

The International Congress of Aesthetics organized by the International Association for Aesthetics, Krakow, July 21–27, 2013

Bioart Panel I:

Towards a New Transaesthetics: Aesthetics and Ontology in Current Bio Art Practices

Chair: Dr. **Ingeborg Reichle** (Humboldt-University, Berlin, Germany)

Speakers:

- Dr. **Ingeborg Reichle** (Humboldt-University, Berlin, Germany)
- Prof. Dr. **Nicole C. Karafyllis** (Technische Universitaet Braunschweig, Germany)
- Prof. **Suzanne Anker** (School of Visual Arts, New York, United States)
- Prof. Dr. **Jos de Mul** (Erasmus University Rotterdam, The Netherlands)

Bioart Panel II:

Aesthetics and Politics of Biotechnological Art

Chair: Doc. Dr. **Polona Tratnik** (University of Primorska, Koper, Slovenia)

Speakers:

- Prof. Dr. **María Antonia González Valerio** (National Autonomous University of Mexico, Mexico City, Mexico)
- Prof. Dr. **Miško Šuvaković** (Faculty of Music, Belgrade, Serbia)
- Doc. Dr. **Polona Tratnik** (University of Primorska, Koper, Slovenia)
- Dr. **Melentie Pandilovski** (Video Pool Media Arts Centre in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada)

Towards a New Transaesthetics: Aesthetics and Ontology in Current Bio Art Practices

Dr. Ingeborg Reichle (Humboldt-University, Berlin, Germany)

During the last decade, the term 'Bio Art' has been the subject of vital discussions as a description of the intersecting domains of the biological sciences and their incorporation into the arts. The use of biological material like tissue culture, plant breeding, and above all genetic engineering as artistic media went hand in hand with debates about the aesthetic value and ethical-ontological consequences of bringing cutting edge science into the arts. The adoption of bioscientific techniques and methods into the arts, however, not only broached a highly controversial subject, it also opened up new ways of artistic expression. With the emerging field of Bio Art, tissue culture, bacteria, cells, and even genetically engineered organisms have become part of the art world, raising questions about the aesthetic and ontological status of live in the age of technoscience.

In the last decade we have seen a number of artists questioning our concept of life while moving beyond the boundaries of art and science. Debates about changing the face of our planet through geo-engineering or debates about assembling life artificially in a petri dish through synthetic biology challenge our concept of "live" in an age, where "nature" seems to be increasingly human-made.

For almost half a century the modern life sciences have been able to produce "artificial" living organisms that evolution has not brought forth so far by using the methods and techniques of genetic engineering. The concept of life as technology has been one of the starting points of producing "biofacts," which owe their existence solely to the culture of experimentation and the expanding systems of apparatus in the laboratory.

The term *biofact* was introduced a few years ago by the philosopher Nicole C. Karafyllis to restate a systematic term for technically manipulated life by substituting “arti” with “bio” in the word “artifact”. Until recently we understood artifacts are artificial, constructed, and created objects. Previously, constructed objects always belonged to the domain of things. An artifact always stands for a thing, made by humans using skills and techniques, and it is a collective name for artificially created things as diverse as buildings, artworks, or machinery. Biofacts can be regarded as biological artifacts, which mean they are, or have been, alive. This conceptual deficiency, amongst other reasons, arose because the technological philosophy up to now was focusing to systematize technology and viewing “nature” always as “the other” or “opposite” of technology. The contributions to the panel “Towards a New Transaesthetics: Aesthetics and Ontology in Current Bio Art Practices” seek to analyze the aesthetic and ontological consequences of Bio Art, exploring a appropriate theoretical framework that is drawn from the fields of philosophy, art history and the arts itself in order to examine current Bio Art practices.

CV:

Ingeborg Reichle is a trained art historian and today active as cultural theorist writing on contemporary art and new technologies, with a focus on biotechnology and artificial life. She lectures since 2011 at the Hermann von Helmholtz -Zentrum für Kulturtechnik, Humboldt-University Berlin. From 2005–2011 she was holding a research position at the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities. In 2004 she received her Ph.D. with a dissertation on art in the age of technoscience: *Kunst aus dem Labor. Zum Verhältnis von Kunst und Wissenschaft im Zeitalter der Technoscience* (Springer 2005), *Art in the Age of Technoscience. Genetic Engineering, Robotics, and Artificial Life in Contemporary Art* (Springer 2009). Her habilitation in 2013 dealt with the epistemology of images, diagrams and models in art and science. She is co-editor of five books: *IMAGE MATCH. Visueller Transfer, „Imagescapes“ und Intervisualität in globalen Bildkulturen* (Fink Verlag 2012, with M. Baleva and O. L. Schultz), *Atlas der Weltbilder* (Akademie Verlag 2011, with Chr. Marksches, P. Deuffhard, and J. Brüning), *Maßlose Bilder. Visuelle Ästhetik der Transgression* (Fink Verlag 2009, with S. Siegel), *Visuelle Modelle* (Fink Verlag 2008, with S. Siegel and A. Spelten), *Verwandte Bilder. Die Fragen der Bildwissenschaft* (Kadmos Verlag 2007, with S. Siegel and A. Spelten). In 2010 she curated the bioart exhibition “jenseits des menschen – beyond humans” at the Berlin Medical History Museum of the Charité. Since 2000 she has been a guest lecturer at various international institutions including the School of Visual Arts, New York; the Department of Biology, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Boston; the Life-Science Lab, German Cancer Research Center, Heidelberg; Timbusu College National University of Singapore; SymbioticA at the School of Anatomy, Physiology and Human Biology, University of Western Australia; School of Creative Media, City University of Hong Kong; Lomonosov Moscow State University.

Where is the artefact? Biofacts and the shifting boundaries of Arts and Technology

Prof. Dr. Nicole C. Karafyllis, Technische Universität Braunschweig

In everyday life, we are quite sure, what artefacts are; for instance, automobiles, screwdrivers and houses. And we are also quite sure, that landscapes, bodies and skin are *not* artefacts. But what are they? In modernity, they cannot be regarded as nature any more. But then, what are they? Or is this the wrong question? BioArt exactly poses this second-order question, that is, if the ontological question “What are they?” is still a good one.

The classical realms of artifacts are technology and the arts. When we look at biotechnological approaches, we get not inspired to ask “What are they?”, but: “What are they good for?” Artefacts in technology have to function according to a specific *purpose*; as a mean they serve a defined end. In everyday life, we do not experience artifacts as media, as long as they function. Their mediality shows only *as* mediality, when they do *not* function any more. That means, technological mediality becomes obvious only *ex negativo*, by becoming dysfunctional, by disappointing us. Not so in the arts which, per a common definition, do not serve utility. There, the mediality of the artefact shows, when the artefact irritates. When it loses its power of irritation, its specific mediality is lost.

This line of argumentation has not solved the problem, what landscapes, skin and bodies are. Rather it can emphasize which theoretical and political difficulties arise, when artists use fluid and living artefacts. As I will argue, the common notions of the relation between the artefact and its mediality dramatically change in BioArt. Commonly, we do not regard bodies and tissues as created and designed, though we believe that they function according to a given purpose. However, in biotechnological modeling are many stages of technical design involved, which preconfigures the form, in which BioArt can act and create (endogenous design). Therefore, the artist has to

find a new mode of difference to his/her work of art in so far as this work still is aimed to embody some emancipative and irritating potential.

CV:

Nicole Karafyllis is a trained philosopher and biologist, and since 2010 chair of the department of philosophy at Technische Universität Braunschweig (Germany). 2008-2010 she held a professorship in philosophy at the United Arab Emirates University in Abu Dhabi (UAE), followed by a visiting professorship on Cultural Philosophy of Science 2007 at the University of Vienna (Austria). Her habilitation in 2006 dealt with the phenomenology of growth. Karafyllis main areas of research are: philosophy of science and technology, biotechnologies and the arts, philosophy of culture and intercultural exchange. Selected publications: N. C. Karafyllis: *Biologisch, Natürlich, Nachhaltig. Philosophische Aspekte des Naturzugangs im 21. Jahrhundert*. Tübingen: Francke 2001 (in German). N. C. Karafyllis, G. Ulshöfer (Ed.): *Sexualized Brains. Scientific Modeling of Emotional Intelligence from a Cultural Perspective*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press 2008.

The Cultured Cell: Reframing Life

Prof. Suzanne Anker (School of Visual Arts, New York, United States)

Revisioning life through technological intervention continues to create living matter in novel and sometimes controversial ways. From frozen embryos and stem cells to purple and orange cauliflower to bio-printed organs, the cultured cell is a living technological entity. Coming into existence through means of mimicry, how can these organisms be classified in Linnaean terms? Tissue culturing of plants can create a million molecularly identical plants from a small amount of stock. Plants can be made from stems and leaves, assigning a new status to seeds. In light of Walter Benjamin's seminal essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," we now turn our attention to mechanical reproduction of living entities. This talk will address the expanding fields of Bio Art and design and the ways in which they are being incorporated into the social order.

CV:

Suzanne Anker is a visual artist and theorist working at the intersection of art and the biological sciences. She works in a variety of mediums ranging from digital sculpture and installation to large-scale photography to plants grown by LED lights. Her work has been shown both nationally and internationally in museums and galleries including the Walker Art Center, the Smithsonian Institute, the Phillips Collection, P.S.1 Museum, the JP Getty Museum, the Medizinhistorisches Museum der Charite in Berlin, the Center for Cultural Inquiry in Berlin, the Pera Museum in Istanbul and the Museum of Modern Art in Japan. Her book *The Molecular Gaze: Art in the Genetic Age*, co-authored with the late sociologist Dorothy Nelkin, was published in 2004 by Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory Press. She has hosted twenty episodes of the Bio Blurb show, an Internet radio program originally on WPS1 Art Radio, in collaboration with MoMA in NYC, now archived on Alana Heiss' Art On Air. has been a speaker at Harvard University, the Royal Society in London, Cambridge University, Yale University, the London School of Economics, the Max-Planck Institute, University of Leiden, the Hamburger Bahnhof Museum for Contemporary Art in Berlin, the Courtauld Institute of Art in London, Banff Art Center and many others. Chairing SVA's Fine Arts Department in NYC since 2005, Suzanne Anker continues to interweave traditional and experimental media in her department's new digital initiative and the Nature and Technology BioArt Lab.

The biotechnological sublime

Prof. Dr. Jos de Mul (Erasmus University Rotterdam, The Netherlands)

In my talk, I will investigate the phenomenon of the technological sublime. Although the category of the sublime has a long history, it became a dominant concept in nineteenth and twentieth-century aesthetics. In (post)modern culture however, we witness a fundamental transformation of the experience of the sublime. Although originally the concept of the sublime predominantly referred to a specific rhetoric effect, in the nineteenth century the sublime became strongly connected with the artistic representation of overwhelming phenomena in nature. I will argue that in the course of the 20th century, the sublime increasingly becomes entangled with the experience of technology. At first, we seem to witness here a return of the sublime from nature to technology, even though the point of departure was an alpha-technology (rhetoric), whereas the

return concerns the domain of beta-technologies, such as nuclear physics and information technology. However, in the age of biotechnologies (such as genetic modification and synthetic biology), the sublime seems to regain a natural dimension. Mediated by biotechnologies nature becomes a 'second' or 'next nature'. Illustrated by some striking examples of recent 'bio-art' it will be argued that in the age of biotechnology the difference between nature, technology and art will gradually vanish, and new dimensions of the sublime will become manifest.

CV:

Jos de Mul is full professor Philosophy of Man and Culture at the Faculty of Philosophy, Erasmus University Rotterdam, and scientific director of the Research Institute Philosophy of Information and Communication Technology (ϕICT). He has also taught at the University of Michigan (Ann Arbor) and Fudan University (Shanghai) and he is a regular Visitor of the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton and the Tokyo Institute of Technology. From 2007-2010 he was president of the International Association for Aesthetics. His publications include: *Romantic Desire in (Post)Modern Art and Philosophy* (State University of New York Press, 1999) , *The Tragedy of Finitude. Dilthey's Hermeneutics of Life* (Yale University Press, 2004), *Cyberspace Odyssey. Towards a Virtual Ontology and Anthropology* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), and *Destiny Domesticated. The Rebirth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Technology* (State University of New York Press, Autumn 2013). He is the winner of the Praemium Erasmianum, the Dutch Research Prize for the Humanities. His work has been translated in more than a dozen languages.

Towards the Question for the Art: Implications of Biotechnology and Ontology for a Possible Aesthetics

Prof. Dr. María Antonia González Valerio (National Autonomous University of Mexico, Mexico City, Mexico)

What is art? One of the main questions that aesthetic ontology has postulated and has tried to address from the point of view of general ontology, that is, from the question about being. The reflections that philosophy has done around this question (For analytic aesthetics the leading question has been: "Which are the artworks?") has been central to think upon the possibilities of art regarding the way in which it corresponds itself – or not – with a certain way of being of reality.

But reality is nowadays constructed in the realm of technoscience and not only in an empirical level, but also in a transcendental one. The production of art is related to technoscience not only because of the use of technologies –and recently of biotechnologies- in its making, but most importantly because in this relationship a model from which to comprehend and interpret reality emerges.

Therefore, the question what is art should be posed in the light of an ontology that deals with technoscience and the production of reality within biotechnologies.

CV:

María Antonia González Valerio is a philosopher working in the fields of aesthetics and ontology, with a focus on biotechnologies and the arts. She is full professor at the Faculty of Philosophy, National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). She is the author of two books: *Un tratado de ficción. Ontología de la mimesis* (Herder, 2010) and *El arte develado* (Herder, 2005). She is co-editor of five books, the most recent: *Pròs Bión: Reflexiones naturales desde el arte, la ciencia y la filosofía* (UNAM, 2013). She is the head of the interdisciplinary research group Art+Science based at the UNAM and the coordinator of the arts collective BIOS Ex machinA (workshop for the fabrication of the human and the non-human). In 2012 she curated the bioart exhibition "Sin origen/Sin semilla (Without origin/Seedless)" at the Museo Universitario de Ciencias y Artes (MUCA) Campus Roma and Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo (MUAC).

Art, Politics, Technology, and Science – Spectacularisation

Prof. Dr. Miško Šuvaković (Faculty of Music, Belgrade, Serbia)

Contemporary relations between art, politics, technology, and science may be identified as a field of obsessions and phantasms about representing the 'truth of the world/life', or, alternatively, as a field of obsessions and phantasms about performing the 'regulation of world/life'. The concepts of this representing and performing should be understood as practices of exemplifying generically the conditions of the truth and potentiality of

forms of life. Bioartists concerns representing the truth conditions and performing the regulation of living, that is, biological material. By means of this representing and performing, the invisible and abstract world of the 'knowledge of life', which science and technology posit before events and situations of life, becomes visible. It is not that art thereby becomes science or technology, but rather that through art, science and technology become visible with all of their effects and consequences in the real, living world. The function of art is to spectacularise the complex field of relations between science, politics, and technology with regards to forms of life.

CV:

Miško Šuvaković was born in 1954 in Beograd. He has been co-founder and member of conceptual artistic Group 143 (1975–1980). He was co-founder and member of informal theoretic and artistic institution “Community for Space Investigation” (1982–1989). He is member of theoretical platform TkH (Walking Theory, from 2000). He teaches aesthetics and theory of art, Faculty of Music, Belgrade (Professor). He teaches theory of art and theory of culture, Interdisciplinary studies, University of Art Belgrade. He published 32 books in Serbian, Croatian, Slovenian and English, among others recently: *Impossible Histories*, The MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 2006; *Pojmovnik teorije umetnosti*, Orion Art, Beograd, 2011; *Surplus Life: The Philosophy of contemporary art and form of life*, Horizonti, Ljubljana, 2011.

The Quest for Survival: Art with Biotechnology

Doc. Dr. Polona Tratnik (University of Primorska, Koper, Slovenia)

In the biotech century we have been facing a tremendous development of the field since the middle of the twentieth century. Biotechnology as the knowledge-power has been perceived as revolutionary, promising that the man is soon to become the “master of the evolution”. Since the computer paradigm signifying the swing of genomics art has found its mission in reflecting and discussing this segment of reality. Humankind has been aiming to gain the ultimate power with biotechnology, however only art projects reveal this striving and link it to another, rather modest yet utmost ambitious goal: the quest for survival.

Today, in Slovenia one can find perhaps the most vivid scene of practices in the convergence of art and biotechnology in the world, transferring the technologies, knowledge, methodologies and living matter into the world of art. Yet they are not meant to be naïve, non-reflexive playing with life. The artists have developed rich conceptual challenges and technological platforms in order to discuss complex but very relevant actual issues, such as those of biopower, anthropocentrism, survival of the species, biological adaptation to extreme environmental conditions, genetically modified food products and possible cannibalism as means of survival tactics, etc. These aspects present extreme aesthetic and political confrontation of public with the levers of the need to foster the development of biotechnology.

CV:

Polona Tratnik is the president of the Slovenian Society of Aesthetics. She is the head of the Department for Cultural Studies, docent for philosophy of culture at Faculty of Humanities and research associate at Science and Research Centre of the University of Primorska, director of Horizonti Institute. She was a Fulbright Visiting Scholar and Guest Professor at University of California Santa Cruz in 2012 and a guest professor in Beijing, Helsinki, Mexico etc. She is an author of five monographs, one forthcoming: *Hacer-vivir más allá del cuerpo y del medio*, Mexico City: Herder, and one just written (*Conquest of Body. Biopower of Biotechnology*).

Biopolitics and Aestheticization of Toxicity

Dr. Melentje Pandilovski (Video Pool Media Arts Centre in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada)

The paper looks into how “Toxicity” entrenches itself into what Phenomenology sees as the co-constitution of society and technology. Namely, the cultural deciphering of the toxic societal terrain resonates with current socio-economic global transformations. The topic of toxicity reconstructs not only the current environmental situation, but also socio-political contexts by looking into modes of contemporary cultural and technological production, the extraction of minerals, toxic waste, local and international policies, community-based responses, and the thematic of production, consumption and disposal.

The paper looks into the extended role that Biopolitics maintains today with the crucial question of how Biotechnology shapes life, and therefore attains the central role in society. In fact Biotechnology adds a

complexity of layers that allows it to radically reconstruct the relations between politics and nature, allowing for a reassessment of how we look at life today. The trajectory of the development of Biopolitics is altered, for life appears not to be what we have originally assumed that it was, and therefore the regulation of life cannot continue under the premises of what had been previously taken for granted. The dualities of power and right, sovereignty and law, do not leave the contemporary Biopolitical discourses for a minute. Biopolitical conflicts appear in the real and virtual worlds involving NGOs, governments and corporations. They also involve issues of energy control (choice of fuel material and alternative energy sources), the causes and consequences of environmental changes and sustainability, life, death and appearance.

The paper considers the changes that Toxicity causes in the cultural, socio-political and ecological landscape relating to art and technology, science, art and philosophy, and the methods & manners of the “infiltration” of biotechnology into every facet of ordinary life. The Bio-political characteristics of Toxicity can be seen by some in line with eugenics, as the toxins will most certainly lead to sterility of the indigenous population, and are to be seen in correlation with the degenerative pathology of the prevailing illnesses such as alcoholism, STDs, obesity, diabetes, cancer, etc.

CV:

Melentie Pandilovski is an art historian, theorist, curator, and critic. He is Director of Video Pool Media Arts Centre in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. Previously he was the Director of the Visual and Cultural Research Centre, Euro-Balkan Institute in Skopje, Macedonia; Director of the Experimental Art Foundation in Adelaide, South Australia (2003–2009); and Director of the (Soros) Contemporary Art Center in Skopje, Macedonia (1998–2003). He has curated more than 100 exhibitions and organized numerous symposia, conferences, and workshops, in Europe and Australia, such as SEAFair (Skopje Electronic Art Fair) in the period 1997–2011.