

Reconciling Games

Raph Koster

What I said I would talk about

Cross-disciplinary approaches!

Reconciling conflicts!

Play. Game.

Game. Videogame.

Ludology. Narratology.

Interactivity. Interpretability.

Centering players. Centering what is played.

Bah.

It was all so very dry.

A game I did not design



Which started out like this (2012)



A vision exercise

What is the game about, on a systemic level?

And how does the player accomplish their goal?

What is the game about, thematically?

And how does the player meet that goal?



Four kinds of problems

HAPTICS

COMPLEXITY

SOCIAL

CHANCE

HAPTICS

Sports, vertigo,
reflexes

COMPLEXITY

Perception of
PSPACE-Complete
to NP-Hard

SOCIAL

Hierarchy, mentorship,
tribalism

CHANCE

Mistaken belief in a
pattern

Not the same as kinds of fun

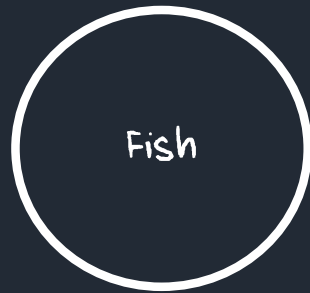
EASY FUN

HARD FUN

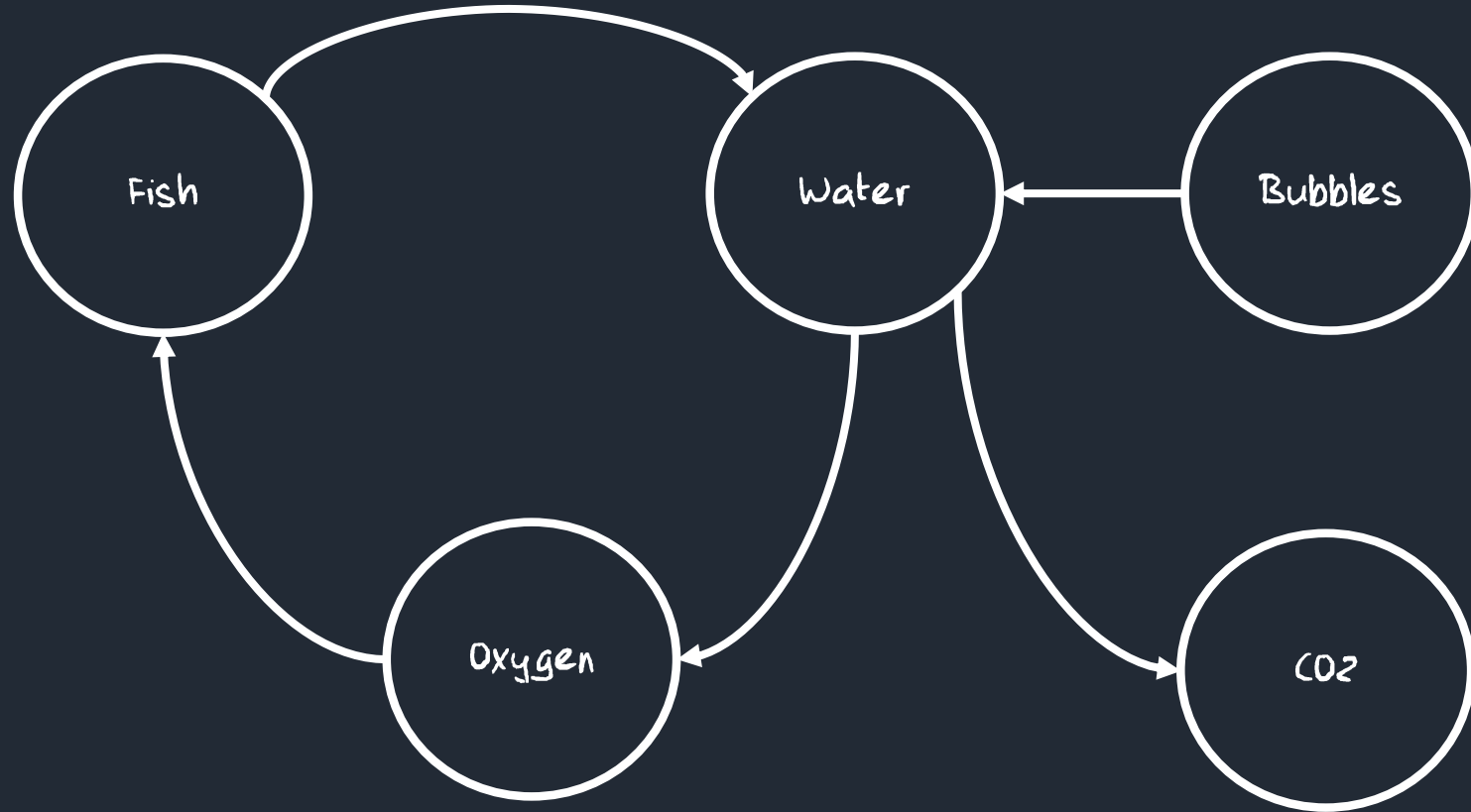
SOCIAL FUN

VISCERAL FUN

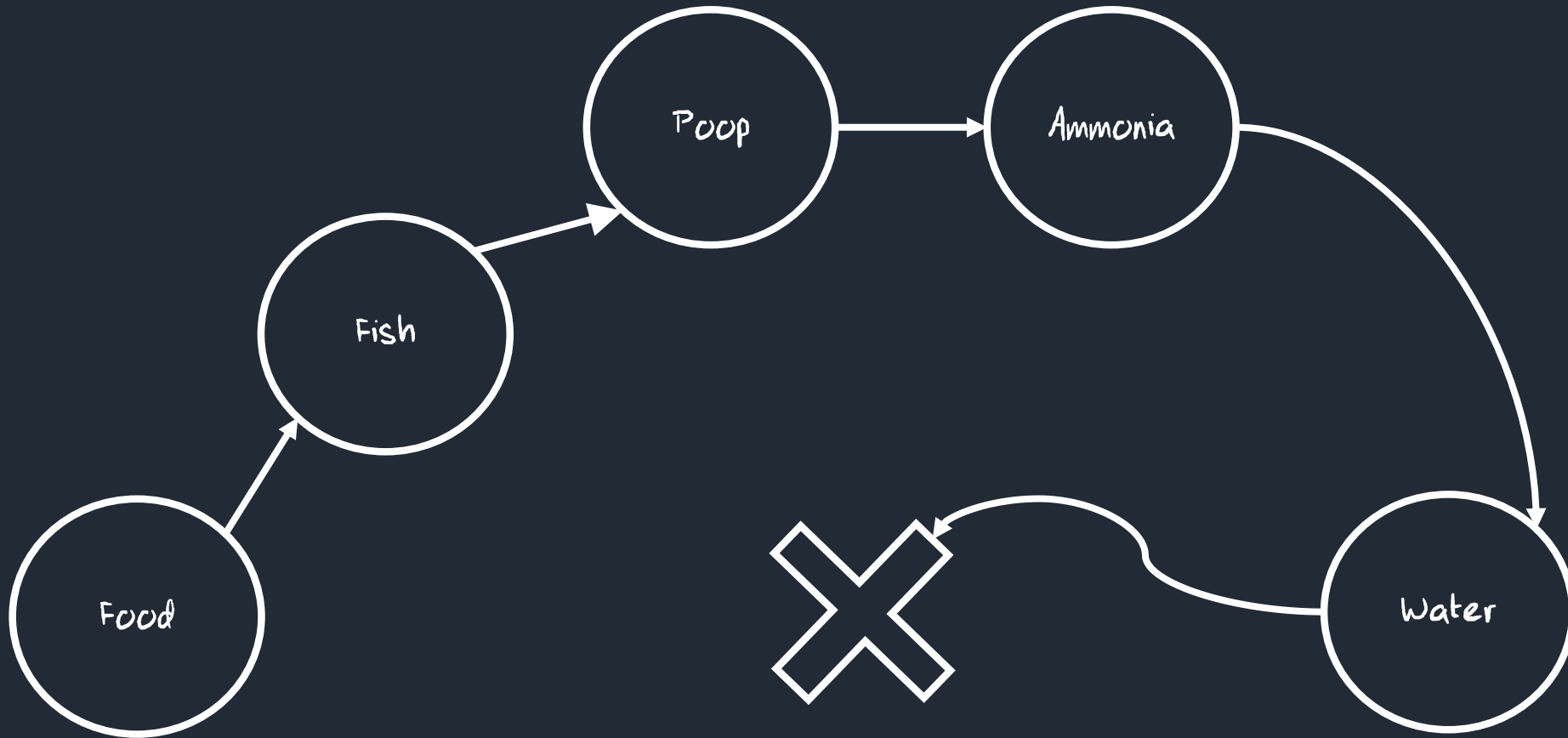
Let's start with complexity



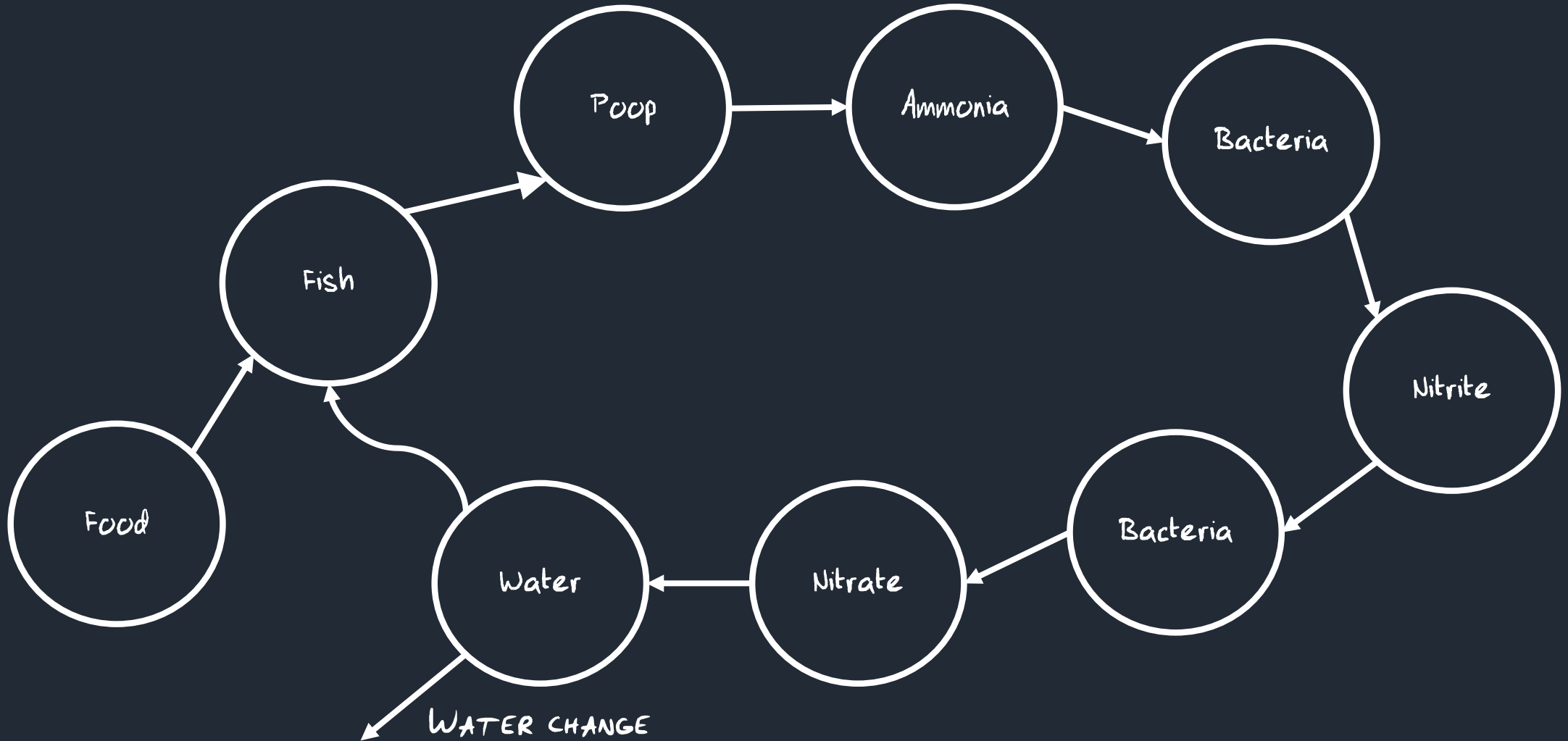
Let's start with complexity



Let's start with complexity

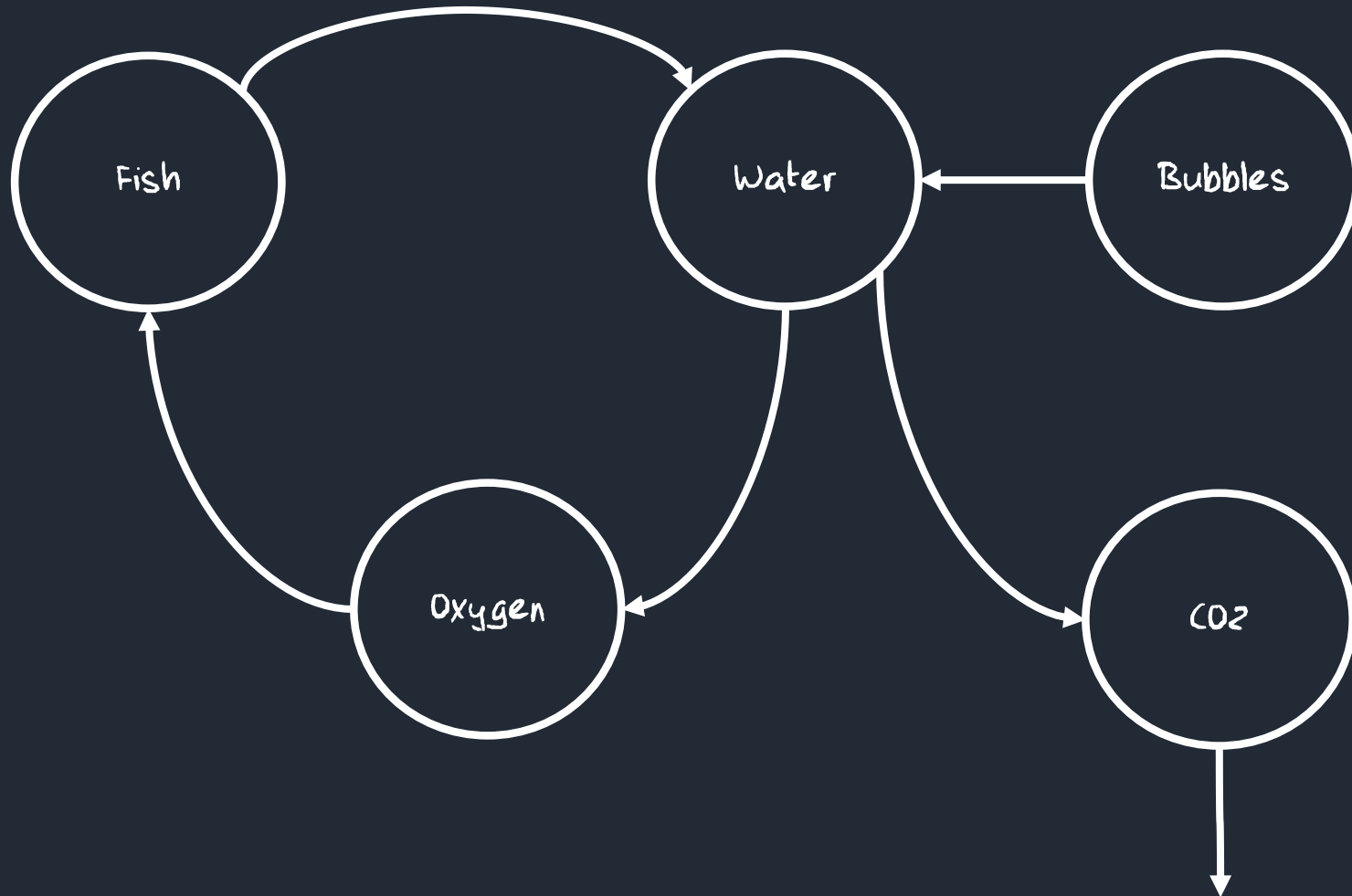


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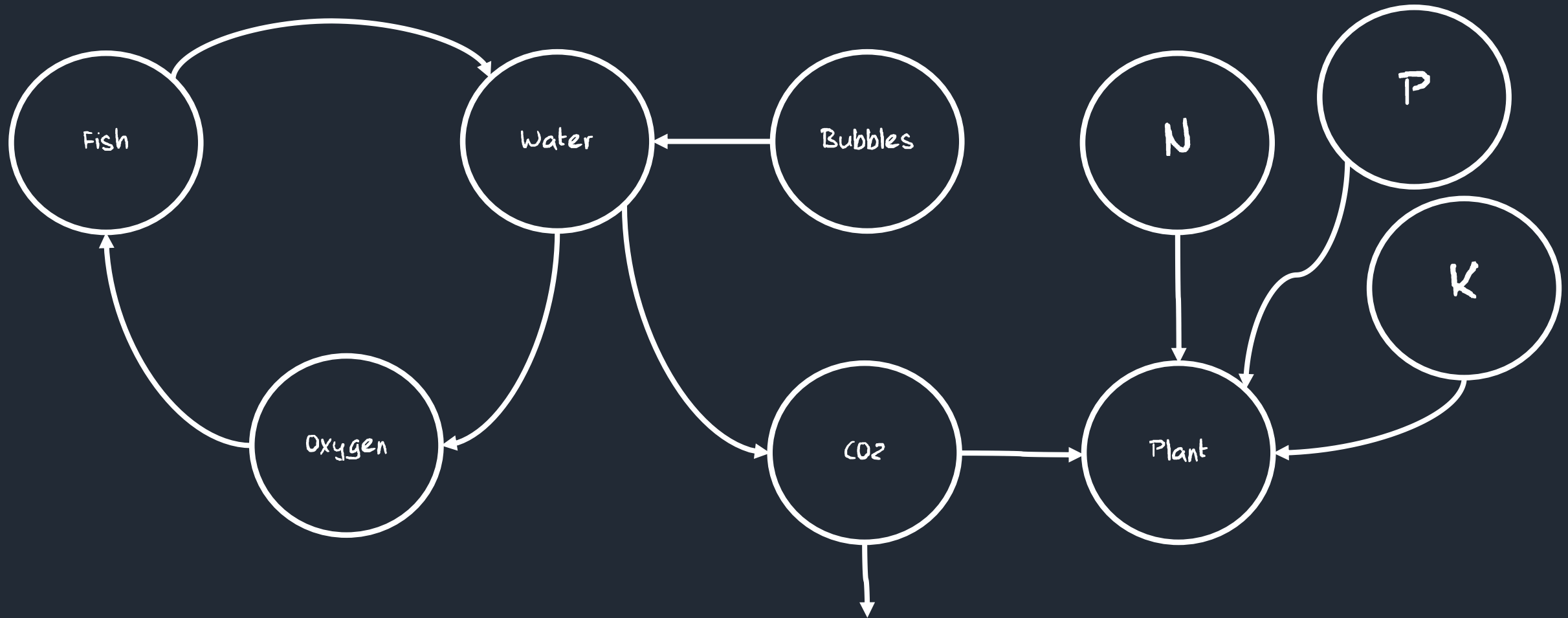


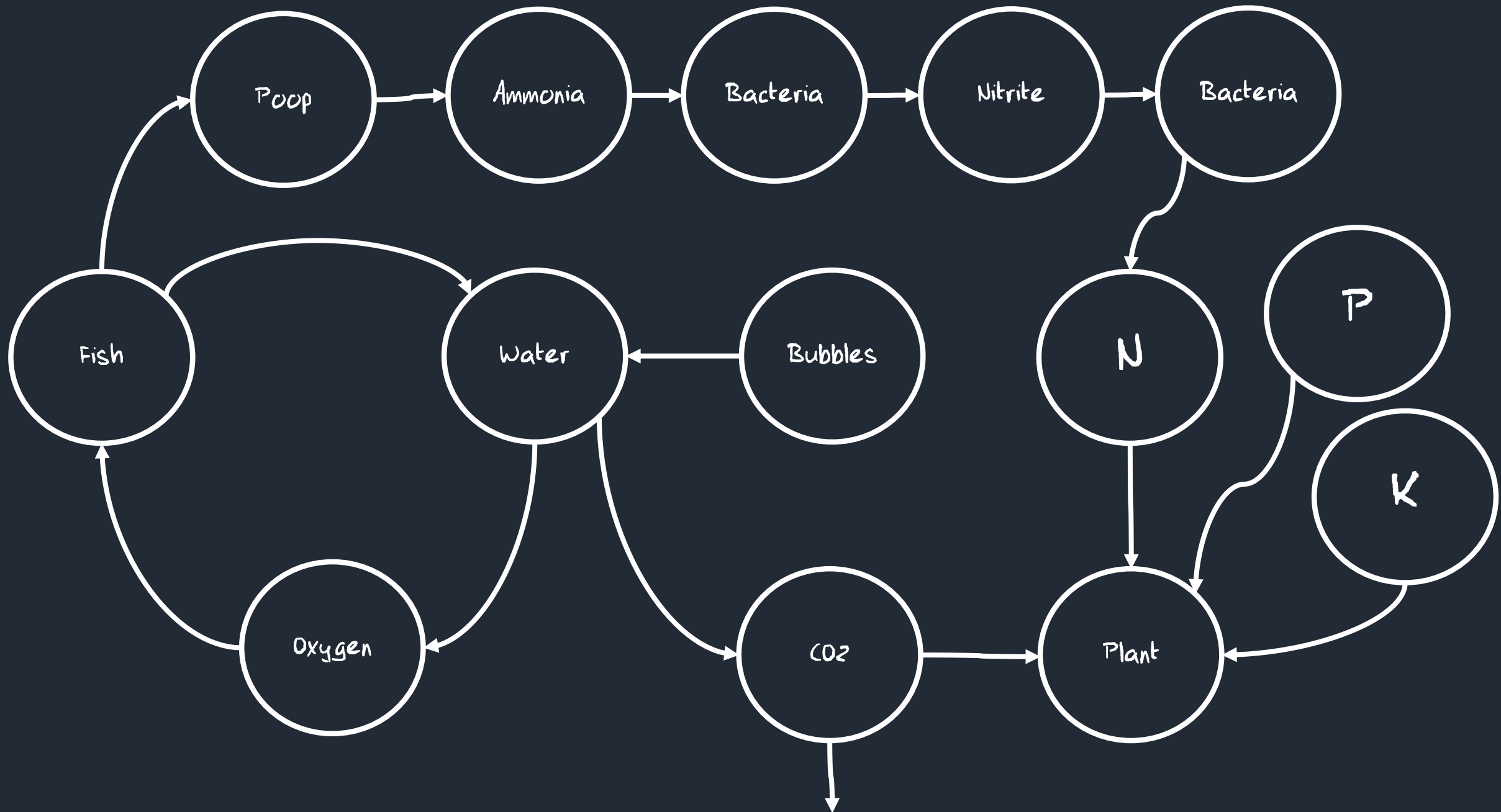


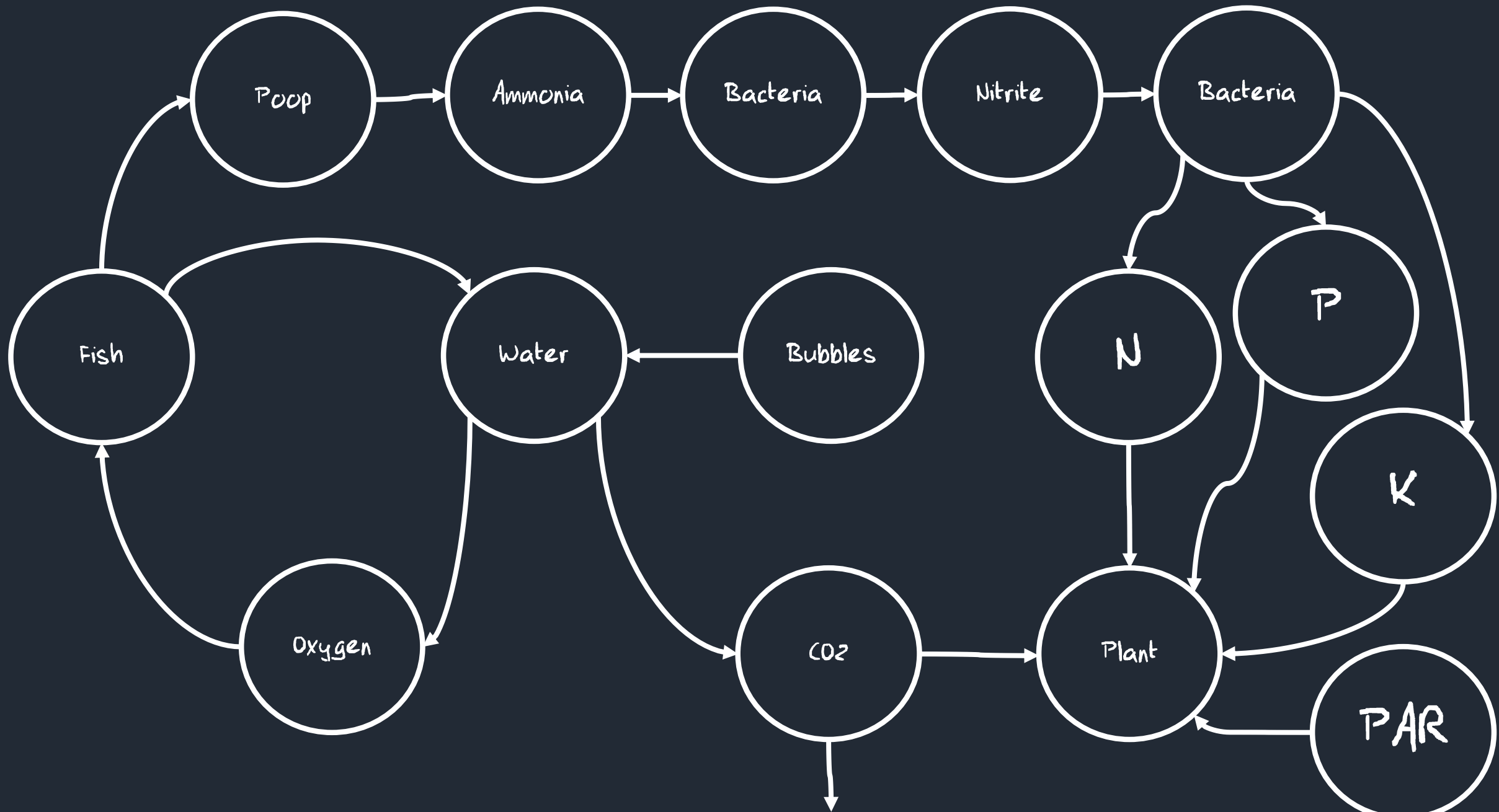
But I want live plants!

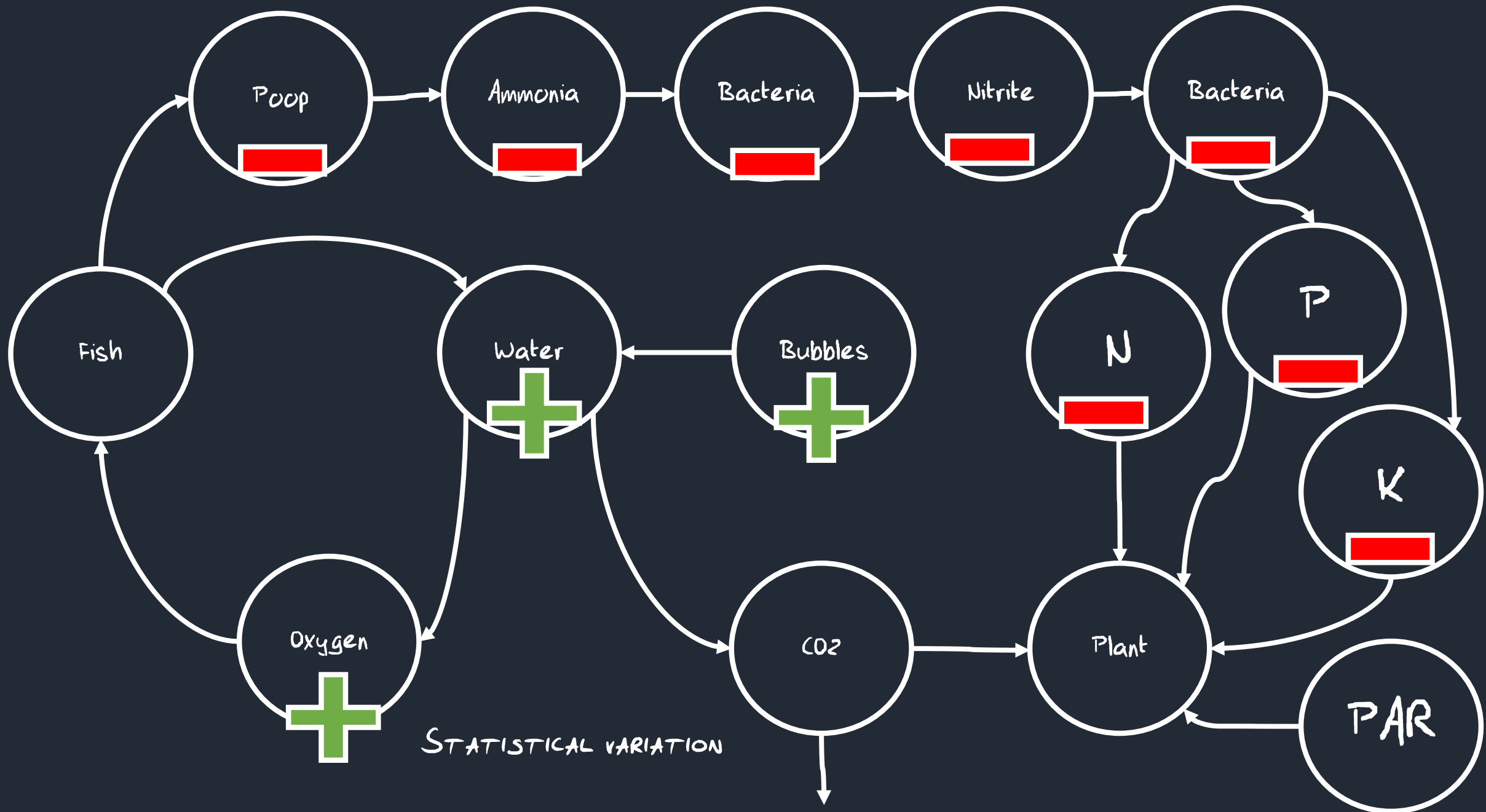


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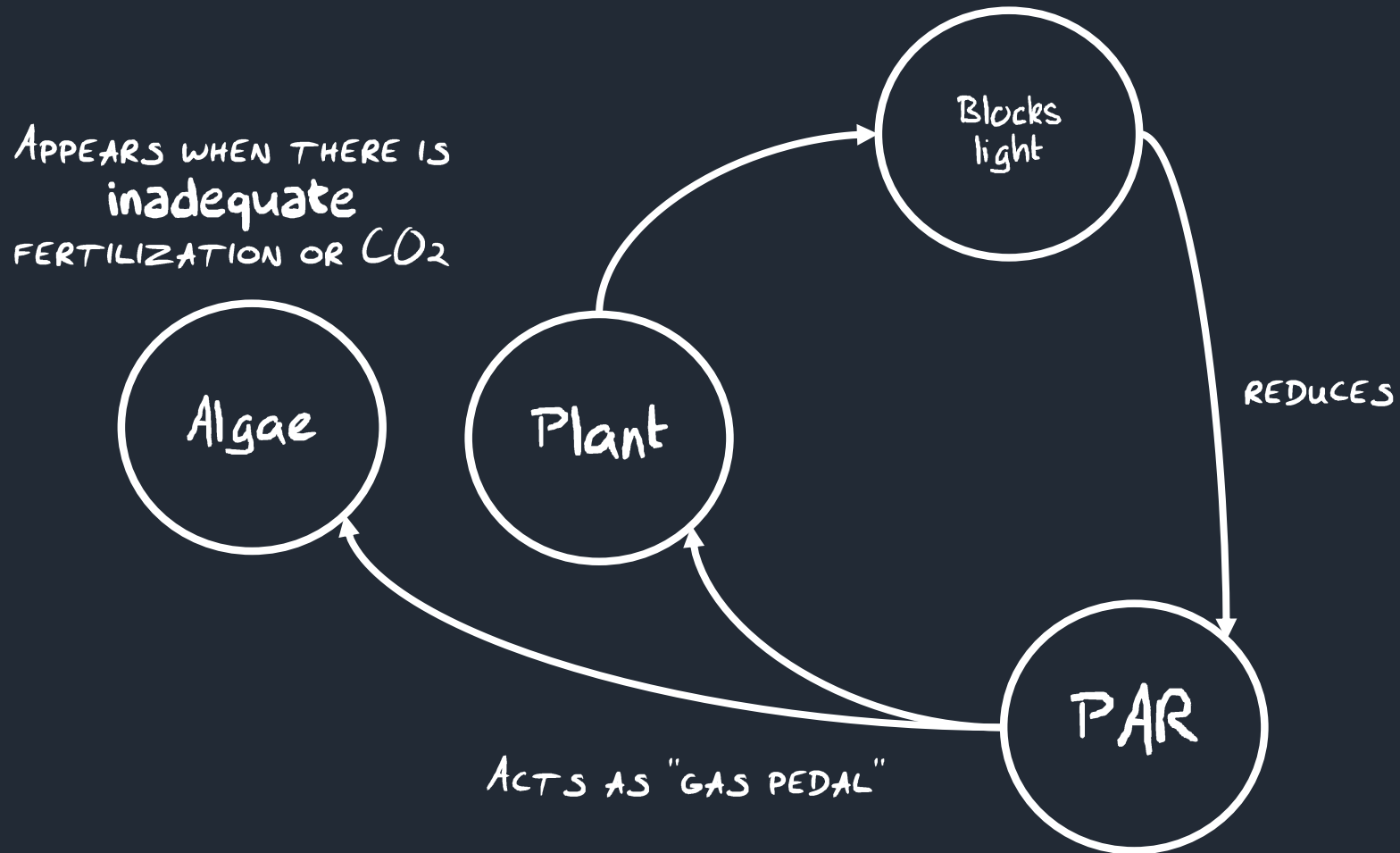








Internal feedback loops



HAPTICS

Sports, vertigo,
reflexes

COMPLEXITY

Perception of
PSPACE-Complete
to NP-Hard

SOCIAL

Hierarchy, mentorship,
tribalism

CHANCE

Mistaken belief in a
pattern

Intuition techniques

NP problems

Multiplayer

Orthogonality (disparate games in one)

Simulations

Signs as tokens (RPGs, Dixit)

Narrative

We do have characters in this game!



Authored narrative

Turns out these bots have little lifecycles.

They start tiny, they get big.

They get sick.

They get lonely.

They die!

Sometimes they leave babies behind.

Emergent or player-driven

I name the fish!

I sometimes kill them through my actions.

I sometimes save their lives!

I make them happy by changing tank conditions.

Acculturation techniques

Rhetorical repetition

Replay for achievements

Frames, labels

Impose worldview thru viewpoint character

Othering

High causality

Empathy techniques

Loose symbolic relationships

Layered symbology

Ambiguity of referents

Anacoenosis: asking audience for opinion, presenting multiple opinions

Surrealism, acausality



Oral culture



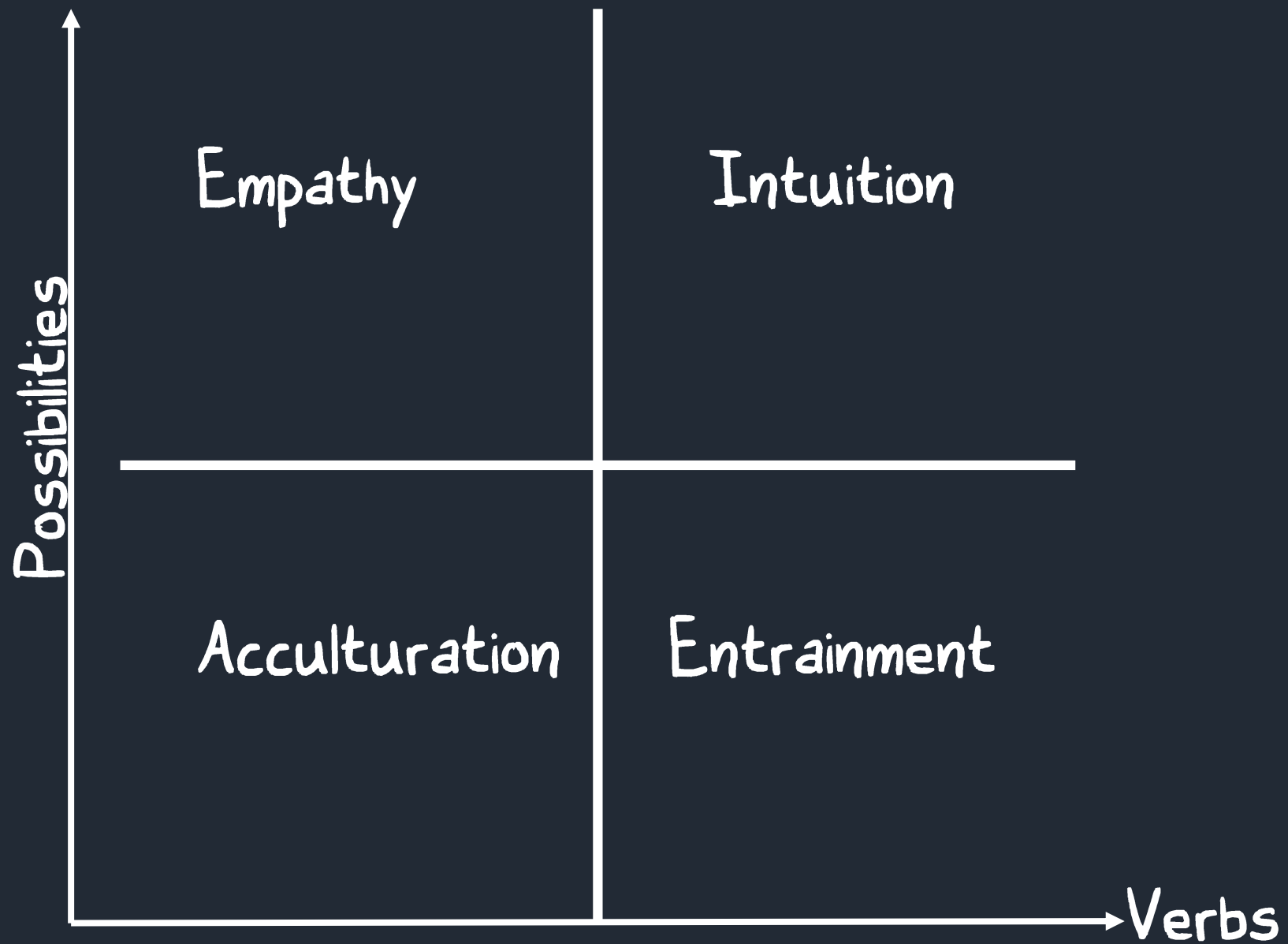
Print culture



Digital culture

Cortazar,
Robbe-
Grillet, even
Ayn Rand

Concrete
poetry,
Pound, Eliot,
Stein



A LESS LUDIC
CORNER

Loose symbolic relationships
Layered symbology
Ambiguity of referents
Anacoenosis: asking audience
for opinion, presenting multiple
opinions
Surrealism, acausality

Rhetorical repetition
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Signs as tokens (RPGs, Dixit)

Stagecraft: cutscenes, triggers,
control
String of pearls
Scaffolding
Speed and reflex training
Selective agency (no choices)
Tropes



Multiplayer design

I get to run a small aquatic MMO!

The fish have social networks, predator/prey relationships, symbiotic relationships...



Roles



A team sport

My wife can't remember to feed the fish.

She also lacks the skill to feed the right amounts or manage the fertilizers.

Drawing on other fields

Psychology

Sociology

Anthropology

Marriage counseling?



Expressive systems

Threshold of complexity required

What Ryan called "ontological interactivity"

INTUITION TECHNIQUES

NP problems

Multiplayer

Orthogonality (disparate games in one)

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Signs as tokens (RPGs, Dixit)











This is a pretty good game!

But no one designed it.

The world is full of systems

Everything is a whirling
clockwork

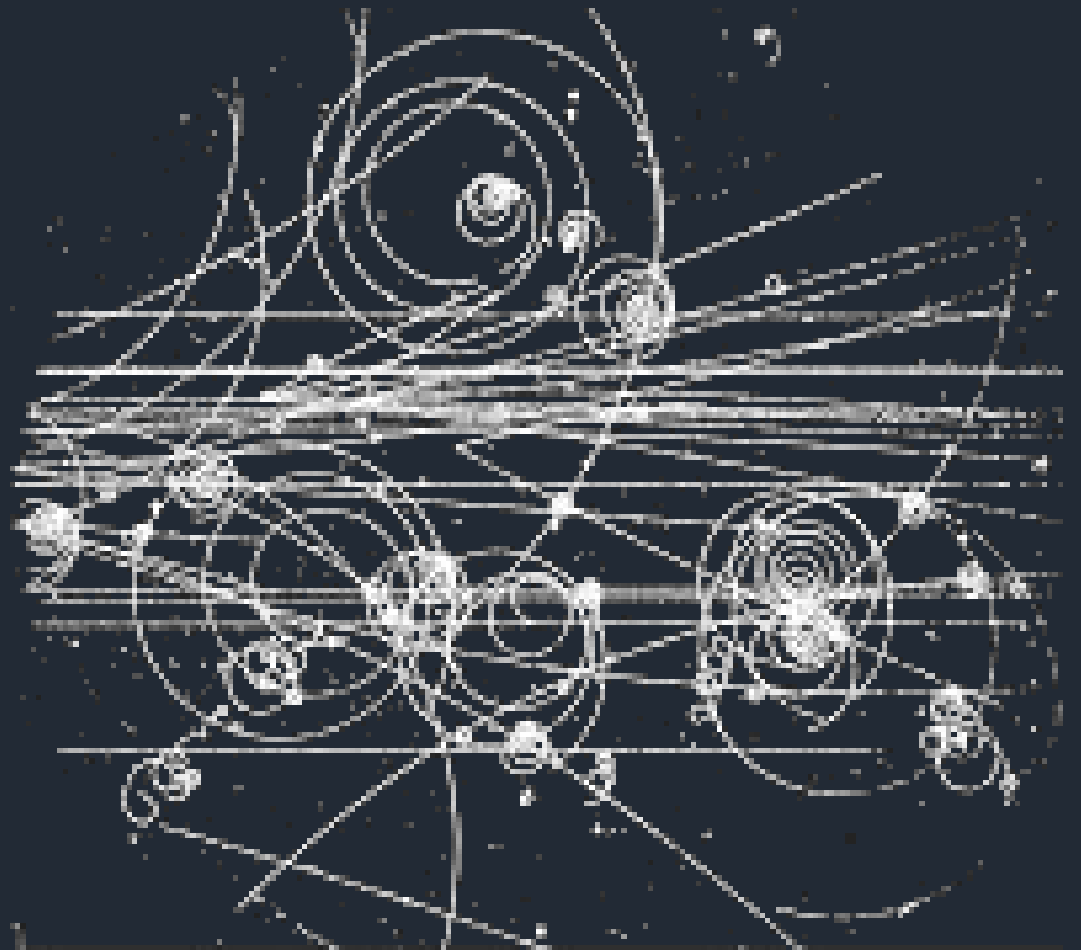
of near-infinite
complexity.

The world is full of systems

Everything is a whirling
clockwork

of near-infinite
complexity.

THE INFINITE, INFINITESIMAL
MYSTERIES OF QUANTUM PHYSICS.

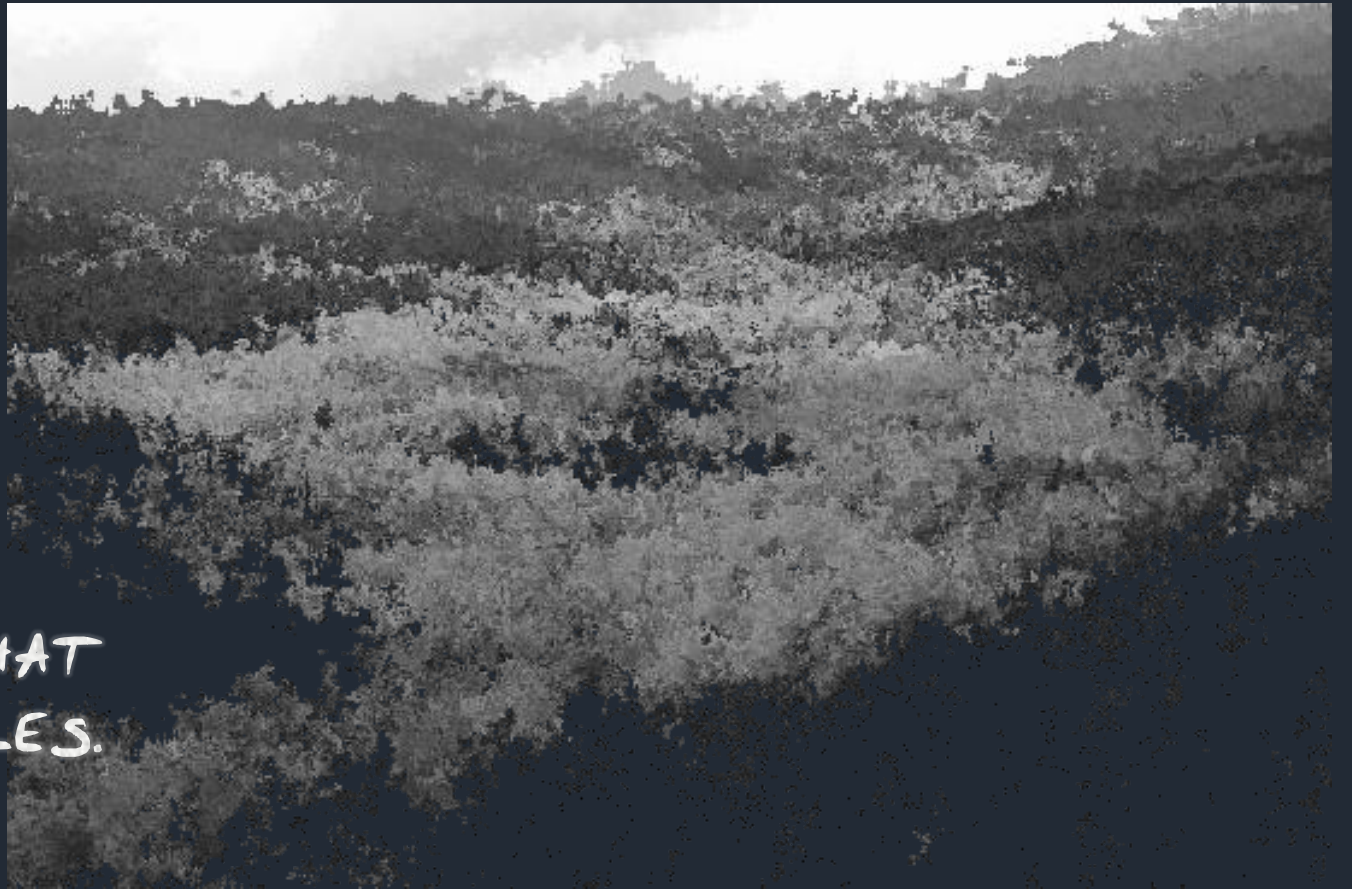


The world is full of systems

Everything is a whirling
clockwork

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THE WONDER OF A TREE THAT
STRETCHES FOR MILES.

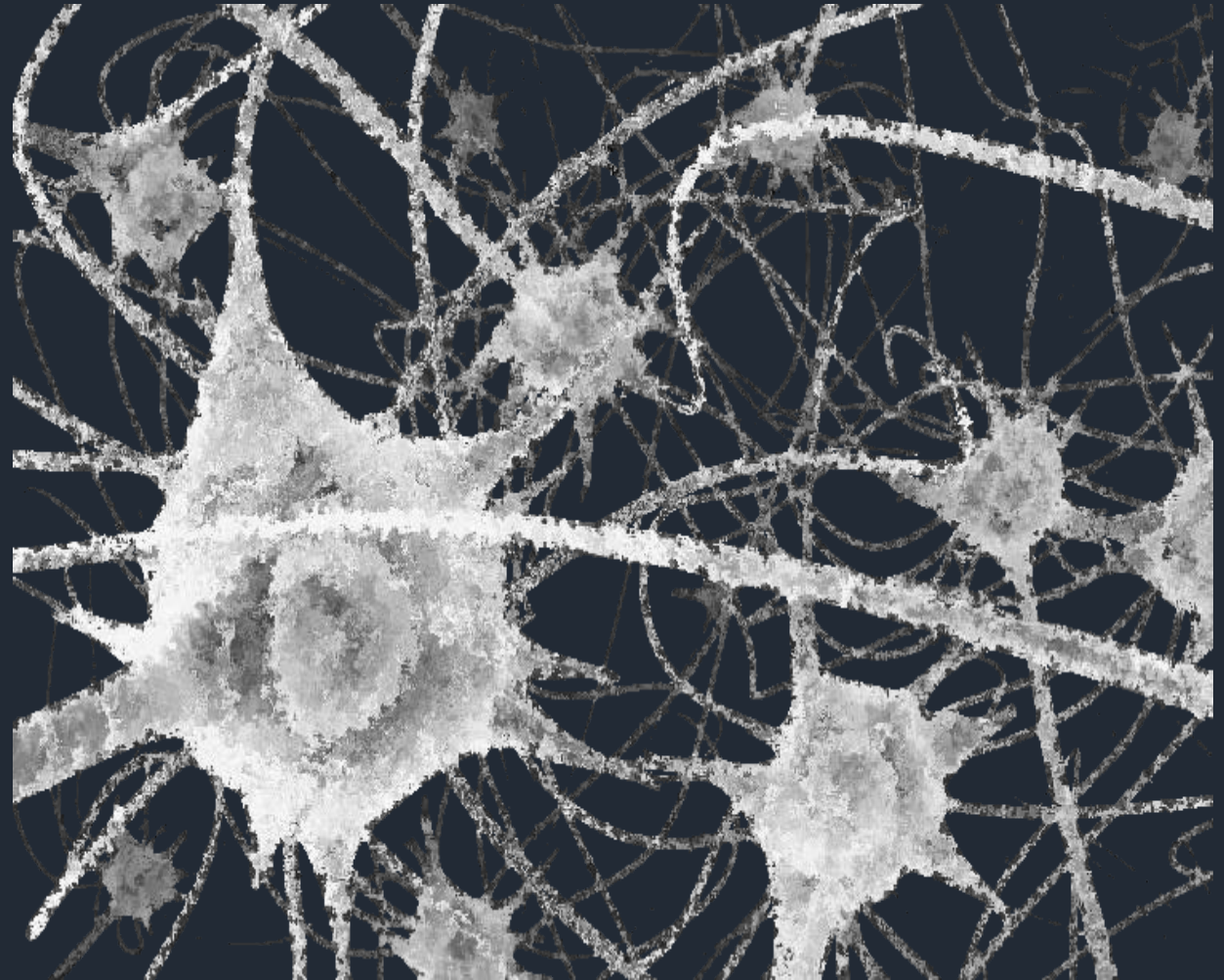


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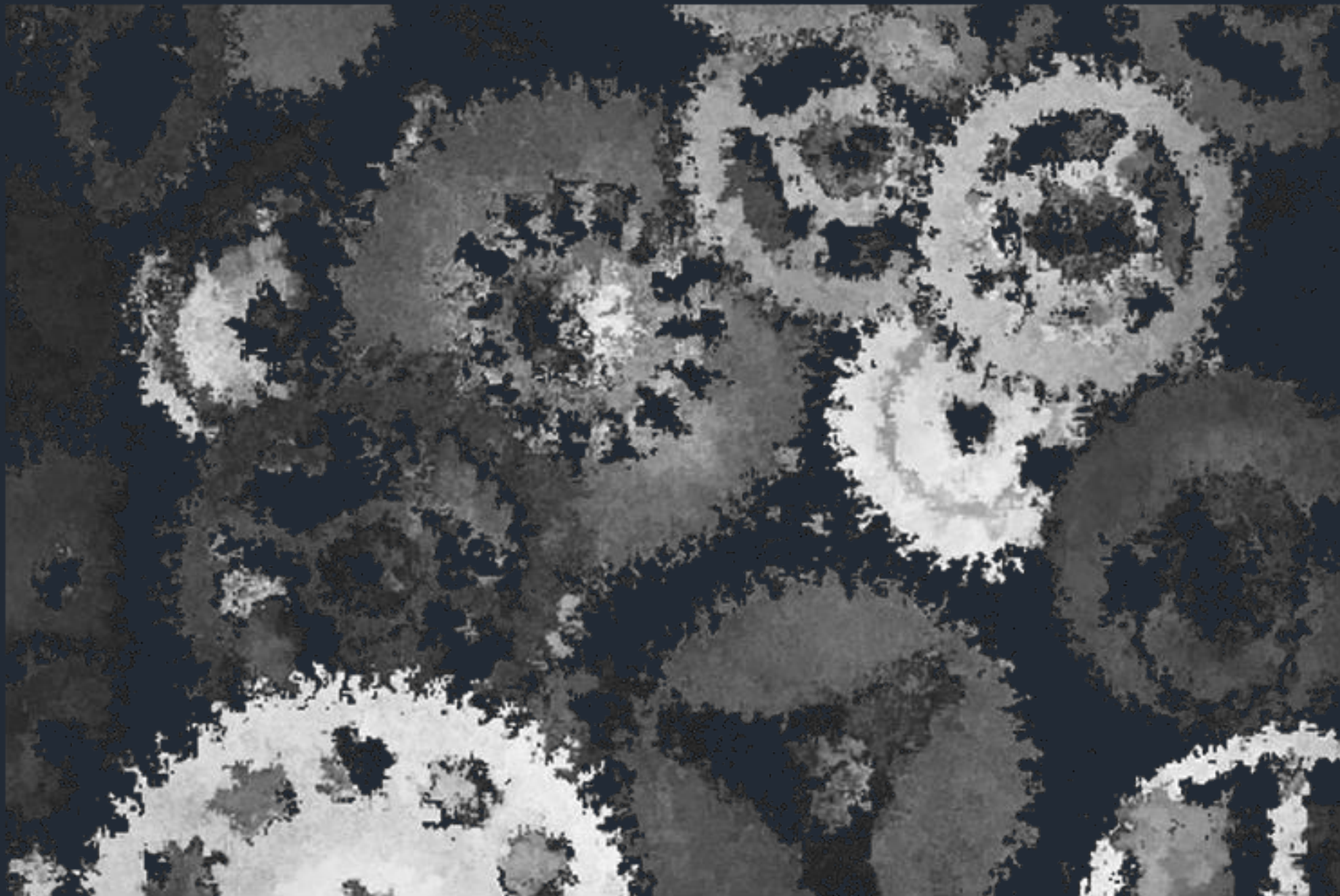
THE MAZE OF NEURONS IN A
TINY SKULL.



Playing

We stick
our real
hands in
pretend
gears.

We stick
pretend
hands into
real gears.



Artifacts

LUDIC ARTIFACTS

Systems designed for
play

Go

Magic: The Gathering

Association football

Werewolf

Space Invaders

League of Legends

LUDIC SYSTEMS

Systems susceptible to
play

The stock market

Musical instruments

Warfare

Politics

The human inner ear

Physics

Non-ludic systems

There are a lot of them.

Narrative is probably the most obvious. (Though there are plenty of attempts to merge them!)

But pictorial, sculptural, architectural stuff is too.

Videogame no longer implies ludic;

which might mean the term actually constrains the field.

Artifacts

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Systems designed for
play

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LUDIC SYSTEMS
Systems susceptible to
play



Back to the vision exercise

What is the game about, on a systemic level?

And how does the player accomplish their goal?

What is the game about, thematically?

And how does the player meet that goal?

Back to the vision exercise

What is the game about, on a systemic level?

- Balancing a delicate ecosystem of relationships.

And how does the player accomplish their goal?

What is the game about, thematically?

And how does the player meet that goal?

Back to the vision exercise

What is the game about, on a systemic level?

- Balancing a delicate ecosystem of relationships.

And how does the player accomplish their goal?

- Managing the environment in which the society exists.

What is the game about, thematically?

And how does the player meet that goal?

Back to the vision exercise

What is the game about, on a systemic level?

- Balancing a delicate ecosystem of relationships.

And how does the player accomplish their goal?

- Managing the environment in which the society exists.

What is the game about, thematically?

- Having a beautiful aquarium.

And how does the player meet that goal?

Back to the vision exercise

What is the game about, on a systemic level?

- Balancing a delicate ecosystem of relationships.

And how does the player accomplish their goal?

- Managing the environment in which the society exists.

What is the game about, thematically?

- Having a beautiful aquarium.

And how does the player meet that goal?

- Feeding, water changes, creativity.

What does the player learn?

Patience.

Resignation.

Meditation's value.

Chemistry.

As a designer...

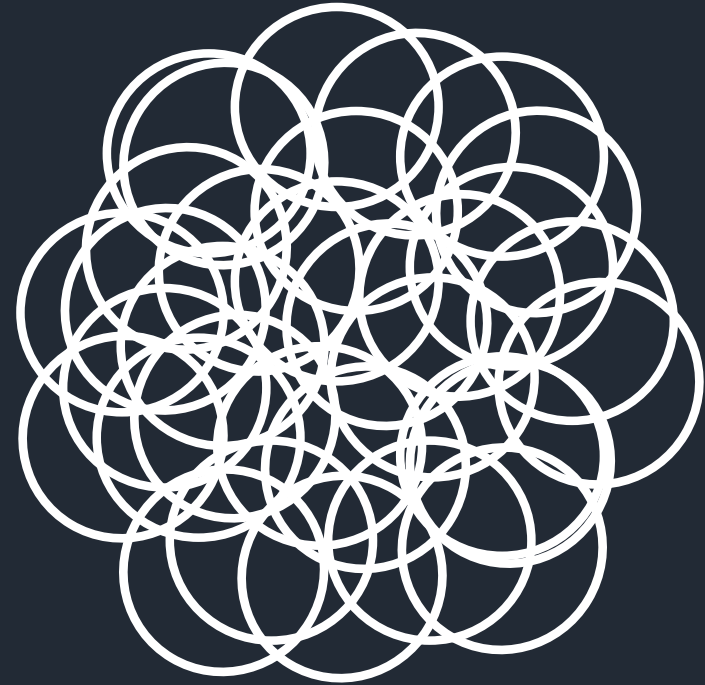
TERRIBLE UX! It really needs a HUD!

Rate of feedback is very slow, causality is hard to establish.

Writing and plot could be a lot better.

Underserves haptics (the "fish netting" minigame is kinda bad).

If I try to replicate



HOLISTIC? OR DECONSTRUCTIONIST VIEW?

I resort to temporary essentialisms,

to formalisms drawn from every field the artifact touches.





Semiotics

Neuroscience

Cellular automata

Anthropology

Rhetoric

Game theory

Topology

Educational theory

Storytelling

Mythology

Cultural anthropology

Economic theory

Cinematography

Cognitive visual arts science

Computational complexity

Probability & statistics

Political science

Training

UI design

OCEAN & other personality models

History Social networks

Spiritual practices

Sports

Psychology

Workplace efficiency

Self-determination theory

Physics

Sociology

Haptics

Philosophy

Industrial HCI design

Marketing

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Cross-disciplinary approaches!

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A closing note

Am I ruining tiny fish lives?

We must design with intention

