

Rustan Söderling
Eternal September
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Text by Sebastian Rozenberg

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Eternal September

1.

Dear –

These dreams are everything, and so by their status as a whole shouldn't need a name. But these mindspaces are also specific in a way that I feel they deserve one. Eternal September.

It's **always** September, **somewhere** on the Net.

Submerged in my wet-crate, this water filled isolation chamber, no other images reach me. Slow memories of someone else. The isolation module has an air of sadness. Autumn floods, and the specific melancholy of septembers. Fogging in every sense. I've defined and framed these memory walks as well as possible considering the difficult conditions.

An ode to the crushed dreams of the pre-internet hackers, the heroes of the computer revolution, left behind when the web widened. Disillusioned by the lack of knowledge and passionate rigor, they left both hardware and network behind, seeking answers in nature – in water, in sacrifice.

No *_life* "forms" remain here, no "groupmind" is in place to offer emotional support. All that remain is the dust of the virtual – empty beer bottles, obsolete storage and the nostalgic names of family run corporations, virtual spaces and hardware that have all been swallowed up or jettisoned into the cloud.

A driverless car, an AI user, cruising through, simulating my bodily responses. The psychological anguish of relinquishing driver status. There is danger in memories, a danger much lessened by relinquishing driver status, navigating by proxy through a platform of remembrance.

What, if anything, cannot be simulated?



Rustan Söderling, detail from *Eternal September*, 2016, images courtesy of the artist.



Still image from *Eternal September* by Rustan Söderling.

2.

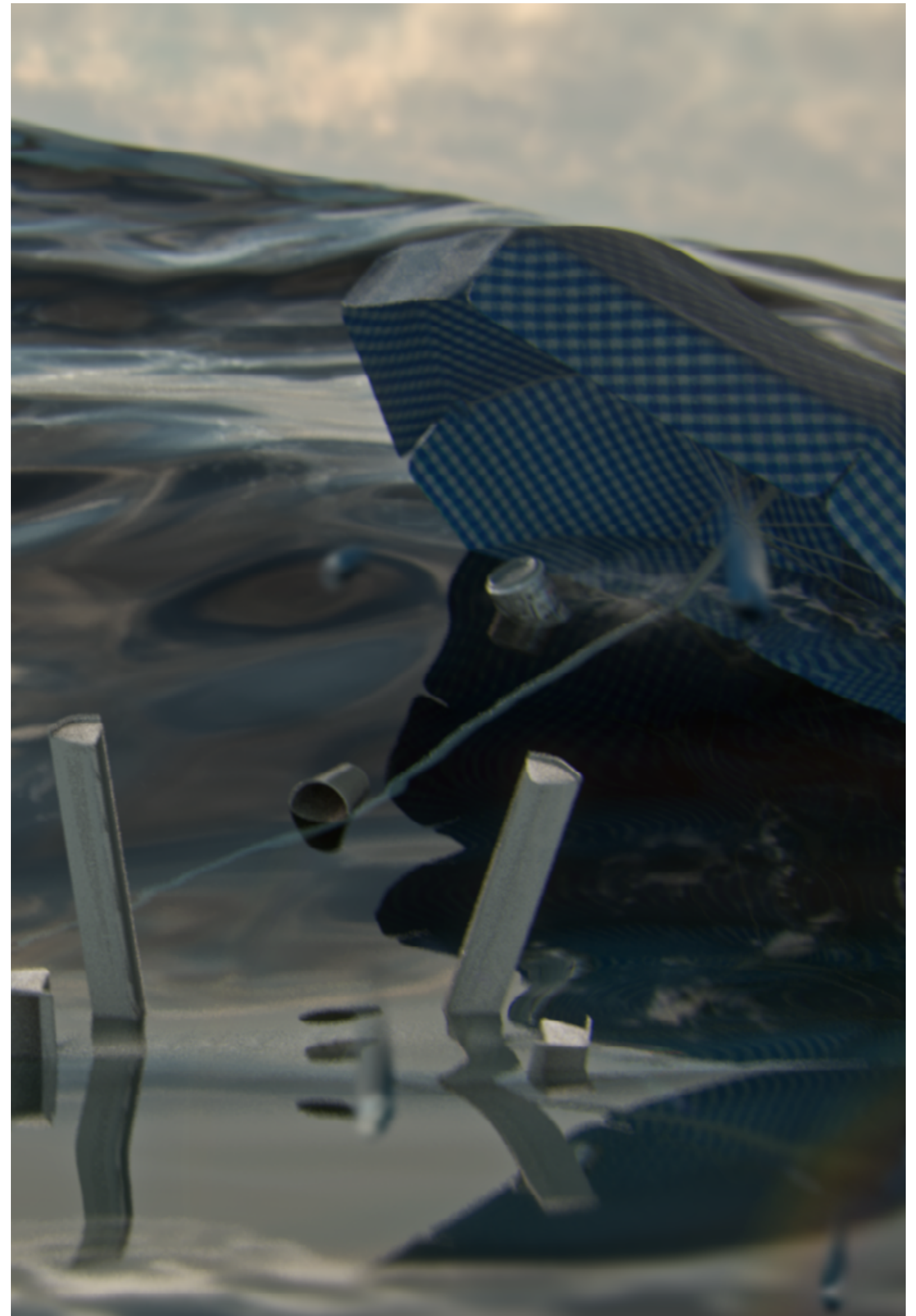
Eternal September is a secret version of the game *Myst*, rooted in historical reality, improved upon and kept in pace with contemporary technology. The new age promise of internet in its network cradle, the water submerged server racks still connected, all the nodes leading to rooms abandoned. Abandoned first by the engineering pioneers and then by the clueless masses that drove them out.

Here lie the eternal ruins of what was once new, and promising.

On a faded brochure I read:

What can one do with such virtual travel, besides downloading papers on genetic algorithms? If a 100 other students were to suddenly show up in the same virtual place, it might be pretty cool. You could: throw a party, devise pranks, role-play, scheme, and plot to build a better world. All at the same time. The only thing you'd need is a multiuser place to meet. A place to swarm online.

The clues seem endless, projecting a sweet poetry of information overload and flaunting every sign of entropy. Before long, I find myself wandering around clicking on everything, faces, litter on the floor,



labels on bottles behind the bar, after a while interested not so much in where I might get to than the texture of the search itself. Wet or dry code non the matter: the visual and sound design, the echoing dense commotion of the terminal, the profusion of hexadecimal color shades, the choreography of thousands of extras, each differently drawn and detailed, each intent on a separate mission or sometimes only hanging out, the non robotic voices with so much attention to regional origins, are all parts of the body of this life form born in the exploding space between user and interface.

The space here is presented in paradoxical terms: even though it is a “nonspace,” one nonetheless enters it, “blinking in,” and moves within it in various directions at various speeds. The seeming contradiction is resolved by the fact that it is not an actual place but a “consensual hallucination,” a conventionalized way of perceiving virtual domains. The matrix, too, is described as a consensual hallucination, data being represented by shape, color, and motion. One can navigate the matrix by moving through it or can “punch” directly to a particular location by entering its coordinates.

3.

A space is also a hole. Quite often networked relationships come in the form of communication between two or more computers, but the relationships can also refer to purely biological processes, as in the systemic phenomenon of gene expression or the logics of infection and contagion. Protocol is not a single thing but a set of tendencies grounded in the physical tendencies of networked systems. So “networks” means any system of interrelationity, whether biological or informatic, organic or inorganic, technical or natural—with the ultimate goal of undoing the polar restrictiveness of these pairings.

Abstracted into a concept, protocol may be defined as a horizontal, distributed control apparatus that guides both the technical and political formation of computer networks, biological systems, and other media. Networks always have several protocols operating in the same place at the same time. In this sense, networks are always slightly schizophrenic, doing one thing in one place and the opposite in another. Networks,

this particular technology of knowledge – which is what this recorded passage through a ruined memory palace is – shapes our thought. Here I’m an isolated mind in a closed space, nothing but second hand knowledge reaching me. A water crystal stuck in dry code.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Rustan Söderling (1984, Gothenburg, SE) lives and works in Amsterdam NL. He studied at Gerrit Rietveld Academie, Amsterdam NL, graduating in 2009. Söderling works with video, print, writing, editing and design.

Recent exhibitions and screenings include the fifth Moscow International Biennale for Young Art, Moscow RU (2016); Hidden Depths, Cosmos Carl (online platform) (2016); Feeling in the eyes, Tenderpixel London, UK and Man in the Anthropocene, Harbinger, Reykjavik IS (2015) among others.

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