

Q: Should we begin with *hydroponics*? How would you describe its relation to “Autarkia”?

A: Everything is very simple. “Autarkia” was initially the code name for a project seeking to breed an “artist plant”. Well obviously it was a genetically modified bio-luminescent, glowing plant, or better – a plant that could carry glowing texts and drawings on its leaves and stems. The project was carried on under the supervision of an artist placement program called *Visionierius*, which is run by the Vilnius Institute of Pataphysics (VIP).

Q: What is *pataphysics*?

A: Sorry for so using many strange words – *pataphysics* as described by Alfred Jarry¹ is the science of imaginary solutions (which symbolically attributes the properties of objects, described by their virtuality, to their lineaments). Don’t try too hard to understand the second part of the description in the brackets, as *pataphysics* resists being pinned down by simple definitions. It is a branch of philosophy or science that examines imaginary phenomena, which exist in a world beyond metaphysics.

My favourite description comes from Georges Perec². “Physics proposes: ‘You have a brother and he likes cheese,’ then metaphysics replies: ‘Maybe you have a brother and maybe he likes cheese.’ But *pataphysics* says: ‘You don’t have a brother, but he likes cheese.’ Ok? The science of imaginary solutions, if presented in the right way, proposes a scientific approach to creativity. Isn’t that great? VIP runs an artist placement program – it establishes artistic missions at high-tech companies, where artist is given access to technology in an attempt to create something “new”, but with no strings attached to the result.

Q: But how did it all start?

A: “Autarkia” began as a collaboration between biotech company “NOMADS”, genetics engineer Šarūnas Paškevičius and philosopher Vaidas Gecevičius, who was responsible for building a hydroponic system that was to host the plants and keep them blooming. He actually proposed the title “Autarkia” – which means self-sustainability. I was struggling to find a space for presenting the project when this canteen in an area that used to be a Soviet space program factory went bankrupt, and it became impossible to resist to idea to take over this space. From this point on, “Autarkia” transformed into an artist day-care centre – instead of hosting genetically modified plants and keeping water and minerals circulating, it started to become a socio-economic experiment feeding the local art scene.

Q: Who’s not involved in “Autarkia”?

A: “Autarkia” isn’t a collective or a union or club, and there is no unifying idea or agenda behind it. As Groucho Marx once said: “I don’t want to belong to any club that will accept people like me as a member.” What we’re embracing is not a utopian community feeling, but rather the

¹ Alfred Jarry (1873–1907) was a French symbolist writer who is best known for his play *Ubu Roi* (1896).

² Georges Perec (1936–1982) was a French novelist, filmmaker, documentalist, and essayist. He was a member of the Oulipo group.

practicalities, day to day activities, routine, and discipline at the restaurant operating in “Autarkia”, which employs over ten artists, writers, designers, musicians, weirdos etc. That is the economy; people create the culture and environment of the place where work. Take a break from your creative suffering, spend some time in a compassionate environment, contribute to a common goal. One of the definitions states that “Autarkia” is an artist day-care (or in more official contexts – an artist centre), but it is also a rehab centre, and maybe it’ll become a place to retire. Everyone comes with their own agenda – some are looking for a place that could stabilise their lives, some have come to realise their ideas, and some come to start something different. “Autarkia” is designed as a long-term project and self-sufficiency is its DNA. It has to be as strong as a cactus to be able to survive, or even hibernate, through any droughts.

Q: Could you talk more about what, or who is “The Guest”?

A: “The Guest” is a reiteration of “Autarkia” as a cabaret in Riga. “The Guest” has ambitions to become a diplomatic mission that will strengthen the already viable Vilnius - Riga connection. The artwork here is the background; a setting for the real drama. We’re here to exchange and sign the contract with Gints Gabrans' startup, which develops augmented reality solutions. The cabaret is a socio-economic comedy/mockumentary in the making about artists trying to adapt and survive an ever changing environment, while exploring clichés about the relation between art, science and business.