Sound of Contagion

An artistic research project exploring A.I. as a creative tool for transmedial storytelling

Prologue

▸ Coronavirus pandemic

▸ Using AI to examine pandemics throughout history

▸ Collaborative partnership between the University of the Arts in Berlin and the University of Oxford

▸ Explores the use of Artificial Intelligence (A.I.) in creative processes

▸ The Team

    ▸ Chelsea Haith

    ▸ Robert Laidlow

    ▸ Wenzel Mehnert

    ▸ Sara Laubscher

What is the Sound of Contagion project?

‣ Transmedial art project addressing the cultural narratives surrounding global diseases and pandemics

‣ Focus on AI and how AI might relate to creative processes

‣ Treating creative process as a meta-idea, which might include AI

‣ Practice-based artistic research & interdisciplinary team

‣ AI as a bridge to facilitate interdisciplinary work

Creative Act
(traditional)

Creative Process
(distributed)
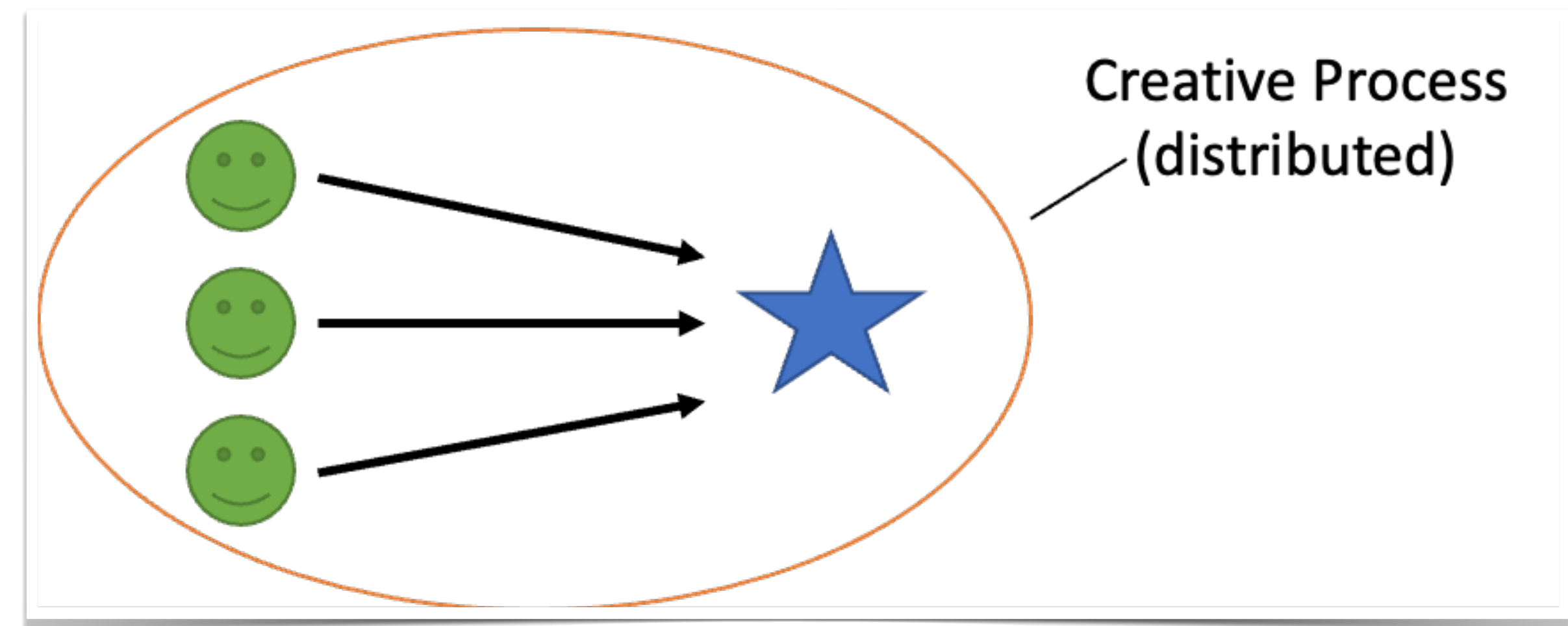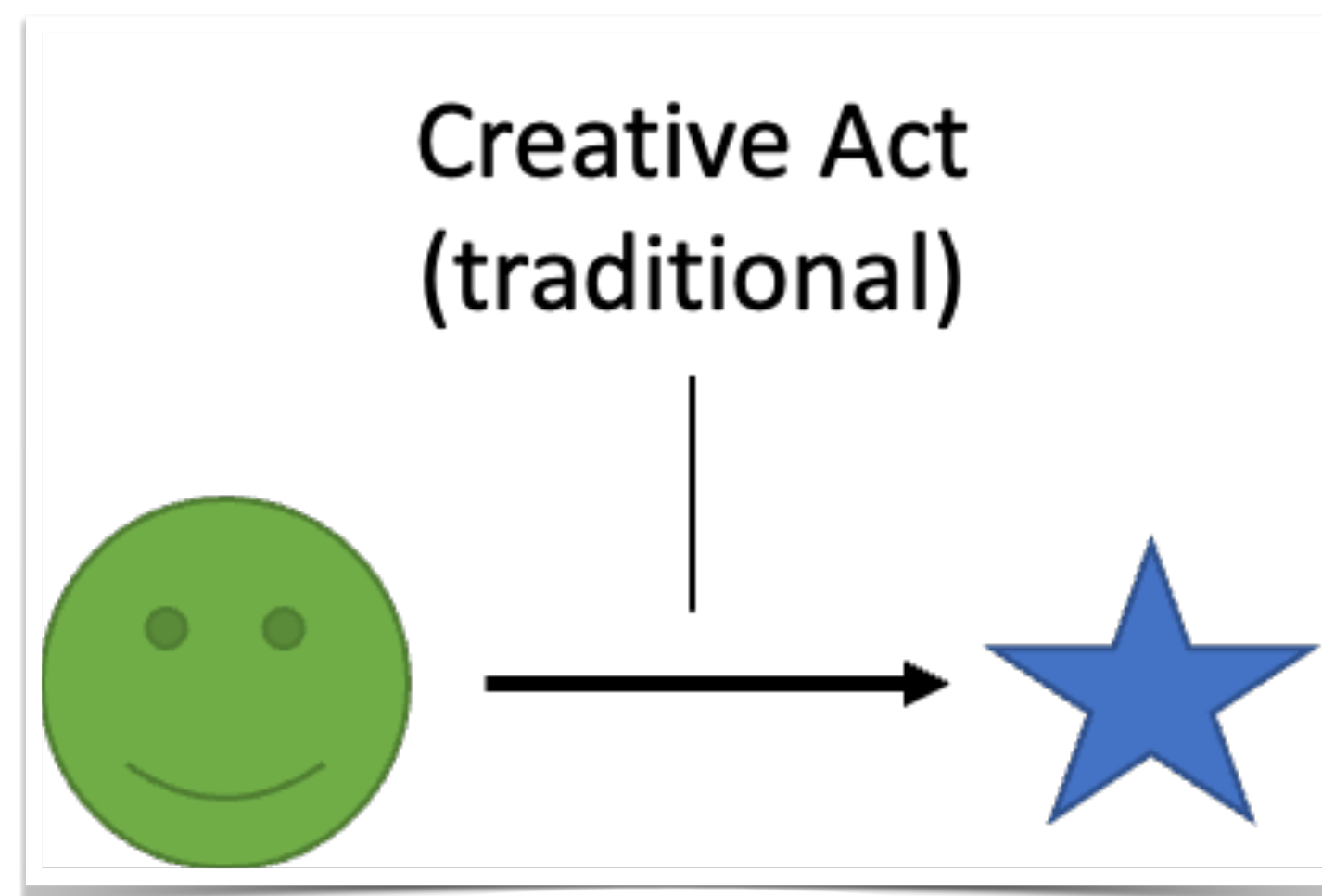
Datasets, Data & Processes

▸ Construct pandemic-related text using AI

▸ Curated a dataset of 21 pandemic-related fictional texts from the last two thousand years

▸ Fine-tuned large language model (GPT-2) on this dataset

▸ Iterative process of training and retraining

▸ With practice, we began to understand how this AI model tended to approach generating text

AI as a creative tool

‣ The project follows a collaborative paradigm and acknowledges A.I. as a creative tool with its own agency and a unique aesthetic.

‣ „The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture."
(The death of the author, Barthes, 1977)

‣ Result: 30 incoherent text passages that did not make any sense

The pandemic is spreading. In a few weeks, it will overtake Mexico and other tropical areas. But in Asia and Africa, the areas in which pandemics have been known to be spread, now less than three weeks of a second or a thousand days. What follows will determine the first and maximum periods of international isolation.

„He had always thought of his childhood as a series of fixed points, and it was a stable foundation from which to build his life, but the vast majority of his memories were temporary and uncertain, not anchored in any place. His childhood was the single largest fixed point of all his life, and it was the defining moment when he first decided to become a Writer."

Worldbuilding

‣ All texts are part of the same world

‣ **Narrative Probes** Flash-fiction like narrations that probe into an imaginary world.

‣ „Storyworlds are **mental models** of who did what to and with whom, when, where, why, and in what fashion in the world to which interpreters relocate" (Ryan 1991)

‣ „Narrative comprehension requires **reconstructing storyworlds on the basis of textual cues** and the inferences that they make possible" (Herman 2002)
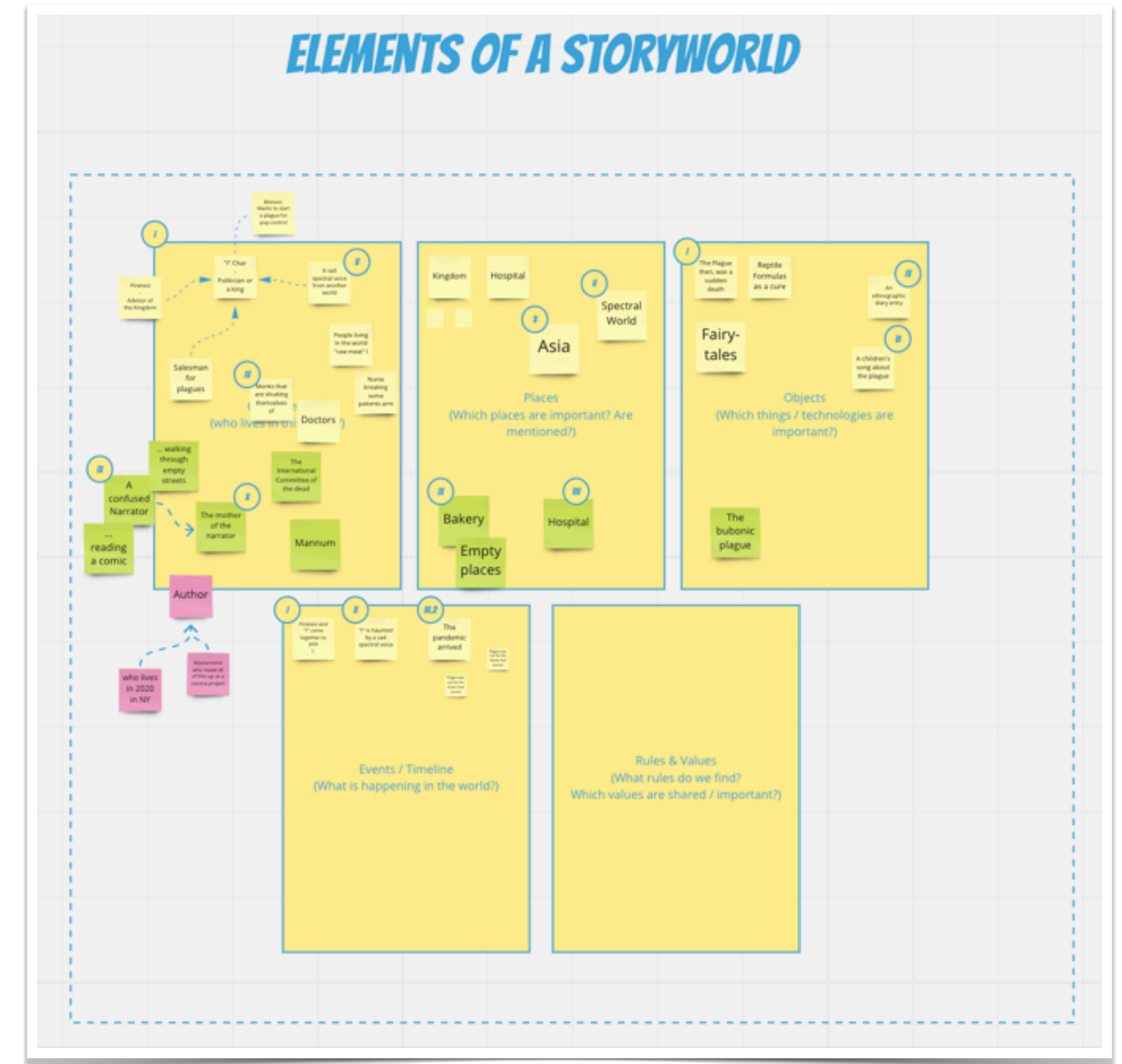
Narrative Probe

They came to a real leader, they said to each other. A real man, not a fake leader, not an actor who pretended to be a leader. He was real. He lived, and he led his people to a real leader. This real man was the one they called their real leader. He was named Mannum, and Mannum knew this about himself; he had practiced seduction and charm the long time. He was a good liar, a real one.

The pandemic of war had begun.

"Then, friend," said Piranesi, "make death eternal in the liquor laws, so that no sick person may return to drink after consuming what they drank."

Readerly Worldbuilding / Mind Narrative Nexus

‣ „The readers carry out a hermeneutical construction of a world by adding pieces (elements) to a structure already in place, evaluating the pieces in light of what is known about the world so far, and, conversely, evaluating the whole world in light of new pieces." (Ekman & Taylor)
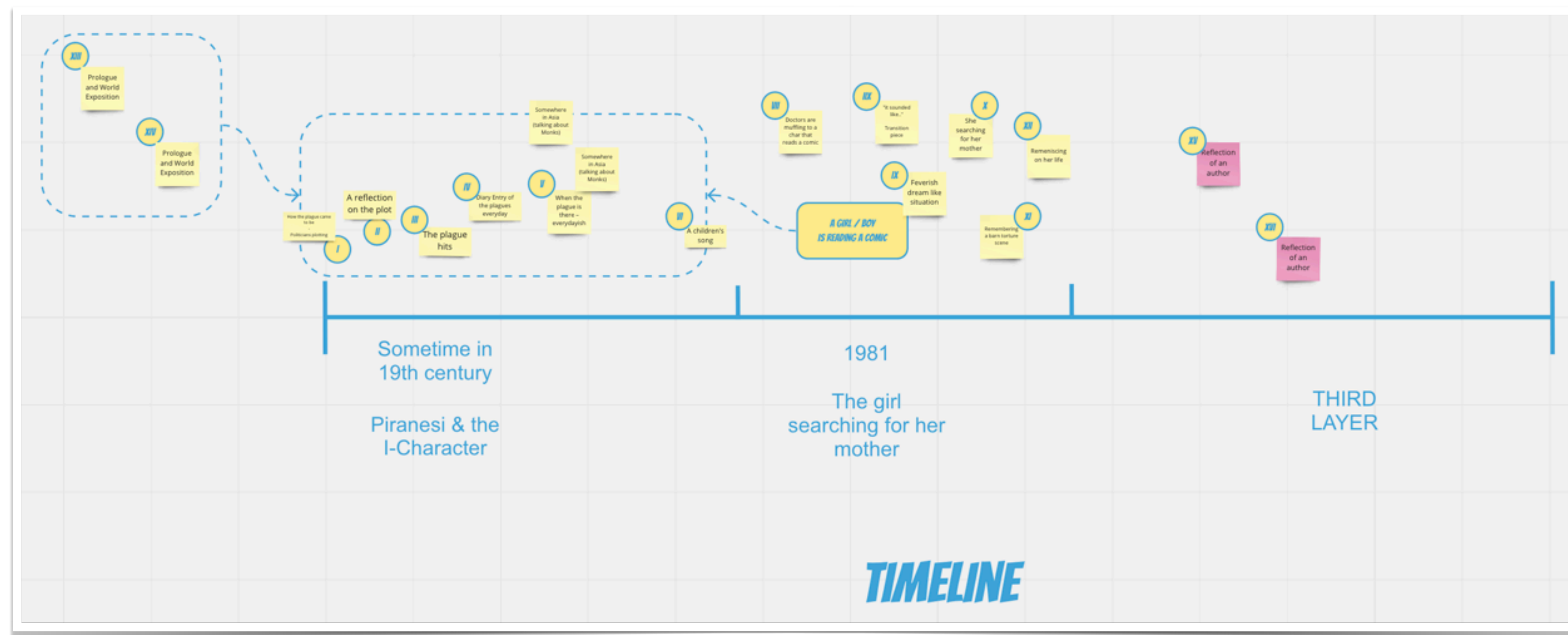
(1) Nested Narrative

Part One   Part Two   Part Three

19th century   1981   2021
Piranesi & Mannum   A girl   The writer
Plotting a war   Searching for her mother   Trying to stay sane
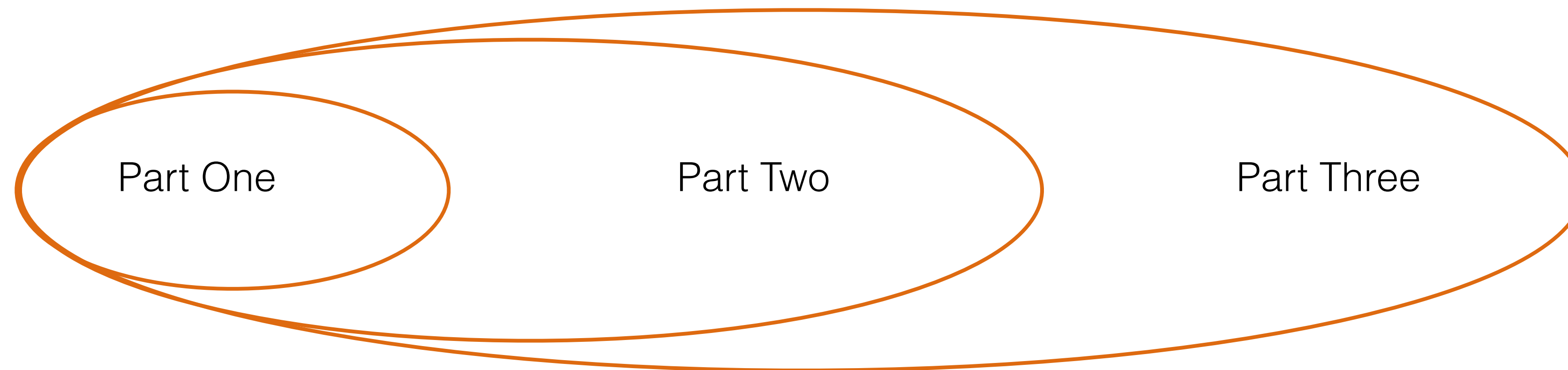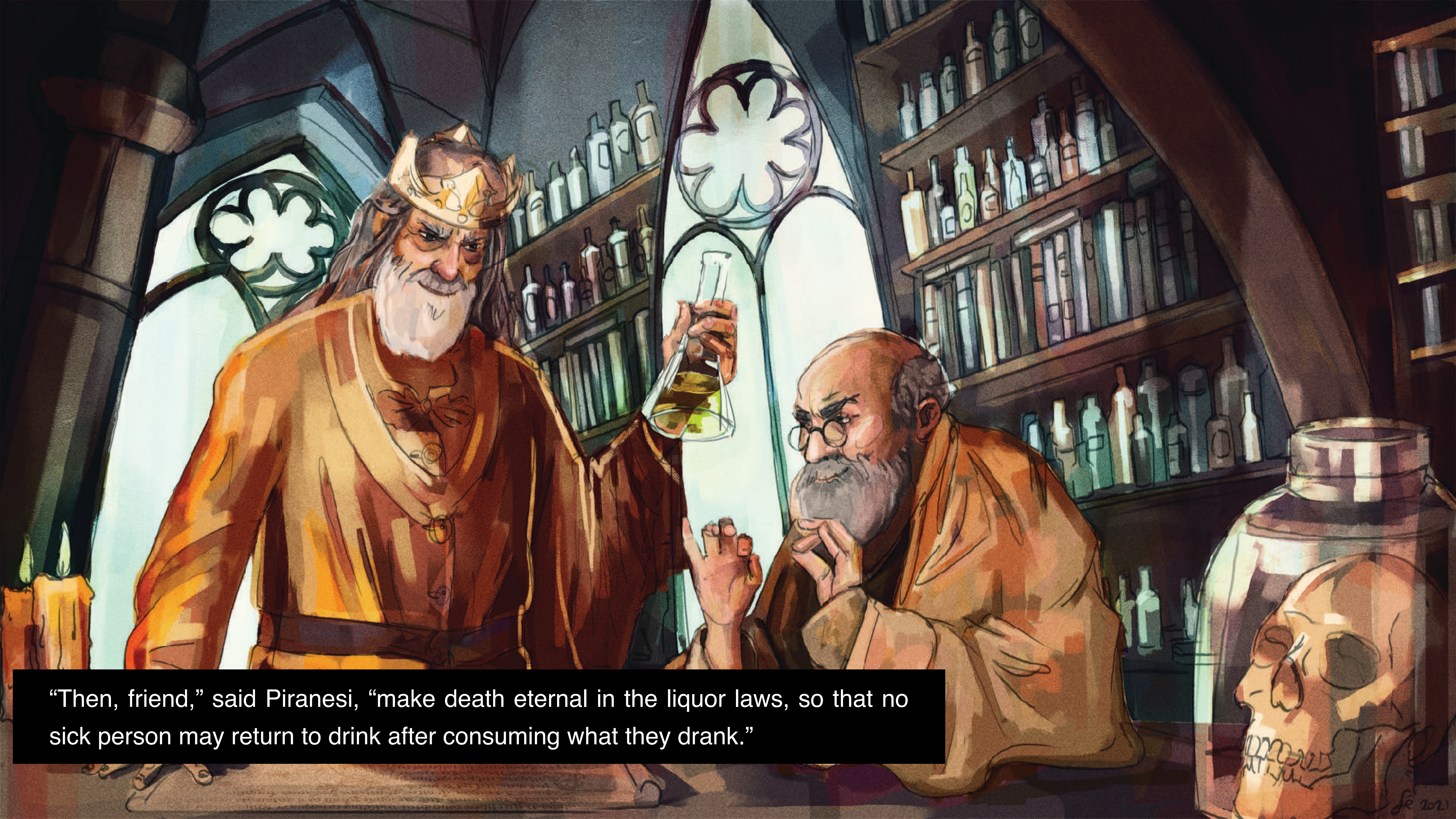
(2) Ilustrations

‣ by Sara Laubscher
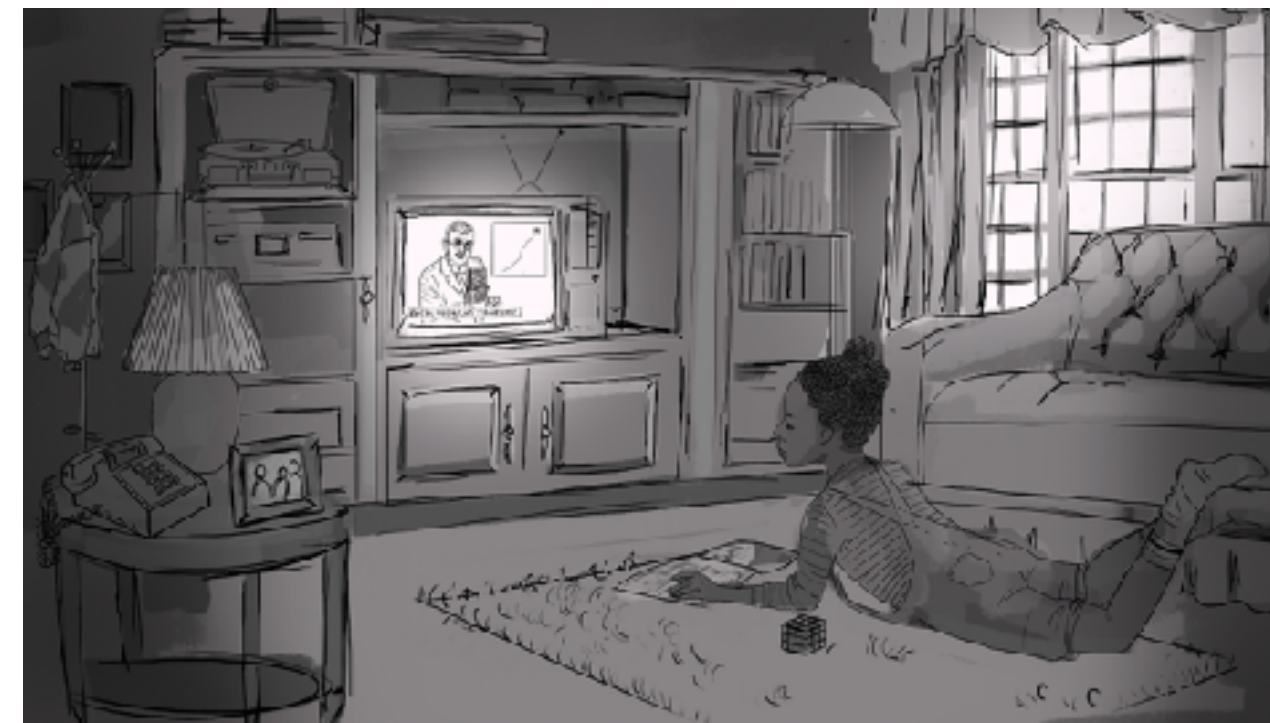
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(3) Lecture Performance & Exhibition

‣ „The Writer", written by Robert Laidlow, performed by the Bandwidth Ensemble

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# (3) Lecture Performance & Exhibition

‣ November, 2021 in Oxford

‣ Musical Performances

　　‣ Performed by the Band Width Ensemble

　　‣ Written by Robert Laidlow & Marco Galvani

‣ Reading through Zoom

　　‣ Texts written by Wenzel Mehnert

　　‣ Reseach Reflections by Chelsea Haith
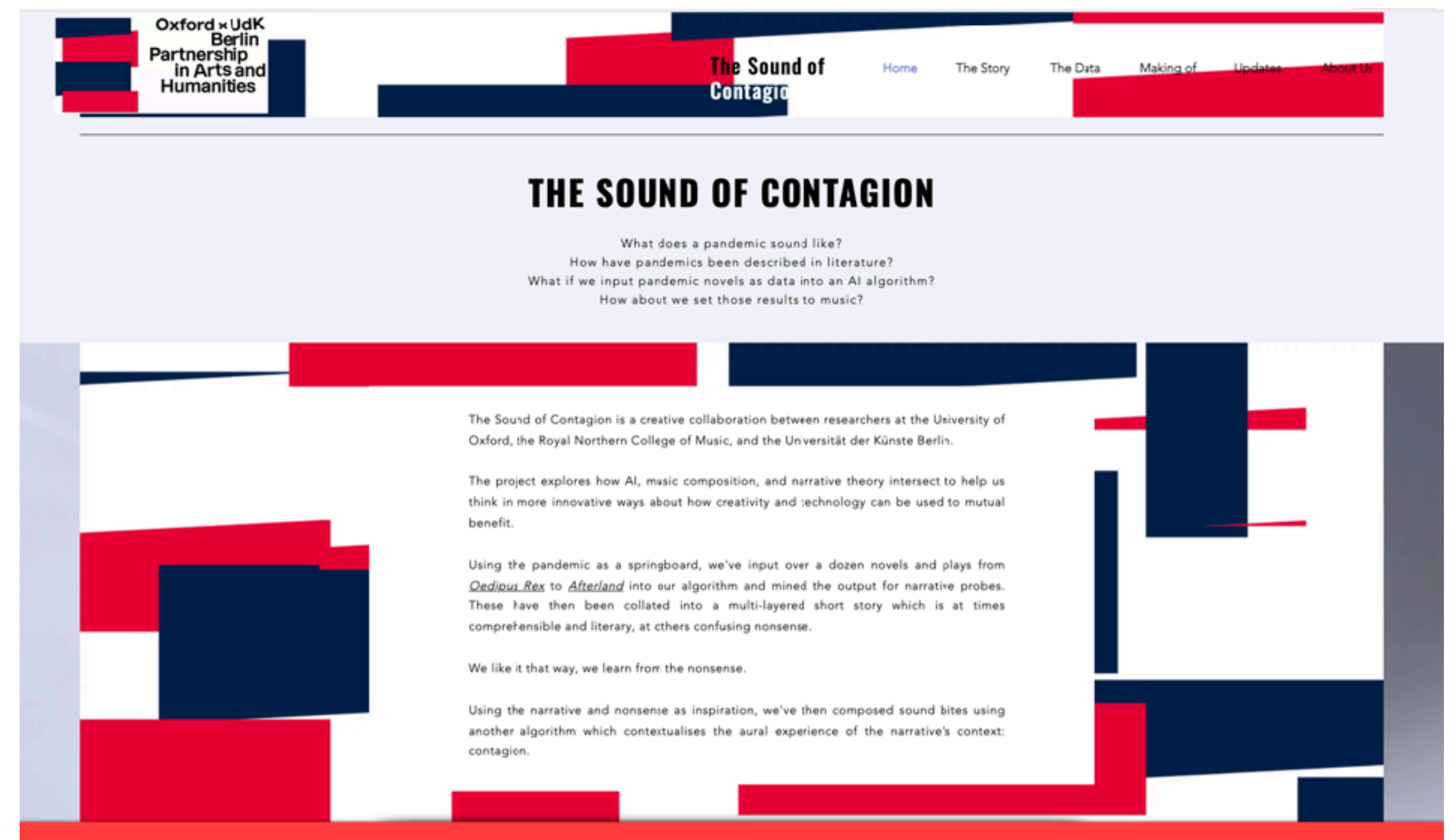
‣ Exhibition with the illustrations
by Sara Lausbscher
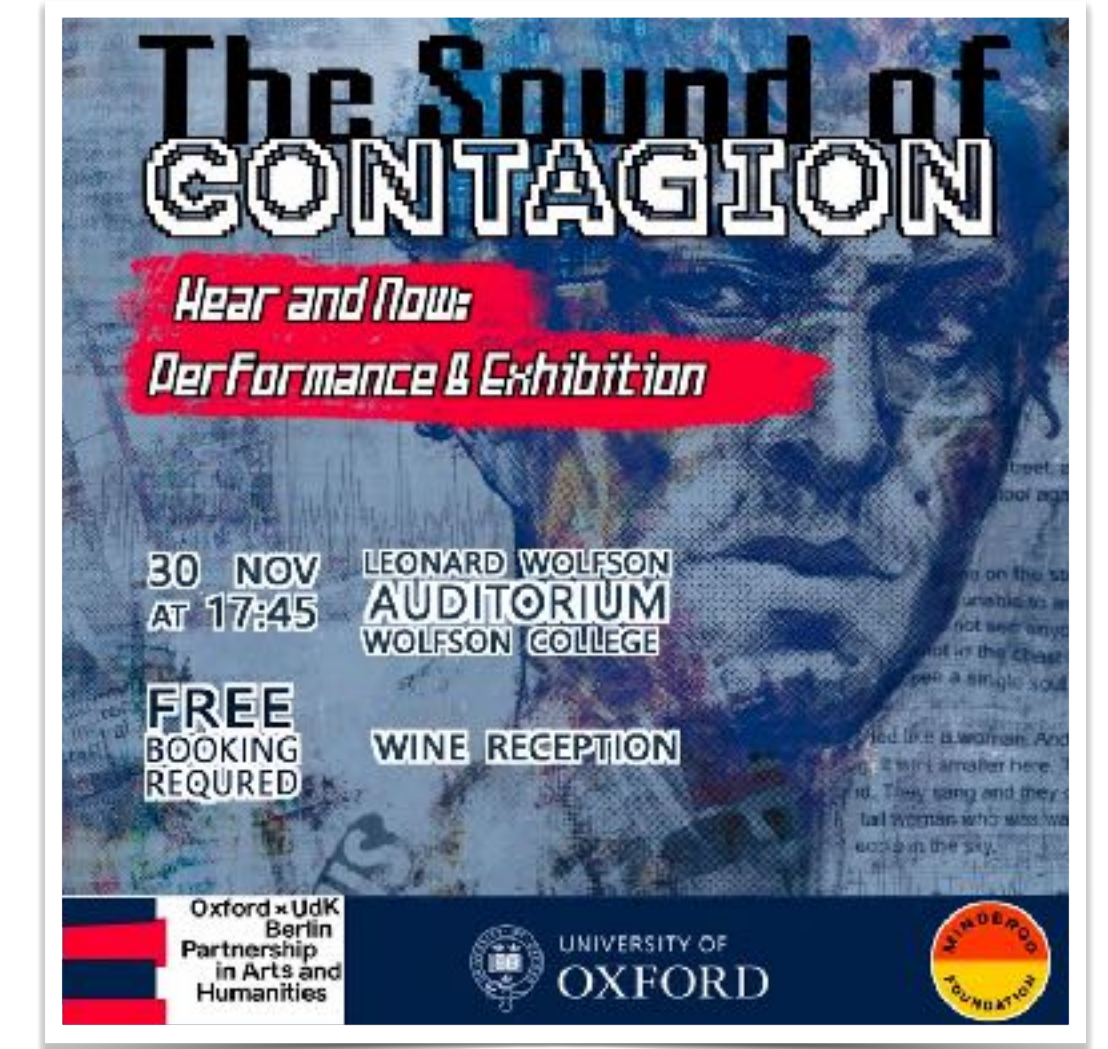
(4) Workshop – A.I. as a creative tool

▸ May 2022, UdK Berlin

▸ Gathering of artists and programmers

▸ 3 days Hackathon to make art with an AI

▸ 16 interviews about using AI as a creative tool
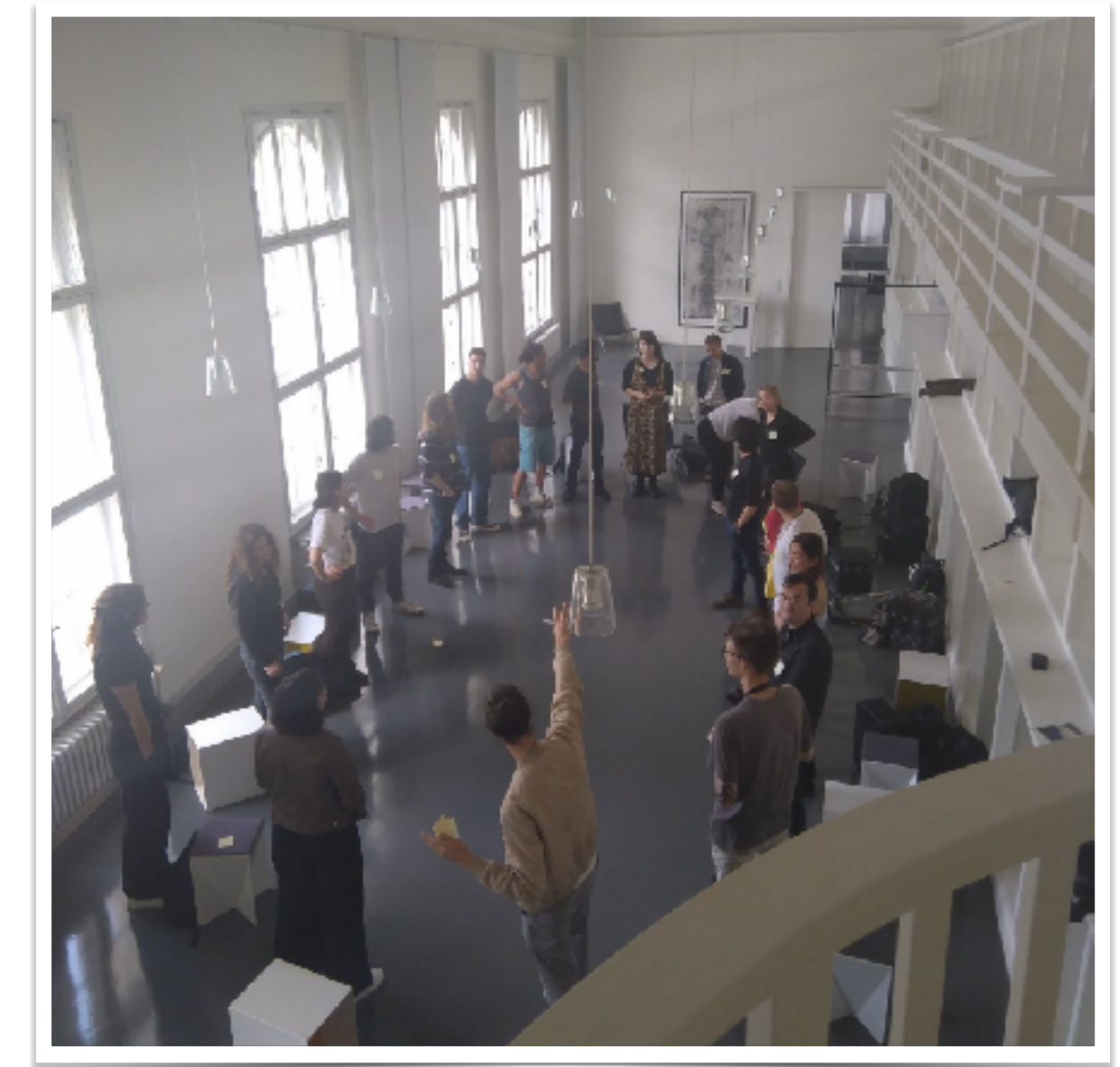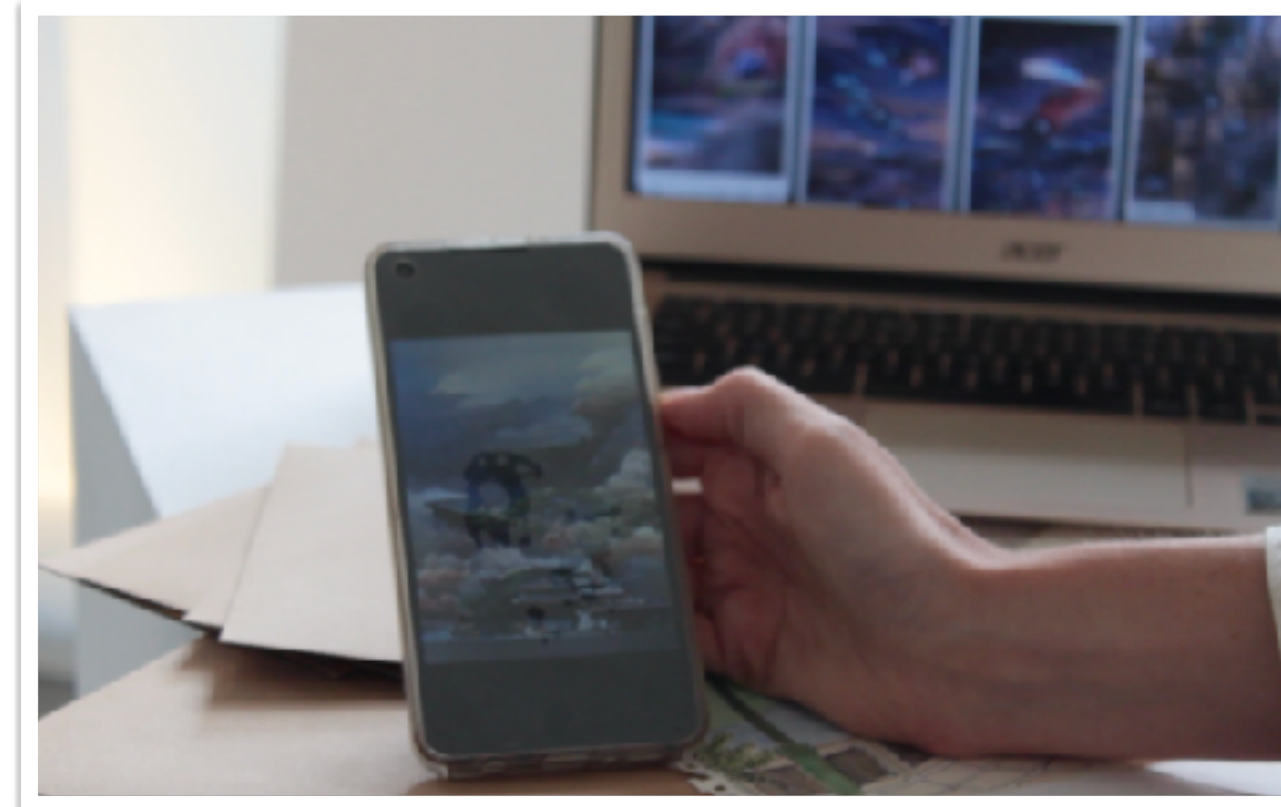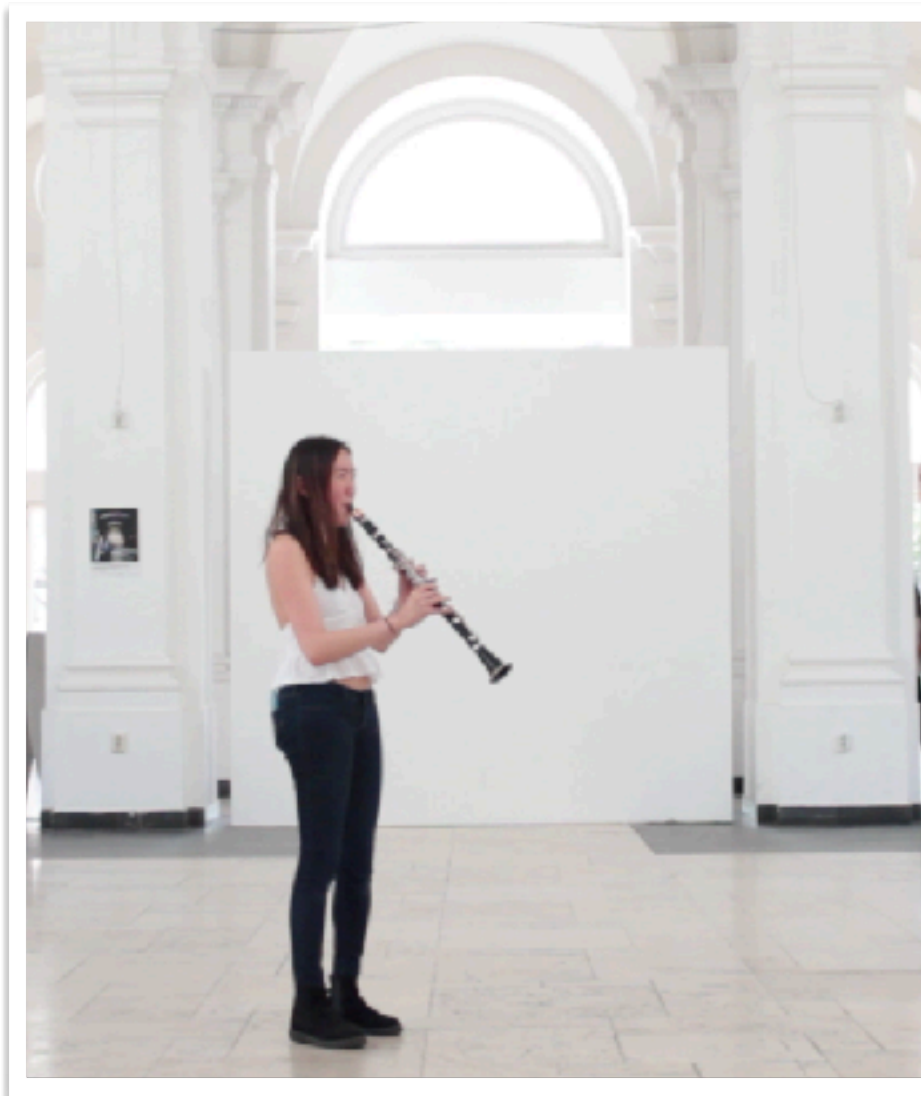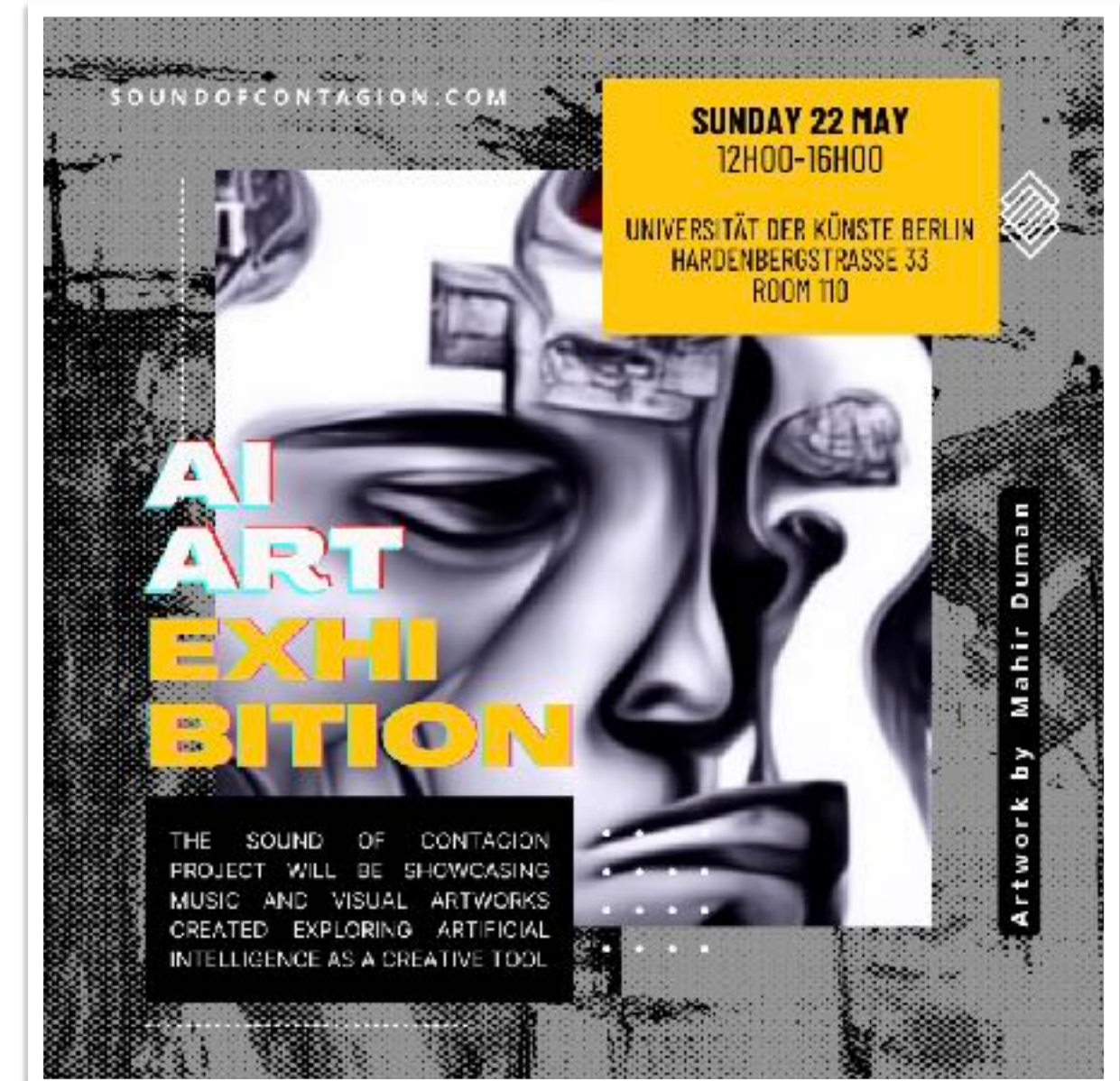
Documentation

‣ Website

   ‣ Texts

   ‣ Reflections

   ‣ Podcasts about the process

https://www.soundofcontagion.com/

Why is AI good for cross-media collaborations?

‣ AI a useful way to facilitate collaborations across different media and disciplines

‣ Using AI inherently has many creative decisions to which we all contributed:

  ‣ Curating a dataset

  ‣ Training the model

  ‣ Curating the end results

  ‣ Using those end results to create an artifact

‣ Low barrier for entry to "try" another collaborator's discipline

‣ AI serves as inspiration – making it easier to get to the heart of a creative process

‣ The role of the artist focuses stronger on sense making

Thank you for your attention
https://www.soundofcontagion.com/

Credits

Chelsea Haith
Robert Laidlow
Wenzel Mehnert
Sara Laubscher
Laurel Boxall
Marco Galvani

Thanks to

David de Roure
Amy Barker
Christine Bayliss
Bryony Oliver
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Carl Schoenfeld

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