

# Creating the game that will SAVE THE WORLD - a ritual brainstorm

## THE CONTEXT

In Quebec, high school dropout rates are at a staggering 19% for boys and 13% for girls. Social workers describe the youth as being caught in a downward spiral of low self-esteem and alienation. Government efforts to help these young people are mostly focused on remedial school work and competency-enhancing activities to increase their 'employability.' Employability in a system that is destroying our living planet at an alarming rate.

Design theorist and philosopher Tony Fry (2011) links *care of the self* with the future of our species and planet. He quotes philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty in saying that we humans are the 'flesh of the world'. That we are not simply beings *in* the world, but beings *of* the world. "For the self to sustain anything, first it has to sustain itself." How do we, as human mammals, sustain the self in this hypermodern, hypercapitalist world?

## THE IDEA

Adolescents and young adults use humor to navigate new or stressful situations. Bangsund (2018) shows that humor plays an important part in coping with environmental anxiety and strengthening group cohesion. Adolescents also need intensity and risk-taking, which they often seek in groups. Romer, Ryna & Satterthwaite (2017) show that adolescents' propensity to engage in risk-taking behaviors is not simply a result of impulsivity, but is in fact expression of a healthy desire to learn about the world.

But more importantly, young people need heroes — role models who use their unique abilities to improve the world around them. Nicholls-Allison (2020) notes that identifying with heroes helps adolescents overcome hardships and limitations, and can have the same benefits on well-being as group therapy. Philosopher Boris Cyrulnik (2016) argues that constructing a personal narrative or "epic journey" (*une épopée*) is not a reactionary or escapist fantasy, but a healthy and realistic way for young people to engage with the difficulties they face in their own realities.

During his Master of Design research-creation project, filmmaker Alexandre Franchi and eight high school dropouts co-created *Quest for Communitas*: a Carnavalesque exploration of their anxieties and traumas, structured like a rite of passage. The transformative process was based on grotesque humor, reversal, profanation and universality. A state of *cummunitas* was achieved, from which a number of rituals, feats and challenges emerged. Performative activities where the youth "played" with their existential anxieties as a means to experience another way of being *flesh of the world*. Throughout this adventure, Alexandre was inspired by the work of other researchers and artists who also delve into madness, magic, ritual and play as healing endeavors.

These scholars of transformative rituals have been invited to pool their experiences and power to reflect on the following question: how could an adventure-game that makes us reconnect with the primal, child-like, and Dionysian side of our nature take shape and thrive? A game that heals the *flesh of the world*?

## PARTICIPANTS

### **Dr. Doris C. Rusch --**

Doris Rusch is a game designer / researcher with a humanities background who holds a position as Senior Lecturer in Game Design at Uppsala University. Doris does research in Deep Game Design - games that explore the human experience through metaphors. Doris was the lead designer and vision holder of award winning and featured projects such as “Zombie Yoga” for Kinect, “Elude”, a metaphorical game on depression, and “Akrasia”, a game that models addiction. Her current project revolves around creating games that contribute to a meaningful life. It takes its departure from existential psychotherapy and inquires myth, ritual and psycho-therapeutic practices that target the unconscious.

### **Dr. Vitor Pordeus –**

Vitor Pordeus is a community physician, immunologist, transcultural psychiatrist and actor living and working in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. He has founded the Madness Hotel and Spa, DyoNises Theater and the Popular University for Art and Science in the oldest Brazilian Public Asylum, recently transformed into a community park, the Nise da Silveira Park. He currently is dedicated to seeing patients in the Rio de Janeiro community at the DyoNises Theater Clinic, a collective enterprise of physicians, therapists and actors.

### **Dr. Rilla Khaled –**

Rilla Khaled is an Associate Professor in Design and Computation Arts at Concordia University in Canada. Her research interests span the design of learning and persuasive games, interactions between games and culture, procedural content generation, and practices involved in game design. Lately she’s been exploring "deep" playing/learning experiences that often take place when you play experimental games. Her latest focus is on reflective game design, a new design perspective that embraces ambiguous subject matter, pushes for subverting game design standards, and draws together learning and experimental games.

### **Alexandre Franchi –**

Alexandre is a filmmaker with 20 years of practice. His films explore myth, fantasy, and humor as a means for coping with trauma. His first feature, *The Wild Hunt* (2009) was set in the world of a medieval LARP. For his second film, *Happy Face* (2018), Alexandre worked with disfigured (facially-different) non-actors. Implementing strategies from experimental theatre and the carnivalesque aesthetic, the non-actors were able to relive and transcend difficult situations through the fictional characters they created. This experience led Alexandre to enroll in a Master of Design at Concordia university to further explore transformative narratives outside of the screen with his project *Quest for Communitas*.

## **Mystery Guest - TBC**

A senior game designer from the commercial industry. But one that specializes in role playing games and fantasy.

*“The old Gods are dead or dying and people everywhere are searching, asking: What is the new mythology to be, the mythology of this unified earth as of one harmonious being.”*

-- Joseph Campbell

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