



# Five Year Report to the Shareholders of Yrevocnu

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## Executive Summary

*"Anything goes" is a prison.*

The release of this report marks the end of the fifth year of Yrevocnu, from Guy Fawkes Day of 2018. It has been compiled for the benefit of those who have donated in kind to Yrevocnu, as well as potential future investors. Its conclusions are drawn from the Quinquennial Examination, a survey of Yrevocnu's members, as well as records from the Library of Tiamat. It aims to be a realistic account of the history, state, and findings of Yrevocnu, without mythical elaboration.

Yrevocnu began when a group of *"researchers, educators, trainers, and technologists coming together to develop a science and practice of combined physical and mental education"*, as an experiment, ratified an unusual, "autopoietic" constitution for self-governance and conflict resolution ("The Pattern") and installed a customizable social media system to maintain contact ("The Forum"). The focal point of Yrevocnu's activities have been a series of gatherings ("Future Balls" or "Events"), each spanning several days and consisting of an ever-evolving variety of trainings, games, rituals, and performances.

The Future Balls have been recognized by members as very successful. These "parties" have been collaborative, creative, experimental, semi-structured, and different every time.

We have learned much from the Pattern, and have yet more to learn. On the one hand, it has not visibly served its intended purpose as a way of resolving conflicts in the community. Perhaps because of this, Yrevocnu has suffered from strife and rancor; when these conflicts have been resolved, it has more often been through interpersonal dynamics rather than invoking governance. Recent changes to the political system of the Houses herald a qualitatively new chapter of Yrevocnu's organization for its second half-decade. It remains to be seen whether personal or cultural growth will also play a role in social harmony moving forward.

The Forum, which was the site of the worst and most demoralizing of the community conflicts, has been decommissioned. Yrevocnu begins its second five year era with explicitly decentralized communications and no coordinating infrastructure policy.

We look forward to Yrevocnu's continued evolution into an increasingly compelling version of what it has been in its first five years.

## Financial Outlook

*“Those that donate in-kind to Yrevocnu become shareholders in Yrevocnu.” - Reef Structure Liquid Edict*

Financially, Yrevocnu has neither assets nor liabilities.

Future Balls are typically financed through payments by attendees which cover shared costs of venue rentals and food. The event organizer has taken on the role (and risk) of collecting and dispensing these funds.

Digital infrastructure consists mainly of free personal accounts on commodity services; the expenses of the Forum were covered by a volunteer systems administrator.

Ergo, Yrevocnu’s ‘wealth’ is in the motivation of its participants to contribute their time, energy, and trust. It has attracted these contributions by providing a space in which people are welcome to pursue their uncommon goals with others. Goals such as:

- Working less
- Total integrated beinghood
- Finding alternatives to our primary and current education-work-financial security pipeline
- Designing a doom metal construction kit for kids that enables exploration of signal processing and algorithmic composition
- Becoming a phenomenal storyteller
- Making short, strange movies.

There has been much vivid speculation about what Yrevocnu would become, and this mythology has inspired many unique and interesting contributions. In the past, the governance structure of Yrevocnu has been deemed too dysfunctional to be trusted with the ownership of valuable assets. However, the future is wide open.

Yrevocnu is not a commercial enterprise, and never will be, unless society radically changes. However, it also freely experiments with alternative business models. The most promising approach, currently being pursued, is to monetize our ability to create original branded content, and specifically short films.

Yrevocnu does have an experimental internal currency, SamsaraCoin, but it has so far not been an essential part of Yrevocnu’s economy. The SamsaraCoin experiment will continue into the next five year period.

## Education and Learning

*“We are researchers, educators, trainers, and technologists coming together to develop a science and practice of combined physical and mental education.” - Glass Bead Party Public Statement*

Yrevocnu grew out of an initiative to develop a new *mathetic*<sup>1</sup> style of thinking and learning through rich, embodied, experiential training in combined movement and interactive arts. While the scope of Yrevocnu has exceeded this original vision, it has also succeeded at it. Yrevocnu is indeed a process of embodied experiential learning.

This is most explicit in the curricula of many Future Balls, which typically include tutorials. Any member is welcome to propose a tutorial, and there is no expectation that a teacher is formally qualified to do so. On the contrary, tutorials are often led by amateurs who are openly using the opportunity to learn themselves.

At Future Balls of Yrevocnu (including the original Glass Bead Party, “Event 0”), there have been tutorials on:

- Artificial intelligence and natural language processing
- Avante garde filmmaking
- Autopoietic constitutionalism
- Beltane
- Conceptualist art theory
- Cooking
- Critical Response Process
- Data visualization (D3)
- Design research
- The French Quarter of New Orleans.
- Glass Bead Games, including Psychedelic Glass Bead Game and Glass Bead Tournament formats.
- Infinite games.
- Meditation.
- Modular synthesis
- Movement arts, including (especially) Shintaido, as well as Brazilian Jiu Jitsu, Contact Improvisation, Hakken, Tai Chi.
- Neck stretches.
- Pre-Euclidean Geometry
- Reiki sex moves
- Ritual magick, including: Chaos, Hermetic, Wicca

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<sup>1</sup> *Mathetic* is a term coined by Seymour Papert to signify his ideal of learning and conceptualizing from both an embodied intuition and also formal reasoning. This term also harkens to the original Greek meaning of “math” - which originally meant “learning” in a general sense.

- Role-playing games
- Social media bots and content moderation.
- Storytelling
- Tarot
- Transmedia
- Video game design, with an emphasis on visual novels and Renpy.
- Virtual reality programming.
- Writing skills (on the Forum)

It may be said that a continuously evolving and experimental sociotechnical process necessarily involves novelty and the opportunity to learn from experience. In this sense, Yrevocnu has been successful at creating an embodied learning environment. So far there has been no attempt at a systematic evaluation showing that Yrevocnu members *learned* what was explicitly *taught*. Undoubtedly, its members learned many things that were not explicitly taught. Perhaps in the next five year phase of Yrevocnu we will have the opportunity to demonstrate what we have learned.

# Community and Diversity

*“The secret to a great house is great people.” - Original Fruits Paradise motto*

We have been attentive from the beginning of the experiment to the culture and diversity of the Yrevocnu community. At the same time, we have seriously considered the question, “Why diversity?” This section will focus concretely on the current makeup of the Yrevocnu community, and on how respondents to the Quinquennial Examination and other instruments have indicated how they would like the community to change.

Yrevocnu’s participation is skewed masculine, and some respondents to the Quinquennial Examination commented that this gender ratio is not good, and that specifically Yrevocnu would be better if there were more women in it. Noting these comments is not intended to minimize the great contributions of women to Yrevocnu. There have been many. The relatively low participation of women does not appear to be due to a lack of initiative in recruiting and attempting to be inclusive of women. Rather, the available evidence indicates that Yrevocnu has not yet provided activities, opportunities, or community that many women find attractive. We recommend that future efforts by Yrevocnu to improve its gender ratio focus less on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) related interventions, broadly speaking, and more on how to make Yrevocnu a more positive and appealing space for women.

Yrevocnu’s activities and culture have some things in common with Burning Man and have been influenced by Burner culture. Many active members have been or are Burners. However, some respondents have commented that they would be happier, even safer, if there was less “burner energy” in Yrevocnu. Yrevocnu continues to explore what a post-Burner culture might be.

Others have noted that Yrevocnu would be improved if it were to attract more successful and powerful people, people with good senses of humor, kinder and gentle people, and people younger than the current members. Ideally, in the next five years Yrevocnu can become a community full of hilarious, kind, powerful women, in their late 20’s or early 30’s, who are not Burners.

We have a handful of such women already involved in the community. When asked what would make Yrevocnu more attractive, one replied, “Childcare.” Indeed, the question of whether or not Yrevocnu is or should be “family friendly” remains a divisive one. Some prefer that Future Balls be parties for adults; others have brought their kids. A small number of children have been inducted into Yrevocnu as members. This remains an unresolved part of Yrevocnu’s identity.

## What is Yrevocnu? What will it be?

Yrevocnu has had the participation of people with high creative output and energy. This output and energy is often not aligned. Future Balls tend to have “something for anyone; nothing for everyone”. They are opportunities for people to try out new activities and situations with other people who are often receptive and have ideas of their own. Those that attend more than once tend to have a high degree of openness to new experiences and ideas.

Beyond this, defining Yrevocnu has been challenging for several reasons.

- The original intentions at the founding of Yrevocnu were not consistently communicated, nor universally held, nor successfully reproduced, nor sustained by the founding members.
- Many of the creative activities of Yrevocnu have involved mythologizing Yrevocnu in fantastic or teleological terms (early versions of Yrevocnu were intentionally, satirically “culty”; later versions engaged magical rituals to summon a mythic city, Now City).
- The participants are not on the same page about whether or not they are there to party and blow off steam, or to contribute to something beyond that, or if they are sincere in their expressions of mythology, or are LARPing a mythology.

As has been discussed, participants have had different ideas of what they are aiming to accomplish and different expectations of social behavior. Discomfort has been expected and sometimes encouraged.

Rather than discuss the mythology directly here, we note that the mythology, acceptance of mysticism, and magical rituals have been helpful and effective within Yrevocnu. We might describe our activities as “improvisational hypertheater”. At the same time, Yrevocnu has been a way to uncover truths that are obscured by the mythologies and hypertheatrics of the world at large.

In the future, we will continue with what has been working. Namely, we will continue to try new things in our Future Balls and other activities, using a “yes, and” approach (a la improvisational theater) to develop a shared story of what we are doing together.

Where we can improve on is our ability to effectively communicate and sustain motivation about what we want to try, about the creative capabilities of everyone involved, and how they mesh with each other. This may involve less resistance to the “yes and” improv dynamic. However, “anything goes is a prison”, and ground rules and conflict resolution remains an area for us to work on.

Respondents have called, variously, for less escapism and more “getting real”, less bureaucracy and petty conflict, less “trying to be productive”, more and also less “family friendliness”, more or less safety, among other things. Others have said that Yrevocnu is perfect just the way it is.

# Appendix: Lab Reports on Dada Science Experiments

## A. Future Balls

Yrevocnu's existence requires that people convene in time. These conventions, which inaugurate the future, are called Future Balls, or Events.

### Methods

At the end of each Future Ball, an Organizer for the next Future Ball is announced. They are then responsible for choosing the time and place of the Future Ball. They may (try to) provide structure or direction for the event. Meanwhile, Yrevocnu members have engaged in an event planning process, volunteering to lead or take part in activities. Something unpredicted occurs.

### Results

Yrevocnu has held 7 Future Balls in its first five years, not including the original Glass Bead Planning Party ("Event 0") which predated Yrevocnu. They have been described as "Somewhere between a semiannual house party, creative retreat, friend reunion, and collective religious experience."

Each of these Future Balls has been led by a volunteer organizer, and each organizer has produced a unique happening.

They have typically been 2-4 days in length, over a weekend. One notable exception is Event 5, which lasted for 9 months. They have been held in Pittsburgh, PA (3), "upstate" New York (New Paltz, Jeffersonville, Middletown) (3), and New Orleans, LA (1). Event 4 was held in a virtual environment during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Discussion

Shame and insecurity from an unhappy past can block the use of creative intelligence that discovers the stories, technologies, and ways of being that are the future. On a personal level, these emotional patterns *are* the past manifest in the present. The happy future, or Next Age, which is "fiction" or myth, manifests when the unhappy past is transcended at last and creative intelligence is free to operate. Events are, ideally, a catalyst of this transition between the past and the future, the unlocking of creative intelligence.



## B. Social Autopoiesis and the Houses of Yrevocnu

One of the more distinctive aspects of Yrevocnu has been its system of governance. The first Future Ball of Yrevocnu was a constitutional moment, and in that moment Yrevocnu ratified its essential structure. Crafted by Dr. Jake Goldenfein as an expression of the legal autopoietics in the tradition of Gunther Teubner, the Pattern of Yrevocnu is a Dada Science experiment that tests, by construction, the implication of a governance system that creates its own parts, and does not reference anything outside of itself.

### Methods

Yrevocnu bootstrapped its Pattern using a grouping of its members into “Houses”, a joke from the Glass Bead Party that preceded the first Future Ball. The Pattern declares that the Houses are its constitutional category, and that the Houses must all agree on the categories of the Pattern, which determine its scope. The Houses may, collectively, make binding resolutions to resolve conflicts that are within the categories of the Pattern. But the Pattern does not concern the internal governance of the Houses; these are fully autonomous.

The Pattern was ratified by three houses:

- Fruits Paradise, the High House, governed by non-ideological anarchy.
- The Woods, the Middle House, governed by psychic consensus.
- Reef Structure, the Low House, governed by rotating autocracy.

Besides the Houses, the only other category of the Pattern agreed upon so far is Future Ball.

### Results

One respondent writes that the Pattern was “a reoccurring [sic] theme for endless background oppositional discourse among the inner circle.” Another writes that the Pattern has “become sufficiently insider that I’m honestly confused”. Another counts “Overemphasis on procedural matters” as one of the things that holds us back. The Pattern was not of universal interest to members or attendees. Nevertheless, it is understood by others to be an essential aspect of Yrevocnu that guides and sustains it as an entity.

It has arguably been an utter failure as a mechanism for productive conflict resolution. This has been due to two peculiarities in House governance. The governance system of The Woods, called “psychic consensus”, was never formulated in a way that was legible to the other Houses. Since the members of The Woods had several fundamental disagreements and changed their minds frequently, this meant that in effect The Woods vetoed any potential Pattern agreements. There is an element within Yrevocnu that sees this as a feature, not a bug: it forces conflict resolution to take place on an messy, interpersonal level, without appealing to or interpreting rules in a legalistic or bureaucratic way.

The other peculiarity has been the rotating autocracy of Reef Structure, whereby a new Commander is decided at each Event, and they have absolute authority over the House. While this system has been efficient and allowed the House to have a distinct sense of authorship and identity, it has lacked legitimacy and raised uncomfortable emotions around authority. With Commanders often unwilling to lead or perhaps, once appointed, absent, the House operated in a bureaucratic, almost automated fashion, which some found arbitrary and unproductive.

Untrustworthy and unstable, members of Yrevocnu determined that the Pattern meant that it should not hold any material assets. Attempts to invoke it to settle conflicts, such as those around harassment, fell flat. The governance of Yrevocnu has been, at best, a circus, and rarely that.

In Event 7, intra-House decisions have radically altered the structure of Yrevocnu. Reef Structure transitioned from a system of rotating autocracy to a system of liquid democracy, which is an improvement on its legitimacy and stability. The Woods has quietly changed its system to something even more mysterious, but apparently far less ornery, than psychic consensus. This radical change in Yrevocnu's structure heralds an entirely new culture emerging in the next five year span.

## Discussion

It can be argued that the original design of the Pattern was based on a theoretical mistake. The legal theorist Teubner's understanding of autopoiesis was based on that of Niklas Luhmann the sociologist. However, Luhmann adopted this term unfaithfully from its originator, Humberto Maturana the biologist. While Luhmann wrote that social systems could be autopoietic, Maturana insisted that only living organisms, and low level organisms at that, are truly autopoietic. Autopoiesis is, in the original conception, a foundational structure of life but not one repeated at higher orders of living organization. Consequently, the Pattern has been designed, unintentionally, such that Yrevocnu has the internal logic of a single biological cell. Is it alive? In the future, we will consider more seriously developments of Maturana's biology of cognition through Varela's more capacious theory of biological autonomy and the subsequent enactivism of Di Paolo and Froese.

## C. The Forum: our biggest failure; our biggest scapegoat

When Yrevocnu launched, one of its missions was to create a new form of communal education technology, perhaps a social media platform of some kind. In the spirit of experimentation towards this goal, a social media system was deployed for Yrevocnu members. It was hypothesized that a dedicated communications channel would create more group solidarity and continuity between events. More ambitiously, some speculated that a communally operated and controlled social media infrastructure would evolve to meet the social media needs of the group without the pathologies of commercial platforms.

### Method

After vetting several options, members of the community deployed a Discourse instance on a private server. A moderator from each of the three houses was appointed. This discourse instance, which came to be called the Forum, remained operational from November 5th, 2018, until it was shut down permanently in February, 2023.

(A Discord server was established for Yrevocnu's use, to provide an alternative, synchronous communications format for Event 4, which was an all remote occasion during the COVID-19 pandemic. For some reason, the Discord was more lightly used than the Forum.)

### Results

One respondent writes "We learned that small, self-moderated forums are THE place to have meaningful online experiences in the age of terminal social media." Another writes about the Forum as an unpleasant site; there was "a lot of judgment about other people not playing the way people wanted (mostly on the forum)."

One unforeseen circumstance which made the Forum especially salient for the community was the COVID-19 pandemic, during which many in-person events were canceled and no live Yrevocnu Future Balls were held. Event 4 was virtual-only, organized around Discord rooms. Event 5 lasted, officially, for many months, and during this time, the Forum activity was *part* of a Future Ball, as opposed to an auxiliary organ for *planning* Future Balls. During this time, some began to see the Forum as a central part of Yrevocnu as a whole. It is quite possible that having the Forum as a channel contributed to Yrevocnu's ability to survive the pandemic.

There was some amount of confusion about the purpose of Yrevocnu's social media system. Some people expressed that they were happy to use it *instead* of other advertising supported media, such as Facebook. However, the Forum declined because users started to question why they were using it, saying that it had little value to them. Perhaps the Forum was successful in weaning people off of addictive media but, being intentionally non-addictive, it proved to not sustain "engagement".

## Invention: Mood Rooms

Yrevocnu members came to the Forum with different ideas of code of conduct, respect, and appropriateness. These ideas were tested, argued, and deliberated openly on the Forum, as it was the main venue in which those enthusiastic about Yrevocnu could try to shape the process in between Events. The Forum provided all the usual affordances of on-line media, including the ambiguity of tone that sometimes comes with text, as well as the possibility of pseudonymity. It also had, inescapably, a hierarchy of power, as one or two members were responsible for hosting, three were given administrative privileges, and others were not technically capable of managing the forum. The Forum, not being a category of the Pattern, was not governed by anything like a due process, but some members were opinionated about how behaviors should or should not be enforced. For example, sometimes people treated each other badly on the Forum, and it arose whether or not that behavior should be censured or moderated somehow. There was also the question of whether the Forum should be “private, members-only”, or allow those who hadn’t attended to join, or be open to the public in some way, was often contested.

We tried not to thoughtlessly import any assumptions from the best practices of corporately operated social media. The Forum was operated in the spirit of play. Sometimes, AI powered bots would engage the forum, seeming to troll its members. Sometimes, new forms of interactivity were added with JavaScript. Discourse has a powerful plugin engine and a great deal of customizable functionality, and this was taken advantage of. Also, behavior on the Forum was sometimes sarcastic, sometimes a form of performance. The Forum took on, at times, mythic or hypertheatric qualities.

The power dynamics involved in managing a forum tread on one of Yrevocnu’s political third rails, which was whether Yrevocnu was a system of rules and processes, or whether Yrevocnu was primarily about personal relationships between friends. Some elements wanted a more conventional Code of Conduct; others were adamantly opposed to any formal censorship.

The Forum evolved towards a perhaps novel form of contextualized moderation. The posts on the Discourse instance were divided into categories with the names of rooms: Kitchen, Hallway, Basement, and so on. Some of these rooms became dedicated to activity with questionable content. The Lavatory was dedicated to sexually explicit content. The Arena was the venue for aggression. Rather than deleting misbehavior when it was flagged as inappropriate, it was instead moved to an appropriate room, where it could be ignored, or at least understood in a context that limited its transgressive power.

One respondent has suggested that this principle could be used more broadly in future versions of the Forum. Users might have more control over which rooms they subscribe to, rather than being presented with a page summarizing updates on all categories. Different rooms could then have behavioral norms set internally, much as the Houses have their own internal, autonomous governance. All of the moderators of the original Forum are in agreement that in the future, Yrevocnu’s communications architecture will be decentralized.

## Collapse

A number of factors contributed to the collapse of the forum. With the end of the pandemic, online activity was increasingly out of favor compared to in person encounters. Participants on the Forum began to question its value, and did not find a satisfying answer. The inability to settle on norms of any kind, as well as the push to keep things fresh and unexpected, led to an untenable situation. The Forum was shut down by its administrator in early 2023.

The community has reverted to commodity/common carrier media, such as email, Google docs and sites, and calendars. There is no system of governance over this infrastructure, only ubiquitous free services that have no ads, registered to personal accounts. There is lower communication volume overall, and less observability.

## Discussion

The Forum was both influential and problematic. On the positive side, the Forum was a place where Yrevocnu players could bounce ideas off each other, share media, and plan for Events. These discussions were often lively and did indeed result in some interesting and original Future Ball activities. It was also the case that the Forum's customizability and interoperability was fun and generative. Many memorable pranks and innovations arose from our experiments with the Forum.

On the other hand, the Forum was the site of much frustrating conflict. Despite being a rather small group of people who knew each other in person, the forum could sometimes be "toxic". No binding code of conduct was ever adopted (see Pattern lab report, Appendix B), and disagreements over what was appropriate and how to deal with conflicts took a lot of energy.

Beyond its primary use in facilitating the organization of Future Balls, the Forum served as an organ of community enculturation. However, the depth of content on the Forum, and its (dis)organization, made it difficult to enter and orient as a newcomer or returning oldcomer. Forum participants became an insular in-group within Yrevocnu. Some have observed Conway's Law at work: the Forum was an inward-facing, centralized communications system that was somewhat alienating to outsiders. Yrevocnu became like this as a social organization. Now it is free to become something else.