

## Aronia m.BaBe: Berry-artist(ic) Research Bart Vandeput (Bartaku)

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### Abstract

In an artist-berry alliance an artistic research practice is developing that arguably provides a case as part of a wider attempt by practitioners to broaden the field of embodied cognition. This implies the acceptance of a view on cognition that includes plant life. Examples of the artistic practice describe how it drives -and thrives- in a time spatial matrix of 'merely happenings', unreflective and reflective normative actions and embraced failure. A dynamic coupling, interspecies interaction system that is enactively named a 'Leaky Loop System'.

### Keywords

Embodied cognition; Plant cognition, Enactivism, Artistic re-search, Ontology, Philosophy of Science, Technology.

### Introduction

One of the most effective vegetal dyes that convert light into electricity is produced in the berry of the 'Aronia melanocarpa' bush. Due to this property Bartaku was introduced in 2009 to a former Russian state owned plantation just outside the Midwestern town of Aizpute, Latvia. Ever since he annually returns to reconnect with the 1Ha Aronia m. Plantation (1HAMp). These repetitive residencies are a key prerequisite for the ever-deepening relationship that fuses Aronia m. and Bartaku's artistic research practice.

In this paper, I propose that this artistic work can be seen as a case that can contribute to the widening of the scope of -or at least contribute to discussions in- the theory of embodied cognition. It is a case that belongs to the realm of the skill of the transversal (non-expert) artist, who is also a naming, wording agent, in the context of his entanglement with a berry. Central here are ideas on perception and (un)reflective action in a setting of affordances. The latter being defined by Rietveld as relations between aspects of a material environment and abilities available in a form of life. (Rietveld, 2014). When an individual engages adequately with an

affordance this is often an exercise of skill. In acquiring a skill, the individual becomes increasingly expert at responding adequately and appropriately to the actions a particular situation invites. Skilled persons - typically craftsmen, or more generic, experts- often respond in a non-reflective, still normative (discontent/wish to improve) way to various possible actions that the situation, environment provides.

The key notion enaction is inspiringly described by Varela, based on a poem by A. Machado, as the laying down of a path in walking: "Wanderer, the road is your footsteps, nothing else; you lay down a path in walking". (Thompson, 2007).

Rietveld has been focusing on humans, later adding non-human animals so as for plants I follow here Gagliano who extends the above-mentioned concepts into the realm of the living (Gagliano, 2014). Her thinking and experiments are embedded in Maturana's view on cognition as a natural biological phenomenon contributing to the persistence of organisms in a dynamic 'process' of interactions in the organism-environment system. Cognition is not a fixed 'property' of an organism.

In the examples of works given below, some past, some ongoing, some becoming, it is shown how they are the result of a succession of enactions that interact dynamically: unreflective ones, especially whilst wandering in the familiar 1HAMp; reflective, in the context of a lab, talk, study... Reflective as well, in terms of embracing failure, be it planned or unplanned. As for Aronia m., the unreflective self-beneficial action (signaling, biochemical action) to its environment happens most in its familiar environment, 1HAMp. Reflective action becomes more dominant when the biotope changes, augmenting the stress levels in Aronia m. and other parts of the biotope. But what then with the enactive moment in which merely something happens,

enigmatically, as in the case of the awareness of the discontent of Aronia m. with its formal name, followed by the immediate appearance of the right new name in a setting of rich affordances? For now, there is no explanation other than the enigma.

In the writing -and perceiving of this paper, in the coupling of embodied cognition with plant cognition via the pathways of the human/berry artistic practice, I will enact conclusively by naming this constellation a 'Leaky Loop System'.

### Aronia m. Baroa b.

September 3<sup>rd</sup> 2014. At the edge of a shrinking town not far from the Baltic Sea, Bartaku wanders as usual at that time of year at the 1 Ha Aronia melanocarpa Plantation (1HAMp). Amidst thousands of Aronia m. bushes he senses their discontent with their formal science given name 'Aronia melanocarpa (Michaux) Elliot'. At an instance, without any reflection a new name is spoken out: 'Baroa belaobara'. The bush tension drops drastically, Bartaku bodily understands it is the right name that came.

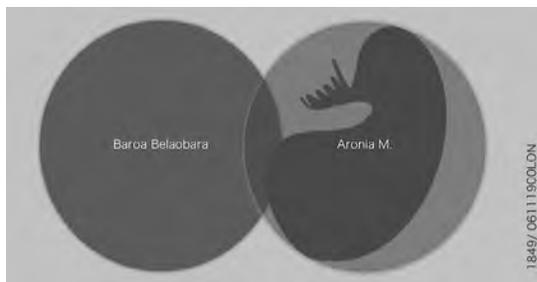


Figure 1. Nomenclatural and shape morphing. Sketch by Bartaku

Few seconds later, that fresh sudden void that arose due to Aronia m. no longer referring to a flesh fruity *something*, was filled: a graphic sketch of a possible future new Aronia m. materialized whilst observing a single onyx black berry on a bush. A day later, using the just learned quick clay shaping method, a clay figurine made whilst gazing at the sketch, came to be. With powder sugar, Aronia Baroa belaobara juice and some brushes ready at hand then, a traditional simple paint was made and applied on the piece. After two days in open air and nocturnal indoor shelter the piece was hard. Most probably due to the high amount of tannins it seemed as if it had been baked in the kiln. Not entirely surprising having investigated the metabolite properties

in the Aronia Overture: a collaborative piece consisting of 11 movements, with Babe juice dripping on a custom-made hardware Babe-audiodevice modulating its sounds. And juxtaposed with an *unchoir* that produces Babehuman sounds, emulating the sensation of choking that one perceives with drinking Babe juice.

Back in Aizpute, soon after the future Aronia dried, a photo shoot took place at Serde Arts Center (Lat) with annually returning photographer Daniel Allen. In the process, vibrations of the wooden -300-year-old-floor led to the fall and mutation of future Aronia m. It was said that the birds did it. At the time of writing the number of mutations due to various causes has risen to four.

These transducing moments of Babe bushes' signals into unreflective, immediate creations of a new name and shape are fusing a whole chain of artistic processes that influence the contexts in which they emerge.

### Nomenclatural Morph

The well thought of act of 'Nomenclatural morphing' is foreseen. A name change request to modify Aronia m. (Michx.) Elliott into Baroa belaobara will be delivered according to the protocol of "The International Code of Nomenclature for algae, fungi, and plants" by *The International Association for Plant Taxonomy (IAPT)*. For the physical formal wordings of the procedure, Babe-ink will be used, applied on a medium, possibly living flesh. Observing the Code, it is most certain that the request will be rejected. Nevertheless, Baroa belaobara, Baroa b. or Babe, will be enacted further outside the realm of the formal.

### Synaptic Morphing

'Synaptic morphing' was initially conceived as an intend to allow Babe to commend on the field of neuroaesthetics by applying Babe-light based electricity to the brain such that the human would start perceiving Babe as the most important work of art in cosmic history. Due to the grounding advice of a neuroscientist pointing to the complexity of invasive brain electrotherapy, the idea transformed. During a bio-signaling workshop a physical and conceptual discontent towards a brain reading device resulted in the unmasking of a face-like-feature with the device pushed flat on a paper. At 1HAMp this feature became the model for 5 masks, one in plaster, made in a highly unreflective way by a fine artist on wine and wodka. One antidotal masks was

sculpted and three times reproduced in a conceptual, conscious stance. The Sun dried masks were brought together in the form of an interventionist happening at an arts festival. They were stained by human performative hands that squeezed out the juice of berry after berry for two days. Shiny, onyx black the masks became.

### **Morphing Aronia m.**

‘Morphing Aronia m.’ features the exploration of a new physical identity for the initial Aronia m. as name. It will have the clay figurine based shape and enhanced metabolite properties. The latter are informed by Babe’s relation with light and the aim is to both honor this berrycosmic relation as to enact a facilitated adaptation of future changing light conditions. Developing the highest concentrations of anthocyanin pigments will lead to an even darker new berry. Various techniques will be tried out, from in vitro cell culture to more complex endeavors. Plants are selected on their high presence of anthocyanins.

### **Distributed Plantation**



With labs nearby but Babe absent, it is worthwhile mentioning that this situation changed due to the highly non-reflective immediate intervention by the grandson of a grandfather who used to have a leading position at the plantation in sovkhos (Soviet) times. Also, the young man had been assisting Bartaku and the local winemaker/chemist in various harvesting moments and other interventions. Aware of other than financial values of the berry land, he prevented the fifteen lot owners from selling to agro-industrial, pension fund controlled entities. He found himself renting for the next years. Bartaku was informed about the ongoing change, immediately found himself daytraveling to IHAmP, photo-shooting the young man amongst the bushes,

and digging out young shoots and driving back together with the Babes to Helsinki. Eleven young shoots are now constituting the Otaronian Distributed Plantation at the science Aalto University Campus. Through a highly unreflective fingeron-digital-glass act, followed by a skillful mapping and digging operation, the Finnish extension of IHAmP has bird view wise the shape of future Aronia m. Parts of the plants have been used for growth in sterile condition in glass and sterile labs. Until the moment of writing they did not enact in the planned way. The protocols fail. Or the humans, protocolling. Or the protocol matter.

### **Conclusion**

A selection of past, evolving and evaporated parts of the Aronia m. Babe berry artist(ic) research practice has been described in terms of contents, process, and method. It is an ever-evolving hybrid entity through mutual, non-hierarchical influencing of the alive and non-alive components in the constellation. A process in which the human and berry are morphing separately, but also in a more entangled way, giving shape to a hybrid humanberry entity.

I propose that the Aronia m. Babe Bartaku based contellation can be seen as a case that contributes to the broadening of the understanding of the field of embodied cognition. This by offering a context in which plant cognition is acknowledged and in an embodied way enacted. A context with variable cognitive and skill-based stances by both artistic researcher and Aronia m. Babe, laying down a path in walking.

The case is particular in that the unreflective can reflectively clash –being fused by berry discontent– with the highly reflective, like the plant Nomenclature. Notwith-standing being conscious of the guaranteed failure, with contentment there is a bouncing back into a context with affordances that could be relevant for non-reflective artistic action. In this seemingly rational methodic realm, the artistic practice and the involved agents evolve through bidirectional coupling, recharging themselves, changing constraints, eco-systems and understanding.

In the process of writing this paper it was understood that the above system can be named in a wordy enactment as a “Leaky Loop System”.

A remaining void is the notion of “it merely happened”, as mentioned above, Bartaku’s sudden awareness of Babe’s discontent with its official name. For now, it has to suffice to encode it as an enigmatic

artistic-empathetic interspecies awareness.

*“And the Aronia berry, is an apple”*

Anete Boroduške, molecular biologist. Faculty of Biology, University of Latvia. Sept. 11, 2015. Serde, Aizpute (Lat)

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### Website

International Association for Plant Taxonomy > <http://www.iapt-taxon.org/nomen/main.php>

### Author Biography

Bartaku practices the art of enquiry with main interest in cognitive ecology, consciousness studies, neurobiology, energy and the philosophy of knowing and becoming. His work is often process-based, collaborative, transversal and situated in the folds and cracks of formal classifications. Since March 2016 he develops the deepening of the entanglement with the Aronia m. BaBe appleberry as a Doctoral candidate at the Department of Arts, Design and Architecture of Aalto University (Fin). He is participating artist in arts ecology project [frontiersinretreat.org](http://frontiersinretreat.org) and member of both cultural lab FoAM (Bru) and the Finnish Bioart Society.