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# Politics of Green Spaces

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We may observe contemporary art practices that investigate the role of urban political economy and private-public property relations in the social production of green spaces under the umbrella of the *Politics of Green Spaces*. Such art practices do “not just create a new aesthetics” but are literally “involved in patterns of social, scientific, and technological transformations”<sup>1</sup>.

Using natural substances and related processes as the building blocks of art projects, and dealing with broader social implications of the state of nature, the *Politics of Green Spaces* operate mostly in the open air and by using a variety of technological hardware and communication systems. Such practices are rather different from those one can find in the domain of bio-art, where artists work with live tissues, bacteria, living organisms, and life processes as well, but use scientific processes such as biotechnology producing works indoors in (wet) laboratories and galleries. Instead, art laboratories of the *Politics of Green Spaces* operate mostly outdoors, often confronted with social reception outside of the comfort zone of galleries and museums’ art context.

In most cases, inequitable social and environmental relations invoke the *Politics of Green Spaces*. This term considers the relations of a variety of living organisms (humans among others, but also animals, mushrooms, plants, viruses, etc.) As such, it expands the notion of networks of living organisms and objects in complex relationships within the post-digital paradigm (where technology is interwoven with almost all parts of our contemporary world) but still related to nature that is not completely computable, and therefore accessible to “big data” analyzes.

The *Politics of Green Spaces* may point to limitations of both humans and constructs designed by humans (as technologies), e.g. as in an episode of the famous sci-fi series

Star Trek: “*We are the Borg. Lower your shields and surrender your ships. We will add your biological and technological distinctiveness to our own. Your culture will adapt to service us. Resistance is futile.*”<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, examining the notions of resistance, deconstructions and decontextualisation of power structures is yet another subject of the *Politics of Green Spaces*. Taking this enduring political agenda into consideration, the inter-relational fields of action encompass biology, zoology, horticulture, growing processes, network culture, real-time processed data, site-specific art, technology and social interaction in a wide spectrum of interests, all within the post media art discourse. Especially, drafting network culture, embedded in the vast and incomprehensible sphere that summons and communicates ALL nature (even what is not perceivable neither by human senses nor machines made by humans), we could also propose expanding the existing notion of culture into Nature Embedded Netculture. Bruno Latour urged that we – humans – must rework our thinking to conceive the existence of the “Parliament of Things”<sup>3</sup> whereby natural phenomena, social phenomena and the discourse about them are not seen as separate objects to be studied by specialists, but as hybrids made and scrutinized by the public interaction of people, things and concepts. Following Latour, we could think of the possibility of conceptualizing larger networks where non-human actors subdue programmed frames of proportion and appear rendered by being observed in the light of processes they take part in.

## Case studies

What follows is a description of three art projects, selected from the group exhibition *Fields*,<sup>4</sup> that will show some of the possible approaches to the *Politics of Green Spaces*. Those three projects are: ***Foraging fields***, a multi-media installation by **AnneMarie Maes**, ***Seeds Underground*** by **Shu Lea Cheang** (2013/4), and ***200 OK*** by **Darko Fritz** (2014). All mentioned artworks belong to post-media art practices, and draw upon histories of advanced conceptual art practices of the 1960s and 1970s. One may see Cheang’s work as an update of socially engaged video art (and communities) of the 1970s and 1980s, Fritz’s installation in public space as a comment on Land art and Maes’ work as part of the rich history of intersection of art and science. In other hand, all artworks take into consideration histories of media art of the 1990s and 2000s, including Internet art as a part of it.

Each artwork we may see at least at three levels: *Bee Laboratory* by Maes acts upon bio diversity at the macro level, urban green environment at the *mezzo* level, and bee culture at the micro level. Cheang’s *Seeds Underground* performs the genetically modified food critique on the macro level, at the *mezzo* level it gets involved with green activism, and at the micro level deals with Monsanto corporation. The horticulture unit *200 OK* by Fritz operates with a critique of technological determinism at the macro level, at the *mezzo* level with transgression of digital interfaces, and at the micro level with creating a new context for the internet error messages.

***Foraging fields*** (2014) is a multi-media installation by **AnneMarie Maes**, presenting the interaction of bee colonies and their surroundings on different levels. The author states: “My beehives are augmented with webcams, microphones and sensors to monitor the behavior of the colonies, whilst the surrounding ecosystem is scanned by analysis of the pollen and nectar that the bees bring back from their foraging flights. The different hives are all nodes in a distributed guerilla beehives network.” The installation consists of a series of artworks made during Maes’ research and on-going five-year long *Bee Laboratory* project: *Flightroute (part 1 and 2)*, mapping with real-time data transmission and mapping of the surroundings; *SEM* – series of microscopic photographs of bees and



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ANNEMARIE MAES: *SENSORIAL SKIN / GUERRILLA BEEHIVE*, EXHIBITION VIEW, GREY) (AREA, 2017)  
 The exhibition reveals a part of author's long-term research towards the *Intelligent Guerilla Beehive*. The project is on the edge between art and science, focusing on issues of sustainability, more specifically the survival of the honeybee species, and using new materials and new digital fabrication technologies, more specifically, sustainable bio-plastics. The visual language in this installation is multilayered. Every artifact is the outcome of a particular experiment. All objects are part of a larger development for building and fine-tuning an *Intelligent Guerilla Beehive*, a mobile shelter for homeless honeybees. This radically new device tackles a domain where human and non-human actors collaborate to maintain the resilience of an ecosystem in decline.



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ANNEMARIE MAES: *SENSORIAL SKIN / GUERRILLA BEEHIVE*, EXHIBITION VIEW, GREY) (AREA, 2017)  
*GRID\_MADRAS*, OBJECT COMPOSED WITH CELLULOSE SKIN, DYED WITH VEGETAL DYES (AVOCADO, STINGING NETTLES, EUCALYPTUS BARK, HIBISCUSFLOWER)  
 LIGHTBOX LEFT: *SCANNING ELECTRON MICROGRAPH (HONEYBEE TONGUE)*;  
 LIGHTBOX RIGHT: *MICROBIAL SKIN WITH ORGANIC LEFTOVERS (INSECTS)*

