# The New Worshipers | El Peregrinaje

**Rebeca Romero**

[You can listen to this work on Youtube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gpNmpKcvyQM)

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## Introduction

Niamh Schmidtke  0:11

Hello, you're listening to Future Artefacts FM radio show hosted by Niamh Schmidtke. And Nina Davies.

Nina Davies  0:19

Earlier this year, several radio frequencies were discovered airing a collection of broadcasts. At first they sounded like regular news stories and interviews. They felt familiar, but also not quite belonging to our present. Slowly, the listeners came to believe that what they were listening to, did indeed belong to their world, just not their time. They were looking into the future through the mundane edges of radio recordings and public service announcements. While this material is still being meticulously studied by researchers in various universities and museums, your hosts have managed to gain access to this collection to air a selection of these broadcasts for you, our listeners.

Niamh Schmidtke  1:00

For full disclosure, we will not be sharing this collection with you, as this introduction is based on a fictional event. In this monthly broadcast, Future Artefacts FM, we will present speculative fiction pieces by artists and writers, followed by conversation with hosts Niamh Schmidtke and Nina Davies. The programme will focus on fictional works intended for broadcast, such as radio plays or fictional interviews, to carve out a better understanding of the now by exploring various interpretations of the future.

## Artist Introduction

Nina Davies  1:34

Welcome back to our third episode of Future Artefacts. Today, we're joined by artist Rebeca Romero. She's a multidisciplinary artist born in Peru, and based in London since 2014. She holds an MFA in fine arts from Goldsmiths University. Her work moves in the intersection of art craft, design and tech. She's interested in connections between technology and an all too often imposed Western vision of the of history. Through a range of media including sculpture, textiles, ceramics storytelling. In video, she explores concepts of diasporic identity, truth fiction, and their relationship to the digital age.

Niamh Schmidtke  2:15

Before we listen to the work, the title is the New Worshippers, El Peregrinaje, and it's a 13 minute piece. After we play the work here, we're going to come back and have a conversation with Rebeca and talk a bit more about her research and of perceptions of the piece.

Nina Davies  2:34

Great See you on the other side.

## The New Worshipers work

Bags packed, tank full

A three hour trip ahead through and out of the city

Towards  t h e  c o a s t

Digital billboards, hot women in tiny bikinis

Welcome us into the speedway

Do not forget to change your tyres

Measure your oil, buy some beer

Grab a bite

Three reckless sips of water

That should calm my agitated gut

From the back seat of the vehicle

I can see the landscape change

Mutate

Into a dirtier, rougher version of the same land

Bye bye concrete jungle

Look at me

I’m running into the wild

They picked me up half an hour before than what we have agreed on

We just followed the route plan that was given to us

I was not ready

I am not ready

But I'm  here now

———-

At arrival

Personal communication artefacts were disconnected

Collected

Then taken out of sight

Everyone, carry a bag

They grabbed their belongings and started descending through the dusty road that would lead them to their destination.

very little vegetation was on sight

Once the spot was found, they formed groups and set up the tents

The sun had not reached yet

It highest point in the sky -

Its time to come together

Pass them around

They sat in a circle and peeled the cactuses with butter knives

they had each brought from home

Their skin was thick, harsh but smooth

Deep cut, the plant starts to bleed,

t h e  s h i m m e r

No more secrets are withhold

The green slime extracted from the interior of the plant was placed on foil paper

The paper was placed on the sand,

under the scorching sun

When the slime attached to the skin went dry

The pieces were collected and distributed in equal parts among the members of the reunited tribe.

Open your mouth and chew

My chest is open and

LIFE is PUMPED INTO US

First fog

Then light

Then nothing and everything at the same time

Under the influence of the plant

Long haired beings braided each other’s hair

They touched their skin, their heads

It was so good to feel caressed

Sporty types ran towards the dunes and climbed their way to the top

using their 4 limbs to support their sweaty bodies

The mountain reacts

Welcome back to where you all belong

You are dust and to dust you will return

The wind blows

Yawns

I can hear it calling my name

Deep breath

Everything is just as it was meant to be

Crashing sounds

Breaking waves

A salty smell in the air

There it was

The mighty ocean

Awaken

Leaving white foam behind every whip

They distributed water

Held in shiny containers that were passed on from hand to hand

What is mine is yours

Quench your thirst

This will dissipate the fog

———

It was so smooth the way it happened

As I closed my eyes I could feel the heart of the earth

pumping

Underneath the soles of my bare feet

I open my arms

Blazing energy cruising my body

I feel everything

I remember it all

——————-

The first time I saw the jaguar                                                                          La primera vez que vi al jaguar

It appeared to me in the middle night                                                    se me aparecio en media de la noche

O t o t o r o n g o                                                                                                                     O t o t o r o n g o

The one that kills with one blow                                                                          El que mata de un solo golpe

Like a thunder in the dark                                                                               Como un trueno en la oscuridad

The profile of the mighty cat                                                                                           El perfil del gran felino

Staring right into my eye                                                                                  Mirandome fijamente a los ojos

I freeze                                                                                                                                            Me congelo

Is it me who you are looking for?                                                                                Es a mi a quien buscas?

The elders knew of the jaguars ability to travel in between worlds

                                                            Los antiguos sabían de la habilidad del jaguar de viajar entre mundos

Shortly after came the snake                                                              Seguidamente se aparecio la serpiente

The rivers of the amazon are shaped after her                                             Los rios de la Amazonia llevan la                                                                                                                                            forma de su cuerpo

She approaches my body                                                                                                       Se acerca al mio

And enters me                                                                                                                                  Y me entra

All that you touch you change                                                                                Todo lo que tocas, cambias

All that you change, changes you                                                              Todo lo que cambias te cambia a ti

Looping against  the interior of my flesh                                            Dando vueltas en el interior de mi carne

It purifies my soul                                                                                                                     Purifica mi alma

And leaves                                                                                                                                             Y se va

Two wild dogs fight                                                                                            Dos perros salvajes se pelean

Outside the maloca                                                                                                            Afuera de la maloca

The full moon shines                                                                                                            La luna llena brilla

My body remembers.                                                                                                          Mi cuerpo recuerda

What my mind has chosen to forget                                                        Lo que mi mente ha decidido olvidar

————-

 How long have I been laying here?

2- 3 hours said A

The tide had started to fall

First call

A fire had been lit in the middle of the campsite

Several of us were dancing, playing, fooling around

I touch my body,

Trying to recognise the space I had briefly left behind

I am no jaguar, no snake

Or is it maybe that I am both?

And also mountain, and moon and Ocean

I join my peers in their celebrations

Our skins shine in contrast to the light of the fire

Our bodies feel like one

The warmness in the air holds us together

Someone hands me a piece of fruit

It is sweet, juicy and all the things you’ll expect it to be

Disappointment is a concept that feels far away

——-

I place myself in the sand

My toes sink in its moving flesh

I am rooted

Connected to the core of my land

LOW TIDE

Second Call

But this feeling is temporary

This will pass too

————

As the sun sets

We get together

Facing the Horizon

Bye Bye Ocean

Bye Bye Mountain

Bye Bye Mirage

The glitch is now obvious

Like a crack in the sky, expanding

A gap appears in between us too

Chilling air

The group disperses

The night falls

———

Next morning

Still in a lighter version of the trance

The feeling is cotton-like

I pack my stuff

Outside the tent, nothing more than dust.

And the remains of a fire that helped us to lit our visions

Everyone  let’s move up

Do not forget to pick up your phones

They have been kept in metallised shielding bags

The collected data of your trip will be sent to your homes

Keep it in a safe place

It is for you to enjoy

Thank you for coming

Please remember to fill in the review forms

Back in the speedway

An hour an a half into our return trip

The cotton veil that wraps me starts to vanish too

But  I see clearly

I am light

I’ve been reborn.

## Conversation

Nina Davies  15:39

So welcome back, thank you for giving the work, a listen, I hope you all enjoyed it. So firstly, I'm just going to say to Rebeca that I just really love the way the work starts. As you describe the drive that the protagonist is taking into, into this experience, I feel like you're simultaneously driving me as the as the listener into this kind of world. When you were writing the script, were you aware of it to meditative effects?

Rebeca Romero  16:09

Yeah, definitely. I feel like through the use of certain tools, like pace, tone, some loops, I attempt to provoke these almost hypnotic situation, where I'm convincing you to let go of whatever else is in your mind and surrender to this story. To change your rhythm join me and fall in to the pace of the story, which actually intends to give the listener a lot of space to breathe in and to wander around.

Niamh Schmidtke  16:36

Yeah, for sure. I mean, I also felt that kind of super specific tone. And almost as though I was being pulled into a trance, especially with the the backing kind of beat of of the piece and how that kind of paces and pulls you along and then breaks off at certain points. I'm kind of wondering as well, like, were you interested in that? I mean, were you interested in that relationship between tone with kind of pulling the listener into the story, but then also as a way to unsettle the reality, so you kind of pull them into this trance, and then you kind of tear it apart.

Rebeca Romero  17:10

Yeah, I think like, I mean, this choice came quite naturally. To me, I think about it, like being in a sort of threshold that you're about to access this dream. Just like when we're kids and your parents tell you a story at night? You know, how big are the chances that you will dream about that story, later, you know, even more finding yourself as a character in it.

Nina Davies  17:31

So one other in another question. I've got many questions for you, obviously. But um, one thing that I noticed in the work is that like tourism seems to be very central to what you're interested in or what the work is. And the work sort of made me think of the TV series Westworld, or it's a TV series and a film from the 60s,..

Niamh Schmidtke  17:53

The 70s.

Nina Davies  17:54

The 70s. Yes, just in case anyone doesn't know about Westworld, the premise of the story is where people go out to these different sort of outside of society. And they go into sort of like almost like a cinematic version of society. So it's all themed, like Westworld is, you know, based in the old timey like, wild west. And there's also other worlds.

Niamh Schmidtke  18:21

Almost like a theme park on steroids.

Nina Davies  18:23

Yeah.

Niamh Schmidtke  18:24

Would be a good way to,  like if you're trying to get a mental image.

Nina Davies  18:28

Yeah. And so this, and obviously, your work is not based on on this at all, because based on previous conversations that we've had, you actually hadn't seen Westworld, which I thought was

Rebeca Romero  18:38

Now I have and I love it. Yeah,

Nina Davies  18:41

It was it was kind of kind of, I was kind of glad to hear that you hadn't watched it, because I was like really strengthened the work. But it did make me think about what this sort of tourism, like, what is this? What is this touristic experience for, for the person who's going through this like that you're writing about, and I was looking at Peyote and I was thinking about whether this is sort of like a indigenous sort of simulation, though another reason why I thought that was because you mentioned tents. And that's sort of what I was looking at up it was like, though, there was like little clues in there that made me think that it was that. But then also, then, you know, aside from the indigenous part of it, I also was thinking, is it just is the drug trip the simulation? Or is it is that what you're going? Is it something completely different? Or are you experiencing a different kind of nature? Are we sat in a future where like the sea you talk about the sparkling sea? Is that part of this like, simulation? Yeah. So I was wondering whether it was your intention with the work to kind of throw this idea of the simulation off balance like, are you trying to confuse the viewer? Like, what part is this? What part of it is the the trip basically?

Rebeca Romero  19:52

Okay, well, I think that my intention was to take off balance ideas of what reality and fiction are. These, for me is one of the main questions here. Same as when we talk about myth and fact. And what is considered knowledge versus popular belief. Through the whole of the story, it was important to me that nothing could really be taken for granted, or provide bits of information to the listener in the same way I would give them an opportunity, a door towards their own version of the story. If there was an ultimate truth here, I would be contradicting myself and the whole purpose of this piece.

Nina Davies  20:33

For you personally, is their sort of ultimate truth?

Rebeca Romero  20:37

Well, I would say that I don't know. I mean, is the plant causing the hallucinations? Is it all computer generated? Was it all a dream? Was it real? I mean, what does reality mean, after all? Is an experience less real? Because it took place within a simulation?

Niamh Schmidtke  20:55

Yeah, that's what I was thinking about. Kind of doesn't matter if we know. Because I think we were kind of just speaking before recording about the work and about this kind of process of, I guess how these ideas sort of sit together, and how there can be this kind of space, as you're speaking, there's space for the listener to kind of weave their own story through this, we're, we're not given a location, like a geographical location, we're never told the word indigenous. You know, we're kind of piecing this together through our own versions of reality anyway. So there's a sense, it doesn't really matter, because it's how you perceive it. Interestingly, it's kind of your perception, if you were the protagonist, kind of are you perceiving this as kind of what version of that reality are you perceiving from this story? Or is it all of it?

Rebeca Romero  21:44

Regarding tourism being a central part of the story? I feel that in a way, what it seems to me is that we tend to believe that life changing experiences cannot take place in the same space where our daily activities happen. We need to reach to faraway scenarios, and sublime landscapes, etc. And nature, which also plays an important role in Westworld seems to be the space where we can find ourselves, go back to basics or simply go wild, whatever that means. So yeah, we seem to need this frame to support our experience somehow. And I have some questions about it. Right. So are we maybe reaching towards a supernatural connection? Something that is bigger than ourselves? Or is it something else? Are we nostalgic? But nostalgic exactly of what?

Nina Davies  22:44

I think that yeah, it's, it's really funny that you talked about so I was thinking about this. I think even today, I don't like not related to preparing for this. I was just like, this was a thought. And I was thinking about this idea of like, when you go on vacation, or when you're doing something new, you're like, this is my life. And this is like who I am, this is who I am. And when you're when you're sort of doing like the sort of daily grind of going to work and doing this, the monotony doesn't make you feel like you're experiencing anything, even though you've obviously are and that is, actually that's more of what your life is than being on vacation somewhere really random for two weeks, or one week or three days. Yeah, I guess just like doing something new. It's about like, by doing something new, we feel like that's what our life is.

Niamh Schmidtke  23:26

Yeah, I was reading Tretiachov, Sergei Tretiachov wrote The Biography of the Object, and it's, it's kind of ,this is a this is a complete tangent. But in essence, there's a section in that essay, where they speak about a lot of literature, first off being focused on kind of singular perspective. So first person perspective, but then also how very often it happens in leisure time, most of our lives are typically spent, or at least from like western perspective are typically spent in kind of a workplace, or doing kind of these mundane activities that just kind of have to happen for life to keep going. But if you read a novel, it's usually not set, you know, reading a novel about someone answering emails all day would probably bore you because that's what you live anyway. But you know, a novel set in someone's leisure time so you know if they go on a date, or kind of what's going on in their mind or what is their family drama that pulls you in because it's not the monotonous. So in a way for me that kind of relates to this idea as well of using tourism or the idea that you know, you have to go away to experience yourself, it's like well, yourself is existing all the time it's kind of which version are you kind of hacking into in a way.

Rebeca Romero  24:46

In Westworld into serious there is like, the tagline is something like, be your best self or live up to your like, there are no limits or something like that. And I found that like fascinating you know, like, how do we need that we have to remove ourselves and enter these spaces to actually find something inside of us that actually is inside of us the whole time. But definitely what I find interesting in this like organise experience is like the extractivist approach that they can have. And what concerns me is the impact that it can have also in the spaces where these experiences take place, and the people that inhabit them in a regular basis. I mean, after all, we mentioned this before who can afford the 40,000 pounds that a day ticket to Westworld cost or who can afford a 2000 pounds all inclusive the trip to the Amazon, shamanic experience included? Or a day trip to a place where you can pretend that we have not completely yet dried all our natural resources, where you can still hear the wind in say your name, be one with nature, cross a portal and soothe your soul?

Niamh Schmidtke  26:05

Yeah, I mean, that kind of brings me on to my next question, which is like typically in speculative fiction, there's is presented kind of a utopia or a dystopia. Of course, there are plenty of versions of this that also exist in between. But do you view this work as being utopic or dystopic? I mean, speaking about Westworld, it's a very dystopic world. I mean, I don't think any of us are speaking about it without like a bunch of, a lot of cynicism. Kind of, do you view your work as perhaps being a warning about this kind of future? Or kind of what do you think the warnings in the work are? If there are any?

Rebeca Romero  26:45

Well, I think that we like as humans in like with these like westernised neoliberal imperialist views of the world, tend to think that we are absolute masters of the universe, we can control everything, predict everything, create everything, stop everything. At the same time, funnily enough, we pursue these other worldly experiences. But the truth is that we really can't control everything and predict everything and create everything. And the alarm bells are and have been ringing for a while. You see the warning about the future. While many of the things mentioned in the story are already happening. It is definitely a wake up call in present tense. And yes, of course, things can get worse.

Niamh Schmidtke  27:36

Yeah, because the future within the work is revealed quite, quite late, as well. There's, there's a feeling of being caught in the present in the present kind of as you enter the story, or as you pull us into your story. You don't, at least for me listening, I didn't feel like I was in any kind of future. It's only at the very end, there's kind of slow clues. But then it's only at the end. And I'm like, oh, I'm actually, I'm actually in a future. You know, it's like, I think for me, that's almost what makes that kind of idea of the warning so much stronger, because I'm like, is it a warning about now? Is it, you know.

Rebeca Romero  28:13

I find that like, those like the scariest situations, you know, when you can happen tomorrow? Because it's like, there's no, there's nothing you can do is almost like an avoidable somehow.

Nina Davies  28:24

Or when it's even like when it's when you're actually like what you're saying like, it's sort of like you're not quite sure whether actually it's like set in the future or whether it's set now like, is that thing, you when listening to a work like this or or or a story or a video or film or whatever. There's this idea that like dystopic is also like always in the future, so you always think that it's like, far away. And it's like a warning of what's going to happen in 30 years or 10 years. But then actually, like, there is that thing of being like, is this actually now is it like, are you presenting as a future? But like, is, is this Are we actually in that future?

Rebeca Romero  29:02

Yeah, I mean, aren't the times we're living in dystopic enough, like?

Nina Davies  29:07

Yeah, exactly. And I think about like, if this work also had been about like, if it had been like a video game, and you have this amazing experience in this other world, and then you kind of ends and then you're in your sad bedroom. Like, it could seem as this really dystopic thing really actually that is like, how most of us live or you we you do go on vacation and you come back and you do go to like, what do you say the Amazon the Amazon? Yeah, yeah. Like that is sort of something that is actually already happening. It's kind of not that crazy.

Niamh Schmidtke  29:38

I'm thinking these forms of escapism exist in in literature as well. Like when people read books you escape, or I mean, everyone has a different versions of escapism as well. It's yeah, as we were talking about earlier, kind of almost escaping your present body in order to become more yourself. Which is quite Yeah, I guess when you think about it. In relation to the now and particularly like, I'm thinking like in pandemic, when the way bodies occupy space and the way we breathe and like connect with air, that physicality of like being in your body and being in the present, makes it feel a lot more dystopic. You know?

Rebeca Romero  30:16

Yeah, I think that I mean, now that we're having a conversation, I'm thinking about where the need for escape comes from. Also, you know, it's like, have we created a reality for ourselves that we are not really happy with, you know. Like, am I happy to wake up at whatever go to work? 40 something hours per week, and you know, hardly ever seen my friends and hardly ever being to afford, to be able to afford like, a two bedroom flat, a one bedroom? No, I'm not happy. So yeah, I want to escape. So it's like, very, in a way, it's very human, you know, that desire? Yeah.

Nina Davies  30:50

I guess it's sort of like, what is, what is escaping? And one thing that I'm thinking about in this conversation is like, is it okay to escape? When is escaping? Like, when could it be potentially so like, in Westworld? Or maybe like with your work as well, like, escaping could be something that seems quite harmful to other people. But then I'm sure that there's other ways of escaping that aren't harmful. So what-

Rebeca Romero  31:13

Definitely.

Nina Davies  31:14

How do you start to unthread? Or unwind? Like, what could be a sort of harmful escaping? Or what is? I guess like consciously escaping?

Niamh Schmidtke  31:23

Yeah, no way. I mean, I'm even thinking of drug trade as well, you know, for people taking different kinds of drugs, it's a escapism, it's a relief from whatever your present reality is. But the illegality of it in most countries also means that kind of who are you impacting in the process of you getting that drug?

Rebeca Romero  31:44

Yeah, no, definitely. I feel like I mean, going back to that extractivist approach that I mentioned earlier, you know, it's like, in in relation to this, like spiritual tourism, right is like we hardly ever stop to think, like, who is left behind cleaning after your experience, right? We don't I don't think we ask those questions ourselves in order to focus in achieving that experience that will change our lives, even if it's temporarily, without thinking how we affect the lives of others. And on a different level, and related to what you're saying, Now, Niamh, I think that the same goes to the belief that we can just isolate, for example, in this case, this plant and the ritual, it is part of, you know, isolated from its context, I always wonder, you know, like, Do you really think you can access this portal, just by consuming the plant, even without being able to understand the ritual, or to read its code?

Niamh Schmidtke  32:51

Yeah, I remember seeing this Swedish TV series a few years ago. And they were, they'd in essence, they'd attempted to export the experience of taking Ayahuasca to Sweden. And they had it in this Swedish forest, and these kind of beautiful wooden floors, and everyone wore white, and you are all in this massive room together,

Rebeca Romero  33:12

They do it here in London, as well, I've heard.

Niamh Schmidtke  33:13

Yeah, and the whole, the whole thing feels entirely insane. Because it's like you realise this is a spiritual practice, and you are led and guided through it in a very specific kind of context. And that feels like the absolute epitome of this spiritual tourism, because it's like, oh, it's now such a high commodity, that we're going to export it back to a place that it can't exist in context, because it's being well, in essence, in my opinion, it's being abused. You know, because it's, then you're taking it, and you're not giving any credit back to where it's come from, you're not giving any support back to where it's come from, I mean, it becomes a neocolonialist practice, then.

Nina Davies  33:54

Also like a lot of a lot of information is like lost and kind of travelling over. And if you if you lose a lot of where that ceremony or ritual is coming from, like, it's very easy to kind of bat off someone else's ritual or someone else's tradition, because you might think that it stems from like a belief system and not like knowledge based system or like a rational bit, rational system. And I'm not talking about necessarily like something coming to the west, this could be going either which way?

Rebeca Romero  34:20

Yeah, definitely.

Nina Davies  34:22

And, yeah, because that's sort of some of the stuff that I work with, with my work with dance and looking at traditional practices, and when they get stolen and performed somewhere else. If you're not taking note of why someone is actually doing that dance, it completely just loses all of its information. And that information can be really valuable. There's a reason why someone might be doing that dance, there might be a reason why somewhat like why the ceremony happens. So what does it become?

Rebeca Romero  34:49

It becomes something else. Yeah, definitely. I mean, I'm, I'm curious about what remains and what, what is transformed. But I think that we'll never know the answer really. As like every experience is like, very, like personal. But, but yeah, I've I've always asked myself that question. Yeah, I mean, as you said, both ways, like, not only by bringing the experiences to the west, but also by Western people trying to

Nina Davies  35:18

Missionaries?

Rebeca Romero  35:19

Exactly. You know, it's like and not really like knowing anything about the cosmology of the place of the people that live there, or, like, literally not being able to read the code. You know, it's like, what, what is it there that is happening? I mean, something happens, or maybe not, you know, it's like, this is this thing that we were saying the other day about the role of performance in ritual, as well, you know, and how certain circumstances or just being in a group with people even living in a certain situation in a certain place can stimulate some kind of like a hallucination or reaction or or vision? I don't know, you know?

Nina Davies  36:00

But also just an experience, like an experience is totally valid. It's reminding me of Niamh, in a previous conversation, all three of us, had you were talking about Christianity coming into Ireland. And it was, you said, like, Oh, is it? The recreating of the story?

Niamh Schmidtke  36:17

Yeah, I guess kind of when we're speaking about that process of, I guess, a certain, a certain ideology, or a certain kind of form of practice, especially spiritual practice being introduced somewhere else. So in this case, there is an Irish myth called the Land of the Youth, or Tír na nÓg for any Irish listeners out there. And the story, in essence, is a really strong Irish warrior gets, falls in love with a woman who comes from the land of the youth, and he, he marries her, and he follows her to this land. But then over time, he misses his friends and his family back in Ireland. And so he comes back. And he's told you can only ride on horseback and your feet can never touch the soil of the country. When he gets back to Ireland, naturally, since this is a story with a warning, he ends up touching the land of Ireland, and he instantly ages all the years that he was gone. In the original version of the story, I think he's cared for by a druid, during, when the story was around in pagan times. When Christianity came to Ireland, they rewrote the end of the story that St. Patrick, the patron saint of Ireland, took care of this man in his last days, and converted him to Christianity in his final breaths. So it's quite literally that thing of, okay, we see what spiritual practice, we see what is kind of the doctrine or ideology of this place. And we're going to stamp ourselves onto it. So that you're kind of, you're saying, Oh, but this was always your belief, or this was always your ritual.

Nina Davies  37:54

It instantly becomes part of the fabric, like, yeah,

Niamh Schmidtke  38:00

But it's like

Nina Davies  38:00

Synthetic

Niamh Schmidtke  38:01

Yeah, it's, it's this weird thing as well of then not allowing something to exist as it does in its own kind of context and landscape, because it's trying to kind of almost like remove it from that. So it's like, we're trying to remove the story from a pagan origin, when that's where it exists. I mean, it feels in a similar way, this way of kind of exporting spiritual practices, especially those that are not from the west to the west, it feels like that similar kind of process of, oh, we see what you have here and we're just going to stamp ourselves into it. Like I think, stamp in terms of being like a very aggressive term, and that not actually understanding where it's coming from and what the context is.

Nina Davies  38:41

Once when I went to, I was back home in Canada and my family went on this road trip to a place called the Soyuz, which is an indigenous part of the land which is occupied by the incomplete people. And we went to a cultural centre of theirs and went to go see it performance like a, well I assumed, because it was performance by by these, these group of people, that therefore it would be traditional. So I just kind of assumed that it would be this sort of, like, traditional experience. And the woman who was dancing was doing like a sort of mostly ballet basically. And I had this initial reaction to it being I guess my initial reaction back then was was probably not maybe disappointment, disappointment, maybe like a bit too harsh of a word, but I was like, oh, I thought I was gonna go see a traditional dance. And then sort of years later, I've been sort of thinking about this experience for like, years, basically. Yeah. It's been haunting me and sort of like that, I guess that initial disappointment, it was like I've been questioning where that disappointment comes from. And I'm like, is it because I wanted to go see something like of a different world and actually like, this, this woman this dancer is, you know, she like, she actually just lives in my world like me. When she goes to dance school she learns ballet, it's totally okay. Basically no, you know what I mean? Not not okay, I guess. But like,

Niamh Schmidtke  40:03

It's making me think about something we spoke just before recording where there's a sense of, why does this always have to feel like it's the other, or it's belonging to an other of some variety? You know, in that case, it's like, expecting, you know, ballet is, still came from our traditional dance as well, it just wasn't the type that you expected, because I guess there can be an expectation that it's from the other, as in the other from you, which, for me relates back to the story as well, or back to the piece where there's a sense of, which I think is really clever about using the protagonist as being a tourist, is that they're coming into a world that is other to them. And then through the, through this process and going through this trance like state, there's that questioning moment where it's like, am I the mountain, am I this and their reality gets completely distorted, as I guess that process of the other becomes completely torn apart? Because it's like, why would they ever be other to you or you other to it? In a way? I'm kind of segwaying through some questions here, but it's making me think about, we spoke before about the pluriverse? Yes. So a very brief kind of version, or definition of that, for our listeners is a pluriverse usually defined as a set of all possible universes, or worlds. How do you feel, I guess, taking that idea of the other or kind of a singular world narrative, how do you feel that's referenced or reflected in this work, in the New Worshipers?

Rebeca Romero  41:40

Okay, well, I am really interested in this idea of the pluriverse, and I've been reading this text actually, by this person called Amaya Querejazu, and she proposes that the ultimate truth of one world, of one reality and one universe is also a myth. So the pluriverse implies existence of many worlds somehow interconnected. In other words, the human world is connected to the natural world, and also to the spiritual world. I think that by incorporating different languages into the story, for example, and giving voice to natural elements, like in this case, the mountain, for example, that normally are not given one, I attempt to bring to prescence existence of this worlds that we quite often disregard. I feel like multiplicity, plurality, they were, they are important ideas for me right now. And I think it's, yeah, definitely, it's an attempt to also bring the 'man' from the centre of the narrative, and start thinking in, in a different way, about the world that we live in, and the world that we could live in, actually.

Niamh Schmidtke  43:07

Yeah, because even beforehand, when we're speaking about tourism, and that process of kind of removing things from context, in particular, and you were talking about, you know, who's who's left behind, you know, who's cleaning up after you. When I think about that, in reference to the pluriverse in this work, kind of, you know, your world is existing just as much as anyone elses. But also kind of the world within your world. So kind of that, that what is part of what part of your world is spiritual or work base or education based or so on? I guess I'm kind of thinking in like, opening up that idea of the pluriverse. I'm wondering, also how that might relate to futures and maybe kind of signalling us towards a different kind of way to live? Or do you think of that as something that we are already achieving or are able to achieve? In the present?

Rebeca Romero  44:00

I think that one concept that I really like when thinking about pluriverses, is the one of assemblage which bring in this idea of like, we don't have to be the same. We don't have to be, you know, like, we don't all have to dance ballet. But, but but we have the opportunity or we should be opened to share this world with our differences. You know, and in, like, kind of horizontal way, you know, where this like hierarchy is that somehow our legacy from colonisation still exists. I feel like, I feel like not, we are not there. It would be a really nice place. We're to go towards. Yeah.

Nina Davies  44:55

You guys heard of the humongous fungus? No. Well, so I actually don't know that much about it.

Rebeca Romero  45:01

Tell us

Nina Davies  45:01

It is I think it's like I can't remember how much land it spans. But basically, it is absolutely huge,

Rebeca Romero  45:08

Is it like mycelium?

Nina Davies  45:10

I think yeah, I think so it's like under it's underground, basically. And it like covers like acres and acres and acres of land. When I found out about that, I couldn't believe it like the, like, I think I saw it on a map of like how much space it spans. And it was that moment of being like, there is a whole, not just only like a whole world. There's like a whole being

Rebeca Romero  45:28

Oh, yeah.

Nina Davies  45:29

That spans loads of different worlds, like human worlds. Like there's different. There's different communities, different people, like different lives. And there's this one thing, just like one singular life, that is all underneath it. So this pluriverse that also like maybe this idea that worlds might be like, the same size or there's something similar to it. But also there are things that are just completely bigger, I guess we could look at climate that way, like climate is a much bigger system and its world is much more complex than, than our world. Maybe I would assume it is.

Rebeca Romero  46:04

No, no, I think that you're right, I feel like there are so many, like things that escape the human eye, so many worlds that escape the human eye. And just because they escape our eye, they, it doesn't mean that they have to be less respected. You know, and this applies to nature, and this applies, this applied to the moment when, for example, this process of colonisation happened to the Americas, for example, you know, they didn't know what they were gonna find. And therefore, you know, it doesn't mean that the, the way people in the other side of the world were living was not real. And you know, and did not deserve a space in the world.

Nina Davies  46:43

Yeah well they were expecting they're expecting one thing and then found something that like, because it wasn't, didn't meet their expectations, it ...

Who knows what they were expecting.

Niamh Schmidtke  46:52

Yeah, cause the other thing about the pluriverse that I think is kind of on the edge of our conversation that I'd love to make explicit is like coexistence as well. And when you're talking about this humongous fungus as well, it's like, just because we don't know it exists doesn't mean we're not coexisting with it.

Rebeca Romero  47:06

Yep.

Niamh Schmidtke  47:07

And that coexistence, also, being that horizontal, or that lateral way of living as well, it's kind of my coexistence with any being does not make me higher or lower than that being, it just means that we are in the same place, or it means that we are existing within worlds that collide in some way.

Rebeca Romero  47:26

We were talking about this also, when we were thinking about how, in relation to nature, for example, you know, how we tend to put ourselves like at the top of the chain, you know, and like doing that, like sort of like enables us to just exploit all our resources, you know, or like, not have respect for like rivers or mountains or forests. And it's very interesting to imagine how that will change if our perspective of the world changed as well.

Niamh Schmidtke  48:01

Yeah, for instance, even now can have certain certain countries in, to protect the Amazon rainforest have turned to giving sections of the forest citizenship. So then, as soon as that land is seen as having equal value to a citizen, AKA a human, then it is protected. You know, my question whenever I hear these stories, or kind of, there's a river in New Zealand, I think we

Nina Davies  48:30

Yeah, I think so.

Niamh Schmidtke  48:31

New Zealand as well, that has had a similar process happen. It's been given citizenship, so that, in essence, it owns itself. But that process of ownership already is something that's quite, is constructed through a human perception of the world.

Nina Davies  48:44

Yeah been given, like legal personhood.

Niamh Schmidtke  48:46

Yeah legal personhood, exactly. But then, yeah, my question and this is always is why? You know, why, why all of a sudden, once it's once it's a citizen, once it's inverted commas person, then we can protect it?

Rebeca Romero  49:02

But that's so hypocritical, because like, so many people, you know..

Nina Davies  49:05

Are not protected.

Rebeca Romero  49:06

Exactly! So what's, what's the point? I don't understand. But yeah,

Niamh Schmidtke  49:10

Yeah, well...

Nina Davies  49:10

How it works,

Niamh Schmidtke  49:11

It feels a bit like this kind of desperation that you can't find that coexistence. So it's like, kind of short circuiting that coexistence by making it the same

Rebeca Romero  49:20

Yeah,

Niamh Schmidtke  49:21

In a way?

Rebeca Romero  49:21

You're a person. So now,

Niamh Schmidtke  49:24

Now, I will respect you.

Rebeca Romero  49:25

We now respect you

Niamh Schmidtke  49:26

Yeah. And it's and even at that, it's like already, you know, humans are not respecting each other.

Rebeca Romero  49:30

It's like a it's like, a reluctancy to like, understand, you know, a different way. It's like, no, I just just want to respect people. That's it.

Niamh Schmidtke  49:39

Which, I mean, this is what I really loved in in your work is there is that clarity at the beginning of the piece, where it's like, okay, I get where I am, I'm in a car, I'm travelling to this place. People are pealing cactuses. There are tents and then all of a sudden, you're sliding out of the known and you're pulled into this trance of kind of, okay, where am I now? I don't know where I'm situated. And you're forced to sit in that. And I feel like that is really important in the piece. And especially if we're talking about coexistence and pluriverse, kind of how do all of these things coexist and forcing yourself to see what that coexistence could feel like or be like, and obviously, one very specific scenario of it. But there can be a sense of because you've never experienced it or seen it, like, how do you know what it's like? Or at least from my perspective, that coexistence feels so hard to kind of be in, because I don't know what it's like?

Rebeca Romero  50:37

Yeah, but is that need of understanding, isn't it? Yeah. Like we need to, we need to understand? Like asking directly in order to kind of like accept that it exists. So I feel like, sometimes it's like, being comfortable with not understanding. Hmm, I don't know. Yeah,

Niamh Schmidtke  50:57

Yeah.

Nina Davies  51:00

So towards the end of the work, which we haven't mentioned yet, which is crazy, that we haven't mentioned yet, is when you mentioned that the data from the trip will be sent to your house. And I mean, that's sort of like the big reveal, basically. It's like a It's a moment where, apart from maybe the word glitch. I was sort of wondering if you had any ideas of sort of what this, what this data was? Does the data benefit the person who's gone on the trip? Or does it have other purposes for the people who've hosted the experience? Or maybe, maybe it doesn't do anything? Maybe it's just data on its own and that's it?

Rebeca Romero  51:39

Well, as I mentioned, I think I mentioned to you two, before, I used to work for this company, that organises like immersive film experiences.

Nina Davies  51:50

Yes.

Rebeca Romero  51:50

So where people here in London, you know, pay, like, I don't know, 100 pounds for for a day where they get to like dress like Romeo and Juliet, for example, and pretend that they are in Verona. And one of the important bits of the whole experience is that they take your phone away from you. So you cannot really take photos to share in social media. So the purpose of the company at the beginning, I think, was for you not to reveal the details of the show that they have put up. So secrecy worked as an added, had like an added value here. But a couple of years into the making of the show they decided to add a photo booth inside. So now they're like literally telling into your face that they're profiting from the fact that you really want a photo in your disguise, right. So I find this like hilarious, you cannot take a photo with your own camera. But you can take a photo with theirs, and pay them 'x' amount of money. And I think that I was thinking about that when I decided to add it into the story because I feel like people love souvenirs. And considering the experience here is supposed to be expensive, and you're not sure when you're able to come back, it is normal, that there is something that you can take home. But of course, in this scenario, the company might also have access to your visions and desires. And I cannot not think about the algorithm and how they might use these to tailor future like better experiences for other visitors.

Nina Davies  53:24

Yeah.

Niamh Schmidtke  53:26

So I guess a final question to ask, your work feels like it's set in a near future. And if we spoke before, it's like, is it the present? Is it the future, it could be a now, and you've previously mentioned, you're interested in 1970s science fiction. I'm wondering how your understanding of like 1970s science fiction is impacted maybe how you've written this version of the future from the present?

Rebeca Romero  53:51

I think that when related to the relationship of humans with technology, again, Westworld, Logan's Run, Planet of the Apes, they held, all these stories held some sort of distrust towards what the future could bring. I feel like that slightly changed in the 80s. And then especially during the 90s, when also in the US, there was like this massive production of like so many sci fi like comedies or like slightly more like light, action sci fi films, where at the end of the day, the human was like victorious. I do think this is of course related. And we talked about this before, to the commercialisation of home computers, phones, etc. When we, the moment when we were thinking that somehow we could have technology-at-our-hands, sort of speak. But I think that since the maybe the beginnings of the 2000s Something's started to change, and we're looping again to this stage where we're like, Oh, wait, maybe we can not control the machines after all? Maybe we're not as smart as we think? Maybe we don't really know what the truth is? And I think that that's where it gets really interesting science fiction wise. A couple of days ago, we were talking about The Matrix, for example. And I think that that's an excellent example of what speculative fiction can be. I really like the complexity of its layering. And I think I really try to add a bit of that into my work.

Niamh Schmidtke  55:34

Yeah, because one thing, we're kind of speaking about then as well as that, often, kind of this idea of the Planet of the Apes, it feels so far in the future, it's like generations away. Or even if I think about kind of certain forms of science fiction from the 60s, it's quite optimistic. It's like, Oh, we got to the moon, we did this, look at us. Whether as by the time you get to the 80s and the 90s, it's like, what have we done? One thing that becomes more apparent, I guess, the closer to the present is that that those versions of the future are usually set within kind of a generation. They're quite close. I mean, one thing we were talking about before is Mark Fisher, an academic and theorist has this idea of the slow cancellation of the future. The idea that, for instance, if you look at fashion trends, fashion hasn't progressed that much in the last 30 years. In terms of trends, like right now, everyone's obsessed with the 1970s. And part of that is that there's almost a guarantee of, those trends have been successful before, so they can be -

Nina Davies  56:38

And the 90s, definitely, and the noughties are beginning to come back.

Niamh Schmidtke  56:42

But it's like, we're constantly going back in time, because those trends have been proven successful horror, so they'll be successful now. And our idea of what the future can be becomes less and less progressive, because it's more attached to what's the profit margin, or what's the kind of commodity of it, or what's the production value of it. And also that unknown as well, that we've kind of been veering in and out of in this conversation. It's being so scared of what that unknown could be, and not being comfortable in any kind of space that you don't fully understand as well, you know, making a future that does not make sense to the present, doesn't really exist right now. Because that unknown is too scary, in a way.

Rebeca Romero  57:27

Yeah, I think that I mean, in relation to Mark Fisher, I think that this dark vision of the future had also to do with capitalism. So I think that, you know, I always think about that, that phrase is like, is not by Žižek, but Žižek said it, and everybody thinks that it's by him, which is like, it's easier to imagine the end of the world at the end of capitalism. And I think that that's when the pluriverse saves the day. Because what it's basically what this concept is bringing in is the possibility or the idea of like, is not the only is not the only option. There are other options. It doesn't have to be this way, you know, we just need to be open to not only imagining but re enacting being, you know, being this difference. Yeah, I don't know if this is related to science fiction question. But maybe,

Niamh Schmidtke  58:29

Yeah, but I think it kind of is. It's like science, what I'm always fascinated by in speculative fiction is kind of creating the possibility for like an alternative world or a different world to the one you're currently living in or kind of using that as a way to talk about the present in a way. And it's like, if you're not ever allowed that prospect of kind of imagining kind of some vast alternative to the now, kind of, how can you change the present if you're not, you know? We can see there's so many faults in how our present world exists. And if we're never allowed to consider or to imagine what the possibilities or the alternatives to that present could be, how can we ever?

Rebeca Romero  59:09

We're trapped in this loop? Yeah.

Niamh Schmidtke  59:11

Yeah.

Nina Davies  59:12

I think we're going to have to finish up now, because we've gone a bit over. Is that okay?

Rebeca Romero  59:19

Yeah, of course.

Nina Davies  59:21

Thank you so much, Rebeca, for joining us.

Rebeca Romero  59:24

Thank you so much for having me. It was fun. Really interesting. Thank you for giving me the chance to talk about my work.

Nina Davies  59:31

Oh, well, thank you for talking about your work that was most important bit.

Niamh Schmidtke  59:35

Yeah, thank you for being so generous with your research. It's been really, really fascinating to talk about it.

Nina Davies  59:41

Yeah. And our first guest thank you so much.