

The Grafting Parlour

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Introduction

The Grafting Parlour is a fluid, growing, performative space between hybrid organisms and human worlds. The GfP is an emerging collective of artists and researchers who exchange and combine methodologies through thoughtful experimentation. Through collaborative enquiry and shared research, the GfP design communications models for interacting with different living organisms. This includes experiments with distant microorganisms and real time performances with varying views of the ecosystem, from the level of arctic bacteria, to the broad sky in Northern Finland.

The Grafting Parlour artists

The Grafting Parlour artists were initially inspired by Greek botanist Theodoros Orfanidis, who archived and displayed the many plant species he discovered. Formed in Athens in May 2008 through the European Mobile Lab for Interactive Media Artists, the collective's creative research takes the form of live portals into the laboratory, video and audio collected from remote habitats, scientific residues, and live experimentation while using performance to engage collaborators and visitors. The Grafting Parlour is an outgrowth of the research by each of the collective's members. GfP draws on Kelly Jaclynn Andres' work developing ecological interfaces for communication with living organisms, Nurit Bar-Shai's interactive installations, which rely on remote participants input to drive a physical narrative, and Saoirse Higgins mechanical communication devices that reinterpret and sonify live data, presenting the data in a new context with a meta-narrative. Lucy Hg brings her experience working with The League of Imaginary Scientists on interactive installations that approach scientific subject matter from a sideways perspective, while Antti Tenetz – a real-life naturalist – studies and records the world around him, starting with the Arctic and extending as far as Thailand. This core group of artists work in tandem with scientists, devising creative applications for their shared interests and joint research. The Grafting Parlour embraces the idea that anyone

could imagine what the next science might be, and that these playful ideas can have both practical and delightful ramifications through the experimental practice of art, science and technology.

Practice

The Grafting Parlour includes and builds on projects and research developed in collaboration with artists, scientists and the public. Their installations, which are performative in nature, draw from the collective's cumulative research, nodes of which become the creative and scientific residues presented as part of their ongoing process. The Grafting Parlour includes subcomponents - nodes of enquiry - developed in collaboration with project participants, scientists and the public, with displays of documentation of public discussions, live portals into the laboratory, video and audio narratives, scientific residues and live experimentation.

Exchange

The Grafting Parlour discussions on art and science with scientists in the field punctuate and redirect their research and methods of enquiry. *A Citizens Call to Synthesize!* was a transatlantic web-cast discussion on citizenship and synthetic biology, addressing ways the public can interact with science, and how a new model for an interactive laboratory fits into the history of science and knowledge. This transatlantic discussion and exchange was set up for the ISEA09 pre-symposium. It took place with The Grafting Parlour members spread out between Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology in Dublin and in Dr. Natalie Kuldell's BioEngineering Laboratory at MIT with her students. Also with Varda Gur, Ben Shitrit and Professor Micha Spira at the Bloomfield Science Museum, Jerusalem, Israel; and the DIY Bioengineering group from the Personal Genome Project at Harvard Medical School with Mackenzie Cowell, Jason Bobe and Reshma Shetty.

Living portals, scientific residues and performativity

The artists have developed portals into different live habitats, spanning the forest to the microscope, thereby creating interfaces for interacting with these remote habitats and non-human species. *Growing Light and Other Conversations* installed at the Science gallery in Dublin allowed visitors to peer into the lives of photo-responsive microorganisms based in remote laboratories in MIT and a live link with the Auroura

Borealis in Northern Finland. These web-portals into the laboratory are real time images into living science.

Media archive

The Grafting Parlour is building a collection of video and audio narratives, which document their different research activities. Research expeditions include The Arctic Circle, Northern Forest, Finland, August 2008 with e-MobilArt Lab at Sodankylä Geophysical Observatory in Northern Finland, August 2008; collaboration with Dr. Natalie Kuldell and students, MIT Bio Engineering Lab, November, 2008; Dr. Natalie Kuldell and students Katie Loh and Fori Wang, with medialabers Marcelo Coelho, Jean-Baptiste Labrune, and Dana Gordon, MIT Bio Engineering Lab, Dec 2008; And a visit to Professor Jeff Lichtman's lab, at MCB Harvard, Nov 2008.

New works

We have just completed an exhibition at the 2nd Thessaloniki Biennale in Greece. Our next exhibition will take place at The Lab in Dublin, coinciding with ISEA 2009. We are also planning to develop a piece for The Academy of Fine Arts in Katowice, Poland in October and The Beta Space Gallery at the Power House Museum in Sydney, Australia.

The ISEA 2009 installation looks at the contested space of nature/science and man. 'Science is meant for the progression of man, but using science for evil can also lead to the downfall of men' (*20,000 leagues under the Sea*, Jules Verne). There is conflict between man versus nature, the visible and invisible. The push and pull, power and control that man attempts to enforce on the world around us. We are exploring how natural and man-made power is operating and revealing the mechanisms and connections that make us, and the world we have built, operational in some sort of way. We are exploring the world as a symbiotic grafting machine.



'Growing light and other conversations', Lightwave exhibition, Science gallery, Dublin. (Copyright the Grafting Parlour 2010).



'Growing light and other conversations', live feed GFP under the microscope from Professor Natalie Kuldell's Bioengineering lab, MIT. Lightwave Exhibition @ Science gallery, Dublin. (Copyright the Grafting Parlour 2010).



The Grafting Parlour, e-mobilart lab, State Museum of Contemporary Art, Thessaloniki Biennale. Audience interacts with live wheatgrass and Avermedia scanner viewing the University of Thessaloniki's Laboratory of Forest Botany local plant collection. (Copyright the Grafting Parlour 2010).



Live moss and bacteria projections onto china plates. Collection on loan from Prof. Eshel Ben Jacob's bacteria research @ School of Physics and Astronomy, Tel Aviv University (<http://star.tau.ac.il/~eshel/>) e-mobilart lab, State Museum of Contemporary Art, Thessaloniki Biennale. (Copyright the Grafting Parlour 2010).

Credits

Scientific Collaborators include:

Natalie Kuldell and her Biological Engineering Laboratory at MIT

Finnish naturalist Panu Oulasvirta

Additional contributing artists:

Jon Stevenson; Fang-Yu Lin; The League of Imaginary Scientists

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* Culture Ireland

Websites

<http://www.thegraftingparlour.org/>

<http://www.media.uoa.gr/~charitos/emobilart/>

<http://www.thessalonikiennale.gr/Index.php?lang=en&info=>