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The Laboratory Garden

The Laboratory Garden is a research project and events series in development that focuses on the emerging artistic practice of incorporating plants, or more generally organic systems, into contemporary artworks using current technology and media. The project investigates this practice against the background of a larger conceptual framework in which these artworks play not only a solitary role, but are part of a proposed living heterotopian laboratory; a *garden realm* creating relationships between the artwork, its surroundings and its viewers. Major focus points are art and artists working with living systems as a paradigm of unfinished interaction in the context of electronic arts, where experimental practice between human and nature is marked by its character of real-time slowness and its fragile and temporal products. The emphasis on the garden as a laboratory primarily focuses on the aspects of interaction between living and organic systems, as well as technical and technological ones, that enable a shift into augmented incidents and environments.

Garden as a Laboratory for Artistic Experimentation: The larger aspect of the garden as field of experimentation – cultural, political and artistic – lays the groundwork for looking at it as a heterotopia, as (after Foucault) an *other* or *counter* space. At the same time, it can also be a testing ground for individual and societal conditions, a place where economic and ecological circumstances can proxy new paradigms of interbreeding innovation and tradition. The project seeks to go beyond the question of artistic human-plant interaction. It brings its subject into the realm of an expanding electronic and digital framework and its underlying currents – and the imagination of the garden as a microcosmic reference space in contemporary artistic practice.

Garden Art and Collective Memory: The idea of the garden may serve both as a blueprint for collective memory, as well as a space for individual artistic positioning. For the collective memory (after Halbwachs) the garden opens up a space to develop common ground on the basis of group-specific behav-

our. The original distinction between communicative and cultural memory thus finds its common expression in the garden itself: It is both a manifest document of an oral history of experience and tradition as well as a universally comprehensible monument.

Garden as Counter Space: “The garden is the smallest parcel of the world and then it is the totality of the world.” According to Michel Foucault, gardens are heterotopias; they are part of society, are situated in its middle, yet, they are places that reflect, question and challenge other places and turn them into their opposite, into *counter spaces*. Foucault therefore describes the garden as the “oldest example of these heterotopias that take the form of contradictory sites.” These heterotopias have a tendency to appear in times of crisis and change, in which hitherto existing rules need to be reconsidered. What are the connections between garden art and the modern sciences? For a number of very different scientific disciplines the garden has become a field for experimentation with “nature” and a model for an ideal order, whereby the innovative connections between science and art as well as the intermix of imagination and recollection have played a significant role.

Garden as a Medium in Artistic Practice: The garden and its variation of the suggested heterotopic laboratory connect to the arts in general and the electronic arts in particular in various ways. It is a place for the presentation of works of art, as an artwork in and by itself, and a medium for artistic practice. Questions arising in this context are, among others: What is the function of gardens in the media and the arts, such as visual arts, media art, bio art and interactive art? What are the traditions of artistic practice in this field today? And what are the new qualities, opportunities and challenges of working with nature and organic systems against the backdrop of technological developments and ever increasing potentials of mediatised cross-systemic connectivity?