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Staging Aliveness – Challenging Anthropocentrism: Subverting Art Historical Paradigms with Soft/Hard/Wet/Ware

While art historical approaches to ‘aliveness’ are traditionally occupied with the status of images and representations, such strategies fail with regards to contemporary art which, through the use of biotechnologies, or hard and software simulations, comes ‘close to life’ in the literal sense. While the technosciences have themselves become powerful producers of aestheticized images, such art calls for an analysis not based primarily on imagery but on material media and epistemic connections. Phenomena that once assumed the form of artistic images are being translated, scattered and fragmented into a variety of instances of mediality.

After painting, sculpture and automata, art in the late 20th century has first employed “dry”; informatics and robotics to stage aliveness, and, more recently, “wet”; cell and molecular biology. But which are the adequate media to re/present, simulate or animate biological systems today? This question has provoked a real contemporary *paragone*: On the one side, advocates of the *animation of the technological* have favoured robots with lifelike behaviour; on the other, proponents of the *technologization of the animated* have focussed on interventions in carbon-based biology.

Within this tension field, I’ll have a closer look at Mexican artist Gilberto Esparza’s artwork indicative of a – still rare, but epistemologically significant – tendency to bridge this dichotomy between the *animation of the technological* and the *technologization of the animated*. While employing software, hardware and wetware all together, Esparza’s hybrid entities combine bacteria, plants and robots, and address a more general trend towards *microperformativity* and *plantamorphization*, to challenge anthropocentrism.

Jens Hauser, PhD, is a Copenhagen and Paris based media studies scholar and art curator focusing on the interactions between art and technology, trans-genre and hybrid aesthetics. He holds a dual post-doctoral research position at both the Department of Arts and Cultural Studies and at the Medical Museion at the University of Copenhagen. He is also a distinguished affiliated faculty member of the Department of Art, Art History and Design at Michigan State University, and an affiliated faculty member at the Department for Image Science at Danube University Krems. At the intersection of media studies, art history and epistemology, he has previously developed a theory of biomediality as part of his PhD at Ruhr University Bochum, and also holds a degree in science and technology journalism from Université François Rabelais in Tours. His curated exhibitions include *L’Art Biotech* (Nantes, 2003), *Still, Living* (Perth, 2007), *sk-interfaces* (Liverpool, 2008/Luxembourg, 2009), the *Article Biennale* (Stavanger, 2008), *Transbiotics* (Riga 2010), *Fingerprints...* (Berlin, 2011/Munich/2012) *Synth-ethic* (Vienna, 2011), *assemble | standard | minimal* (Berlin, 2015), *SO₃* (Belfort, 2015) and *Wetware* (Los Angeles, 2016), among other co-curated exhibitions and performance projects. Hauser serves on international juries of art awards such as Ars Electronica, Transitio or Vida, as well as of several national science foundations. He is also a founding collaborator of the European culture channel ARTE since 1992, has produced numerous reportages and radio features for German and French public broadcasting services, and widely published essays in print journalism and in art books for many years.