

Mikhail Maksimov

S. A. R. Online Sessions, 2021

Sanatorium Anthropocene Retreat (S.A.R.) Online Sessions is a video game developed for Open by Moscow-based artist, filmmaker and game designer Mikhail Maksimov, with music score by Russian composer Vladimir Rannev.

Play (*S.A.R.*) Online Sessions:

[Steam Link](#)

The game is set in a post-apocalyptic scenario: awaking to a deserted Russian Pavilion in Giardini, the game stages a fantasy-like performance in which the main character (the player) mutates between human and non-human entities – a robot, a virus, and a humanoide – navigating a derelict digital environment and trying to recollect what has happened.

By playing with the fluidity of the protagonist's identity, and drawing on writings by Bruno Latour, Nick Land and Donna J. Haraway, the game tackles the concept of transhumanism. In this way, S.A.R. projects itself beyond "human exceptionalism" in search for more meaningful ways to engage with human and other-than-human agents.

S.A.R. Online Sessions is the second installment of a special project with the same name, commissioned by the Russian Pavilion and originally launched on pavilionrus.com in 2020. At a time when the Covid-19 pandemic made access to Giardini impossible, Maximov's video game was effectively the only way to experience the Pavilion and its surroundings. This year, the new version of the game introduces a new and integral multiplayer feature, expanding the game's potential to connect individuals beyond physical proximity and advances a new way to experience togetherness.

"There are two things I would like to emphasise:

1. A video game is made of a series of decisions – a rigid algorithm similar to a music box. Only random online accidents reveal the cracks of the surface. The multiplayer function that forms relations between characters and objects within the network algorithms unfolds in a specific mode that differs from a singleplayer journey – as the gameplay is based on the accidental volitions of the players. The client-server architecture of the game opposes the players' individualities and therefore can barely accept them. Collective events within an online game are easier to set up than individual personalities. The very notion of relations in a multiplayer game is based on an individual-collective duality whereby the preservation of individuality (or a semblance thereof) among uniform active copies of the game is sometimes more challenging than earning collective achievements.
2. The multiplayer format enables the following structural sequence: the valuable experience of a non-human agent first transforming into a microorganism, then transiting through a human, achieving singularity, and going back to non-human agency. The valuable experience of reverting to the non-human agent – albeit enriched with the events and limitations leading to potential new levels of worldmaking is the main focus of the gameplay.

All the insights above are translated into S.A.R. Online Sessions.”

Follow the Let's Play between Mikhail Maximov and the Moscow Game Center (from May 22nd)

[DTO EPISODE #01](#)