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A (False) Biography of an Unknown Mother

I am proposing to present the theoretical basis of an ongoing project about the fading image of mother as autonomous woman, an interactive text-based story exploring my late mother's early adult life. Being one of her primary caretakers during the eight years of her battle with brain cancer, I knew her first as mother, then as child, but never — as many do when growing into adulthood in parallel with a mother's aging — as woman. The project is an interactive historiography of my mother before motherhood, a history that stands outside the realm of documentation. Notions of travelling through space and time to encounter one's unknown ancestors, as in Octavia Butler's *Kindred*, serve as theoretical inspiration, with the caveat that my reasons for historiographical uncertainty is not based on race, but gender politics.

The choices made have little impact on the story unfolds, instead constructing how memory is formed, while exposing uncertainties I faced in constructing this history. Using Jacques Derrida's notion of *différance*, the project is a platform through users construct meaning through the interaction between their ethos and the platform's procedures, whereby the user produces intimate meaning beyond authorial intentions.

I am now the age my mother was when she emigrated to the United States, began a family, and fell into a prolonged post-partum depression. The life she led before can now only be conjured through fiction based on select archival evidence. Confusing my memories with hers to construct this false history, the project maps the transition from early womanhood to motherhood, constructing a faded and forged image of life before.

Butler, Octavia. *Kindred*. Beacon Press, 2003.

Derrida, Jacques, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. *Of Grammatology*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016.

Alexandra Petrus is a PhD student in Cinema and Media Studies at the University of Southern California. She received her BA in Film Production and German Studies from California State University, Long Beach in 2017, and her MA in Game Development and Research at the Cologne Institute of Technology in 2021. She is co-founder and CEO of Achtung Autobahn studios, a Germany-based games studio specializing in social-realist games. There, she oversaw the development of *Berlin Maniacs*, an action/adventure game situated during the 1968 student protest movement in West Germany. Her current research focuses on game studies, historiographical procedurality, and cultural memory.