economy. There are a bunch of details in this work that may not be very clear. For example, in the Utopia space, the blue-colored characters are chatbots of the Russian government service system Gosuslugi (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gosuslugi>) , with the help of which, among other things, the delivery of subpoenas requiring participation in the Special Military

Operation in Ukraine. These characters in turn talk to the player with lines from Lautréamont's *Les Chants de Maldoror* ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Les\\_Chants\\_de\\_Maldoror](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Les_Chants_de_Maldoror)).

**Matteo Bittanti:** I must admit this specific reference went over my head. *The New Game is Over* delves into the intricate exploration of player agency, its implications, and the resulting effects. It offers players the opportunity to strive for emotional mastery or succumb to the overwhelming tide of feelings. How does the dark and profoundly hopeless interface design of *The New Game Is Over* resonate with and shape the overall experience? In what ways does this deliberate design choice contribute to the examination of emotions and enhance the player's engagement with the game's overarching themes?

Mikhail Maksimov: Of course, I am far from the truly poetic interface of *Mu Cartographer* ([https://store.steampowered.com/app/513360/Mu\\_Cartographer/](https://store.steampowered.com/app/513360/Mu_Cartographer/)), but I tried to create a narrative interface that emulates the smartphone settings' UI, but with weird names and strings. In general, the interface panel can be visualized as a text work, each line of which is equipped with a button or a switch. For example, the Universe Interface (<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1pRoxf1zFuxWqWLEMrRrotVSghUniRkhn/view?usp=sharing>) reads like a poem:

*Visible Universe.*

*Fireflies everywhere*

*Axe can't shoot?*

*Black color matter?*

*Fire hole on/off*

*I hate green screens*

*Let's railotheque begins!*

And at the same time, each line creates a concrete change in the space of the game screen. This perverted embodiment of the idea of the Soviet poetic avant-garde, in whose conception art outside of rational assistance to the proletariat was recognized as irrelevant and harmful.



Matteo Bittanti: *Apropos*, the Russian Pavilion at the 17th Biennale of Architecture in Venice was completely dominated by avant-garde video games and game art performances, all created by insanely talented Russian artists (<https://www.gamescenes.org/2021/10/game-art-the-russians-pwned-the-2021-biennale.html>) . You presented your outstanding work *SAR: Online Sessions (Sanatorium Anthropocene Retreat: Online Sessions)* (<http://dying.fun/2021/06/15/saronline-sessions-exhibition/>) ). This daring and thought-provoking display stood out as a trailblazer, pushing boundaries and challenging conventions. As one contemplates the promotional nature of such grand-scale events often likened to the “Olympics of art”, the “World Cup of architecture,” and so on, a question arises: What drives the Russian State’s deep involvement in the artworld employing video games as a propaganda tool and playful nation branding? Was this part of Vladislav Surkov ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vladislav\\_Surkov](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vladislav_Surkov))’s grand plan? Is this akin to what Walter Benjamin calls “the aestheticization of politics” ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aestheticization\\_of\\_politics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aestheticization_of_politics)) in his seminal essay “The work of art in the age of technological reproducibility”?

Mikhail Maksimov: That’s a terrific question! You know, the West plays a key role in Russian history. For example, according to the art critic and cultural critic Boris Groys ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boris\\_Groys](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boris_Groys)) , Russia is constantly trying to peel off the patina of the West, trying to find some of its own features, and underneath they find another patina of the West, and this endless undressing of Matryoshka dolls. Returning to the Architectural Biennale, remembering that the Moscow Kremlin was built by Italian architects with the participation of Russian artists, the exposition of the Russian pavilion at the 17th Venice Biennale was curated by the Italian curator Ippolito Pestellini Laparelli. And it was the only time in Russian history when the Russian pavilion was honored with a Special Mention award. I don't know anything about Surkov’s participation in the preparation of the Russian pavilion exposition. From my vantage point, Russian authorities seem to harbor little interest in supporting modern or contemporary art. Their focus appears fixed on cinema as the preferred artistic medium to cultivate and promote. I also know that the Russian cultural agency allocates some money for the creation of patriotic computer games. In contrast to Benjamin’s aestheticization of politics, I would suggest the concept of “body politic” ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Body\\_politic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Body_politic)) , which Eugene Thacker (<https://eugenethacker.com>) discusses in his book *Tentacles Longer Than Night. Horror of Philosophy Vol. 3* (<https://www.collectiveinkbooks.com/zer0-books/our-books/tentacles-longer-night>) . The living dead are key characters in culture and especially in computer games – dead speculative realists are also present in the *SAR: Online Sessions* (<http://dying.fun/2021/06/15/saronline-sessions-exhibition/>) . According to

Thacker, we're living in the era of dead political body politics and the current situation should be studied through *Necrologies*.

(<https://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/1567/chapter-abstract/174475/Necrologies-or-the-Death-of-the-Body-Politic?redirectedFrom=fulltext>)

Matteo Bittanti: “the body politic implicates a medical ontology that it is nevertheless always attempting to supersede [...] while the body politic is certainly not exclusively a medical affair, this sort of medical ontology forms its central problematic. The medicalized view of the body politic is thus that beyond which the body politic must always move, but that without which the body politic cannot be thought as such.” (150, 151) Here we go again: premedication. Let's talk about another kind of “disease”, at least as it is framed by contemporary media scholars. In the video walkthrough of *The New Game Is Over* currently featured on VRAL, one of the main themes is pervasive дезинформация, often translated into English as disinformation, which exactly one century ago, Józef Unszlicht, deputy chairman of the KGB, described as the dissemination – in the press, on the radio, and so on – of false reports intended to mislead public opinion. Unszlicht introduced a special disinformation office to conduct active intelligence operations. Today, all information is дезинформация, and we have a situation in which a former convict who became a hot-dog seller then creates the most effective troll farm in the world whose operatives performed as Black Lives Matter activists, among other things (<https://www.nytimes.com/video/us/politics/100000005414346/how-russian-bots-and-trolls-invade-our-lives-and-elections.html>), Saint Petersburg's Internet Research Agency, and then an equally successful mercenary group named after Adolf Hitler's favorite composer. In short, perhaps you cannot have nice things, but at least you have both green screens and green men. Meanwhile, in the so-called “free world”, a 21 year old gamer obsessed by guns distributed hundreds of classified documents about the war in Ukraine (<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/04/13/world/europe/jack-teixeira-pentagon-leak.html>) on a Discord chat originally created to discuss a video game about zombies to impress his acolytes. Because reality has become gamified on so many levels, what kind of counter gaming options are left to those who decide to sabotage the status quo? I mean, you can change your point of view (within the game), but can you change the mechanics? Is there a “way out”, which incidentally is the goal of your game?

Mikhail Maksimov: I realize this is your curious notice, the three areas in my game are very reminiscent of movie sets for the production of disinformation but, the fact that there is a green screen in the game suggests that I am at least not hiding the fact that the whole world is theater... Disinformation is at the heart of dramaturgy, at the heart of any surprise: literally, man is created to have the pleasure of not understanding what is around him, and after a while to discover the truth... People from childhood are

accustomed to disinformation: remember unpacking presents under the Christmas tree or the game when an adult comes up behind, covers the child's eyes with the palms of his hands and asks: "Who am I?"

(<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1F988ychbmH59DVoJUSiSfB213wWfxPsl/view?usp=sharing>)

"Do the pigeons walking on the sidewalk shake their heads to the beat because they have air pods in their ears? What is the music in the air pods that makes the pigeons' bodies rock? As an artist, I've been shaped by *October* (<https://direct.mit.edu/octo>) magazine and a leftist view of art, which suggests that only a critical perspective creates the condition for a work of art. It's incredibly hard to think that this was disinformation too. So in this game, the green screen could be anything, even the green screen itself. As for the exit... I thought for a very long time, and of course tried all the ideas of the end of the world, from nuclear apocalypse to black square. In the end I came to the conclusion that the ideal end of everything is stupid nothingness, fluff, emptiness, ridiculousness, not solemn chaos and not global catastrophe – but painted butterflies on silly theater sets with the most unassuming sound... Dummy is the end.

**Matteo Bittanti:** In the visible layer of *The New Game Is Over*, people literally spring from coffins, suggesting that they are living dead, that is zombies. They move mechanically onto an assembly line aka magic carpet that quickly leads to their demise, that is, another coffin... The old saying from cradle to the grave is hereby changed "from the grave to the grave". The message is clear: their lives are linear, predetermined, and uneventful-by-design, mainly controlled by the "(in)visible hand" – of the Market (?), the State (?), Big Tech (?), possibly all three combined – which pulls the strings and rotates the gear. In such a situation, the adage "touching grass" results in nothing more than an exercise in astroturfing, both literally and metaphorically. Apps like Instagram and Skype are specifically designed to give people the impression of autonomy. In reality, they control people, making sure that their movements, actions, and even desires are manufactured in a top-down fashion. Shoshana Zuboff says it better but I'm too lazy to look for the perfect quote. My question is: Can one actually cut the strings and become, *gosh, free?*

Mikhail Maksimov: Matteo, that's incredibly funny, I'd like to put another log on the fire. The carpet is a map of the Earth, people are thrown onto the carpet-map of the Earth and after a while they get to the golden gate. This gate is a copy of the North entrance to the VDNKH exhibition. VDNKH is the Soviet analog of EXPO World's Fair created in the early 30s of the 20th century. This permanent exhibition was a symbol of the ideal soviet system, a simulation of future communist life. Therefore, the golden gate is also an allegory of the entrance to the meaningless paradise, but of course, yes, it resembles the entrance to

the cemetery, which is the end of human life... Look at North Entrance Arch of VDNKH (<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1s6aBsVRG1dqvt0LiGlokoeH6LKuFQPw4/view?usp=sharing>) in *The Foundling* movie ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Foundling\\_\(1940\\_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Foundling_(1940_film))) (1940)

So life is controlled by someone from outside, and the outcome is bleak (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j80UUgnJ6Cw>) ... But that's an important question, maybe what we need is not freedom, and we need witnesses to our unfreedom, in other words, spectators. Three is enough (<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1DQ0EGSCtY9aSe3Hc7nz88klvzL4BHAuo/view?usp=sharing>).

**Matteo Bittanti:** [*Mental note: I loved the inclusion of Cory Arcangel/Super Mario Bros' clouds, perhaps suggesting that climate change is a hoax and the permafrost thawing in Siberia will bring joy and happiness to a cybernetic meadow where mammals and computers live together in mutually programming harmony like pure water touching clear sky.*]

Mikhail Maksimov: Every one of your questions is incredibly interesting and this premise is a storm of emotions too.

**Matteo Bittanti:** For that, I'm definitely blaming the copious amounts of opioids I'm currently ingesting, courtesy of Purdue Pharma and various art museums. Next, we're off to the eternal/afterlife layer, hereby represented as a subway or train compartment turned into a disco club. Everybody is dancing amongst scantily dressed prosperous bald women in tiny shorts, slow lizards, balloons, and stroboscopic lights, while panic emojis take over the screen. I thought social media dispense massive doses of dopamine (<https://www.arte.tv/en/videos/085801-001-A/dopamine-1-8/>) to keep us scrolling diligently. But you're suggesting instead that anxiety is the default condition. But if anxiety is the dominant feeling, wouldn't that be counter-productive to the powers that be? Don't they want happy, obedient sheep ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y344g\\_3KSRs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y344g_3KSRs)) ? Aren't video games and social media and deepfake porn akin to the soma drug in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*?

Mikhail Maksimov: Yes, it's an afterlife moment where disco rails spin in an empty train compartment. Look out at the shuffling tiktokers (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?t=795s&v=YnEYORyy1CY>) and think about the fate of the animals that didn't make it to heaven.

**Matteo Bittanti:** I agree: the sheep are cannon fodder for the slaughterhouses. As I was watching Manuela Martelli's *1976* (<https://mubi.com/films/1976-2022>) (also known as *Chile 1976*), I was reminded that when dictators, psychopaths, and autocrats take over a

country – Pinochet, in this case – suddenly the only thing you see on TV screens is people dancing, all night, all day. Reality is replaced by the *Society of the Spectacle* and the party never ends. Italy experienced something similar during Berlusconi's *Ventennale* – incidentally, the media tycoon launched his commercial TV network in 1973, as Debord introduced the cinematic version of his famous treatise. What followed was videocracy (<https://mubi.com/films/videocracy>) . But TikTok brought this grotesque spectacle – the permanent dance – to a planetary scale. The Party never stops and, unlike TV, it follows you everywhere.

Mikhail Maksimov: When I make a game piece, it doesn't mean I'm going to use the techniques that corporations use to tie players to a service. After all, when we step forward with our left foot and then our right, the body also releases dopamine as a reward for what we've done, but we don't criticize walking. When February 24th 2022 came around, for many months, everyone around me was turned into an anxiety production machine, literally every morning, people were using news feeds instead of Tinder and scrolling around trying to get their anxiety down: doom scrolling (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doomscrolling>) . Although it began during the Covid-19 pandemic, anxiety can be used to control people. Ultimately, can anxiety be used to understand the world? Using the ability to explore the world with anxiety, the horror production in each layer of the game can be adjusted so that the worlds connect, at which point the Exit sign flashes. It is a sign of a way out, a possible knowledge of the world. But is it a way out? What awaits us behind this door? To go over the limit you have to be unlimit desperate. I realize that anxiety is a new commodity and management tool, but maybe it's also a new vision, a new optic?

Matteo Bittanti: The constant unleashing of anxiety is a great way to control the masses. It works even better than fear. You fear something and, all of a sudden, you don't, it's gone, forgotten, erased. Like Covid-19. Anxiety is vague yet pervasive. You cannot switch anxiety off. It's always on, like our smartphones. The news feed, like social media, is an extremely effective anxiety machine: it keeps us in a constant state of constant unease and uncertainty. When I read the news, my feelings oscillate between dread and rage. But perhaps anxiety can be used as a raw material to create something new. Art feeds on anxiety. When you design a new artwork, a new game, do you find yourself in an anxious state? It seems to me that you are able to tap into the nervous energy anxiety provokes while steering clear of its more paralyzing and destructive tendencies. Am I delusional? After all, there's a fine line between harnessing anxiety's charge and being consumed by it...

Mikhail Maksimov: You've described exactly how things are in the world, and what my game is really about in depth. Anxiety is the fuel, the energy that now powers the batteries of the universe. The state is the plumber of the anxiety pipeline, and we will soon be paying the anxiety bills because the "anxiety reduction" that Oxycontin provided no longer works. This absurd suggestion confirms your sentence about how thin the line is between anxiety and how we perceive anxiety. The Beatniks had projects to put LSD in New York's water supply, in the 1990s there was an engineering project to provide the internet through the electrical networks, now we can also talk about how artists can use anxiety for cognitive and reflective needs, stirring in waves of anxiety to make their artistic statement.

**Matteo Bittanti:** Utopia is represented as a post-scarcity land of milk and honey ruled by the Market, hereby represented by a cash register that literally prints money out of thin air, and nuclear energy assures endless power to the masses. I get the reference to Antonio Canova's *Tre Grazie*, hereby floating gracefully around material wealth, but what's up with the pigeons and their constant pooping?

Mikhail Maksimov: You have very elegantly described the state of affairs in the sky, but that is only half-truth. I would like to add that the three graces are three dead punk stars ([https://drive.google.com/file/d/15lwesuWTtvIjHun4S465v\\_zktG9P-MrU/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/15lwesuWTtvIjHun4S465v_zktG9P-MrU/view?usp=sharing)) named Mikhail Gorshenev ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mikhail\\_Gorsheniov](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mikhail_Gorsheniov)), the bloody pigeons are generally dangerous creatures, being both symbols of peace and animals that according to Russian sources carry a military virus to the territory of Russia (<https://www.newsweek.com/russian-conspiracy-theory-says-us-training-birds-spread-bio-weapons-1687399>). The symbol of nuclear energy is the danger of nuclear threat, although your explanation is very beautiful!

**Matteo Bittanti:** Well, I appreciate your patience and your elegant way of telling me that I completely missed the fucking point [insert wink emoji here]. Let's move on to the next question as I admit defeat. The format of the video walkthrough is to game play what photographs are to performances. Consider Vito Accoinci's seminal performance, *Following Piece* (<https://www.moma.org/collection/works/146947>) (1969), where he randomly selected and then followed individual passersby he encountered in New York City, maintaining his pursuit until the person entered a building. Today this seminal performance is remembered through some photographs, specifically gelatin silver prints, or, more likely their digital reproductions scattered online. The photographs, by the way, were staged, that is, taken after the performance itself, a sort of insta re-enactment, a remake, a remediation. What is the function of a video recording of an avant-garde video game like *The New Game Is Over*? Is it documentation, a form of art itself, or what will

remain after the game is no longer playable because emulation is not an exact science and technology is notoriously unreliable and we will all be dead because of climate apocalypse or nuclear holocaust or both?

Mikhail Maksimov: It's a very important question. I'm sure that every artist working and creating video games decides this question for themselves. I started out as a visual artist working with video, and when I was introduced to game engines a decade ago my goal was to make video walkthroughs of non-existent games, let's plays, streams of strange games that could never be released (<https://vimeo.com/74753420>) . I never even thought I would build execution files and release apps in the AppStore. As a medium, the video game is not only unreliable – for example, think about how the huge pool of Flash programs has all but disappeared – but also inaccessible to many people. It's worth recognizing that video is also a game, only the gamepad is in the player's head. So it's definitely important to me that games exist as video.

**Matteo Bittanti: Yes, it's not only Flash games that are gone: as most classic video games are unavailable today**

(<https://gamehistory.org/87percent/#:~:text=87%25%20of%20classic%20video%20games,you%20could%20still%20watch%20it.>) , **they can only exist through game video documentation. Long live game videos. Last question: *The New Game Is Over* was originally presented as an interactive installations within the context of *GES-2, Sorcerers Exhibition* (<http://dying.fun/2023/02/26/new-game-is-over/>) . As I only experienced it on my screen, I was wondering if you could briefly discuss the specific nature of this installation. How was it received?**

Mikhail Maksimov: In addition to some details, the installation (<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ycipL3uBgZ88-RIGUYnokWI7cgWBqrCQ/view?usp=sharing>) implements a technological scheme with a Leap Motion controller so that two people can play the game at the same time, one of whom turns their hands into hands of death (<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1VdcqUj0ZXZYFnDzuxLXBioPzbaGbK2HP/view?usp=sharing>) with which they can control the game. Also I want to thank Andrey Parshikov (<https://www.instagram.com/andreyparshikov/?hl=en>) who curated the exhibition.

**Matteo Bittanti: Well, I would not want to high five you with my hands of death. Is there anything else you'd like to add?**

Mikhail Maksimov: The Oculus Quest version of *The New Game Is Over* is available in the Meta App Lab (<https://www.oculus.com/experiences/quest/6075157412552830>)

The VR version is here (<https://dyingfun.itch.io/nvrgio>)

Finally, the PC version is on itch.io (<https://dyingfun.itch.io/ngio>)

## *The New Game Is Over*

video walkthrough (1920 x 1080), color, sound, 10' 15", Russia

Created by Mikhail Maksimov, 2023

Courtesy of Mikhail Maksimov, 2023



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