The Treaty of Finsbury Park 2025

Cade Diehm & Ruth Catlow 10 April 2020

In 2020, NASA prepares a mission to colonise Mars. Alone in the expanse, the desire to set sail into the void is understandable for a frightened globe. A planetary health check reveals the terrible reality: countless lost species and one million additionally at risk of extinction, their erasure a direct result of relentless human activity. Five years later, an inter-species diplomatic mission convenes to negotiate a mutually assured agreement to reclaim the battered living, mechanical and digital systems for mutual care and respect



The Treaty of Finsbury Park 2025 is a future event in which a multi-species delegation negotiates an unprecedented mutual agreement on behalf of all organisms in the face of an unprecedented threat. It is conceived as part of Furtherfield's Citizen Sci-Fi program, and is centred around the 2020 2021¹ theme, Love Machines. At Summer Solstice 2021, we will play a game with various characters to imagine Finsbury Park as the site of revolution across urban green space. This will be played as a Live Action Role Play (LARP).

At its core is a central provocation: humans live in highly curated isolation, alienated from a planet teeming with life, by the imperialist systems of domination that we have created to control it. Rather than nurturing kinship with the vibrant ecologies of creatures in our own world, we try to cure this loneliness by seeking companionship from our

machines or look far beyond our own realms for signs of life.

The Love Machines LARP in Finsbury Park seizes upon and exploits the contradictions of machine-induced isolation and disconnection. It explores these themes whilst centring itself around its players, who are immersed and embedded in urban green space. It reprogrammes the rituals of imperialism in order to renegotiate terms for a new society of creatures. The Treaty of Finsbury Park 2025 is an equal part serious/critical/playful/humorous event that interrogates and subverts the practices and protocols of a state visit.

The resulting creative collaborations and commitments — created and presented as part of the 2021 Furtherfield *Love Machines* season — present a sincere call to rethink the self-isolation of humans against the rest of the planet, made urgent by the ongoing ecological collapse.

¹ Note, The Treaty of Finsbury Park 2025 was postponed by a year in early 2020 following the catastrophic COVID-19 pandemic.

Context

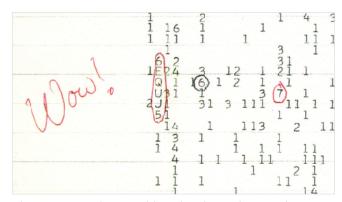
The Love Machines LARP reframes Finsbury Park as a city state within a city state itself, and employs both statist power rituals (such as closed-door negotiations, state dinners and ceremony) and hypertechnological process (application programming interfaces, network topologies, complexification, etc) to provoke new perspectives on green ecologies and how we perceive them. The result is twofold:

- a vivid participatory exploration of the role of ritualistic power, performed within the park, drawn from current and historical contexts and meticulously documented and filtered through a highly controlled public relations effort; and
- 2) A set of collective work by "visiting dignitaries" that interprets the ecology as a network a complicated state with extensive human generated documentation and systems of infrastructure of its own, and ultimately explores the role of colonial power in contributing to the urgent ecological precarity of today.

Love Machines recognises the ecologies of urban green space as a political actor — one at heightened risk and with a shattered sense of autonomy. At this precipice of ecological collapse, Love Machines seeks to derive a deeper, more personal understanding of the systems of autonomy and manifest destiny inherent in this networked ecology and advocate for it by drawing on the powerful but problematic tools employed by the states that can consolidate power.

In parallel, we must not force creatures to speak to us on our terms. Rather, we must learn new ways to listen and cohabit with the urban green ecology. We must allow relations to bloom through language, touch and a newfound intimacy, and commit to the evolution of cooperation across difference.

Ecologies as Networks. Machines as Ecologies



The "WOW!" signal, captured by radio telescope by researchers in 1977, this radio wave is widely interpreted to represent a deliberate and cohesive signal sent to Earth despite no additional evidence.

Homosapiens lead a remarkably lonely existence. For centuries, we have sought companionship in the domination or domestication of other species — both primitive examples of our desire to define the terms of how we interact with the world. Beyond cultivating these non-negotiable relationships, we dream of companionship, and seek it from afar, both through the machines built by our hands and from the stars as we seek to communicate with extraterrestrial life.

Although we have so far failed with the sky, we have made greater but flawed progress dictating the terms of companionship to machines. Our work here is twofold: we build tools to see and listen to more of our environment, and we fabricate networks and interfaces to communicate and emulate. It is significant that much of our collective work on building electronic intelligence is funded by military, distribution or advertising efforts. In one absurd example, these technologies are curated together to create a robotic personal assistant that can impersonate human qualities to fool waitstaff when booking a restaurant².

The race to architect companionship via machine-powered communication is just as lonely. For all of the work on artificial intelligence, the outcomes are built from interface paradigms that have existed since the 1960s. What is a WhatsApp-powered interaction with a corporation, if not a human powered version of *ELIZA*³? We seek artificial

² Natt Garun, *One year later, restaurants are still confused by Google Duplex*, The Verge, 9 May 2019.

³ Joseph Weizenbaum, ELIZA A Computer Program For the Study of Natural Language Communication Between Man And Machine, Communications of the ACM, 1966.

companionship whilst disregarding the ecologies in our own world.

Within fragmented technocultures, our own social companionship is found in the intersection between roleplay and the painful realities of our social hierarchies and the natural world. The evidence of this is all around us; Livestreaming⁴, the exploding popularity of furry culture, Performative social networks like VRChat and modified roleplay gaming⁵. The painstaking recreation of hyper-realistic lush pre-Anthropocene Earth and alien worlds⁶.



From top: Facerig, a program that allows anyone with a simple webcam to puppeteer an expressive non-human entity; Far Cry 5's exquisitely designed natural landscapes; Players interact with each other as digital cat girls in VRChat, a free to play fully-immersive open world.

Urban Governance and Non-Human Real Estate

Since the Industrial Revolution, all other organisms have existed at the absolute behest of a hierarchy organised entirely for the benefit of humans, and forced to cope with a variety of increasingly extreme challenges⁷. We negotiate terms of co-existence with other planetary species and ecosystems by employing ever more complex systems of technological control.



The act of 'othering' non-human entities and enforcing this through violence is not universal, but does exist in pre-modern societies.

In urban green landscapes, the species that occupy them maintain an uneasy truce with an environment terraformed by their human neighbours as dictated by particular cultural directives driven by political, economic or social goals⁸. In many cases, these are not agricultural. Rather, these spaces are designated leisure and health facilities for the populations of working "poor." They are created by industrialisation and their legacies are cultivated to manage human conflicts and antagonisms - to act as political overflow pipes. Urban green ecologies are valued and justified primarily as arenas for social leisure and conflict for human societies.

As such, green ecosystems often take the form of 'states within states', without autonomy, administered as semi-'natural' holes punched into grey concrete grids. Forced to self manage, and sometimes with outside administration, these ecosystems are by their definition under siege.

⁴ For example, <u>Twitch.tv</u>, a wildly popular streaming platform <u>bought by Amazon</u> in 2014 for 1 billion dollars.

⁵ For example, EclipseRP, a server modification for Rockstar's Grand Theft Auto V, enabling new storytelling features for immersive multiplayer roleplay.

⁶ VRChat and immersive open world environments have poorly understood political and cultural significance. See: <u>Our Artificial Wilderness: Virtual Beauty and Ecological Decay</u>, the New Design Congress, 2020.

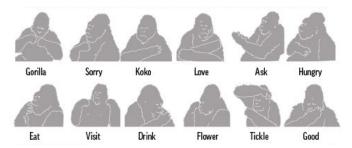
⁷ Zanariah Jasmani, *Small urban parks and resilience theory: how to link human patterns and ecological functions for urban sustainability.* Department of Geosciences and Natural Resource Management, University of Copenhagen, Denmark, 10 June 2013.

⁸ Examples of the codified understanding of designed urban ecologies are numerous, like New York's Central Park: A Research Guide, by Central Park Conservancy.

Whether incidental cohabitation spaces within broader hostile environments or 'planned spaces,9' the whip hand of antiquated human dictates govern the terms for existence for the organisms that occupy this space.

Regardless of the capitalist terms under which these ecologies exist, they comprise vast worlds unseen (or feared) by human populations where nodes and inhabitants exist both in defiance of concrete and motorcar, but also as vibrant networks of resilience and mutual support.

Humans as the Incurious Monolinguist



A selection of words understood by Koko the Gorilla (1971–2018)

Zoologists and animal psychologists who have dedicated their working lives to cross-species communication have traditionally existed as a sort of scientific curiosity to the wider world. The same is true of creatures that overly signal their attempt to communicate with us. Animals like Koko¹o, a gorilla who was able to communicate with humans on our terms, are both rare curiosities and clumsy examples. While it remains a breathtaking feat to teach a gorilla American Sign Language, these interactions typically require the non-human to acquiesce towards the human¹¹. One species learns the second language, not the other.

In 2019, Virginia Tech researchers published a breakthrough paper¹² that described their efforts to translate the language of honey bees. Through decoding "waggle dances," the team could sustain efforts to support and understand these insects and their preferences for foraging and their understanding of landscapes. Unlike Koko, this represents a rarer effort; allowing another species to (unwittingly) communicate their lived experience to the listening homosapien.



Indigenous Australian artwork is highly detailed and place significant importance on biological and spiritual interconnectivity and systems.

Beyond bees and gorillas, the Cartesian¹³ belief that drives the denial of non-homosapien rationality, community and feeling culminates in a deliberate dismissiveness of the polyphonic world around us. In denying the same intellectual and emotional affordances we grant ourselves to our planetary cohabitants, most of what we know about the lived experiences of non-humans is wrong¹⁴. While we violently reappropriate habitats, those under siege mourn¹⁵, fight back¹⁶ and teach each other to survive¹⁷, all universally recognisable forms of resistance and solidarity. While we search¹⁸ for beings with qualities such as autonomy, empathy and intelligence in space and attempt to build them ourselves¹⁹, the beyond-human living world is a

⁹ Jack Ahern, Urban landscape sustainability and resilience: The promise and challenges of integrating ecology with urban planning and design, Landscape Ecology, July 2012.

¹⁰ Koko the Gorilla was a Western gorilla known internationally for her ability to communicate via American Sign Language, and her pet keeping.

¹¹ For example, framing the intelligence of New Caledonian crows via casual relationships theory, Sarah A. Jelbert et al. *Using the Aesop's Fable Paradigm to Investigate Causal Understanding of Water Displacement by New Caledonian Crows*, PLOS One, March 2014.

¹² Roger Schürch et al. Dismantling Babel: creation of a universal calibration for honey bee waggle dance decoding, Animal Behaviour, April 2019.

¹³ Caitrin Keiper, <u>Do Elephants Have Souls?</u> The New Atlantis, 2013.

¹⁴ Jason Hribal, Fear of the Animal Planet: The Hidden History of Animal Resistance, AK Press, 2010.

¹⁵ <u>Mourning Animals: Rituals and Practices Surrounding Animal Death</u>, Michigan State University, 2016.

¹⁶ Video of a <u>sulphur-crested cockatoo forcefully removing anti-bird spikes</u> in Australia, date unknown.

¹⁷ Carl Safina, The secret call of the wild: how animals teach each other to survive, The Guardian, 9 April 2020.

¹⁸ The Search for Extra Terrestrial Intelligence Institute (SETI) is amongst the most well known institutional examples. Its stated goal is to 'explore, understand and explain the origin and nature of life in the universe and the evolution of intelligence.'

¹⁹ For example, IBM's *Watson*, an artificial intelligence named in honour of the company's <u>Nazi-collaborator CEO</u>.

vibrant social infrastructure network coping with our ignorance.

This unenlightened state is not a universal human perspective, but today it is pervasive. Monolingualism is embedded across societies, regardless of economic or political affiliation and often the most extreme examples are forged in communion with intuitions of landscape and organisms, through appallingly stunted interpretations of them by colonial thinkers. Examples of such thinking are numerous in all cases of colonial contact with "untamed savages" in "undiscovered wildernesses", but a visceral example can be found in the discovery of the land that would later become Melbourne, Australia by European colonialists, as retold by Bruce Pascoe:

Isaac Batey saw that the hillsides of Melbourne were terraced in the process of yam production and that the tilth of the soil was so light you could run your fingers through it. Mitchell saw these yam fields stretching as far as he could see near Gariwerd (Grampians). He extolled the beauty of these plains assuming that God had made them so that he could 'discover' them, not once thinking how peculiar it was for the best soil in the country to have almost no trees²⁰.

The attribution of Indigenous agricultural processes to the work of a white God is a perfectly encapsulated example of the poisoned belief systems that led to, amongst many other crimes, a system of organising landscapes and economies in which a key consequence was accelerating eco-genocide. Equally



important is how this same worldview now poisons mobilisation in response to this self-inflicted threat. Much like Batey and Mitchell's delusional personal gift from God, it is beyond dishonest to describe the symbolic act of a Western government recognising ecological collapse in 2019 as a 'world first,' given that representatives of vulnerable states have mobilised for decades against parasitic imperialism, often losing their lives in the process. In times of immediate crisis, such as the COVID—19 worldwide pandemic, colonialist intellectualism and policy ignores at our collective peril these Indigenous perspectives that have argued that we *must treat the world as an interconnected, living organism with supreme complexity, fragile resilience and indeed, mystique*²¹.



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²⁰ Bruce Pascoe, *Australia: Temper and Bias*, Meanjin Quarterly, 2018.

²¹ Xiang Zairong, *COVID-19: on the epistemic condition*, Open Democracy, 6 April 2020.







Performative Power Rituals as Instigators of Change

In 1259 BC, the Egyptian-Hittite peace treaty²² was signed, ending a decades-long conflict between two early civilisations. This document is significant, as it represents the earliest example of an international peace treaty between enemy human states, a ritualistic document produced by two deeply ritualistic cultures.

All human societies have deeply intricate²³ state and religious rituals²⁴. From the theatrics of court jesters to the chants and rites performed by priests, ritual is an essential component to the generation of state and religious power²⁵. Of its many available performative tools, state power often elects elaborate dinners as a ritualistic setting for exploration, negotiation and agreement. Oftentimes forged behind closed doors, participants emerge victorious for a public, ceremonial signing of documents²⁶.

State aesthetics and theatrics impart narrative and gravity to political events, conveying power and wealth to all observers. Employing a universal language overcoming complex inter-cultural barriers, their curation and execution themselves can be highly complex and political acts.

Much has been written about the power of social eating²⁷ ²⁸ ²⁹ (for example, familiarial households meals, Western forms of courtship, 20th Century political cafe culture). But the power of ritualistic decision-making is an increasingly under-utilised resource for those on the left looking to establish power. In our modern connected urban societies, ineffective alternatives (such as online organisation) have arguably restricted the ability for political instigation to morph into cohesive narrative and action.



Treaties and their designs have remained mainly recognisable since their inception. This example – the Treaty that ended the Dutch-Portuguese war in 1661 is as ceremonial as any modern document.

²² Egyptian-Hittite peace treaty, Wikipedia, retrieved 01 April 2020.

²³ Joseph McDermott, State and Court Ritual in China (1000BC to AD 1750), Cambridge University Press, 1999.

²⁴ For example, Colin Renfrew et al. *Ritual, Play and Belief, in Evolution and Early Human Societies*, Cambridge University Press, 2018.

²⁵ Merridee L. Bailey, Katie Barclay, *Emotion, Ritual and Power in Europe, 1200–1920*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.

²⁶ An example of this within a modern context is the *Invitation for the State Dinner on the Occasion of the Signing of the Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty*, 1979.

²⁷ Mary Ann O'Donnell, *The Cultural Politics of Eating in Shenzhen*, *Gastronomica*, 2010.

²⁸ Beyond the table: The Politics of Eating, Columbian University, 2018.

²⁹ Regina F. Bendix, Michaela Fenske, *Politische Mahlzeiten*, 2014.



"The Signing Ceremony", by Sajan Rai, 2020.

"The Love Machine Protocol has been invoked! The Finsbury Park assembly is to meet and the Treaty will be signed at sunset on the 2025 Summer Solstice.

Politics is transformed!"

- Eyewitness account on the eve of the signing of the Treaty of Finsbury Park, 2025

The 1969 "Treaty on Treaties" - the basis of international law for five decades³⁰, enforced, monitored and sanctioned by human and technical military might - is now outmoded. Instead, it is viewed as barbaric for the intense isolation and alienation it gave rise to in human society and for the way it enabled systems that ruthlessly brought planetary life to the brink of annihilation.

The *Love Machine Protocol*³¹ is now widely adopted by

the vast majority of federated and nested assemblies world wide - this is the new politics - one which has incentivised the rapid adoption of multilingual and interspecial negotiation techniques and agreements. It is the global convention for negotiations involving complex living systems in contested temporal territories (called "*Placetimes*"); this elevates humans to the level of insight and enlightenment of other species creating a levelled political field for all organisms.

³⁰ The colloquial name for the *Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties*.

³¹ The origins of the Love Machines Protocol and the history between 2020-2025 that necessitated it remain the subject of intense debate.

Preamble

We live in increasing isolation, alienated from a planet teeming with life by the imperialist systems of domination that we have created to control it. Rather than nurturing kinship with the vibrant ecologies of creatures in our own world we try to cure this loneliness by seeking companionship from our machines or look far beyond our own realms for signs of life.

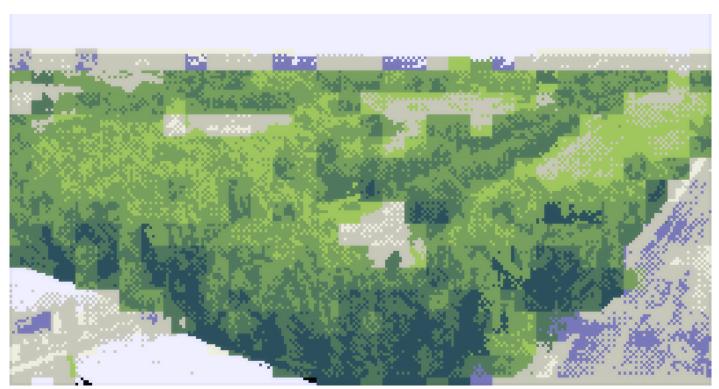
The Love Machines Live Action Role Play (LARP) reprogrammes the rituals of imperialism in order to renegotiate terms for a new human and non-human society in Finsbury Park. A visiting delegation of artists, armed with park blueprints and documentation, bylaws, data-sources and policies, work with local delegates who present testimony from the many lives of the urban green space. All manner of Finsbury Park life forms and systems are given a place at the table - from creatures deep underground, to the methods of management that sit

underneath people's experiences of the park. Artist visitors will meet with each group and find new ways to talk to them. A 3 day deliberation about the mutual interests of the lives of this ecology culminates with new commitments to the "Love Machines Protocol", made and formalised with a Treaty signing at the 2021 Summer Solstice.

The resulting commitments are assembled as a sort of Application Programme Interface (API), a carefully designed set of empathetic electronic and biological behaviours and interactions, enabling future users to operate the park as a love machine in the higher interest of all living entities and systems.

These are then presented as part of the 2021 *Citizens Sci-Fi* exhibition at Furtherfield gallery and online, a sincere demand to reconsider the self-isolation and othering of humans against the rest of the planet, made urgent by the ongoing ecological collapse.





The Protocol

The *Love Machine Protocol* is invoked by self-forming multispecies assemblies in moments of significant harm, suffering or peril. In order to invoke the protocol they must define the physical boundaries, declare a new "*Placetime*" and appoint skilled envoys to communicate their multiple interests. They issue an invitation to a nomadic collective of and

contemporary but incomplete experts from the Artists' State, a delegation from the outside world.

Placetime envoys are joined by a delegation from the Artists' State for negotiations. They are sealed off (in buildings on the disputed site) from the natural environment, communication networks, and electromagnetic fields for 2 days during daylight hours.

While cloistered, they undertake a series of rituals and informatic and creative processes (learned from machine and living systems) to create a "Interspecies Seeing Room³²" for the living and built ecologies the Placetime. In this way they develop a shared vision of needs, natures and mutual potentialities and a nuanced understanding of the traits of the Placetime.

Together they compose a Treaty underpinned by an API signed by all participants that enables future users to operate the park as a Love Machine in the higher interest of all living entities of the new Finsbury Park *Placetime*.

Sites of Engagement

Finsbury Park

This public park in the London neighbourhood of Harringay was established in the Victorian era. Now this urban green space like all across the world - occupied by diverse life-forms, communities, communication and information systems - and should be recognised as an occupied state at heightened risk. The Treaty signing event will take place somewhere across its grassy fields and it will be the first Treaty of its kind.

Furtherfield Commons

South West corner of Finsbury Park

For 3 days the community space and its surrounding gardens are repurposed as a "interspecies seeing room" for the living and built ecologies of the park. Reproducing the conditions of machine-induced isolation and disconnection, though immersed and embedded in urban green space, participants will be disconnected from all natural and communication systems during daylight hours.

Furtherfield Gallery

Based in the heart of Finsbury Park in 2021 Furtherfield Gallery hosted the *Love Machines* exhibition during the second year of its 3-year *Citizen Sci-fi* programme. This combines citizen science and citizen journalism by crowdsourcing the imagination of local park users and community groups to create new visions and models of stewardship for public, urban green space. Visitors to this exhibition are invited to contribute to the formation of the Finsbury Park Treaty, a series of interactions that would eventually see the park realised as a *Love Machine*.





³² Drawing inspiration from Brett Victor et al. *Dynamicland*, ongoing.

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1st edition, published 10 April 2020

Written by Cade Diehm Edited by Ruth Catlow Additional editing by Edward Anthony Illustration by Sajan Rai

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