John Plotz: From Brandeis University, actually at Brandeis University this time, welcome to *Recall this Book* where star anthropologist Elizabeth Ferry, Hey Elizabeth, and me, John Plotz hey, invite scholars and writers from different disciplines to make sense of contemporary issues, problems and events. OK, so did you know that Sony Walkman originally had two headphone jacks since they were designed for sharing music, not isolating yourself within your own perceptual enclosure? Did you know that it was discovering the Walkman in 1983 that allowed William Gibson to come up with the concept of cyberspace in his pathbreaking Neuromancer? And that early VR goggles were conceptualized as, "visual headphones?" Have you ever asked yourself whether virtual reality's main appeal is as a gateway to another world, or as an effective way to shut out the annoyances of the world that you actually have to live in? If your answer to all of those questions is no, then you're like me before I picked up our guest, Paul Roquet's amazing new book *The Immersive Enclosure of Virtual Reality in Japan,* which is out this year from Columbia University Press. Roquet is an MIT associate professor of media studies and of Japan studies, and his previous work includes the 2016 monograph *Ambient Media: Japanese Atmospheres of Self*. So, Paul, we're really delighted to have you on *Recall this Book*. Welcome.

Paul Roquet: Thank you. Nice to be here.

John Plotz: So we have a ton of questions that arise from your wonderful various chapters. I'd love to talk more about the Walkman. I'd love to talk about your thoughts about the way that VR's development has historically flip flopped between the world of military and of consumer culture. And I also because I'm, you know, a wonky pre-20th century

English professor I have some pre-history of VR questions, basically about the ways that past art forms from paintings to novels to films have sometimes been seeing themselves as some kind of immersive media. Both positively as a pedagogical form of immersion and other times negatively as a kind of addictive enclosure. But before we strap on our TV goggles and head out into the wild, could you just kick us off by describing your books, key claims, or its key findings briefly?

Paul Roquet: A starting point for this project was really looking at how much ambivalence there is towards VR nowadays, but also historically towards 3D media, 3D film and other things in the past, and that always fascinated me. Why even among people who are really into the idea that there could be this headset you could put on that would take you somewhere else and you would really believe it they're also finding ways that it didn't quite fit in with their actual lives. So with hearing from VR developers or journalists covering VR that when they would put on the headset for work, you know they couldn't see their kids if they were at home. This is during the work from home sort of period. They're being cut off from everything around them. Usually though, they would kind of quickly gloss over that. That's kind of the friction that'll maybe go away eventually is the headsets get smaller and we'll be able to just kind of immediately jump into this other world. But for me, especially looking at the history of immersive technologies, the Walkman, as you mentioned, and headphones and sort of other things that claim to bring you somewhere else, there's always the simultaneous bracketing off of everything that's around you, and for me that was also an essential part of what VR offers, that it's simultaneously as it's pulling you into some new space, reorganizing your senses to really bring you into that provide a sense of presence, as a lot of VR developers and promotional language uses, it's also cutting you off. It's putting you in an enclosure that quite aggressively takes you out of the space that you're in. So that's what I came to think of as a kind of perceptual enclosure, and it really

fascinated me. Just what a demand that is that it's unlike a lot of media where you at least have a kind of air gap between you and the screen or you and the speakers, and you can kind of move your head freely and reorient yourself in relation to it. Once something is right on your face, even if you turn around, it's still going to be there right in your face. You can't really look away. And so that made me think of whether we need to put VR in a different kind of lineage going back to headphones and other what I came to think of as a kind of head mounted media history, specifically the specific demands of media interfaces that attached to you. And there's more of them emerging every day, but also thinking about what VR does. As not only bringing you into a new space, but also making the offer to take you out of the space that you're in zero as I'm looking at how VR is emerging in Japan as I've studied in past work, I noticed particularly there wasn't so much of the emphasis as in the US on transporting you somewhere else or simulating actually existing environments virtually through a computer. But it was more about, hey, you can go into these fictional sort of fantasy worlds and really be there and be surrounded by it, and also you can leave behind your own body. Your own normal everyday appearance your own sort of relationships. You can set all that aside no matter how small a space you have to work with, and really go somewhere else so that affordances of VR, in a sense, it was really much more foregrounded instead of being disavowed. As you see, it happened a lot in the English language discussion. Japan became a place where you could really see people exploring what that offered, so that appealed to me as well. The way to think about VR, that was both a kind of diminished reality, and I use that term slightly differently than VR developers would, but allowing you to bracket off certain parts of your world at the same time as it was connecting into this longer, as you mentioned, kind of longer media and literary history even of a kind of other world that you can go into using the technology.

John Plotz: What is the particularity of the argument you're making

here? Like, are you noting 2 pathways among many? Are you noting 2 ends of what is fundamentally like a linear scale, you know, between enclosure on one side and immersion on the other, let's say or are you making a kind of national cultural argument which of those things seems like the sort of the strongest thread that you're pulling?

Paul Roquet: Yeah, thank you for asking that question. I'm always trying to be careful not to make it too much of a national binary or regional brain even, I think of it in terms of a spectrum, and I may have trouble figuring out what's at the absolute ends of those spectrum. But definitely on one side you have people in VR using it to do psychology experiments, for example, where there's a lot of emphasis on being able to create something with a, they call it ecological validity. Sort of the real effects of actually being in that space, then recreate a space and then run experiments on you to figure out if how you're responding versus in the game industry, for example, which has already emerged as sort of a primary space for VR development. I think that the kinds of approaches I find in Japan are actually much more common globally. Interested in creating these kind of other fictional environments and bringing people into them, making them consistently available to explore. So I think what I find in the Japanese case and you find both approaches in Japan as well for sure. But I think it does offer, particularly linguistically I think, the discussion in Japan more than anything because it's not in or added to this kind of western lineages of thinking about immersion as a complete sort of perceptual thing that's going to transcend your immediate reality, there's much less of that, and that allows for a different kind of conversation to take place. And a lot of those ideas I think are useful or could be useful for the broader global VR discussion as a different way of thinking not just about the technology, but also about how it's already being used in many parts of the world.

Elizabeth Ferry: Maybe asking the question a little bit differently than

John did, but it's kind of a cousin question. You mentioned for instance, you make reference to other scholars and your own sort of thinking about a frontier kind of idea that is maybe emerging in US-based VR and also at certain points you talk about things happening in Japan or in the, I guess particularly in Japan around say the economy or particular forms of density, urban density. Can you say more about how you think about the relationship between this kind of contextual stuff and a particular trajectory of development of VR?

Paul Roquet: I think it's a way of trying to put together a history of urban space or everyday domestic space with the media that becomes used with that space. So I was influenced here a lot by the work of Yoshikazu Nango, who's a urban studies scholar in Japan who writes a lot about it. He calls it the heat ready cook on or the one-person space as it emerges. During the same time period, I'm talking about the 1970s and 80s, and it's simultaneously as all of these visual electronic consumer technologies are emerging like cars and video game consoles as just as a movement towards moving into smaller. Literally one-person spaces in the case of studio apartments in Japan, which first really took off around this time period. So this idea of almost a kind of cockpit that you're living in that has everything you need right nearby. And you can reach for your remote control and have access to all these worlds. But it's also you don't need that bigger living space because you have the virtual space there. For you.

John Plotz: So one of the things we talk about in America in the 70s, this notion of a meet the me generation, you know, like if the 60s were solidarity, radicalism understood as solidarity, the 70s or radicalism understand is like anime, or living for yourself or getting divorced, or whatever. Is that same concept in Japan, or and if so, how would you relate it to that technological change?

Paul Roquet: Yeah, very similar. So both a lot of urbanizations or people moving to the city from the countryside, but then also a shift towards more sort of individual lifestyles and identities, leaving behind of both sort of more communal activism and sort of community oriented work, but also even the domestic space of the family. Kind of shifts from that towards your individual lifestyle, which you're going to do sort of your own media consumption habits, which you can buy to affect how you feel about yourself. And I look at my earlier work, the rise of the Walkman, in terms of personal listening habits and people using media to really regulate their moods in a more personalized way really emerges around the same time period. So yeah, I see it's very much in tandem with what's going on globally. And it was really interesting look. Sort of in the pre-VR moment, but already by the late 70s and early 80s you see Japanese cultural critics talking about a turn not just to these very personalized mediated spaces, but also to a kind of virtual history. So they use that term cosmetic, like the virtual space of a history, rather than talking about existing Japanese history, whether it's the. The Post war, which is very much present still at that time, or talking about sort of. The 1960s or political issues and into the 70s, all the issues that were going on more culturally. This the virtual space of history sort of offers it different lineages so. Authors like Haruki Murakami, for example, coming up with very detailed sort of worlds for their fiction that feels real. It feels real on a sensory level, but it's definite. Very carefully distinguished from any kind of actual history.

John Plotz: So actually, I'm so glad you went there because I was thinking, you know, already thinking that my recallable book might be something from back in, like the 16th century or the 18th century, where this question of novel as virtual world making might be raised. But the Murakami is a wonderful example. Can I offer like Sir Walter Scott. So for example the famous Waverley novels which were meant to be Scottish history, they are meant to exist both within, they're meant to be the past, and they're also meant to kind

of resonate with what it is to be a modern Scot living in 1815, which is modern for Scott. So how much would you accept that kind of analogy or how much would you techno-deterministically say that there's it's something new going on here? Because of the quality of what this kind of affordances of these what was it called head mounted environments? Head mounted yeah.

Paul Roquet: Yeah, the head mounted display is. How it's usually funny. But I don't like this page 'cause it's I don't think about the sound aspect as well.

John Plotz: Yeah, yeah.

Paul Roquet: I would split the difference. So there's definitely a really long history of this desire to go into a virtual space where they never use the word virtual, and I was released, both in the USA and Japan and elsewhere, how often VR engineers and developers constantly invoked Alice in Wonderland and Alice's Adventures in Wonderland. That becomes sort of the primary reference point for a space that you want to go into. So down the rabbit hole. At the same time, I think there is something really specific about, as I mentioned earlier, sticking the interface. To your face, literally. And what that does in a way that a book, for example, does not. And there's still some kind of space between you and the interface. There is some, I think, a more specific history there as well. I think too, though I was recently, I went back and looked at a column by Ian Bogost on East readers, where he was talking about how compared to the flat screen of an e-reader, a book at least you open it up and you have a page on the right and a page on the left, and there's a kind of valley in between. There's a kind of immersive sort of portal of that in that space as well, so there's definitely earlier history as many people have written about sort of panoramas and sort of earlier.

Elizabeth Ferry: You enter into it in that sense, yeah.

Paul Roquet: Immersive yeah devices, but sticking it to the face, I
                 Think does raise the level of imposition or aggression, in a
                 sense, more than what was there before.

Elizabeth Ferry: The reference to Alice in Wonderland is so interesting too,
                 because one thing I loved about your discussion was the
                 kind of interplay between enclosure and expansion,
                 right? And that I mean one thing about the Alice in
                 Wonderland.

John Plotz: Especially through the looking glass, right? I mean.

Elizabeth Ferry: Well, actually I was thinking of Alice in Wonderland and the
                 size issues, right?

John Plotz: Oh, the rabbit hole.

Elizabeth Ferry: The sort of trajectory of like stories where tiny little
                 spaces become big worlds, either because it's like a portal
                 like the wardrobe, say, in the Narnia books or you become
                 very little and therefore the tiny little space becomes a big
                 space. That seemed to really be an aspect of it that
                 resonated with the that, you know, we cut off all this
                 sensory perception in order for us to expand our mind.

Paul Roquet: Absolutely, and playing with scale has already emerged, I
                 think is a key aesthetic quality that a lot of VR experiences
                 play with. When the scale of a virtual object is just a
                 property in the game engine, you can slide up and
                 down. You can really play with shrinking the size of the
                 view as the protagonist you know, between human size or
                 insect size or giant.

Elizabeth Ferry: Right.

John Plotz: Yeah, but there's a long history of thinking about
                 innovations in fiction as related to scalability, like
                 naturalism. What Lukacs says about what naturalism is that

it differs from realism because it's scale. It scales human experience. It's not up just at the human level, you know.

Elizabeth Ferry: Maybe I can ask you about the kind of moral valences and you know, 1 aspect of that is certain kinds of moral panic that you see around that were around the Walkman and that you see now around VR. Do you see that kind of thing in Japan?

Paul Roquet: Not as much. It's gradually emerging, but especially when Facebook purchased Oculus. You know, Facebook brought in all of this baggage already and combining that with this very potentially invasive device and that's going to be on your face. It raised a lot of those red flags, I think in the US context, but. really remarkably little, I think awareness or journalism following that. In Japan there's been slightly more overtime, maybe connected with what's sometimes called the kind of tech lash in the context of sort of being more critical of some of the social media companies which are increasingly that are involved in VR as well. So not just Facebook, but byte dance, for example, is emerging as the prime competitor, the owner of Tik Tok. So there's all of these issues that were just kind of catching up on when it comes to data collection and surveillance and. Other kinds of social media issues that are clearly going to port into a virtual reality context as well.

John Plotz: Actually, can I put up in I want to come back to the question of augmented reality as opposed to this kind of immersive virtual reality, but just to pursue the point about what the cultural uptake or anxiety is in Japan. Can you talk more about these shows in which people are imagined as trapped inside? So I actually I've happened to have seen Sword Arts Online, which I find incredibly interesting, but I had no idea that it was part of a larger culture of such shows.

Paul Roquet: So yeah, so sort out online, especially the animated versions

of anime adaptation of the light novel really kicked this off. On a more popular level, but I found quite a few examples of earlier.

Paul Roquet: Stories about being trapped in a VR or Proto VR machine, and that is the anxiety I think that you do see if you look closely at the narratives in the same way that if you look at sort of American action movie history, you see different enemies sort of emerge from the other places.

John Plotz: Yeah, yeah.

Paul Roquet: The enemy in the Japanese VR narrative is almost always an American sort of sometimes government, sometimes the Pentagon, sometimes the CIA, but secretly trying to gain access to these machines that could eventually operate as a kind of psychological in there manipulating people senses to convince them of whatever they want to be confused about.

John Plotz: I see. So the problem is not the existence of it per SE. 'cause people opt into it. The problem is that it could be. Dangerously Coopted by some outside alien, yeah.

Paul Roquet: Who has? Who ultimately has control over it? And this I tie back into, especially in the initial VR moment of the kind of trade wars between the US and Japan where. There's a lot of anxiety over who's going to dominate this industry that's emerging, but now it's similarly there's a kind of geopolitical undertone to some of the narratives where the. The risk is not so much that VR is going to take over, but that particular organization in our country that we don't we don't totally trust is going to be the ones controlling all of our perception.

Elizabeth Ferry: Yeah, and then the counterpart of that is what you describe as a kind of techno orientalism.

Paul Roquet: So there's projections going on in both directions, which it's fascinating, I think.

John Plotz:	So the augmented reality point, this is really someone else is point, but I wanted to just kind of toss it to you. But I have a friend who, Eric Noyes, who is really great at thinking about what gadgets work and what don't. And he was talking about the failure of Google Glass. And he made a comparison to the Apple Watch that seemed to resonate with what you were saying, which he said that the problem with Google Glass is that it was augmented reality, but it was like, it was sucking your eyes. It was right there. Whereas the watch, even though it's not actually a watch, it's like all of these other things that are augmentation of ordinary reality, like I have a little. Text of you know, I can tap a picture of my wife to text her, you know, that kind of thing. But he said that that was super irritating to people when it was on glasses, but when it's on watches people accept it. Does that resonate with what you're saying, 'cause, in a way, it runs. I can see how it runs with what you're saying, but it also runs counter because it makes the glasses. The bad guy, the villain, yeah.
Paul Roquet:	Yeah, it's interesting, this focus on sort of the visual imposition, yeah, much more serious than anything else. The watches at least sort of at the end of your arm, and that that distance really matters in.
John Plotz:	Yeah, well, that's what he said. He says the distance mattered. A strange way. Yeah, yeah. It's socially recognizable. You know that we owe.
Elizabeth Ferry:	And you can choose, to some extent to interact with it.
Paul Roquet:	And also.
Elizabeth Ferry:	Yeah, right, you can get it, bring it close. You can decide whether to. Look at it or not.
Paul Roquet:	We can forget. About it a lot easier I think as well. Right. But

the direction things are going in, I think all of these are emerging. So there's been some interesting experiments with VR horror, for example, using something like a watch to track your heart rate so it can know how you're responding and change the experience in relation to.

John Plotz: OK. Oh my God.

Paul Roquet: Whether you're responding more or less than it wants you. To so it's one thing about VR.

John Plotz: Wow, talk about cybernetics.

Paul Roquet: Is it kind of expands?

John Plotz: I mean, that's like the ultimate feedback loop.

Paul Roquet: Creating that loop. Wow.

John Plotz: Yeah, right. Huh, but so I guess. I guess another way of asking my question though is that is Google glasses failure? Is that it's not immersive enough, in a way, like it's in between 'cause it leaves 'cause it's diaphanous, you know it like leaves you partly gathering data from the glass and partly looking through it.

Paul Roquet: And one way I tried to think through the historical question of when a technology sort of. Makes the leap from being something that's going to upset a bunch of people, like the ending of the bars in San Francisco that outlawed Google Glass 'cause. It was making everyone else uncomfortable, and one reason I turned to the history of headphones was it was a really interesting sort of legacy of something that for a long-time people felt quite similarly about.

John Plotz: Right.

Paul Roquet: It was cutting you off, as we talked about. Before, but it's

also heavy. You kind of sweat in the summer 'cause. Yeah, the headsets were so heavy. I mean, it wasn't. There wasn't a space for that in polite society. There was a great article in the local Boston context of somebody. To take a headset on the T and, you know, just being harassed and the police even took this seriously enough to. I think they tweeted this is not a good idea. You're making yourself a target for thieves.

Elizabeth Ferry: Yeah, I think it was the D line in Brookline.

John Plotz: To oh really?

Paul Roquet: Yeah, yeah. So that's one response.

Elizabeth Ferry: Streets of Brooklyn.

Paul Roquet: And then there's this, this group in Japan that that immediately. As soon as the stand alone version of a VR headset emerged, there are we can take that. On the train and we can play with it in between stations. Maybe even have it relate to what station you're at. The content is going to change, and there was enough of a space for that to happen that it wasn't going to be seen immediately as an affront to everyone else there.

John Plotz: That game that you play where you have to walk around in real space to get the little animals that you find Pokémon Go, yeah?

Elizabeth Ferry: Oh, go.

John Plotz: Is that an anomaly or is that does that point towards some other development of?

Paul Roquet: This I think it's similar to the Walkman in the sense that there's enough of a draw. In this case, I think Pokémon the original, sort of emotional attachment many people have to that. Those characters, there's enough to sort of push them

out of their comfort zone and have them walk down the street playing the game and then you can kind of get used to it. And I think the similar thing happened with the Walkman and headphones if there's enough of a drive to. To get over that initial to people looking down.

Elizabeth Ferry: Because the music is familiar to you and therefore it's just coming in a different way.

Paul Roquet: Yeah, and that's that kind of being able to define your personal soundscape in a lot of ways.

Elizabeth Ferry: Can you break down again this super interesting? History, you draw on virtual and also particularly the sort of different direction that Japanese understandings of virtual reality, but also of virtuality? You kind of connected it to this, to a distinction between kind of Western tradition of essence, right?

Paul Roquet: Yeah, that's, that's the other term. I had to do a lot of work just to kind of parse, you know, the different flavors of the virtual or virtual as an adjective more precisely. So in Japanese, there's a few different ways. It's been translated. There's the castle, which is, more literally, kind of imaginary space. It doesn't have the kind of platonic idea that there's a more pure sort of virtual world we can get to someone like super touchy was very against that translation. It goes pretty far back and it comes through in the history of how virtual memory in the computer science context was translated and it still used today. But for someone like touchy, that was completely wrong because the virtual in an American especially, but in English language context, there's a sense of kind of essence that's there. So going back to like the Eucharist, if you really look back. So like Martin Luther talking about the virtual essence of something, you can still have something really important that's there, even if physically it's some other material that does not exist in the causal context.

Elizabeth Ferry: Right.

Paul Roquet: So when you translate, virtual reality is. Castle Genjitsu is just reality. It loses all of that baggage to me. It feels kind of like baggage, but it loses that context, it brings it a little bit more. Into this temporary imaginary? The almost kind of layered space that sits on top of the existing world, but it's something more temporary, something more illusionary. Fantasy, basically. Fantasy, yeah. So in some ways it taps more directly into the literary and sort of fantasy fiction history that we were talking about before.

John Plotz: So is the opposite of virtual in that sense actual?

Paul Roquet: For me, the opposite of the COSO is something invariant, so something that cannot be turned off. And some ways some definitions of virtual go in this direction, but something that's always going to be there regardless of whether you're attending to it or not. So you turn around and it's still going to be there is a.

John Plotz: That's so interesting.

Paul Roquet: Something invariants, so it's slightly different than.

John Plotz: So it's durable or.

Paul Roquet: It's so and you look at.

Elizabeth Ferry: Extend or independent?

Paul Roquet: When you look at analogical dictionaries, they're very careful. I thought this was fascinating that that the KA so this character for koso is not in distinction to the true, so it's not true. It sounded true versus false distinction.

John Plotz: Sure, sure, sure.

Paul Roquet: But it's a something that's the 'cause that really means kind

of temporary, the console. So it's something that's temporary. Is provisional. There's one. Japanese scholar who's ties it back to the rock garden tradition and this idea that you're going to see other landscapes emerge within the rocks in the sand. If you look closely and you know it's not actually there, you know it's going to disappear this as soon as you look away or you start attending to it in that precise angle, but it still sort of has its own reality to it.

John Plotz: Yeah, I'm trying to think about how.

Paul Roquet: So it's different than the actual I kind of I set aside the kind Of actual versus virtual philosophical discussion, yeah, probably because it so rarely emerges within the discussion that the discourse I was looking at VR developers or otherwise. The kind of background delusion that.

John Plotz: Yeah, I remember this discussion.

Paul Roquet: Mini edge.

John Plotz: So Elizabeth and I are both fans of this book called Coming of age in Second Life. And I remember there's a wonderful discussion in there about the sort of things that can occur in second life, which are nonetheless real. Like if people fall in love in second life, that's very different from like, you know, shaking hands with someone in second life or you know, giving them, even handing them $100 bill, but like you can get married. In second life and it would be valid. But so.

Paul Roquet: That's, I think, what interests me as well. There's a lot of actual things going on. I recently watched a documentary, "we met in virtual reality," which is quite similar. A lot Boelstroff is talking about,comes back in the VR context. And there's certainly a lot of that, but what nterests me especially in the Japan context is this idea that the actuality you can find within the virtual space is going to be carefully detached and carefully sequestered from the

actuality. You might have the rest of the day, sort of, outside of the headset.

Elizabeth Ferry: So that's that temporariness you….

Paul Roquet: So it's less of an ontological question of sort of what's real and what's not and more providing a space even if actually it's certainly the foundation is the same. I think they would agree that it's still built on all of these real-world material things.

John Plotz: So Paul, we're probably turning the corner towards home here, but I didn't I we basically wanted to invite you to talk a little bit about the military applications question. I don't think I have a coherent question there, but I like that you framed, you know, the oscillation between the space of, you know, Pentagon funding or governmental funding and then. Consumer driven demand, so yeah, you want to tell us how you think about that?

Paul Roquet: Yeah, that emerged as I was trying to come up with a coherent sort of sense of where what this certain virtual is doing, both in English and in Japanese. I think it's the same moment that the very strong military sort of government sponsored research context that all of the Proto VR research that term wasn't in use but researchers were talking about virtual images and virtual worlds and other things before that had all emerged in a government sponsored Defense Department in the US context set of projects. So not only when during the nearer sort of coined the term virtual reality, Gibson is talking about cyberspace. There's sort of a number of terms Myron Krueger is talking about artificial reality. All these words in different ways, I think looking back now, are making a concerted effort to set aside. They're sort of detached the technology from that military context and represent it so. Leno talks about bringing a certain poetry to the field that wasn't there before, but also I think it's kind of trying to cleanse it of that history at the same time that this could be your personal

fantasy space. It's not sort of military hardware to increase lethality as some of the documents that rise.

John Plotz: Yeah, what's the Neal Stephenson line from *Snowcrash*? He has a different word. It's not the Internet.

Paul Roquet: The *metaverse*, yeah, which is taken over.

John Plotz: So metaverse, right? Of course, of course that's come back. Yeah, it's so interesting. So do you get any sense that the people are consciously doing this or you think it's more just?

Paul Roquet: I don't think it's some kind of hidden strategy, but I do see as it's taken up more in the kind of West Coast, sort of California context at the time. There's a very deliberate moment to sort of reshape the conversation. And then Japan, it's a slightly different direction. It's sort of more in the consumer technology video game, sort of how do we make this applicable to people everyday life context that really emerges in there. So I try and trace this kind of gradual several stages of re-translation of the term, which I think that the word virtual reality in its ambiguities allows for that kind of shift in context to take place, because nobody know exactly, nobody knows exactly what it means for quite a long time and still today.

John Plotz: Yeah, yeah, yeah. So this is probably a good moment to turn to the section that we have called Recallable Books, where each of us names a book that listeners might enjoy that pertains to the topic of this fascinating discussion. So to grease the wheels for you, Paul, maybe Elizabeth and I will go first, so Ferry?

Elizabeth Ferry: So mine is. Continuing on the on the *Alice in Wonderland* motif, I guess. And these questions of scale and size and also embody enclosure within the body and expansion. Madeleine L'Engle's *A Wind in the Door*, which is in her series of which the *Wrinkle in Time* is the first one where

they go into the mitochondria of her small brother who's desperately ill and kind of fight a battle of, maybe a battle that feels more in the Japanese model of VR in a sense.

John Plotz: That happens in *An Incredible Voyage* too, right?
So I'm going to, I'm going to be truly fictional, nerdy and go back to *Don Quixote*. As an early novel that understands itself as writing against a tradition of people getting completely immersed in a romance. So the notion is that, you know, Quixote himself doesn't understand the difference between what it means to live in the world versus living in one of these romances that he thinks he's living in, so that the novel can somehow straddle that in a way that the romance can't 'cause. The romance just is committed to full on virtuality I guess, and then the one thing I would say about that just we didn't really talk about the Sancho Panza side of things. But like, I love that Quixote has this sidekick Sancho Panza, who is just relentlessly, well, whatever the opposite of virtual is, whether that is like, he's durable, he's quite durable. He's just sort of there and material and earthy and often. And so, yeah, I don't know, it seems germane to me, but Paul, over to you.

Paul Roquet: Unfortunately a lot of the work I talk about in the book has not been translated into English, but one I think is particularly evocative of this earlier moment in VR is *Klein bottle.* It's a Klein notes oboe in Japanese, which riffs on this idea of the Klein bottle. Is this sort of thing that has no inside and outside, but at a mystery fiction. Sort of quasi science fiction about a play tester for this immersive game system that eventually we realize is an American military in origin, but it completely immerses you. It puts you in this kind of colonial Africa context, and you have to sort of fight it out. But it also really evokes the anxiety of an older sort that these technologies are going to get so strong you're not going to be able to distinguish between what's inside the machine and what's outside the machine. So you spend a lot of the book thinking you're back in Tokyo outside of the machine, and then it's like, nope, nope, you're actually, still

in VR, you're still there. Ends on a really bleak note, but for me it's a really interesting moment and a useful book, I think, to think about what's changed between now and then, and I don't think we really have that fear, at least not in the same way anymore.

John Plotz: What's the date on the book?

Paul Roquet: 1989 so it's a moment in Japan too, but there's a lot of anxiety about sort of people getting too sucked into.

John Plotz: Oh, wow.

Paul Roquet: It's a fictional context as well. It doesn't use the term virtual reality, but you can tell they're kind of picking up on the signals that this is about to emerge the other aspect, the other collection of texts I was going to mention, which goes back to the same moment, but I found really fascinating as part of this research to back to was the earlier wave of VR criticism in the early 90s, which I think is actually super relevant to what's going on today. But almost never gets cited, never gets read. So I wanted to give a shout out to that. I looked at a lot of the early feminist critiques of virtual reality from this initial moment when it was first emerging, a lot of it's still quite relevant to what's going on now. It's kind of scattered here and there, and there's a number of anthologies feature visions immersed in technology. There's quite it's scattered all over the place, so you have to do a little bit of digging.

John Plotz: That's great.

Paul Roquet: I'd love somebody to put together an anthology so my book isn't doesn't exist yet, but yeah, putting that together and part of the. As we talked about the sort of jettisoning our VR history as that's happened again with the recent revival, to sell it as something totally new is going to transform everything that we've really had to forget about this previous so-called failure of VR. But I think in the

process we've also lost all of this valuable work responding to it. So I would put a plug in for going back to that as well.

John Plotz: That's great. Well, fortunately this is one of the reasons we like having a website that is associated. So if you follow the links in the show notes, you will be able to come to those books will.

Paul, this has been a real pleasure. So thanks so much for taking the time. If you enjoy this conversation, dear listeners, you might want to listen to RtB 3, which is our 2019 conversation with Lisa Gittleman about new media. Also I think our conversation with Samuel Delaney about virtual world building in RTB 7 and also we had a wonderful conversation with Leah Price about sort of book history and also, you know, so children literature as virtual spaces, so all of those might be worth taking a listen to as well. Thank you all for listening, Paul, thank you so much for coming and hope to talk to you again soon. *Recall this Book* was founded by Elizabeth Ferry and me, John Plotz. It is sponsored by Brandeis and the Mandel Humanity Center. Sound editing is by Naomi Cohen, website design and social media by Miranda Peery of the English department. We're eager to hear your comments, criticisms and thoughts. If you like what you hear, please subscribe, rate and review us on Apple Podcast or wherever you get your podcasts from. From all of us here at RtB, thanksfor listening.