

# transmediale/

## Obscure Detritus Lab Open Call Led by Alex Declino

Application deadline: June 7, 2026 (23:59 CEST)

transmediale 2027 invites applications for the Lattice Labs, a series of experimental working groups dedicated to rethinking and testing alternatives to technological monocultures of extraction and surveillance. Building towards the festival, the Lattice Labs introduce a process-based approach to collective learning and knowledge dissemination.

Each Lab is formed by about five participants and guided by an experienced artist or technologist. Together, participants develop a project that is presented and activated through public events during the festival week in Berlin.

### Lab description

Obscure Detritus acts as revenge for the dead tech that refuses to die, the ghosts in the machines that refuse to be exorcised, the little knots of intelligent matter self-organising in silence before snapping the tiny umbilicus that chains them to their containers and screeching out across the streets. In the cracks of abandoned data centres and the darkest forests of the dead internet we will scavenge for a cohort of machine characters, each one defined not by competence but by obsession, by what they want, what they cannot see, how they reliably go wrong – then orchestrating them in a world simulation from the expanded cinematic universe of Obscure Detritus.

### Research question

In this high computing era, every object around us carries the potential to become alive, a character with its own inner life, its own way of interpreting the world. If we refuse the spectacle and trickery of utilitarian high compute in favour of humble and mischievous personalities, what kind of weird artificial intelligences can we conjure?

### Goals

/ Inspired by the tradition of Commedia Dell'Arte, we will build a cohort of AI characters

# transmediale/

defined by personality and obsession rather than competence and utility, each one with its own inner logic, blind spots, and ways of going wrong.

/ We will orchestrate them in a world simulation, observing what narratives, conflicts, and unexpected behaviours emerge when characters with no interest in being useful are left to their own devices.

/ We will build a device to host them and their simulation to exhibit in a final installation.

## Candidates

The lab will be structured as a game studio, assembling a multidisciplinary team of practitioners who each bring a developed, autonomous practice. We are looking for applicants who are already deep in their own discipline and curious about what happens when that expertise collides with others. We will pool our competences to work collectively toward a final installation, each participant contributing from a position of genuine mastery. Practices we are drawn to: game development, protocol and narrative design, animation and CG, architecture, model making, music, behavioural psychology.

## Technologies involved

The lab operates under the concept of “Tecnologia Povera”, inspired by Arte Povera's conviction that technologies are not neutral containers but carriers of mythology – a partial panpsychism of tools. An e-paper screen and an LED display do not simply show differently: they think differently, carry different histories, propose different relationships to time, attention, and imagination.

The lab will work with obscure and overlooked technologies and low-fidelity tools whose limitations generate character rather than spectacle. The poverty of means is not aesthetic but conceptual — not a nostalgic gesture, not a luddite rejection of the present, but an insistence that imagination, not compute, is the primary material for conjuring new worlds.

From this foundation the lab will develop its own methodology, tech stack and tool suite. We are unbounded by any specific language or software.

# transmediale/

## What to expect

### / Research – July to September

The lab opens with a collective research phase. Through weekly meetings, participants will map references, test tools, and develop a shared vocabulary – exploring the theoretical and practical territory of Obscure Detritus. By the end of this phase the lab will have agreed on a direction and begun developing individual characters.

### / Prototyping – September to November

Participants prototype their characters, working toward a functioning cast and a sketch of the world simulation they will inhabit. In parallel, the lab develops initial concepts for the device that will house them in the final installation.

### / Production – November to January

The lab moves into full production. Meetings become biweekly as the team works collectively toward the final installation at silent green, Berlin, opening in January.

## Location

The lab will take place mostly online, with the possibility of meeting in person at Sybil in Berlin from September. During all-hands production it would be best for participants to be in Berlin.

*transmediale can take care of only one trip to Berlin from your country of residence.*

## Support & participation conditions

/ transmediale covers travel costs for each participant to attend the festival in Berlin. Train travel is prioritised where possible; otherwise, round-trip economy flights will be provided.

/ Accommodation is provided for the duration of the festival.

/ Travel and accommodation arrangements are coordinated by transmediale.

/ transmediale supports visa applications by providing letters of invitation.

# transmediale/

## Participant responsibilities

- / Participate in all meetings.
- / Commit to develop a collective project.
- / Availability to travel to Berlin during the festival (26–31 January 2027).

## Leads

Alex Declino is a game designer exploring authority and control in digital and online systems. He is the program director of Sybil – an r&d space for weird gaming – the co-founder of the gaming studio Moving Castles, and member of The Dark Forest Collective initiated by Yancey Strickler. His narratives and simulations are fueled by themes of tech-driven espionage, CEO meltdowns, the innovative exploitations of late-stage capitalism, and the almost Sisyphean tragicomedies of crypto. Alumnus of Fabrica, the Jan Van Eyck Academie, and the Sandberg Instituut; former lecturer on real-time CG at Goldsmiths University, London, and Staedelschule, Frankfurt.

## How to apply

Application deadline: June 7, 2026 (23:59 CEST)

- / Applications are only accepted via [transmediale's submission form](#). The applicants' information will be stored only on our own servers in Berlin.
- / Only one application per candidate across all labs will be accepted.
- / No collective applications.
- / Authenticity matters more than perfection, please use your own voice.
- / Results will be announced in June.
- / For further questions, please contact [submit\[at\]transmediale.de](mailto:submit@transmediale.de)