



Three years ago, an anonymous 4chan user posted an image in the /x/ forum<sup>1</sup> in a thread about cursed images. The image showed a room with mono-yellow patterned wallpaper, dingy fluorescent lighting, stained carpets and a sense of impending dread; the more you looked, the more you felt disquieted. The user called this *The Backrooms*, a space you enter when you noclip out of reality: the humming buzz of the lights, the stench of the mildewed carpets, the lack of human presence, and the sensation of familiarity give *The Backrooms* a feeling of Kenosopia, *the eeriness of places left behind*.

*The Backrooms* are conceptually linked to Liminal Spaces, areas of enforced thresholds, neither here nor there. These spaces are transitional; with ambiguity and disorientation we find ourselves able to cross-over into other realms in a dreamlike state. Liminal Spaces exist between the familiar and the unknown, leaving us disassociated from the reality we once knew, and able to think about a reality we are yet to know. Liminal Spaces allow for eerie encounters and eerie sensations, the eerie in this instance interrupts the mundane and permeates when something (us, people) is absent<sup>2</sup>. When occupying a position at both sides of a threshold, context is rendered obsolete and instead makes way for the unexpected or the uncanny. But it can also leave us stuck, unable to position ourselves inside reality or outside of it: it is here we begin the journey through *Occlusion Leak*. Navigating our way through the systems we have become embedded in, the game places emphasis on the impossibility to infiltrate these megastructures, and brings to light our lack of control in singularly inducing change. If we're not included at the outset we assume our position at the frontend, unable to reach, or fully understand, the black-box of the backend.

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*Faint clicking and something that sounds like wind through the crack in a window saturates the game board as you enter. Deep pulsations reverberate and rumble through the screen. The sound when you click on a drawing pierces the drone. Floating to other areas of the gameboard, the drawings snap into position, sometimes crossing each other, sometimes not. A dog with its face peeled back comes into view behind the snake with many heads, an ouroboros of sorts. Mutated zombie menace. The drawings appear to be timeless and spaceless, their textural qualities reminiscent of early cave drawings but the imagery itself has no contemporary reference points. Maybe from nature, maybe animal, maybe human, the pieces irregularly produce short video clips when touched. There's an order to the chaos. Sticking with it uncovers secret, hidden rules - a secret (visual) language - where pieces change colour, perform unexpected moves and eventually infect each other. Reaching the infection stage, the drawings are forever altered, turned upside down and glowing red. Is there a way back or is this the end?*

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Unlike other gamified experiences, *Occlusion Leak* offers very little by way of initial rules or instructions for play. "Click pieces to move → Move pieces to progress game" is ambiguous - what are the "pieces", what does "progress" look like? Although armed with a starting point, the player navigates through the game by way of intuition and chance: over time, patterns emerge and unnoticed elements present themselves through either active searching or passive interaction. The game tests self-motivation but also the extent to which the game itself is efficient in motivating the player, and relinquishes itself to the fact that it may never be fully experienced, or fully animated. Triggers remain unpulled, rules of play unexpressed. Causality, however, remains constant.

<sup>1</sup> <https://archive.4plebs.org/x/thread/22672919/>

<sup>2</sup> Fisher, M. (2016). *The weird and the eerie*. London: Repeater Books.

Occlusion Leak posits a new understanding for how we interact with, and unfurl, the infrastructures we inhabit by becoming a metaphor for the 'bigness' of systems that are difficult to decipher and maneuver. Through the act of play, we are asked to impersonate a child-like curiosity in uncovering and revealing, letting go of our preconceived notions surrounding gamification and linearity. In this context, getting lost in something we can't yet interpret is the only way we can begin to understand it (and the systems around us). Like *The Backrooms*, we find Occlusion Leak at its moment of *no-clipping* itself, falling out of the reality we know into uncharted territory mapped by players who have come before us - pieces scattered suggest we weren't the first here: the Kenosopia of the internet backwaters.

Rebecca Edwards