

Gabriel Abrantes

Standard Error



STANDARD ERROR

Gabriel Abrantes

If *Standard Deviation* unfolds as a scatter of influences upstairs, *Standard Error* condenses the dispersion into a single, volatile figure downstairs. Here, different versions of Ratzo, the rat protagonist in Gabriel Abrantes's most recent work *Rattrap* (2025), dominate the grounds: singing, dancing, in live conversation once more.

In *Rattrap*, Abrantes extends his exploration of animation and spectator engagement, blending satire, affection, and shock to both mirror and disrupt contemporary internet-mediated cultural and political discourse. Building on his previous video installation *Bardo Loops* (2024), where animated ghosts are trapped in endless arguments in environments ravaged by fire or flood—a surreal yet existentially dystopic vision of a future potentially populated by AI quarrels in endless repeat—*Rattrap* shifts to an all-too-real present: a mind-bending, existential horror cave—if you choose to enter it. Ratzo's world unfolds: a miniature, surreal diorama littered with rubble and debris, in a desolate Tarkovskian atmosphere of tall, indistinct structures fading into hazy gray light, suggesting an industrial or post-apocalyptic landscape. A lonely grand piano foreshadows each eerily theatrical scene to come and explored by each visitor by themselves. Ratzo is far from an accident of code. The actors Ana Tang and June João embody its movements, voice, and speech patterns, while the collective IrmaLucia (José André, Ivo Francisco, Luís Martins) developed both the rat and its scenography using Autodesk Maya and Unreal Engine. The installation in the physical space realized by João Moreira, reveals a construction site-like setting. Enter Ratzo: an over-intellectualized, internet-bred trickster,

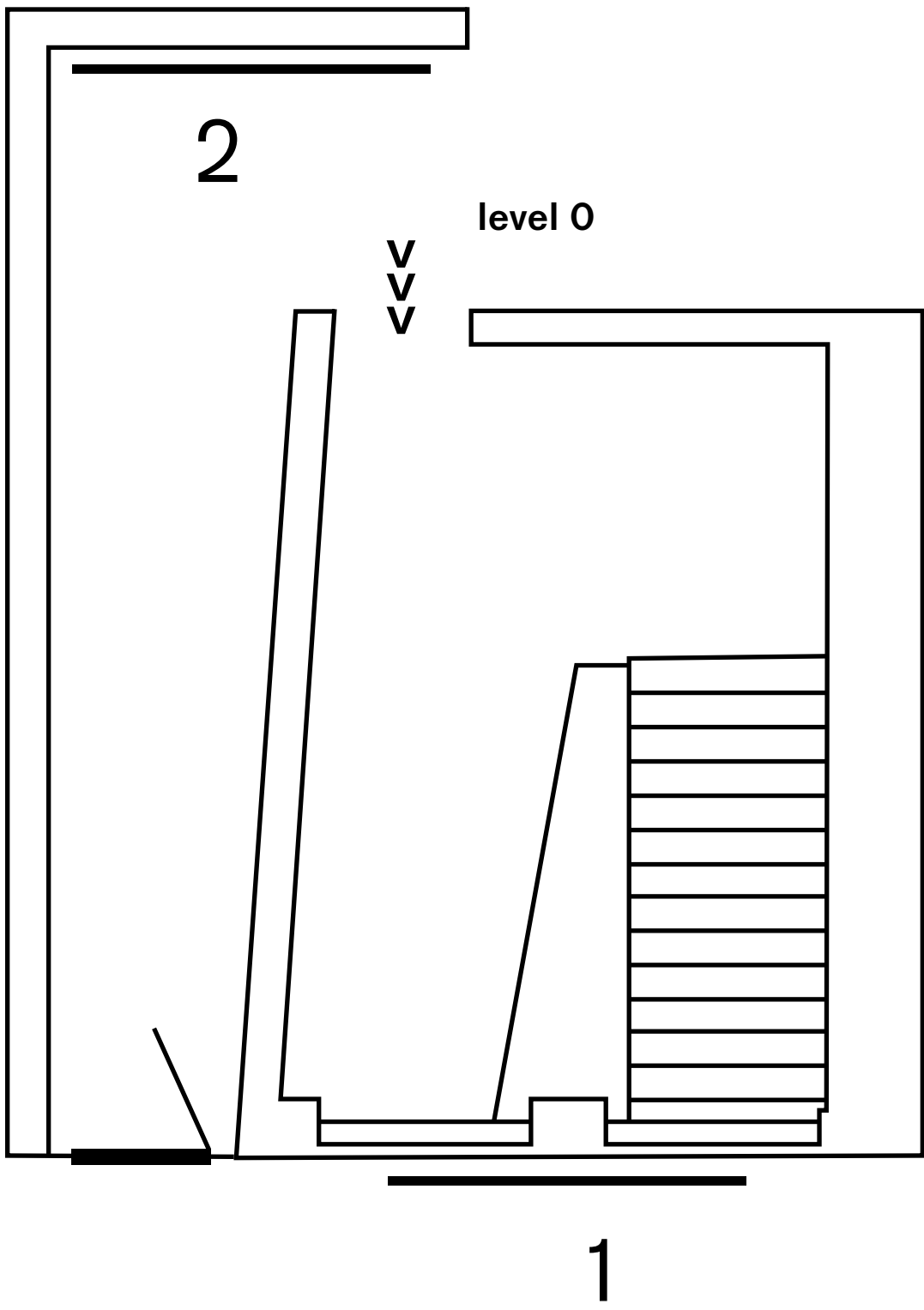
provocative and sensual, thriving on performative chaos, oscillating between nihilism, passionate engagement, and playful mischief. Ratzö is part roasting machine, part karaoke lamenter, wielding wit, shade, and surreal humor to provoke, mock, and critique. Ratzö uses language like a weapon, from inventive metaphors and rhythmic wordplay to diminutives and absurdist exaggeration. Ratzö wants a reaction! But Ratzö, too, reveals vulnerability, neediness, and social outcry. The rat's tone swings unpredictably between condescending affection, playful and suggestive remarks, sharp mockery, and sudden cruelty—mirroring today's online cancel-culture dynamics, in which condemnation is just a stone's throw away. Be forewarned: offensive language and explicit content following. Yet, in all its unpredictability, Ratzö remains AI programmed and, hence, should be predictable. A clash and pun not to be missed, also in reference to the titles of the show. Over months, Abrantes has fed his rat with content for it to evolve and mature into its current form and keen awareness of digital culture, systemic isms, and contemporary social critique. Trapped in between language and imitation—who is mirroring whom? A role-play behind masks, with players in disguise. As an anthropomorphized figure, the rat often embodies traits that humans attribute to cunning, treachery, or survival—qualities at once feared and admired. There is also “Scabby the Rat”, first created in 1986 by the International Union of Operating Engineers in Chicago, the giant inflatable rat has become an enduring cultural phenomenon beyond its origins in Midwest labor activism. The rat symbolizes nonunion workers—or “scabs”—who perform work despite an ongoing strike or labor protest, while also signaling the perceived corruption or exploitation of employers through big companies. Its theatrical scale plays with labor dispute as public performance, combining protest and street theater. *Rattrap*,

too, thrives in this in-between: language teeters between code and masquerade, a spectacle that provokes suspicion as much as fascination. Cultural theorist David Rieff, in his recent book *Desire and Fate*, critiques contemporary identity-focused discourse and activism for leaving out class struggle, arguing that the focus on personal identity, affective politics, and symbolic gestures often obscures material urgency, dismisses systemic inequities and therefore diminishes actual collective engagement. In this context, the inflatable rat serves as a vivid reminder of class-conscious critique and theatrical dissent, a function echoed in Abrantes's Ratz, where absurdist spectacle, provocative humor, and performative chaos confront social and cultural contradictions, fears and desires. Outside of the gallery, a silent Ratz version flickers through the glass. Like the neon lights on Times Square during the pandemic—empty signalers of a world paused—Ratz will keep on dancing.

Marie -Therese Brugnol



2.
Rattrap Karaoke
2025
Video, color, 5'



1.
Rattrap Dance
2025
Video, color, 5'

3.
Rattrap
2025

Interactive video
installation, color,
variable duration

