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## ReForm

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# Appendix: ReFormat

## ReFormat<sup>1</sup>

**R:** symbol for medical prescription, abbreviation of Latin *recipe*, imperative form of *recipere*, 'to take' or 'take thus'. Medieval prescriptions typically instructed the patient to take certain substances believed to be curative or therapeutic and to compound them and combine them in particular ways.

**ReForm:** to make changes in something e.g. a person, a social, political or economic institution or practice in order to improve it.

**ReFormat:** to give a new format to; revise or represent in another format; to change the way information is stored and organized, especially on a computer.

<sup>1</sup> This installation is the latest in a series of works by Amsterdam-based artist Ruchama Noorda. These works examine the buried, forgotten or otherwise neglected cultural, spiritual, political and artistic legacies of the early 20th century Lebensreform movement. Through a combination of library research, the alchemical manipulation of materials, invented ritual, public performance and on-site immersive experience, Noorda sets out to assess the continuing influence of Anthroposophical and Theosophical beliefs and practices on counter-cultural life-styles, social and artistic forms, back-to-nature-ism and the now booming alternative medicine, organic produce and natural healing industries.



Fig. 5.0. *The Shepherdess*, video still. Vera Hofmann and Ruchama Noorda, 2015.



Platform 1 & 2

File contents: items displayed on the platforms include: compressed landscape pills made from earth/building debris/plant life collected at the ruined sites of two early 20th century utopian commune: Walden in Bussum, the Netherlands (1898–1907) and Llano del Rio (1915–1918)<sup>2</sup>; *Gaper*:

2 '... Noorda employs dirt in the form of fragments of built structures taken from the ruins of two early 20th century utopian communes, together with earth and plant matter collected at these sites. By compressing this material into small circular discs, she condenses the material foundations on which these social and spiritual experiments in alternative living once rested into portable easy to swallow medicinal tablets. ... These instant art-works, to be taken with water, come with a fact-sheet; a guide for overcoming the ... split between mind & body, the collective & individual aspects of being. Noorda's installation... seeks to activate that vital spark (élan vital) which she believes to be present in everyday material' (from hand-out accompanying the installation *R, Compressed Landscape*, Galerie van Gelder, Amsterdam, 2014)

photograph of the artist with pill mounted on tongue; publications: Frederik van Eeden *Binnenlandsche Kolonisatie (Homeland Colonization)* [1900] & *Gemeenschappelijk Grondbezit (Common Land Ownership)*[1903]; Life magazine article on Nature Boy, eden ahbez (1948); photograph by Paulien Oltheten of participants in mud spa/'rave'/sculptural installation titled *Asocialen-Prophesy-Detox*, Diepenheim, 2012; ergot sample in lightbox; pharmacy prescription leaflets; entheogenic *Salvia Divinorum* plant derived from a strain collected in the Sierra Mazateca in Oaxaca, southern Mexico by American psychiatrist and ethnobotanist, Sterling Bunnell in 1962<sup>3</sup>.



Miscellaneous

File contents: Photograph of Private Prophecy/ No Excess sign (Joshua Tree, California, 2015); mud circle with pills; handwritten notes: 'Llano del Rio'/'Walden'; wall painting with sleeping bag; glass display shelf array with *Live Earth* cartons.



Grotto

File contents: In the right hand corner of the space stands a grotto/cave: point of access to and exit from the Underneath/the Underworld. Unfinished, open-ended, it serves a variety of functions: theatrical prop/ sacred shrine/ primal shelter/paper shell/portal to regression and epiphany/ miniature screening room. Two copper emoticon-gongs stand guard at the grotto entrance.

3 'An entheogen ("generating the divine within") is a chemical substance used in a religious, shamanic, or spiritual context that may be synthesized or obtained from natural species.' (Wikipedia)



### The Shepherdess

File contents: The video screening on a loop inside the grotto is titled *The Shepherdess*—the Mazatec name for the psychoactive plant *Salvia Divinorum* (Sage of the Ghosts) used by indigenous *curanderas* (shamans) in traditional *velada* (healing vigil) ceremonies.<sup>4</sup>

The video made in collaboration with German artist, Vera Hofmann combines verité footage of the artists vigil encounter with the Shepherdess during an overnight stay in the VU-Hortus (The Hortus Botanicus of VU University) in Amsterdam in May, 2015 with a virtual rendering of the experience in Second Life ('the largest-ever 3D virtual world created entirely by its users' according to the official site [secondlife.com](http://secondlife.com)). Noorda and Hofmann each designed and operated their own avatars and worked independently on their individual segments, which were later, combined at the editing stage. The journey narrates the travel back and forth across species, through multiple time layers, unevenly realized digital landscapes, outer and inner space, from analogue to digital, from ocean bed to childhood swimming pool to (cardboard) kidney dish.

For the Shepherdess all scales are equal, all surfaces permeable, all material transmutable.

*Because I can swim in the immense  
Because I can swim in all forms*

.....  
*I am the shepherdess*

<sup>4</sup> The idea of the *Salvia Divinorum Vigil* was developed in conversation with fellow Civic Virtue member Geirthrudur Finnbogadóttir Hjórvör before the collective disbanded in 2014.

### Maria Sabína, Mazatec curandera channeling the spirit of the Salvia D. Goddess<sup>5</sup>.

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Fig. 5.1. *The Shepherdess*, video still. Vera Hofmann and Ruchama Noorda, 2015.

<sup>5</sup> Sabína became famous after she introduced ethnomycologist R. Gordon Wasson, Albert Hofmann and other western psychonauts to psilocybin and was later ostracized by her fellow Mazatecs for betraying tribal secrets. According to Wikipedia her likeness is now used to market everything 'from restaurants to taxi companies'.



Fig. 5.2. *ReFormat: Emoticon and Grotto*, Ruchama Noorda, Royal Academy of Art, The Hague, 2015.

