



# ART AS CONTINUATION OF THE WORLD

## The role of art as Speculative Fabulations

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Title:	Art as Continuation of the World
Programme:	MFA in fine arts, Fine art, 120 credits
Course:	Frakk3, Contextualisation 3,15 credits
Level:	Second Cycle
Term & Year:	Autumn 2023
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## **Abstract**

This essay explores the role of art as speculative fabulation, and especially focusing on the internal use of materials, virtuality, and combinations of both. Drawing from Ursula le Guin's *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction*, the essay explores how these elements work together in artworks to form speculative fabulations. With focus on the cultural turn in Natural science and climate policies and the role of art in shaping the entanglement between human-made and other agencies. The essay explores the potential of virtuality in fabulations, presenting sights unseen about the material realms and how material and virtual elements can work together, mirroring the artist's reflection on materiality. The virtual provides a space for reflection on the materialities of multiple agencies.

**Wordcount:** 5759

## **Keywords**

Speculative Fabulations, material, virtual, Carrier bag, Ursula K. Le Guin,

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## Introduction

Simon Kofe, foreign minister of the island nation of Tuvalu, is standing in front of a podium with the lush greenery of palm trees gently blowing in the wind behind him and white sunlit sand underneath. The formal speech podium with international flags and microphones and Kofe himself with his full suit and tie look out of place from the surrounding environment. As Kofe describes the grave challenges of rising sea levels that are threatening the island nation, the camera is slowly panning outwards, revealing not the imagined continuing sunny beach, endless tropical blue sea waters and surrounding islands, but instead a virtual 3D-model floating in a software space of jet black nothingness.<sup>1</sup> In 2022, during the summit of Cop26, the UN climate change conference, officials from the nation of Tuvalu presented their aim to become the first digital nation and through the use of virtuality create a digital space as an anchor point for the nation's diaspora of climate refugees.<sup>2</sup> Tuvalu's digital nation project is not an artwork, but the virtual worldmaking operates in a space similar to the artworks used as examples in this essay. Living as a human in a drastically changing earth past its tipping point asks for new ways of being, and art can create spaces, stories and speculations to change our culture; the ideas of how we operate and live as humans. Paavo Järvensivu, an independent economics researcher, writes, "We need to plan for a sustainability transformation - and it will be an exercise in cultural thinking".<sup>3</sup> The cultural turn within ecological studies is to go from asking how to produce low-carbon electricity to asking what we are producing it for. With that change, imaginings of human life with a low negative impact on nature would become the focus.<sup>4</sup>

This essay focuses on the combination of virtual visualisations and materials in artworks that make narrations and speculations about the immediate world around us. The question I will address in this essay is how artworks can be positioned as speculative fabulations and how the combination of physical material and virtual imagery can operate within artworks?

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<sup>1</sup> "‘First Digital Nation’: Tuvalu Turns to Metaverse as Rising Seas Threaten Existence," YouTube, November 17, 2022, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f6m3-HHuoil&#38;ab\\_channel=GuardianNews](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f6m3-HHuoil&#38;ab_channel=GuardianNews).

<sup>2</sup> Tory Sheperd, "Could a Digital Twin of Tuvalu Preserve the Island Nation before It's Lost to the Collapsing Climate?," The Guardian, September 29, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/sep/29/could-a-digital-twin-of-tuvalu-preserve-the-island-nation-before-its-lost-to-the-collapsing-climate>.

<sup>3</sup> Järvensivu works at Mustarinda and BIOS Research Unit in Helsinki, Finland, an multidisciplinary research unit which studies the effect of environmental and resource factors in society.

<sup>4</sup> Paavo Järvensivu, "Plan to Transform," essay, in *State of the Art – Elements for Critical Thinking and Doing* (Bioart Society, 2023) 26-27.

My previous artistic practice comes from the field of textile art, where the interconnectivity between material thinking and storytelling has always been present. In the coming master project at HDK-Valand, I will work from worn items and materials to create speculative environments in computer game programs as a type of nonlinear storytelling about the afterlife of consumer culture. By writing this essay, I have reflected on artistic storytelling modes and by writing through multiple sources, I've had the opportunity to reflect on my practice through others' thoughts, theories and art practice. I am writing this essay with a recurring central point in Ursula Le Guin's novel *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction* because it is a main reference point in my master's project. Also in this essay, I am looking at a similar question that Le Guin addresses in *The Carrier Bag*: the role of a story in changing the idea of what being a human could be, which I'm addressing by looking at artworks as speculative fabulations.

### **The Carrier bag and Fabulations**

In Le Guin's *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction*, she argues that the first human invention is not the conquering spear but instead the carrier bag, shifting the early human narrative away from conqueror into a gathering of things, knowledge and stories from their interaction with the environment around them. The role of the carrier bag and its individual content becomes a selected entanglement between the individual and the world, a way of making untold stories that are different from the hero story.<sup>5</sup> The hero story is the movement of the spear, a straight arrow set in motion to hit its target; Le Guin explains it through the unrealistic continued growth of stock markets, conquests in wars and the slaying of dragons. By the carrier bag, a different idea of what it means to be human can be told, not set on a pedestal from the world around them but instead as a part of it.<sup>6 7</sup> Le Guin is a writer in the science fiction genre and usually tells stories of unfamiliar environments on other planets. She has been a strong point of reference for the writer Donna Haraway about how to re-address the relationship between humans and the rest of the world, and it is through this connection that Aline Wiane, lecturer and researcher in arts and philosophy, comes up with the term for artworks as speculative

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<sup>5</sup> The hero story is always written in a singular format to tell about the repetitiveness of same storyline over and over again.

<sup>6</sup> Le Guin Ursula K. and Donna Jeanne Haraway, *Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction* (London: IGNOTA Books, 2020).

<sup>7</sup> The carrier bag has, since its release in 1986, been established as a foundation in both feminist/queer literature writing, being a central reference for writers such as Isabelle Stenger, Donna Haraway and Anna Tsing.

fabulations.<sup>8</sup> In our time of climate urgencies she describes the artwork as a speculative fabulation to work like this:

Fabulations is not religious anymore but political; it is not confined in a specific moment of the evolution of human societies; it does not rely on memories as it is always turned towards the to-come; it needs art as a decisive tool rather than making it a harmless side-effect. ... Fabulations refuses both fatalism and escapism in pure fiction. Fabulations is an addition to the reality it deals with - it makes potentialities appear and gives strength to the potentialities it develops.<sup>9</sup>

The wording of speculative fabulations comes from Haraway's own description of her practice as a researcher and writer as SF, standing for many possible combinations (speculative feminism, science fiction...). A speculative fabulation is an artistic guesswork from our material or cultural present. It is through the making of art trying to look ahead into a potential future or alternative times, a need born out of the multiple environmental collapses and climate urgencies happening today. I've decided to actively use this term in this essay to address the possible storytelling aspect an artwork can take.

### **The Virtual**

From 1993 to early 2010, when I grew up and was an avid PC gamer from age eight, computer games and virtually produced films and TV programs had an unmistakable unreal aesthetic, like cartoons of blocky 3D forms. Today, many styles and expressions within the virtual and 3D generated exist, but in stark contrast to the early 2000s, photorealism is now common in many movies and commercials. Since around 1960, virtuality came to mean something that does not physically exist but is made to appear by computer software. Virtual imagery extends and enhances the physically real, it's not about saying that the virtual is not real; in the experiences it provides and allows viewers to experience, it impacts forms of ideas, emotions, expressions and training.<sup>10</sup> Today, the virtual is all around us and integrated into many parts of our lives, from filters in our phones, movies, and commercials to an integral part of designing and selling products in multiple industries.<sup>11</sup> Virtual visualisations

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<sup>8</sup> Aline Wiame, "Gilles Deleuze and Donna Haraway on Fabulating the Earth," *Deleuze and Guattari Studies* 12, no. 4 (2018): 525–40, <https://doi.org/10.3366/dlgs.2018.0329>, 526.

<sup>9</sup> Wiame, 'Gilles Deleuze and Donna Haraway on Fabulating the Earth', 531.

<sup>10</sup> Antony Bryant and Griselda Pollock, *Digital and Other Virtualities: Renegotiating the Image* (London England: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2010), 11.

<sup>11</sup> Henrik Jensen and Tomas Akenine-Moller, "The Race for Real-Time Photorealism," *American Scientist* 98, no. 2 (2010): 132, <https://doi.org/10.1511/2010.83.132>, 98.

can be seen as a type of forecast of the materialities we will live around by closely representing them within a virtual space like a side note to reality.<sup>12</sup> However the virtual is not separated from the material, with the need for computers, hard drives, server halls, cables, screens/projectors/VR headsets to operate and exist. It's far from im-material and very much part of large industries worldwide. Just like a weft needs a loom or spindle for thread, the computer components are the tools needed to create the craft of the virtual.<sup>13</sup> When I worked in a parallel process between computer-generated 3D environments together with the gathering and combining of physical material, I found the two artistic expressions operating differently yet with similarities. So, in this essay, I am addressing a combination of artworks working with physical material, virtual imagery and both, to focus on the different storytelling modes in exhibition settings. With the word material in this essay, I mean things physically existing, as opposed to the virtual images created with computer software. The materiality of things around us could for example be bottle caps, leaves, hard drives, foods, soil, mountains and sea bottoms, paper and pebbles.

### **Layout of the Essay**

Throughout the essay sections, the carrier bag type of story will be addressed as a point of entrance for finding alternative stories, human roles and the start of fabulations. The layout of this essay is split into three sections, followed by a conclusion. The first section, *The Carrier bag content and material connections*, addresses the fabulating art object in relation to the material realm and how the carrier bag way of thinking links together with the environments around them. The second section *Sharing Sights Unseen and the Role of Virtuality* addresses the virtual based on our material world and its use within a fabulation. The last section *The Entanglement of Virtual and Material in the Other Story* focuses on artworks with both material and virtual aspects and expands on the argument made in this essay. Each section is followed up with my own reflections of what I gained from the writing process.

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<sup>12</sup> Jensen and Akenine-Moller, 4.

<sup>13</sup> Bryant and Pollock, *Digital and Other Virtualities*, 16.

## Section 1: The Carrier-bag Content and Material Connections

In a white-painted exhibition room is a lit podium displaying a collection of rocks, with colours ranging from different shades of grey to integrated parts that are bright yellow, turquoise, pink and orange. They have the type of worn look only rocks that have been below or close to water have, with minor markings where the underwater organism has clung to and mohawks of bright yellow fibres like seagrass. A mixture of gritty surfaces and smooth curves, like stone polished over hundreds of years by wind and sea. These objects are part of the readymade sculpture collection of the Canadian artist Kelly Jazvac, *Plasticglomerates*. The sculpture series started in 2013 with the geologist Patricia Corcoran and the oceanographer Charles Moore, the stones are equal parts artwork and artefacts of a new type of stone with the same name, which was first found in Kamilo Beach, Hawaii and later coast-wide around the globe. An emerging hybrid stone that occurs when plastic melts and fuses with the matter in its surroundings.<sup>14</sup>

Even if I only have seen this artwork through my computer screen, the textures, weight, and even smell are something I can imagine, similar to rocks and plastics around me. Katie Shaag, professor of Theatre and Performance, describes the *Plastiglomerates* as strange new objects formed naturally around us, and as a key to understanding our new coming epoch, which made me connect them with Wiane's idea about artworks as fabulations. The unfamiliar material marker, a plastiglomerate, becomes a connection between all matter and an uneasy indicator of humans' impact on ecology and the slow violence of pollution. Shaag connects this to the new materialistic ideas from Jane Bennet, on how the materiality of things around us and within us is in a constant state of becoming.<sup>15</sup> Jane Bennett is an American political theorist and philosopher.<sup>16</sup> In the introduction of her publication *Vibrant Matter*, she states why leaving the hierarchical binary thinking of humans above the rest of the content in the world is essential.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Kelly Jazvac, *Plasticglomerates*, 2013, Geological collection.

<sup>15</sup> Katie Schaag, "Plastiglomerates, Microplastics, Nanoplastics," *Performance Research* 25, no. 2 (2020): 14–21, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13528165.2020.1752572>, 15.

<sup>16</sup> Bennett is professor of the Humanities at the Department of Political Science at Johns Hopkins University School of Arts and Sciences.

<sup>17</sup> Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter a Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 20.



Why advocate the vitality of matter? Because my hunch is that the image of dead or thoroughly instrumentalized matter feeds human hubris and our earth-destroying fantasies of conquest and consumption. It does so by preventing us from detecting (seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling) a fuller range of the nonhuman powers circulating around and within human bodies. These material powers, which can aid or destroy, enrich or disable, ennoble or degrade us, in any case call for our attentiveness, or even “respect”.<sup>18</sup>

Bennett addresses the idea of material and matter as dead and passive as something that feeds the consumption and destructive relationships to the environment, and a crucial role in trying to live more sustainably is to start to unlearn that binary thinking. Leaving the hierarchical ideology of humans above the rest of the content in the world, as much for our sake as for others, and instead try to understand matter as having agency.<sup>19</sup> The non-human agency is a complex term that I see as a thinking and doing mode, a way of trying to start reaching what a different type of living could be. A shift from: I need this - to - what impact would this have? It is not necessarily trying to understand a nonhuman's agency or saying that it is functioning similar to humans, but instead, it is using the term nonhuman-agency to challenge human thoughts about the world around them. In a similar way as Le Guin is seeking the life story, as opposed to the hero story, Bennett is seeking ways of refiguring the matter and materiality around us away from the hierarchy of humans as makers into a more entangled view of constant doing from different agencies. Bennett's idea on how to achieve this is very similar to fabulations and storytelling, and she brings up the childhood perception of the world as being full of many living things, some of which are organic, some of which are not, and some of which are human. She calls this *Thing-power* and describes it as a starting point for thinking beyond the life-matter binary.<sup>20</sup>

Le Guin's *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction* was first about the written story and, more precisely, the novel. Wiame expands on the carrier bag in connection to Deleuze and Haraway to incorporate the artwork as a potential story carrier through fabulations, as the artwork could meet the requirement of the fabulation in continually inventing and investigating the unknown from an outpost of our realities.<sup>21</sup> Donna Haraway, a writer in the history of consciousness and feminist studies, continues on the carrier bag theory by putting it

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<sup>18</sup> Bennett, 4.

<sup>19</sup> Bennett, 20.

<sup>20</sup> Bennett, 21.

<sup>21</sup> Wiame, ‘Gilles Deleuze and Donna Haraway on Fabulating the Earth’, 536.

in a context with nonhuman agencies within storytelling.<sup>22</sup> She uses an example of a seed bag to tell about how matter and materials become active actors in the fabulations; the seeds might not grow, or they might prove invasive and take over an entire planet.<sup>23</sup> A carrier bag way of storytelling constantly places the storyteller in an entanglement with the world. The material or objects are not just proof of the environment or travel someone has been through, like a type of trophy, but always an active actor in the story, like Shaag's description of the Plastiglomerates.

In the artwork *Chromobytes* by Thomas Thwaites, a British artist, designer and writer, we are invited into the potential formations of minerals after our digital age, speculated to form thousands of years ahead in time. *Chromobytes* are small geological-looking formations of shiny and eroded metal encapsulated in bright glass cabinets in the environment of a mine with rough stone textured walls.<sup>24</sup> The straightforward contrast between the shiny glass and the dark, rough textured stone walls becomes a separation between the similar geological formations within the glass, saying that the rocky walls and the speculative metal stalagmites are similar yet with an incomprehensible distance between them. Thwaites has created a type of artificial stalagmites using metal ions from discarded hard drives from surplus computers and describes it as a kind of geology made from digital technology.<sup>25</sup>

The artificial stalagmites in Thwaites's artwork within the carrier bag theory bring in elements of science fiction; in contrast to Kelly Jazvac's found readymades, the geological formations in Thwaites's artwork did not exist, so through various methods and in material dialogue/entanglement with the contemporary surplus of computer hard drives, he created the object to tell stories about a speculative coming age. This brings in an element of object-based storytelling to form narrations in connection to the materiality around us.<sup>26</sup> Haraway addresses the situated story like this: "It matters what stories we tell other stories with; it matters what concepts we think to think other concepts with. It matters where how Ouroboros swallows its tail again.", as a way of stating that stories are always part of the world they are made within and where fantasies, as well as theories, come from and what

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<sup>22</sup> Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 118.

<sup>23</sup> Haraway, 119.

<sup>24</sup> *Chromobytes* was made in collaboration with Abandon Normal Devices, an arts organisation based in North England, and the Chemistry Lab at the University of Manchester.

<sup>25</sup> Thomas Thwaites, *Chromobytes*, 2017, artificial stalagmites, Commissioned by Abandon Normal Devices.

<sup>26</sup> Wiame, 'Gilles Deleuze and Donna Haraway on Fabulating the Earth', 536.

interactions they are made up through are essential and part of the interactions and possibilities they can present.<sup>27</sup> I think you can translate Haraway's take on situated storytelling into working artistically with materials, the actuality of Twaites working with real metals from hard drives strengthen the connection from our present time towards his speculative future stalagmites.

This chapter has influenced my master's project regarding ways of thinking about material elements in relation to traces and time. Both the artworks I used as examples in this section address long periods of time, vastly longer than human life, yet interconnected into the traces and resources we form today. Materials' role in a carrier bag type of fabulating artwork becomes a possibility of coming together to discuss needs and neighbouring needs and wants around ourselves, how we both are afflicted and are afflicting through others and our own actions, to try to think ahead while being present.

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<sup>27</sup> Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 118.

## Section 2: Sharing Sights Unseen and the Role of Virtuality

The artwork *Perpetual Motion* by the artist Sigurður Guðjónsson was exhibited in the Icelandic pavilion at the Venice Biennale of 2022 and is an installation consisting of a six-metre vertical screen fastened on the wall with an accompanying large-scale projection on the floor. The projector and screen depicts metal dust captured through microlenses and is created into an immersive landscape showcasing material movements beyond our standard field of vision. It draws my mind to surfaces of partly known planets seen from NASA imagery to minuscule universes within ourselves only available through microscopes. Guðjónsson artwork opens up a world within worlds or a world beyond worlds, too large or small for humankind to see. His time-based media artworks are best known for examining the mysterious, hidden components of man-made machinery and technological artefacts that are just out of view but still ever-present.<sup>28</sup>

Virtual productions within cinema and computer games have been, since their emergence in 1960, used to create narrations of unknown creatures and sites. Over the last 15 years, realism and photo-based technology have entered the industry, building directly on images and movements from existing humans, animals, buildings, and materials are the virtual creations directly related to our senses and the physical world around us, yet in the space of total control within programs, where multiple narrations can play out. The development towards real-time photorealism in virtual building programs,<sup>29</sup> usually led by the development of highly detailed computer games, has been aimed at software design and hardware in parallel.<sup>30</sup> In connection with Guðjónsson's work as a virtual unseen landscape of micro dust, Marcos Novak, a Multi-faceted architect and researcher at the University of Austin, Texas, reflects on the possibilities of virtuality within art as “sharing of sights”. He explains the virtual as a constructed sight through the example of a dancing dervish. Which is a ritual dance with roots from the 13th century, where a spiritual state is sought after by spinning on the spot. Novak addresses the virtual by stating that even if it's not the direct meditative spinning state achieved by a experienced dervish dancer, the virtual production forms a constructed sight and becomes something you can share, leaving the head of the dancer and

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<sup>28</sup> Sigurður Guðjónsson, *Perpetual Motion*, 2022, video installation. Icelandic Pavilion, 59th La Biennale di Venezia.

<sup>29</sup> *Race for Photorealism* came out in 2010 and since then much development has happened, especially in real time working with 3d from programs such as Unreal Engine and Unity - focusing on making the production of virtuality available to creatives from multiple fields.

<sup>30</sup> Jensen and Akenine-Moller, ‘*The Race for Real-Time Photorealism*’, 134.

instead becoming a world in progress, where the sharing of states of being and experience of otherworldly or inner worldly states, becomes the virtual primary possibility.<sup>31</sup>

The virtual can be a powerful artistic tool of storytelling, but how does that storytelling connect to speculative fabulations about the changing world around us? In section one, did the vibrancy of matter and the carrier bag theory serve as a way of becoming with the surrounding materiality around us, but how does the artistic use of virtual production within fabrications alter our view of the material? Mindaugas Gapševičius is an artist with a PhD in Media Arts and is exploring the impact of non-human actors on human creativity and the impact of humans on environments. In the quote below he is reflecting on the role of the computer as a machine in connection with his work using sensors on plants and humans simultaneously:

Ignoring the question of human omnipotence over other species, I prefer to focus on the interaction between machines and organisms. In fact, machines have made us humans think about omnipotence. But here I see a paradox, because it was not humans but machines that were supposed to become omnipotent. And now — as I am changing myself — I think that we humans have created machines in order to help us to listen to and understand the *umwelt*.<sup>32</sup>

Gapševičius points out that the machine, in this case a computer, alters the way we see and interact with situations around us, which he describes the programs in computers as a mediator of senses *unfelt*. The machine, virtual programs and the type of self-made sensors that Gapševičius is working with, is based on input-output. The role of the machine and computer becomes a type of mediator-interface between different actors in the setting, a mediator between the material-based virtuality, sight sharing artist and the public engaging in the artwork.<sup>33</sup> For example the artwork *Perpetual Motion* depicts metal dust and with the notion of the virtual possibilities of sight sharing and a mediator of senses, the possibility of seeing the dust from machines in a scale otherwise inaccessible to human senses. This becomes a similar entanglement with materiality in the story as established in section one, however, with a focus on inaccessible sights relation to the material entanglement. Virtuality

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<sup>31</sup> Moser and MacLeod, 304.

<sup>32</sup> Mindaugas Gapševičius, “*Machine as a Companion*,” essay, in *State of the Art – Elements for Critical Thinking and Doing* (Bioart Society, 2023), 157

<sup>33</sup> Gapševičius, 164–65.

and materiality have often been used as opposite or in a hierarchical structure of real and unreal<sup>34</sup> - true and untrue - but when it comes to the role of fabulations within art, this twofold thinking is not very useful. Stories are always part of the world they are built in, hence always present for the impact, ideas and thoughts they bring and virtuality plays a role of the ability to share stories and states as sights unseen about the material realms.<sup>35</sup>

Lina Persson is an artist who makes situated interventions through narrative story worlds and animated worldbuilding. In her artwork *Return of the Silurians*, exhibited at Gotland Art Museum 2017, is a mixture of museum objects in a glass cabinet, to small clay sculptures and projection installations present. Projected on the walls in the installation are computer-animated underwater landscapes reminiscent of the natural history museum diorama, and on the floor are three limestone blocks, a cross-section of the Gotland coral bedrock. The mix of the material and reanimated virtual projections work together to imagine the future from the past, yet with the sci-fi annotation of the return of a long-lost age.<sup>36</sup> In contrast to Guðjónsson virtual micro worlds with a strong connection to material movements, is the material in *Return of Silurians*, the fossils, used as an anchor of the ancient age of Silurian and its creatures, bedrocks and plants. While the projected films capture the artist's visual imagination of their return; how the water landscape is once again moving in the currents. The sight unseen in Guðjónsson's work becomes here instead a visual link to the story being told. The stiff and cold shapes in stones and clay in the glass cabinet are smoothly swimming on the coast of Gotland; with its visual controls, the virtual becomes a way of telling a story from the materiality that is beyond the possibility of either the material state or the perceptions of the human.

In this section has the concept of virtual imagery within artworks as sights unseen made me think about the virtual environments I'm developing differently. The virtual space can provide a type of sense of something inaccessible or highlight a partly existing context to the material. For future potential in my practice, the virtual can work with inaccessible materials or fragile objects, for example, museum objects or endangered sites, and create a narrative/connection that is shareable yet not disturbing the actual material.

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<sup>34</sup> Here am I addressing the virtual computer made imagery in relation to materials, not saying that the virtual is lacking a material side such as computer components to be created and shared.

<sup>35</sup> Bryant and Pollock, *Digital and Other Virtualities*, 16.

<sup>36</sup> Linda Persson, *Return of the Silurians*, 2017, video installation, Gotland Art Museum.

### Section 3: The Entanglement of Virtual and Material in the Other Story

The artist duo Nabbteeri, consisting of Janne Nabb and Maria Teeri, constantly returns to the theme of compost and erosion, and with it, exploring in their art a shared relationship towards death. When I entered the largest exhibition hall at Färgfabriken in Stockholm in August 2023, the air was filled with the earthy smell of dried grass. The windows were covered in different coloured sheets of dried matter and stitched-together large sheets of fabric were hanging between pillars in the middle of the large room, forming layers of projection surfaces throughout the exhibition hall. In the large installation named *Whatever Lives Bends Down*, the virtual and material is taking equal space in the room. The three large-scale projections on the sheets portray a mixture of videos of landscapes, cut between monologues of people talking about their life and surroundings, and with a repeating pattern of virtually created aspects. Bundles of sticks falling in a black space, softly moving organic forms similar to bacteria or mollusks, to a whirlwind lifting autumn leaves over and over again.<sup>37</sup>

Nabbteeri's virtual aspects within the filmed environments become something that draws my mind to the type of signs within a story, a burning holy bush or the following of a white rabbit down a hole, when what is supposed to be natural background noise in the human story and binary thinking instead becomes leaders in the story. The combination of the material and the virtual in the installation is cooperating and shows how the hidden sights in the virtual world is mirroring the artist's own reflection of the materiality; at the same time, the material installation reflects back onto the virtual world, showing several carrier bags that are constantly intersecting and overlapping. The virtual can become a place for indications about the materiality of many agencies, a place for Benet's so-called *Thing-power* to emerge, a stepping stone away from material and human binary thinking. The active processes in Nabbteeri's installation of rotting grass and sticks with apparent smells and senses in the room speak to the odd virtual elements in the projections of something sensed but not necessarily seen and understood. There is almost a mystic and abandoned graveyard feeling about the exhibition, where the dance of seasons and time with all of its small changes and durations are constantly in progress, something much vaster, or perhaps, entangled, the uncontrolled time of changes. The virtual strangeness suggests forms and movements to this vastness; it gives back a sense of the life of grass and sticks, making what is thought to be known move into the unknown again.

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<sup>37</sup> Nabbteeri, *Whatever Lives Bends Down*, 2023, installation, Färgfabriken Stockholm,

Tyrone Martinsson, a professor of photography at Gothenburg University, is addressing the relation virtual reality has to experiencing environmental change. The virtual can become a meeting point for understanding the material, as in the effects of climate change on the North Pole. Virtual tours allow people to engage and experience the environments at a safe distance, not for the humans but for the landscape's sake, and also share the type of slow violence that the impact of climate change has had on these areas.<sup>38</sup> Looking at Le Guin's search for the life story about being human through the carrier bag has for me similarities to Martinssons reflection on the virtual.

The trouble is, we've all let ourselves become part of the killer story. and so we may get finished along with it. Hence it is with a certain feeling of urgency that I seek the nature, subject, words of the other story, the untold one, the life story.<sup>39</sup>

Through a story about carrying little Oo Oo and listening to Oom while picking seeds and grains to bring home. The other story is opposed to the hero story; the hero goes out to kill Mammoth and conquer lands. Instead, Le Guin focuses on the value of telling the other story, a gathering, repetitively picking and engaging as one of many in the environment. "Picking oats is not an exciting story, but it's a necessary one..".<sup>40</sup> The carrier bag type of story addresses the ongoing movements of living and interacting with the world around, of continuously gathering and, through that, negotiating wants, needs, safety and pathways: ways of being and living together. The shared connection between all carrier bag types of stories is the small occasions in the passing of time and the relationship to gradual change. Similar to this gradual change is Martinssons role of virtual tours in explaining climate change at the North Pole for tourists. The visuality of gradual shifts in the landscape becomes a way of understanding climate change and its impact. Bennett, in a similar way, also addresses the need of the other story through the necessity to understand the matter around us not as passive and dead and Haraway positions the carrier bag way of storytelling as always entangled with the matter in the world.

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<sup>38</sup> Tyrone Martinsson, "Extended ways of experiencing climate change: From photography to virtual reality in Svalbard" essay in *Tourism, Knowledge and Learning* (Routledge, 2022) 86-90.

<sup>39</sup> Le Guin, Yi, and Haraway, *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction*, 32

<sup>40</sup> Le Guin, Yi, and Haraway, 29.



Present in all of these artistic fabrications I used as examples in the essay is the ongoing human life as a side-along process, not the main focus, but instead one of many factors. The artwork *Plasticglomerates* and *Chromobytes* shares the theme of geological time, the deep time passing of new formations of rocks and stalagmites, yet directly connected to the everyday type of life we lead today, with materials such as plastic fragments and discarded computer hard drives. The artworks are in different ways leaning on the world and the gatherings we are making today to form homes or work environments. Similar is *Perpetual motion*, created by the minuscule movements from metal dust in machines, emphasising the gradual and ongoing. *Return of the Silurians* is instead connected to the carrier bag type of story with the reanimated clay and rocks into a watery landscape, minding its own business and getting on with its returned life. The exhibition *Whatever Lives Bends Down* is an example of how the material and virtual can work together and how the sights unseen within the virtual become a mirroring of the artist's own reflection of the materiality, like in Guðjónsson, micro landscapes are the virtual giving space for the unavailable, unattainable sight, which very much has the potential to alter how we see the materiality around us. It forms a space, a type of carrier bag, where we can question and renegotiate the human idea of the material around us. Thinking through the carrier bag as a start to finding alternative stories with Nabbteeri's large-scale installation has made me think about what I am living and gathering around me. This self-gathering has influenced a shift from working with specific sites in my master project to following instead and ransacking objects in my life, surroundings and home when creating virtual environments.

## Conclusion

This essay has addressed the role of art in a time of climate urgencies and the internal use/working with materials, virtuality and combinations of both with a base concept from Ursula le Guin's *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction* - a storytelling mode that is not looking for the hero story, the overtaker - but instead durational living. Materiality, virtuality and a combination of both operate with similarities yet from very different standpoints in relation to the notion of speculative fabulation. The purpose of this essay was to address the question of how artworks can be positioned as speculative fabulations and how the combination of physical material and virtual imagery can operate within artworks.

By working from a starting point of the cultural turn in natural science and climate policies, the role of art as speculative fabulations becomes a way of addressing different futures and ways to live. The role of the carrier bag and its individual content becomes a selected entanglement between the individual and the world around them, a way of making untold stories that are different from the hero story. The role of speculative fabulations in connection to the carrier bag and how art practice can partake, with requirements of fabulations from Wiame, as something looking ahead with a base from a current standpoint. Both the artworks, *Plastiglomerates* and *Chromobytes*, address the geological deep time and how the material cultures today are shaping a coming epoch in the entanglement between the human-made and other agencies. Materials' role in a Carrierbag type of fabulating artwork becomes a possibility of coming together to discuss needs and neighbouring needs and wants around ourselves, to try to think ahead while being present.

I addressed the virtual and its potential to share sights unseen through the artwork *Perpetual Motion* and *Return of the Silurians*. Virtuality visualisations and materiality have often been used as opposite or in a hierarchical structure of real and unreal - true and untrue - but when it comes to the role of fabulations within art, this separation is not very useful as stories are always part of the world they are built in and impact on ideas and thoughts, and virtuality plays a role of the ability to share stories and states as sights unseen about the material realms. A sight unseen is the virtual possibility of presenting a story from the materiality that is beyond the possibility of either the material state or the perceptions of the human.

The exhibition *Whatever Lives Bends Down* is an example of how the material and virtual in fabrications can work together and how the sights unseen within the virtual become a mirroring of the artist's own reflection or experience of the materiality. Still -equally - the material side of the installation reflects back onto the virtual, there are multiple carrier bags stories with constant intersections and overlaps. To leave the matter and human binary thinking, the virtual can become a space for reflection about the materialities of multiple agencies, a place for Bennett's thing-power reflections to develop. The virtual gives space for the unavailable, unattainable sight, which very much has the potential to alter how we see the materiality around us; it forms a space, a type of carrier bag, where we can question and reiterate the human idea of the materialities.

I think writing is an interesting and important tool in artistic enquiries as it creates a reflective meeting point between different sources, one's own reflection/making and other art practices, a type of melting-pot with a way of connecting and communicating with others research as well as bringing one's own project forward. Writing this essay has influenced my master's project and thoughts about my artistic practice regarding ways of thinking about material elements in relation to traces and time within the virtual. Virtual visualisation at large in society continues to be a method used to talk about inaccessible, imagined or planned situations for human life, making it a material-referencing storytelling tool that leaves the boundaries of what our world could be. The virtual as a story carrier and artistic tool, together with the scarcity of material resources and the change of habitats on earth, makes it essential to keep addressing through artistic enquiries.

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