

Pressespiegel Art Laboratory Berlin 2022

CLOT

Insight: 'Radyo Somatodelia', experiments in sonic animism von Nathalia Dutra Maciel (publiziert am 7. September 2022)



Rady

o Somatodelia, Tad Ermitaño (2020). Orasyonador installation

I feel something about the projects' origins can be conveyed by a picture of me as a science student at the University of Hiroshima. It's a bit clichéd, but I was a goth. Dressed all in black, wore black nail polish, had my hair up in a ponytail, and sometimes went barefoot. I would be dressed this way as I peered into microscopes and dissected fish. My teachers let me go my merry way, thinking, I suppose, that as long as I got my work done, my personal choices were up to me. Plus, I was a foreigner anyway.

Tad Ermitaño, whose influence can be traced back to the late 1980s, is a significant player in new media art in the Philippines and South East Asia—regarded as one of the country's forerunners of sound art and experimental film. His artistic practice has developed into a remarkable assertion of technology to create projects that examine the processes, senses, and structures surrounding man's relationship with machinery.

His work frequently involves the manipulation of audiovisual events, which the artist mixes with an instinctual aesthetic awareness of the relationship between temporal and spatial aspects. Ermitaño uses a variety of technologies to communicate his fascination with sound, including analogue circuits (Bell, 2011), mechanical instruments (Hasa, 2015), and computer programming (Sammy and the Sandworms, 2013).

His work also holds interactivity elements, allowing for flexibility in how they are displayed and experienced. For instance, *Twinning Machine* (2012) is a computer-augmented video installation that simultaneously receives a live video feed from a camera, edits the film, and projects the edited pictures using software the artist created.

Held at [Art Laboratory Berlin](#), Tad Ermitaño now brings us; **RADYO SOMATODELIA, Experiments in**

Sonic Animism: *Somatodelia is an attempt to help dissolve the mind/body dualism by trying to show how the idea that the mind as this invisible, non-material, 'spiritual' independent thing is a falsehood that sweeps under the rug all the ways it depends on, originates in, is fed by the physical. For instance, when a person trembles, it is these physical gestures by which I know his mental state.*

And by 'know', I don't mean I deduce their mental state from the signs they display, but that these movements of their body are either mirrored or entangled in our own. The relationship between the observer and that which is being observed is thus intersubjective – we are merged in empathy. (Tad Ermitaño, Notes on Somatodelia).

The birth of Somatodelia, woven together by relationships and entanglements, human and more-than-human, seems to originate with a young university student. The piece creates linkages between time and space. Somatodelia paths its methods of wayfinding and intimate connections to generate relationships between varying places of existence.

These multitemporal frameworks are reflected in the piece's complexity. Floating within these multilayered places of existence, Radyo Somatodelia mimics how our thoughts are birthed, formed through this dance between fragments of lived experiences that are seemingly unrelated but somehow in our neurological sphere exist in cohesion.

These days, I think it was a manifestation of some kind of effort to seek out or increase my proximity to the extraordinary, a drive which I think is why I was interested in science anyway. Science was a place of wonder. Where fire and rust were revealed to be the same process at different speeds, where speed slowed time down, where organisms could be cultured, their DNA spliced, and where sheep could be cloned. Science was where you looked under the hood of Reality...

I had become acutely conscious that the ecological apocalypse we are in the middle of could be laid at the door of science and the technology that leverages it.

I had begun to suspect that the scientific view that consciousness was an epiphenomenon — a by-product that had no bearing on the physical Reality of the universe — made it possible for human beings to use technology in ways that might be nakedly exploitative or even compensatory in vulgarly Freudian ways — and be completely beyond criticism that had any basis in the bedrock Reality that Science dealt with.

Ethics and Morality, even Psychology, rested on premises that were much more ephemeral and easily ignored. I suppose it is only logical that the Studies of Epiphenomena would be somewhat epiphenomenal *in relation to Studies of Phenomena*.



Radyo Somatodelia, Tad Ermitaño (2020)

...I think I have a history of trying to make what might be “Sacred machines”. Machines that dealt in realms that were outside the strictly mechanical. Drone machines for meditation, Gamelan machines run by computers interacting with the audience through video avatars, and rhythmic machines for casting retribution.

A few years ago, I first encountered photographs of the tree bridges of Meghalaya in India. There are bridges woven from the aerial roots of banyan trees. Looking at these photographs, the phrase “animist technology” occurred to me. I’m not even sure what I meant by that, but I was struck by the realization that these wooden bridges were not built by destroying or killing trees, but by encouraging and leveraging the living forces in the trees.

As the trees grew older, their life forces actually made the bridges grow stronger in ways that bridges built from dead wood and quarried stone never did. This was a technology that surfed natural forces, a technology of cooperation, not of domination.

Those photographs might be the seed of this project. Or, to borrow an animist metaphor, perhaps the trees that were subjects of those photographs were the sponsors of this project, in which I try to go beyond/under the hood of the idea of an animist technology to speculations about the metaphysics that would generate/express itself in such a technological approach.

Creating new seeds of existence, Radyo Somatodelia dissolves conceptions of mind-body dualism and creates space for mindful and observatory navigation of how our mind/body exists in constant conversation. It is a reflection of our existence and how we communicate with each other through ways that exist outside and beyond linguistic capabilities. It gives us tools to navigate and reflect on the intimate, non-spoken connections that our bodies form with each other.

Exploring the way we move is a consequence of the way we have moved. Tad Ermitao invokes feelings of intimacy, bringing us to investigate our relationships. A lover's tremble is now reframed into nuance. Pushing away from binary thinking, Somatodelia invokes us to reflect on our physical movements and create space for the subtleties in understanding how we move.

An animist metaphysics would for sure have choice of things to say about the place of consciousness — of humans and nonhumans in this universe. I suspect it would also talk about intentions and teleology — of things trying to become, or trying to reach for goals, or trying to grow into shapes or forms of existence that some part of them dimly suspects are there to be found. Regarding care and intimacy, it would be the founding attitude of animist metaphysics.

The metaphysics that we live with — where we are disembodied epiphenomenal intelligence in a sea of dead machinery — underpins commonsense ideas that definitely enable indifference and cruelty. Most of us do not act with indifference and cruelty in our immediate surroundings and towards our immediate circle, *but metaphysics definitely makes it easier for, say, an executive to approve of policies that would stripmine a forest or disenfranchise communities.*

I am hoping that an animist metaphysics would make the everyday care with which we face our immediate circle an attitude that would be the rule for dealing with everything.

Tad Ermitaño calls for radical care. Care regardless of perceived, predisposed connections, or judgments of value. Care for care. Somatodelia generates spaces for intimacy within these parts of ourselves that we might not perceive as controlled. Furthermore, it calls us to reevaluate how we often mindlessly interact with the world and the things around us.

Somatodelia is a call for introspection, in which, through understanding your relationships with others and other things, you come to more deeply understand yourself. Merged through concepts of empathy, Somatodelia creates spaces and mirrored reflections within these entanglements of intersubjectiveness between observer and observed.

It generates non-linear non-spoken bonds between all aspects and players within our existence. Living in nuance, Somatodelia challenges our understanding of relationships, how we speak about them, and what we mean. It extends, bends and contorts your previous conceptions of what you understand as truth, simultaneously giving you tools to uncover new ones.

I think empathy can easily be hijacked by dialogues that lead to paralysis. It is a false idea that simply because we can understand someone or something else, it should be impossible to hurt, kill or move aggressively against it/her/him. There is a kind of veganism which I think seeks a kind of guiltless existence on the planet — a way of living that kills no animal. Of course, even raising vegetables means eliminating insects and other animals that would compete for these resources.

Again, this seems to me a kind of obverse of human exceptionalism. We are primates and omnivores *and no more expected to refrain from aggression and killing than orangutans and chimpanzees, and bonobos do. Animist cultures are filled with rites of sacrifice, which try to balance empathy with practices like hunting. I keep thinking about the title of William Burroughs' book — the Naked Lunch.*

We are in a phase of history, maybe where we are trying to bring out and contemplate all the forms of violence that we wreak upon the earth and try to minimize this violence. It is right to minimize violence

and minimize cruelty where violence is inevitable or at least chosen. However, to believe that life can be lived without a footprint of blood is a fantasy. We are always occupying space that we are clear of others.

Somatodelia reframes our stoic understandings of reality and calls for explorations that are free of rigid academic barriers. It adopts the intimate entangled and intersubjective, generating an intimate channel of connection. It reevaluates animism as a language that speaks from inside this journey of wayfinding. It reclaims personal experience as a valid way of undertaking the world because, at the end of the day, what else do we have?

I am hoping people get a sense of “something out there.” Or maybe “things in here with us”. Just a suspicion that there might be ways of focusing attention that would be rewarded by returned recognition. I am thinking about that moment when an animal you observe from a distance meets your eye. There is this shock of recognition, which comes easily because we are fellow animals; the animal has eyes, turns its head, and so on. But what about things that do not share our biology? How would we feel “seen” by an earthworm or a stand of grass, or a rock? This is the sort of door I am knocking on.

Radyo Somatodelia runs until **October 9 2022**, at Art Laboratory Berlin.

<https://clotmag.com/news/insight-radyo-somatodelia-experiments-in-sonic-animism>

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CAMMACK LINDSEY, exploring holobotical musicals that emerge from symbiotic interactions von Nathalia Dutra Maciel (publiziert am 22.07.2022)

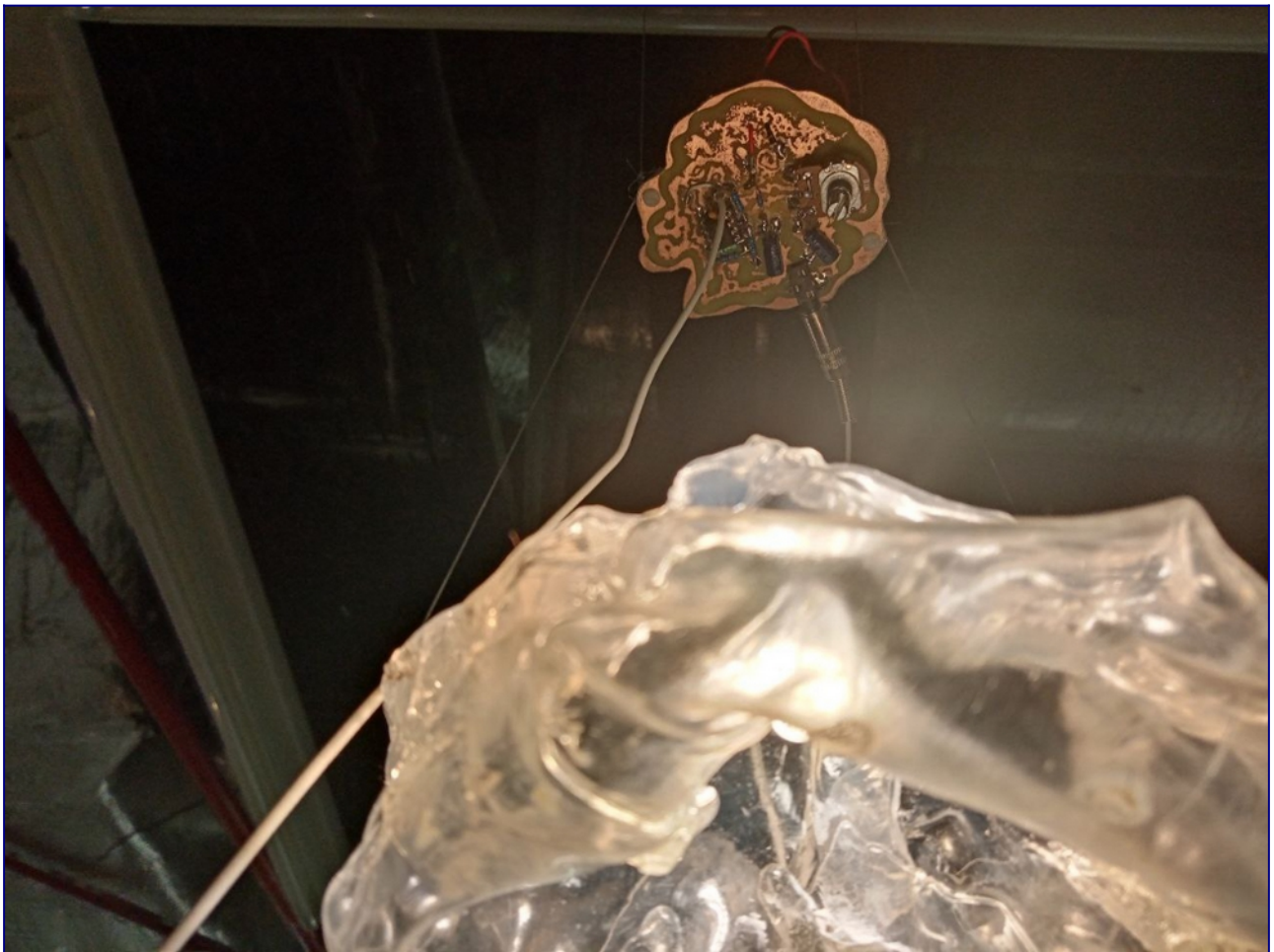


Cammack Lindsey is a Berlin-based artist who combines complex oppression networks to embody collective resistance by investigating scientific and historical relics of failures from extractive capitalism. Their work exists and is influenced by the transition period of opera into musical theatre. From that intersectional place of existence, they bring holobotical musicals that emerge from symbiotic interactions between the (non-human) subvisible world and the human—Cammack centres within their theory and practice a desire to expand and redistribute space. This intent is often explored through collaboration with cyanobacteria, micro-algae, code, the voice, sound and the materialization of colours, magic, ghosts and clouds. Through these profoundly multifaceted performances and installations, Cammack honours possible stolen futures.

Their work **Holobiont: Relics from the Revolution** is showing at the group exhibition **Hackers, Makers, Thinkers** at Art Laboratory Berlin. **Holobiont: Relics from the Revolution** is a science-fiction musical installation that grew from imaginary foundations and was set inside a factory where toxins from cyanobacteria are extracted to transform into profitable products. By creating imaginary lines, Cammack forms an environment of symbiosis between an intersectional working class and toxic cyanobacteria amid revolution. During the context exhibition, they presented excerpts of their newest musical theatre piece currently in development, *Cyanotoxic Romance*, which exists as a continuation of *Holobiont: Relics from the Revolution*, that revolves around love and relationships between multi-species in times of precarity.

About 2.5 billion years ago, the cyanobacteria' reproduction led to a sudden increase in oxygen levels. This caused fundamental change on Earth and established the basis for life as we understand it today. Cammack's work invites you to envision how cyanobacteria and humans could symbiotically expand through music. It navigates musical pathways for algorithmic computer music and natural patterns from cyanobacteria subvisible world data and finds a shared narrative through interdisciplinary investigation. Developed through histories, personal and collective, this work exists within a proletarian queer-feminist thought framework and urges for alternatively prolific closeness and intimacy between humans and nature.





I would love to start by getting your definitions of the “the human” and the “non-human subvisible world.”?

The human and non-human subvisible worlds are different elements in one realm, perhaps, in that one without the other wouldn't exist, or exist in the same way at least. In referring to the subvisible world, it is from the title of the Lynn Margulis book with her son Dorion Sagen, “Garden of microbial delights: a practical guide to the subvisible world”, where they discuss microbial realms, our bacterial ancestors, viruses, bacteria, protists, and fungi.

For me, the term non-human subvisible world extends beyond this and is not necessarily even living, such as air, chemicals, microplastics, toxic waste, magic, and ghosts, things humans perceive to be not of ourselves. It is somehow the things that are in communication and affecting our bodies and existence, whether we acknowledge them or are even able to see them. While differentiating human from non-human is silly, as humans are inherently holobiomes of many different microorganisms, with the majority of our cells being “non-human”, this separation in the language is based on our perception of our “human” lens.

There is nothing wrong with human-focused narratives as, unfortunately, we are all human by society's standards. To deny this, like the capitalists have been trying to do since before the industrial revolution, is a cruel act against nature to transform the body into a machine to extract labour-power to profit off most people, the working class. I find it disappointing to those who believe we are living in the Anthropocene, as I believe this term is highly misleading in that it is the capitalists' fault for current disasters attributed to climate change and not the majority of humans.

Could you expand on how you navigate the concept of symbiosis to create purpose within your art?

If you take the example that all life exists because of a form of symbiosis, how does this perception of life change how we produce our art or organise work? A symbiosis of ideas that perhaps on the surface seem unrelated, for example, cyanobacteria and the working class, but has more in common when their stories ferment together to create a musical narrative. On the idea of working and collaborating with others, my thoughts and ideas transform into entirely new ideas when fused with others' input, and maybe my ideas weren't even my own to begin with.

For example, when we express emotion through a written song or poem, it probably will also reflect someone else's similar thoughts or feelings. While we each are an individual, our realities can continue through collective thinking, thinking not only of oneself and my ideas as my own. But of course, this can be conflicting when we live under a system that emphasises the individual over the collective. Even in situations encouraging collective thinking or working, it is all under the same umbrella built from this unavoidable individual importance.

Your work often creates complex networks of oppression as a form of collective resistance. How important do you think networks are when building collective resistance as a society? In what ways would you love to see this reflected by those who interact with your work?

While discussing symbiosis between toxic cyanobacteria and the working class during a revolution in a musical! It is already quite complex and out-of-the-ordinary; combining topics that seem unconnected is a way of beginning to form these networks. In my last musical about ghosts subtracting colour in a colour space to establish interruptions of production, I was interested in how to explain ghosts as manifestations of our material condition. For example, thinking about why these ghosts are here, as perhaps as a result of my stress, mental illness or trauma, as a result of the capitalist system that exploits me, a system that encourages and permits non-punished behaviours associated with sexism, racism, homophobia, transphobia, etc.

One must also question how I'm forming these complex networks from the privileged perspective of an artist. At the same time, I am still a proletarian, even if the system desires me to be labelled as a freelancer in the increasingly focused gig economy. Something I find myself now thinking a lot about is how art is used as a tool often to uphold ideals, expectations, or standards reflected by different groups in society. How can I make art for the working class, or, what is working class art? Should I speak in a language that I understand and feel comfortable with, or should I try to speak in a way that is understood, a shared language? And whether we like it or not, we are all a part of a bigger picture, and it is pretty tricky to create art to form a collective resistance that extends beyond the art world or doesn't alienate the very people you want to address. This is something I'm constantly working on, how to speak for myself while still being able to be understood.

You speak of expanding space as a way to redistribute stolen futures. How many of these spaces do you allow yourself to imagine? Do your projects live within these scientific/historical settings, or do they exist in a plane of their own?

The narration I created around the Holobiont installation takes place within a laboratory that plays with the inter-relationships of science and magic in relation to the history of capitalism, exploitation and extraction, to make sense to myself somehow how we have come to this point in our story when everything is in a constant state of political disasters that keep over-spilling. And, then through this fictional story, imagining how we could overcome the disaster, which I believe can only be achieved through revolution, a lot of sacrifices, and change, which for me is the foundation of what symbiosis is, organisms coming and fusing together to create something completely new, embedded themselves inside the tissues of one another, together with our past trauma, emotions, with memories and lessons from our ancestors, human and non-human, to forge futures that came make way for new forms of being. All these fictional stories I build are formed within the same universe that bleed into each other and manifest themselves as some way of helping myself cope; I don't imagine or expect that they could change the world.

What advantages do you think the sound has in creating sentiments of love and symbiosis?

For me, my sound work and accompanying poetry / lyrical work is the essence of my work, as I feel I am more efficient in speaking in a language of sound to portray my emotions together with meaning in constructed ways that hit straight to the depths of the heart and cannot be interpreted any other way

than what I imagined them to be. The act of creating and singing a song, especially when done with others, is an embodiment of love and symbiosis. Often the words, or the feeling, I am portraying through this song is something that many other people are feeling similarly to me. The meaning of love changes based on need and historical and environmental settings and can mean different things.

Still, as a form of caring and responsibility, it can be shown through the history of the working class and labour songs, for example. How a piece can linger for hundreds of years arises from symbiotic and collective resistance and struggle to pass on words of encouragement and knowledge to future generations. In terms of non-spoken "sound", I think it has the beauty and grace to explain things that often our words cannot, and how it can be a tool to accompany or illustrate a deeper meaning to the narrative.

What does intimacy sound like to you, and what feelings/intentions did you centre when creating the compositions for Holobiont: Relics from the Revolution?

When I created the piece, I was graduating from University in the middle of a pandemic, and going to the university; there was practically no one there in a building usually full of students and teachers. And since I was graduating, I was allowed to be there physically. Before the pandemic, I had found the song from Brecht Ein Pferd klangt an, and the anger illustrated by the singer, primarily through a performance from Gisela May, resonated with me. Anger as an expression is something I have learned to express and was something not particularly easy for me. And I think through the expression of anger, in the environment of this very soft and intimate environment in the installation, "Holobiont" portrays controlled anger as a means of motivating initiative and movement in also understanding why anger is growing and how it is important to listen to our anger, our greed, hate, or jealousy.

What were some of your main influences when creating the Holobiont: Relics from the Revolution universe?

When I first began research for this piece, I took inspiration from artificial wombs depicted in science fiction films and animes, Imagining the symbiosis between the working class and cyanobacteria to be forming and growing within the very installation, as the sounds from the temperature and pH data from the cyanobacteria and air, envelops the visitors into the symbiotic relationship themselves. Theoretical and scientific inspiration as a foundation would be Lynn Margulis, Silvia Federici and Karl Marx, along with much different scientific research about cyanobacteria, specifically toxic cyanobacteria and other phytoplankton/micro-algae. For story building, I looked into works of fiction such as my Octavia Butler's Fledgling, Leslie Feinberg's Stone Butch Blues and Maxim Gorky's The Mother.

What's your chief enemy of creativity?

I do not know if it is, per se, my chief enemy of creativity, as for me; I don't see my practice as something creative but rather something that I simply must do. But something that I feel is a more recent question when creating my work is how my identity relates to the collective struggle. Or how much of myself, my body and my perceptions should or should not be a part of my work. And I think

getting lost in caring about others' judgements too much, mixed with a desire for my art "fit in" aesthetically with others, on top of the pressure to be physically beautiful or sexy or cool, has also held me back in creating something honest that reflects my comfort in the ever-changing, slimy, toxic, and dirty chaos.

I feel I'm in the process of unlearning this, embracing the mess, and finding out how to express my identity through the yuck, together with collective growth. As well, I always feel this instinct to protect my identity, how I feel and see myself, my past and my trauma, as I do not want to incorporate it and find myself stuck in how someone else defines me or having some part of myself I believe in, being monetised off of, or appropriated and used to bring forward ideals that I do not associate myself with.

You couldn't live without...

One thing I know I can't live without, but somehow I sadly go long periods without, is being close to (warmer) seas or oceans. Although I had a wonderful trip to Rügen and the Ost Sea last summer, I realised while visiting the Mediterranean Sea last October that the experience of sitting alone and with the warm salty water is something I need and brings me calmness and purpose somehow. I enjoy the waves, the current and the feeling of being engulfed in the water while being slightly overwhelmed and in awe by my fear of powerlessness.

<https://www.clotmag.com/interviews/cammack-lindsey-exploring-holobotical-musicals-that-emerge-from-symbiotic-interactions>

CLOT

**'Exploring the Hackers, Makers, Thinkers conference' by Lyndsey Walsh
(publiziert am 15.06.2022)**



Following the opening of *Hackers, Makers, Thinkers: Collective Experiments in Social Fermenting*, Art Laboratory Berlin, in collaboration with Weizenbaum Institute at Universität der Künste Berlin and The Einstein Center Digital Future at Technische Universität Berlin, hosted their two-day conference packed with a lineup of panels, workshops, curatorial exhibition tour, and exploratory discussions.

The first day of the conference took place at Designtransfer at the Universität der Künste Berlin's campus, with a simultaneously running livestream on the Art Laboratory Berlin YouTube channel. Panels were split into the exploratory themes of *Hacking Food Narratives*, *Symbiotic Elements* and *Sonic Cyborgs*. In addition, they included a brief intermission for the conference in-person attendees to tour the student exhibition at Designtransfer.

The first panel *Hacking Food Narratives*, featured two presentations by Hackers, Makers, Thinkers' exhibiting artists **Rice Sisters Brewing Club** and **Pei-Ying Lin**. Their talks were interwoven into a greater dialogue examining notions of social fermenting and food systems with the addition of guest speaker **Oron Catts** from SymbioticA Centre of Excellence in Biological Arts and the Tissue Culture and Art Project.

Pei-Ying Lin: *Virophilia* (2018), video installation. Hackers, Makers, Thinkers: collective experiments in social fermentation. Art Laboratory Berlin (2022). Photo credit: Tim Deussen

Throughout their panel, the speakers highlighted the often-forgotten role of microorganisms that contribute to our food systems and the problematic aspects present in the speculative (and not so speculative) future of food concerning laboratory-grown food products.

Rice Sisters Brewing Club, composed of members Hyun-Jin Shin, Soyeon Ryu, and Hyemin Son, started off the panel by elaborating on their framework of social fermentation, which has served as inspiration for the thematic investigation of Art Laboratory Berlin's conference. In their talk, Rice Sisters Brewing Club member Hyemin Son posed a question that is at the central thesis of their work:

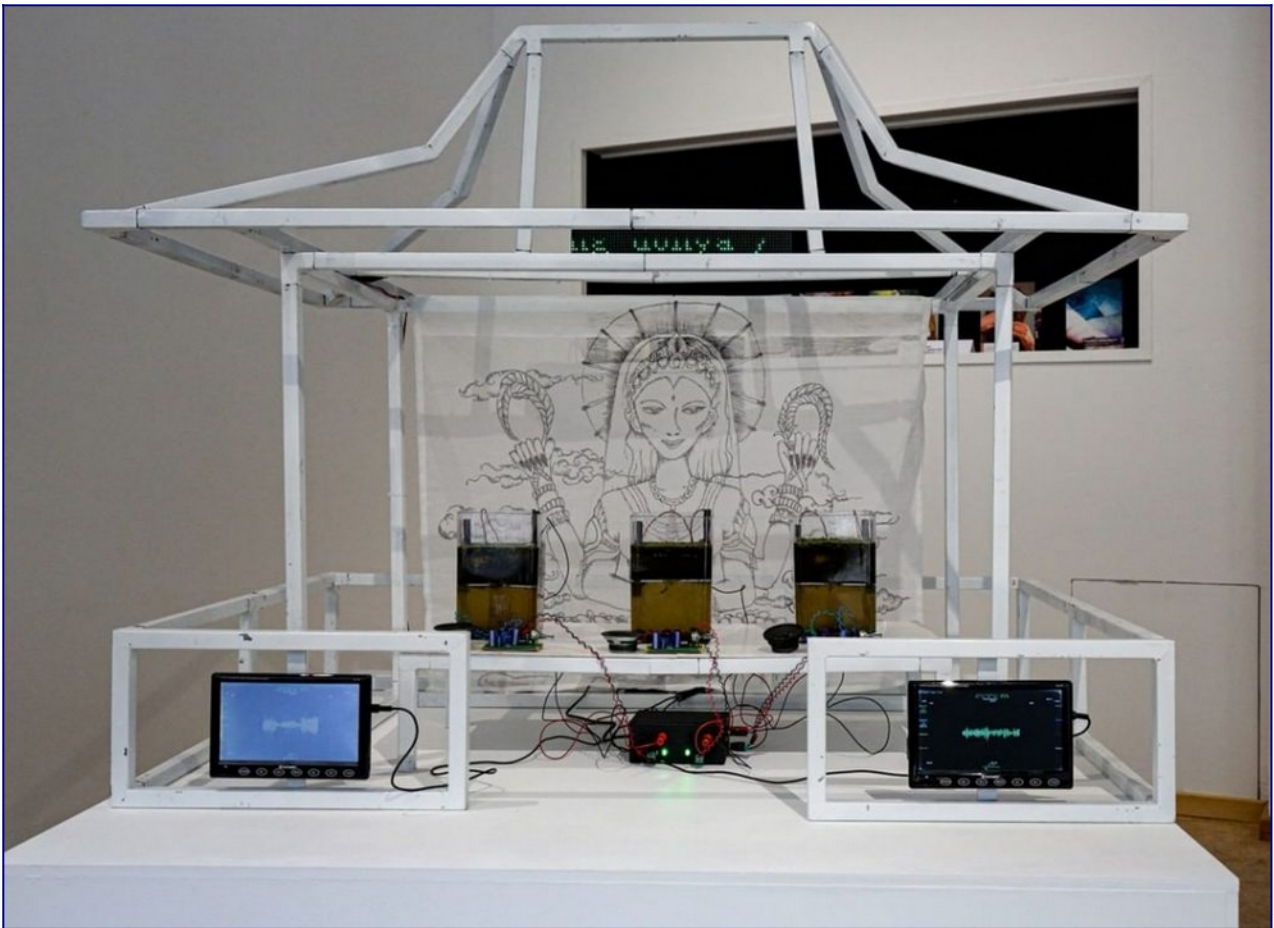
Can we take fermentation, a process in which a substance ripens to change into different substances over time beyond the boundaries of food culture and imagine it as a social model, a way of life, and another system?

In the actions of the **Rice Brewing Sisters Club**, the sisters are not only culturing microorganisms through their workshop *Seokkeodungdung: Doing 'Social Fermentation'*, but their ongoing work and its actively fermenting components also permeate the Art Laboratory Berlin gallery space with their project *TERRESTRIAL-CELESTIAL*.

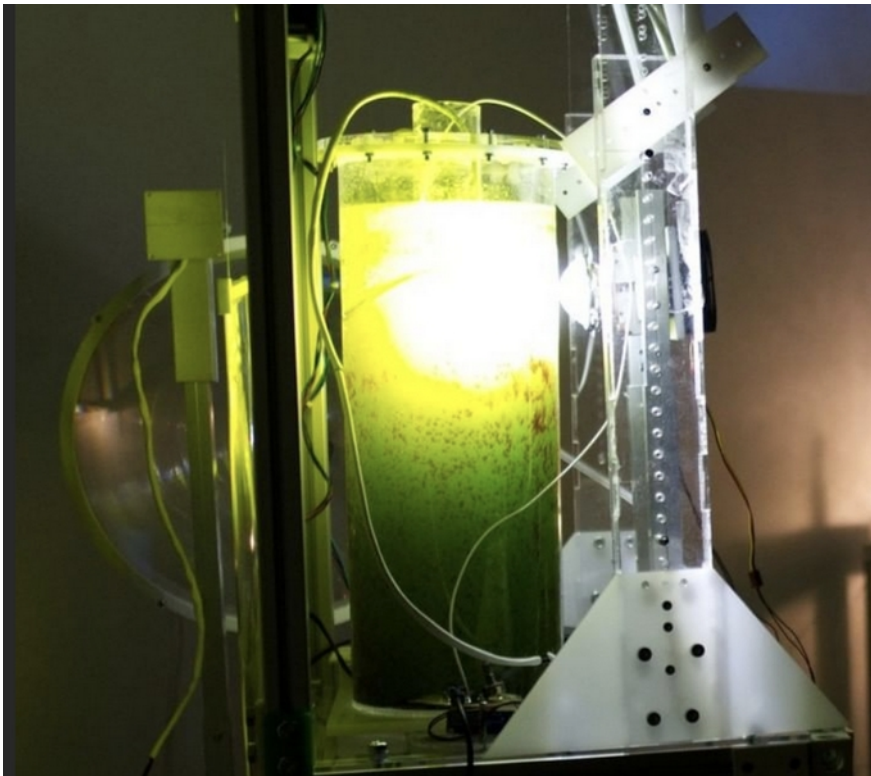
These threads of social fermentation link and interconnect with **Pei-Ying Lin's** talk on her artwork *Virophilia*. However, within *Virophilia*, there is an ever-present sense of unease about the entanglements between cultural systems, food systems, and microorganisms that have become only more present given how large the impact of the pandemic has had on culture and daily routines, one that continues to shape and hold an influence over our lives.

Oron Catts rounded out the discussion on food by looking at technological changes in food culture. He explored his work with Ionat Zurr in the Tissue Culture and Art Project Disembodied Cuisine and their more recent project alongside Steve Berrick's *Sunlight, Soil & Shit (De)Cycling* (3SDC).

The comingling of these creative perspectives on food narratives explores the larger convergence of cultural stories, technologies, and practices that continue to shape how we cultivate and culture nutrients in our environment. Whether these stories and narratives emerge from the speculative imaginary, have been passed down from cultural guardians and aunties, or invading the cultural landscape from technoscientific dreaming, they expose how the process of making food is a more than human act, one that both socially ferments as well as biochemically ferments.



Entangled beauty: A Perfect Marriage, Irene Agrivina. *Hackers, Makers, Thinkers: collective experiments in social fermentation*. Exhibition view, Art Laboratory Berlin (2022). Photo credit: Tim Deussen



Holobiont: Relics from the Revolution, Cammack Lindsey. *Hackers, Makers, Thinkers: collective experiments in social fermentation*. Exhibition view and detail, Art Laboratory Berlin (2022). Photo credit: Tim Deussen

Art Laboratory Berlin curator and panel moderator **Regine Rapp** raised an interesting question regarding the speakers' overlapping interests regarding metabolic processes in food narratives. Metabolism as metaphor denotes what Hannah Landecker refers to as *allowing the term regulation to be a conduit between economic and biological domains – or, more broadly, the manifestly historically specific nature of scientific endeavour in its porosity to cultural context* [1].

In relation to food narrative, these shifts in social relationships between humans and nonhumans also play out the turning over of nutrients and materials in a manner that mimics metabolism within food systems as a whole. This begs the question, can in tumultuous times, when regulation seems to be disordered, can fermentation seek to find and reconnect systems, both social and food, as the porosity between biological and cultural remains fluid.

The second panel curated around the theme of Symbiotic Elements featured anthropologist and architect Sénamé Koffi Agbodjinou, exhibition artists Cammack Lindsey and Irene Agrivina, and biologist Shujie Wu from the Freie Universität Berlin.

This transdisciplinary panel began with **Sénamé Koffi Agbodjinou** giving a talk via Zoom on *An Ethic of Entangled Models*. Throughout Agbodjinou's talk, many ideas were presented concerning the separation between nature and humans and humans and other humans in their communities. Looking at groupings and communities as the first technology that humanity has created, Agbodjinou's talk critically traversed the many borders and viruses that have corrupted our communal sense of building relationships and impacted the use of humanity's greatest and first technological achievement.

Second, **Cammack Lindsey** presented the background of their work *Holobiont: Relics from the Revolution* by both telling and singing to us the story of cyanobacteria. Combining science fiction, musicals, and set design, Lindsey explores the entanglements in potential industrialised uses of cyanobacteria and their role in toxic marine blooms, diving into evolutionary history by recounting how their bodies are a living relic of symbiosis in eukaryotic organisms.

Irene Agrivina's talk on *Entangled Beauty* also revealed insights into her project *Entangled Beauty — A Perfect Marriage*, featured in the *Hackers, Makers, Thinkers* exhibition. The work explores the role and use of cyanobacteria as a biobattery to create a prototype of a worship shrine to the Javanese goddess of fertility Dewi Sri. Weaving together traditional Indonesian mythology with biology, Agrivina spoke on the multiple layers of symbiosis woven between culture, the environment, and microorganisms.

Lastly, **Shujie Wu** presented her scientific research from her paper publication titled *Diversity of Far-red Cyanobacteria in Extreme Environments*. In her research findings, she presented how photosynthesis can occur even in darkness and the potential future implications of this research for emerging biotechnologies and biotechnological solutions.

Throughout the second panel, the speakers continuously referred to symbiosis. Art Laboratory Berlin curator and panel moderator **Tuçe Erel** took a moment to reflect on the nature of scientific and artistic

perspectives comingling within these discussions, which on their own had taken on another form of symbiosis. During the discussion, a reminder by Oron Catts on the role Cyanobacteria played in causing the extinction of a multitude of species due to the creation of oxygen in our atmosphere critically re-examined the values we seem to project onto symbiosis and opened up a line of questioning about who really benefits from these bonding ties and connections, as well as an awareness about the importance of perspective when telling stories of symbiosis.



Khipu, Constanza Piña Pardo. *Makers, Thinkers: collective experiments in social fermentation*. Exhibition view, Art Laboratory Berlin (2022).

The last panel was curated around the theme of *Sonic Cyborgs* and featured talks from exhibition artists Constanza Piña Pardo, [Interspecifics](#) members Leslie García and Paloma López, along with Interspecifics collaborator and artist Maro Pebo, and artist and designer Nayeli Vega.

Constanza Piña Pardo first presented on her work *Khipu* featured in the *Hackers Makes Thinks* exhibition. Piña Pardo explained the context of “Khipu”, which are a “prehispanic electrotextile computer” created through the process of knot-making. Then, diving into her own work and explorations, she unravels the process of creating her installation at Art Laboratory Berlin and the meaning encoded within it.

Nayeli Vega followed suit and further discussed “Khipu” in her own work and research titled *Codes in Knots*. Looking at how knots can be encoded, Vega builds off from the traditional Khipu practices to form new possibilities of knot-making that can extend and interact tacitly with the knowledge encoded in them.

Following Vega’s discussion, Interspecifics members **Leslie García and Paloma López** spoke about their work *Codex Virtualis*. The project is part of an art and science research on using artificial intelligence in image synthesis to create an open-ended taxonomic collection of speculative lifeforms. During their discussion, they opened up about how they have worked to encode knowledge systems

from non-white and western traditional practices to question the colonial nature of artificial intelligence.

The last speaker of the day was **Maro Pebo**, who kept her talk short, entertaining, and to the point. Pebo presented *On Symbiosis*, bringing up many themes and takeaways from Donna Haraway's writing on kinship and the cyborg. Covering Moist Media and transspecies thinking, Pebo highlighted various artistic works within this critical framing.

Panel moderator **Michelle Christensen** from the Weizenbaum Institute at Universität der Künste Berlin and The Einstein Center Digital Future at Technische Universität Berlin opened the discussion to have the artist assess where we all seem to stand with Haraway's philosophical writing and opened up the question to ask if the framing of these relationships in Haraway's work has been highly romanticised. The speakers reiterated many of the points made in their presentations about bringing non-western and non-white traditions back to the same level of regard held for Haraway's work.

Reflecting back on social fermentation as a guiding force in the conference, the way that these ideas interact, come together, and mutate or are metabolised shifts and transforms how we view our everchanging world and environment. These collective experiments into creative practice, scientific knowledge, interspecies dialogue, and technoscientific extensions and mediations explore how porous these disciplines and focus areas actually are. It grapples with how both science and culture are involved in the interrelatedness of ideas, nutrient systems, and knowledge.

Ending on Haraway's work brought the conference full circle in a way, and moderator Michelle Christensen reminded us that even Haraway herself sees her ideas and philosophy as knowledge to continuously turnover. Through social fermenting, we are able to take this matter and these materials and transform them into new narratives, new meanings, and new ways of building and forming relationships.

[1] Landecker, H., 2013. Postindustrial metabolism: Fat knowledge. *Public Culture*, 25(3), pp.495-522.

<https://www.clotmag.com/biomedica/exploring-the-hackers-makers-thinkers-collective-experiments-in-social-fermenting-conference-by-lyndsey-walsh>

CLOT

Performance: Virophilia by Pei-Ying Lin & Soydivision at Art Laboratory Berlin (publiziert am 0.06.2022)



Virophilia, Pei-Ying Lin (2018)

Taiwanese artist and designer Pei-Ying Lin is interested in viruses, especially those that are beneficial or crucial for human survival. Her project *Virophilia* has evolved both as an artist book and installation, and also exists as a “Cookbook for the 22nd Century” using foods whose genome has been altered by viruses.

Not all viruses are pathogens. New discoveries of beneficial viruses are starting to reveal, some are even crucial for our survival. The number of viruses surrounding us also vastly outnumbers what we have known. To make it short, humans and viruses depend on the existence of each other, Pei-Ying Lin says

*The artist also gives us insight into how the project was inceptioned: **Virophilia** is the third virus project I have in my practice. Viruses have always been my interest because they are semi-living and neutral, only become activated when entering a host. How viruses behave is also a collective interaction between the host and the virus instead of the virus on its own. They exist when life on earth started, and are deeply intertwined with our life and history.*

They are like kaleidoscopes which unfold the delicacy and complexity of the social and biological aspects. My first project around viruses explored the human-virus-vaccines relationship, while the second project talks about the human-virus co-adapting process. Gradually, it became interesting to challenge how ‘close’ we will choose to be with viruses consciously, and that leads to the idea of using viruses in food. In a way, it is not a completely new idea, many similar approaches have been explored in virology and immunology.

However, as an artist, she continues, she has the privilege to make things imaginative and playful with cultural artefacts. Therefore, a cookbook came into being. In the research process, she learned a lot about alternative (and in fact more scientific) perspectives to look at the position of viruses in the ecosystem, thanks to the friendly virologists such as Miranda de Graaf, Corina Brussaard, and Rene van

de Vlugt. Where their research is taking a 'virus-entered' perspective and looking at how these little particles interact with the living things around them. They taught Pei-Ying Lin that viruses are not just pathogens but often have mutually beneficial relationships with their hosts. There are 'principles' or say 'functions' (from a human perspective) that viruses do. Scientists are thinking of ways to make use of them when it comes to medical research. *So why not artists? Why don't we take these elements and implement them in fiction? And perhaps once we have some imagination about it, then we can start to talk about our relationship with viruses, just like what science fiction has contributed to the development of technology?*



And what if viruses were used in cuisine? The project *Virophilia*, a **collaboration with Soydivision**, **presents the most intimate relationship humans can have with viruses – by digesting them.** The performance is the experiential version of the project *Virophilia*, which explores the futuristic possibilities of using viruses in culinary experiences. When we no longer think about viruses only on their pathogenic characteristics but also that viruses have other relationships with their hosts, could we open up a whole new relationship with them?

Participants will be invited to join an experiment of alternative perspectives through eating, drinking, and storytelling. The performance experiments in different ways and narratives will allow the participants to experience an intimate encounter with viruses through Indonesian inspired food, where viruses join the process of making the ingredient and the process of cooking. I cannot say much about it, because it is very much based on the embodiment experience and to talk too much about it will lose its magic, Pei-Ying Lin says.

They dive deep into how different biological entities are engaged in the process of the 'material' of the dishes. In a way, food is all once living biological beings. And therefore there are many entry points

where viruses are present or can take a presence. They try to experiment with different possibilities on how viruses *join the process of food making — from growing to the broad definition of cooking, to the stage of serving. It is through this process that you will realise how complicated and intertwined the biological world is in the context of food, which we don't think about usually.*

And how Pei-Ying Lin thinks art and science can help us to cope with challenging situations like climate crisis or the one we are enduring now with Covid-19? For her, this is a complicated question. In one way, art is a very nice medium that frees knowledge from verbal communications to increase *the public's understanding of what we currently know. A public that's most updated to the newest knowledge will allow us to make more timely decisions for ourselves. But outside of this typical communication context, there is also the aspect that art has the ability to create fiction. Fiction is a playground for thought experiments. We are allowed to look at the same situation from different perspectives in fiction. And this allows us to think about the issues more thoroughly and deeply.* ç

Future fiction allows us to think ahead of time, and thus we will have time to react. What's more about fiction in art that has materialities, such as performances, food performances, sculptures, etc, is that it allows the participants and audience to experience the narrative in a non-verbal way, through embodiment. And this is powerful in the sense that you will no longer be trapped in the stereotypical framework that's been created by the mass media, but much more direct and much more personal. And therefore, different.

The performance *Virophilia* takes place on 11th June (2 slots: 6:30 and 8:30 pm) in the *context of the group exhibition Hackers, Makers, Thinkers*

<https://www.clotmag.com/news/performance-virophilia-by-pei-ying-lin-soydivision-at-alb>

CLOT

Insight: reflections on 'Hackers, Makers, Thinkers' at Art Laboratory Berlin by Annique Cockerill (publiziert am 05.07.2022)



Khipu, Constanza Piña Pardo. *Makers, Thinkers: collective experiments in social fermentation*. Exhibition view, Art Laboratory Berlin (2022).

Creatives globally are adjusting to a re-opening, post-pandemic world. **Art Laboratory Berlin's** newest project series *Hackers, Makers, Thinkers: Collective Experiments in Social Fermentation* is a global exploration of bio-art creative processes undertaken through isolation, in order to explore how new social possibilities might emerge from the radical transformations of the last few years.

Six artist and artist collectives were invited to participate in artistic research, installation, and a two-day conference into collaborative art practices and the emergent concept of "social fermentation". Fermentation in its traditional sense describes the anaerobic activity of microorganisms to enact change, usually producing alcohol or some other desirable foodstuff. Via their thesis of collaboration and adoption of the Do It With Others (DIWO) project development mode, **Art Laboratory Berlin** aims to cross-contaminate the creative microcosms of international artists and encourage a healthy socio-cultural biome to thrive in a post-COVID Berlin.

The **Rice Brewer Sisters Club (RBSC)** allows the literal and metaphorical definitions of fermentation to co-exist in their installation and ongoing project *TERRESTRIAL-CELESTIAL*. The installation brings rice fermentation techniques learnt during isolation in Korea into the gardens and galleries of Berlin, culturing human and garden micro-organisms within rice balls. The rice balls act as an incubator for the *nuruk* (the Korean fermentation starter) and are used to activate indigenous micro-organisms from the soil through *seokkeottuumbi* (a composting method). They are then re-introduced as microorganism 'seeds' for healthy garden biomes, enriching the soil of the Schrebergarten they originated from.

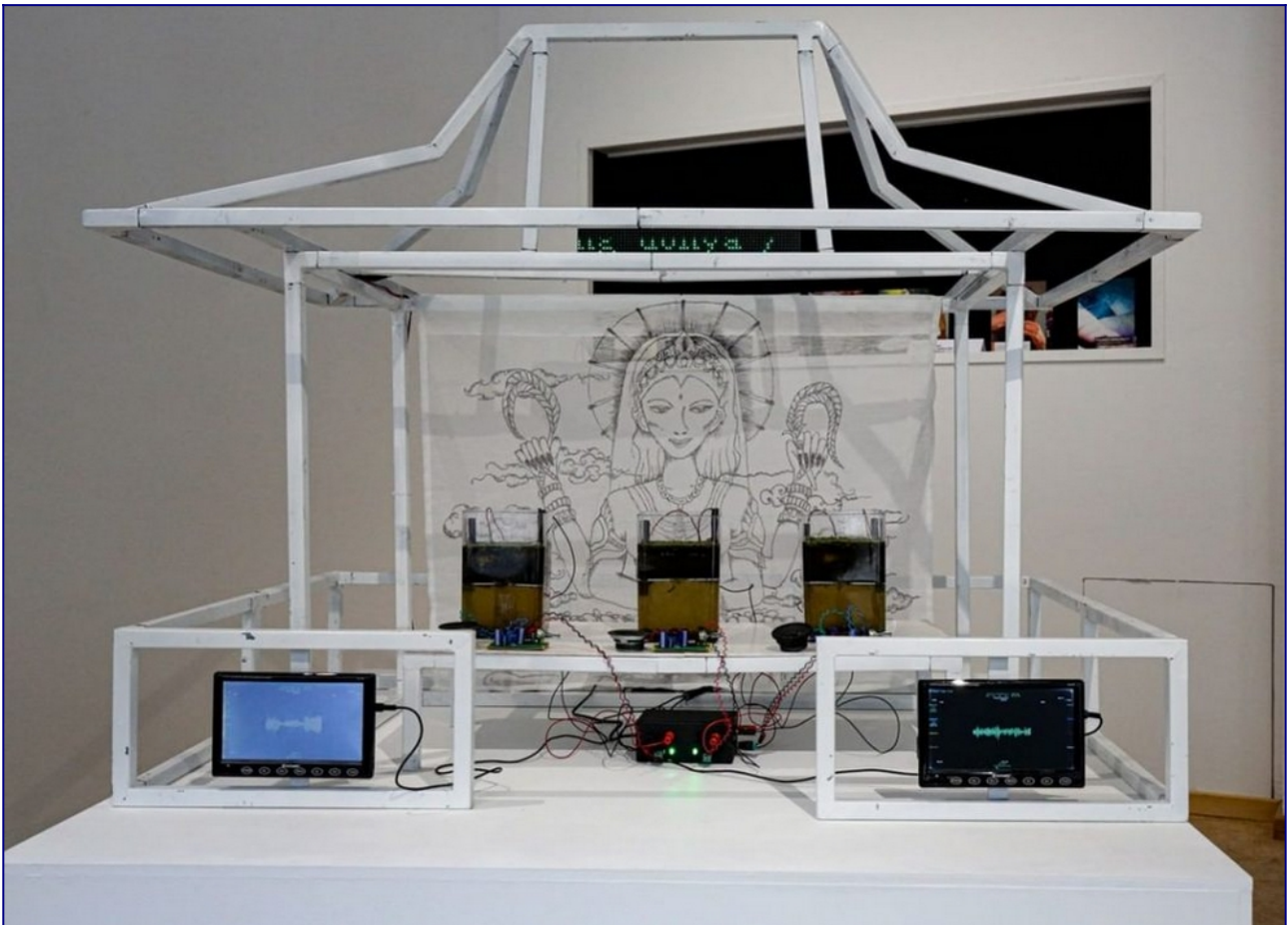
A key decision in this project was which gardens the RBSC was going to work with throughout this project. *We visited sixty gardens in the first ten days*, Soyoon Ryu from the **RBSC** tells. They were trying to find the right combination of garden, gardener, and micro-biome. They realised that they wanted to work primarily with immigrant gardeners, traversing social and microbial cultures through stories. The storytelling was emphasised as integral to the fermentation process- the elements of social fermentation: *It's in your traditions, it's in your soil*.

The importance of personal culture is a continual theme throughout the exhibition. In her work *Entangled beauty: A Perfect Marriage*, artist **Irene Agrivina** places the scientific and artistic into the context of Indonesian spirituality and rural culture within Southeast Asia. The symbiotic relationship between the water fern *Azolla* and the cyanobacteria *Anabaena* functions as biofertilizer, water purifier, bio-battery, and space of worship for Dewi Sri, the Indonesian goddess of fertility and rice. As the two interact they generate excess energy which Agrivina has harnessed to incorporate an audio component into the installation.

Dewi Sri is said to have fallen from the sky, her body forming the variety of plants on which life is sustained. Cyanobacteria were the earth's first photosynthesizers and are credited in modern science with forming the oxygen levels necessary for the planet to sustain complex life. The installation highlights the parallels between these creation stories, drawing together science and spirituality.



ei-Ying Lin: *Virophilia* (2018), video installation. *Hackers, Makers, Thinkers: collective experiments in social fermentation*. Art Laboratory Berlin (2022). Photo credit: Tim Deussen



Entangled beauty: A Perfect Marriage, Irene Agrivina. *Hackers, Makers, Thinkers: collective experiments in social fermentation*. Exhibition view, Art Laboratory Berlin (2022). Photo credit: Tim Deussen

Whilst cyanobacteria may be heralded as creators, Cammack Lindsey addresses its darker role within our modern environmental context. Cyanobacteria, or blue-green algae, is the main organism within algal blooms which trigger catastrophic toxicity and oxygen deprivation in affected waterways. This, of course, is not the algae's fault. In their installation **Holobiont: Relics from the Revolution** and its accompanying performance, **Lindsey** imagines that the industrial and agricultural carelessness that has been polluting the waterways and causing algal blooms might evolve into a sort of symbiosis with the intersectional working class who suffer under the same exploitative systems. The result is a revolution, a friendship, a cross-species romance which underscores how the power of collaboration may radically alter systems in the face of eco-failure under capitalism.

Like *Entangled Beauty*, the audio of *Holobiont* is fed by changes within the biological component of the installation. What differs is the content. **Agrivina** links her installation to the rice fields and farmers of Indonesia through a generated cricket call, an allegory for the natural world's engagement with the rural. Instead, **Lindsey's** installation evokes an apocalyptic eeriness as the reactor of cyanobacteria begins to sing *O Falladah, Da Du Hangst (Ein Pferd Klagt An)* by Bertolt Brecht. It tells the gruesome story of a horse who collapses from exhaustion and is immediately set upon by a starving working class who once cared for it. The horse dies wondering what conditions would cause people to turn from kindness to ravenous violence so quickly.

o felft ihnen doch! Und tut das in Bälde!
Sonst Passiert euch etwas, was ihr nicht für möglich haltet!
So help them! And do it soon!
Otherwise, something you think is impossible might happen to you!

Speculative science fiction within bio-art is utilised in several other works within this exhibition to delve into themes of collaboration. **Pei-Ying Lin** has been perusing her fascination with viruses through art since before 2011, at which time she predicted that by 2020 *we would have a world that has been affected by viruses so much that it becomes a big part of our life*. Knowing that it's hard to view her installation *Virophilia* without an anxious attentiveness. However, the various formats through which **Pei-Ying** explore the viral possibilities of the future delve into more than just virus as a pathogen.

Cookbook for the 22nd Century explores a natural evolution of the humanities relationship with the virus in the food industry and includes recipes that make use of viral properties to enhance the culinary experience. The works also include an ongoing scroll of known viruses and video documentation of the interactive cooking performances undertaken through the pandemic. Spanning from the virus's role as integral to food production to colour changing cocktails and fever-inducing meals, *Virophilia* acts as a thought experiment through which the virus transcends its label of pathogen and becomes a collaborator.

Perhaps the work most evocative of the science fiction genre is the video and audio installation *Codex Virtualis* by Mexican artist collective **Interspecifics**. At first glance, the work appears to be a digital taxonomy of simple living organisms. However, none of the organisms in this taxonomy exist in nature. The project is a collection of speculative life-forms generated through ecosystems of neural networks and AI algorithms that mimic evolutionary possibilities. The organisms are rendered in 3D, establish relationships with stimuli within the meta-environment, and are even exposed to conditions enabling the organisms to transfer genetic features.

The final installation takes *Hackers, Makers, Thinkers* from speculative futures to speculative pasts. Chilean artist **Constanza Piña Pardo** has been researching the ancient Incan "Khipu", a pre-Hispanic device for recording information through knotted textiles, since 2013. Her resulting installation *Khipu*, along with an artist book and series of workshops, imagines the lost technology as a computer system of which the artist herself is a part and asks the question of how modern technology might have developed with different cultural backgrounds.

Her work is a bio-digital astronomical diary depicting celestial movements and salient events over 180 wool strings knotted in computer binary. **Piña Pardo** points out the single golden thread: a solar eclipse she witnessed. Each thread also contained a copper wire connected to a circuit, which picks up electromagnetic changes present at the installation sight and sonifies them. The resulting work is reminiscent of a gigantic string instrument arching above the witness's head.

Overall, the inclusion of this installation in the curatorial decisions also introduces a meditative peace and slowness to the exhibition. Within the context of the "What's Next" curatorial question, it proposes that the process focus reclaimed by some artists over isolation doesn't need to be compromised as the world opens back up. In doing so, it introduces a new, final form of "social fermentation", in which cultural histories might brew new life in the artistic biomes which follow.

<https://www.clotmag.com/news/insight-reflections-on-hackers-makers-thinkers-at-art-laboratory-berlin>



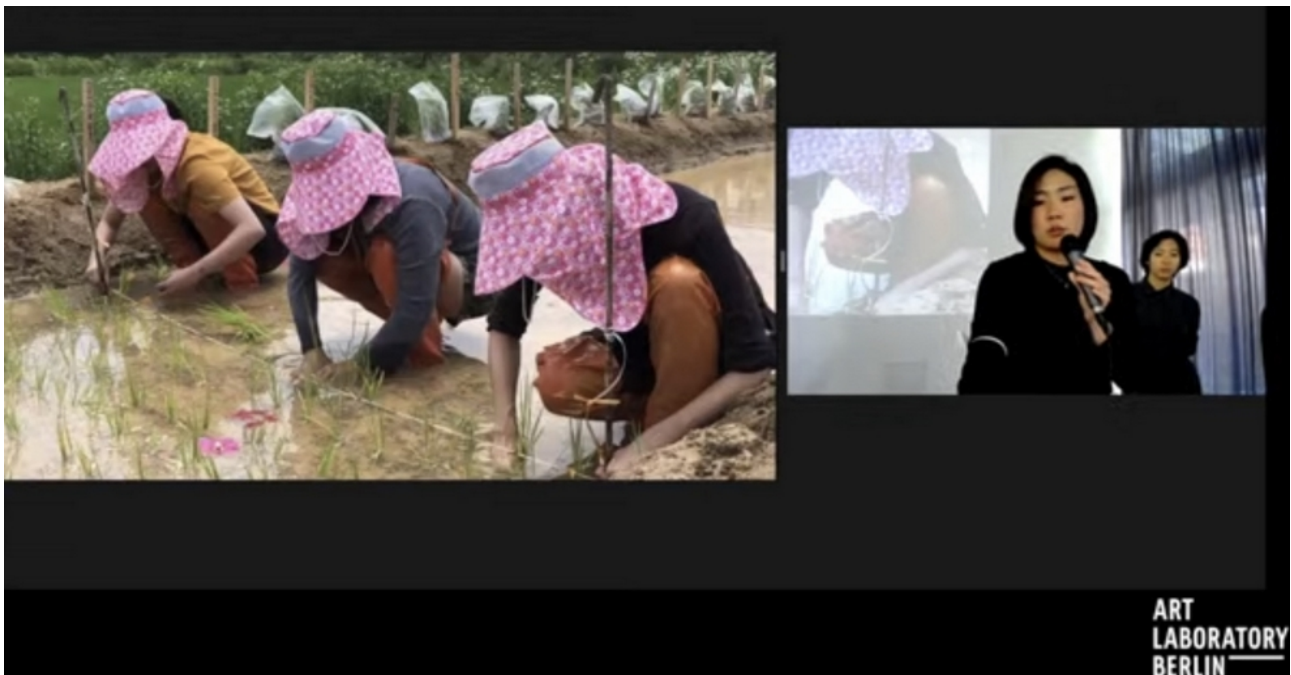
MAKERY

Fermenting the Social, along with the physical by Rob La Frenais (publiziert 5.06.2022)

In parallel to their new exhibition 'Hackers, Makers, Thinkers – Collective experiments in social fermenting', a two days event was proposed at Art Laboratory Berlin.

[Hackers, Makers, Thinkers](#), which has just happened, is a two day international hybrid conference in Berlin exploring 'what social possibilities can be thawed and revived' after two years of social distancing and isolation, organised by Art Laboratory Berlin in collaboration with the Weizenbaum Institute (UdK Berlin) and The Einstein Center Digital Future (TU Berlin). It was introduced by Art Laboratory's Regine Rapp who emphasised the theme would be DIWO (Do It With Others). Commenting on the oft-times criminal association with the word 'hacker' she proposed instead a redefinition of the term as a 'tool-set' or a 'collective mind hive'. Makery was able to attend day 1 online, day 2 being formed of offline workshops and walking, talking labs. Some of the speakers were part of the 'Hackers, Makers, Thinkers' exhibition collectively curated by Regine Rapp, Tuçe Erel, Christian de Lutz and Tengal Drilon.

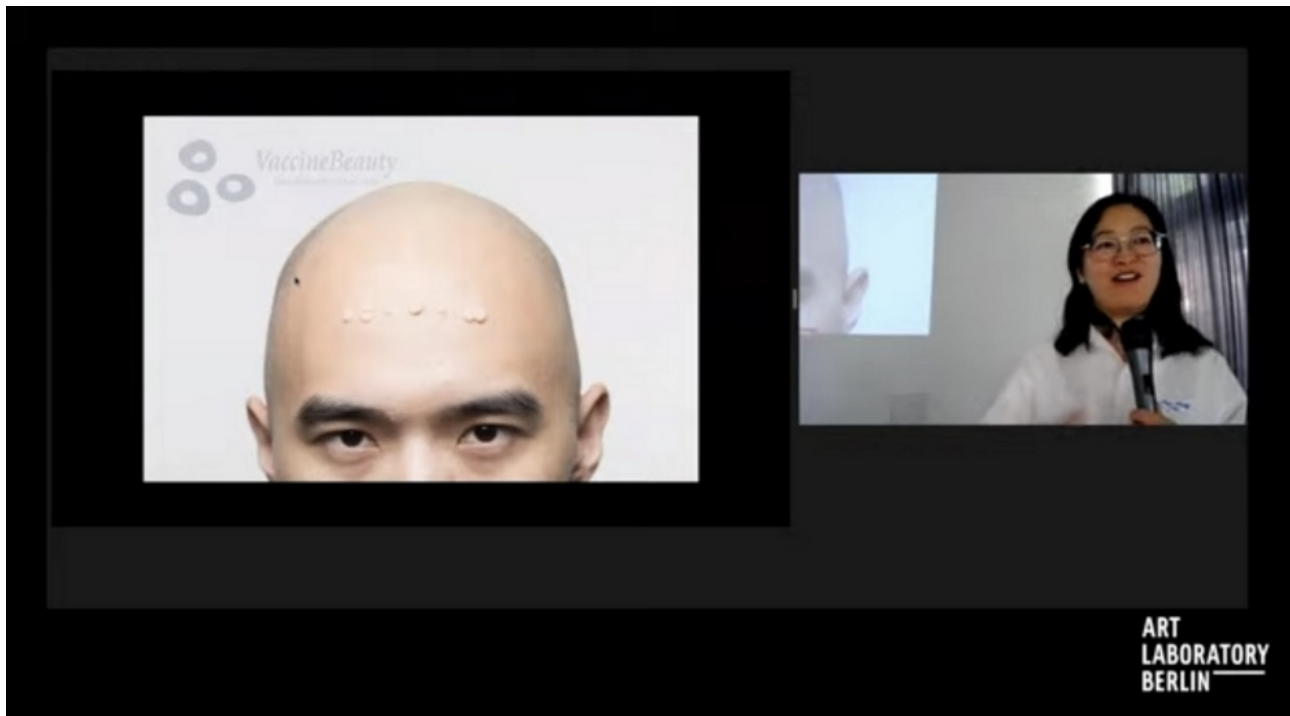
Hacking Food Narratives



Rice brewing – Screenshot from the online conference

The day kicked off well with the Korean eco-feminist group, the [Rice Brewing Sisters Club \(RBSC\)](#) comprising three artists: Hyemin Son, Aletheia Hyun-Jin Shin and Soyoony Ryu, who formed as [a collective after the MeToo movement in Korea](#) that "identify as sisters whose artistic methodology employs the concept of 'social fermentation' with the medium of rice". They have arrived after a long tour of Asian countries, investigating local methods of fermenting rice wine across SE Asia and investigating indigenous micro-organisms (IMOs), working in partnership with multiple independent producers (farmers, brewers, writers, artists, theorists etc). They are now in residence in Berlin and are investigating the properties of different types of Berlin soil, all of which have complex histories, not least because of that city's geo-political history. They 'share their germs with the soil', mindful of the

city's many layers of migrants and migration. They call this 'planting memories'. The Rice Brewing Sisters Club were originally inspired by one of their grandmothers, who kept in their home a big pot of rice and water covered with a blanket. Slowly, the smell of fermentation begins to fill the house. During their travels they discovered a hidden sisterhood of rice wine 'aunties', who pass on their secrets to their daughters and sisters and have different belief systems while brewing, some quite scientific, some more mystical. They also name-checked their brothers in fermentation, the aptly named '[Soy Division](#)' an Indonesian theatre and music collective in Berlin. Via their social fermentation they "share their cross-disciplinary camaraderie and epicurean enjoyment, but more importantly, they aspire to a collective spirit that animates other bodies and voices alongside their own to co-create new imagined realities".



Pei Ying Lin: Vaccine beauty. Screenshot from the online conference

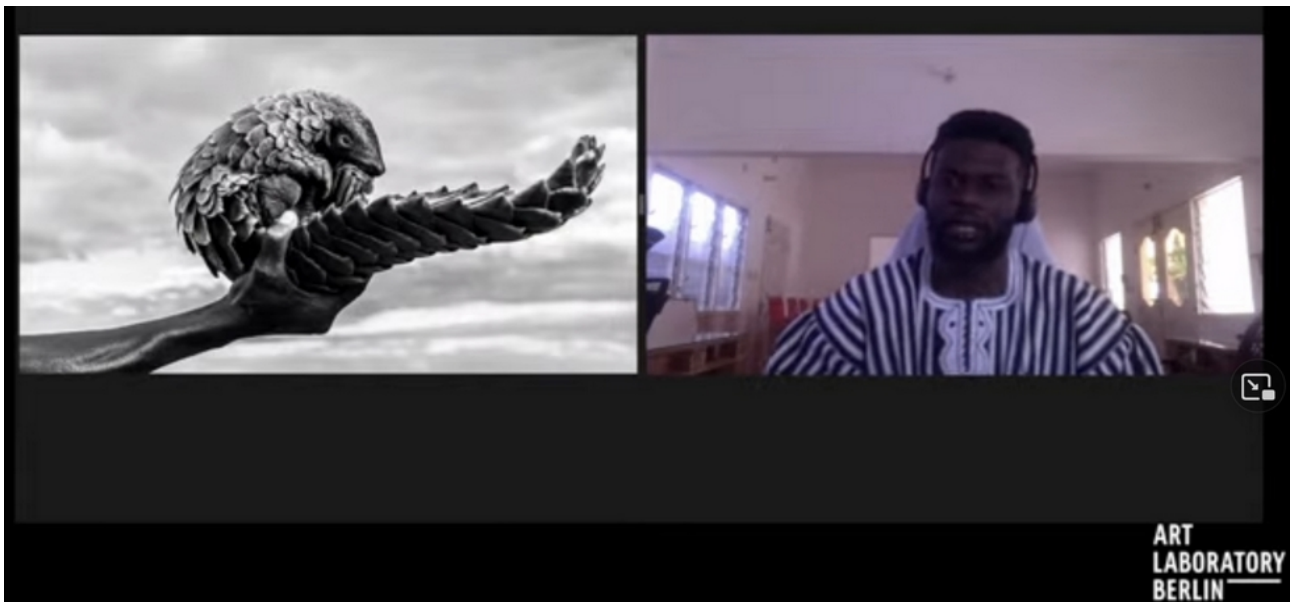
Designer and artist from Taiwan, [Pei-Ying Lin](#), started off by talking about her project [Virophilia](#) – a “cookbook written for the 22nd century human beings in consideration for incorporating the positive usage of viruses into our daily life”. Started before the current pandemic, the website has the motto: ‘Viruses do no harm’. Wearing a white lab coat during her talk, she talked about early viruses such as Norovirus and emphasised what she called the ‘neutrality’ of viruses. She discussed how pathogenic viruses could even be seductive, and a ‘mirror to the human’. She discussed her latest project in the context of the current virus ‘Vaccine Beauty’, where people’s vaccination status is openly displayed on the forehead so passers by can see if the wearer is ‘beautiful’ in a viral sense. She also revealed that 90 percent of Dutch tomatoes are infected deliberately with a virus that makes them taste better. Interestingly, the isolation that we have all undergone during COVID may have made us [more susceptible to other viruses that were lurking in the wings](#).



Oron Catts. Screenshot from the online conference

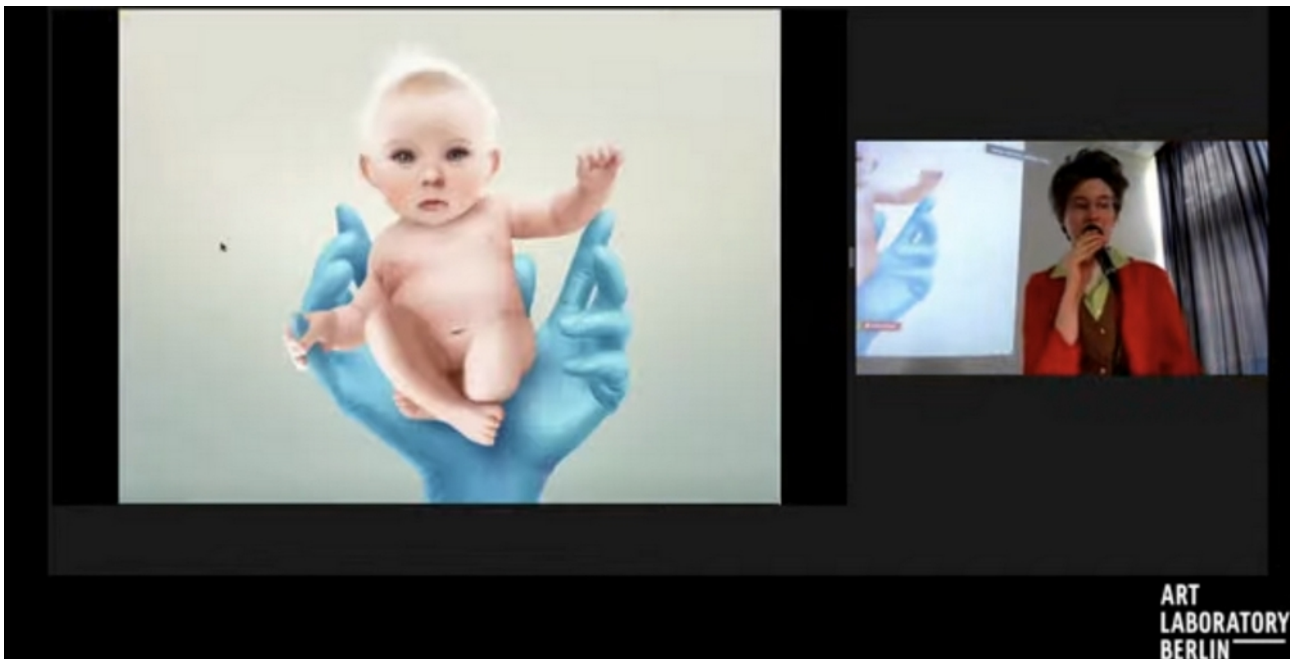
Oron Catts is one of the most well-known and provocative figures in the biological arts and broke many new boundaries, with his partner Ionat Zurr, being the first to create lab-grown meat, for example, in 2000, and 'Victimless Leather' in 2004. Since then a vast industry has grown up around the quest to create lab meat and apparently feed the world. Making an in-person appearance for the first time at Art Laboratory Berlin, he had just come from the Munich conference [Digital Life Design](#), where a number of companies who were clearly pursuing [a techno-utopian fantasy according to Catts](#) with people citing 'data as a new food ingredient'. "These companies are a satire of themselves". He cited companies like Eat Just and New Harvest as examples where "science brings us food from nowhere" and has come up with his own fake corporation to combat what he calls 'metabolic rift technologies' – separation of sentience from nature in concepts like the 'metaverse' – 3SDC – or '[Sunlight Soil and Shit](#)'. They had a 200 dollar a plate launch dinner for 3SDC cooked by indigenous chefs with foraged and naturally-grown food. The price was made artificially high to demonstrate the cost of such foods. He comments on the animal rights movement against bullfighting in Spain which simultaneously denies the implicit violence in burger chains and rages against what he calls 'secular vitalism' which he compares with the early Soviet belief that science will make us immortal. There are now even companies that go one step further in separating biology from nature such as the [research team at MIT who are trying to manufacture wood](#) without leaves and twigs. I asked him in the live chat if [his original work ArtMeatFlesh](#) (2000) was actually intended to be satirical. He replied later "As you know our work is always full of irony. The choice of engineered frog meat should have given it away..."

Symbiotic Elements



Sename Koffi Abodjinou. Screenshot from the online conference

The anthropologist, architect and founder of the fablab [Woelab](#), [Sénamé Koffi Agbodjinou](#), speaking remotely from Lomé, Togo, introduced the concept of capitalism as virus, citing businesses who want to virally expand into becoming countries. He also attacked technology companies as another sort of virus that does not serve communities, instead promoting a form of terminal technological imperialism, where natural reality was not efficient any more. The first form of technology in human history, however, was actually 'community' – that is the ability of people to help each other to perform tasks. He went back to Descartes as the European philosopher who saw humans as wholly separate from and superior to nature and nonhuman animals, who were considered mere mindless machines to be mastered and exploited at will. This separation from nature was similar to the separation of human from human, in the creation of tribes and countries and the birth of individualism, the motor of capitalism. He finally cited the widespread [trafficking of Pangolins](#) (also a possible cause of Covid-19), a very interesting armoured animal that can freeze and bury its head when attacked and which cannot be kept in captivity, from Africa to places like China as a symptom of this separation in what he called an 'obscene morality'.



Cammack Lindsey. Screenshot from the online conference

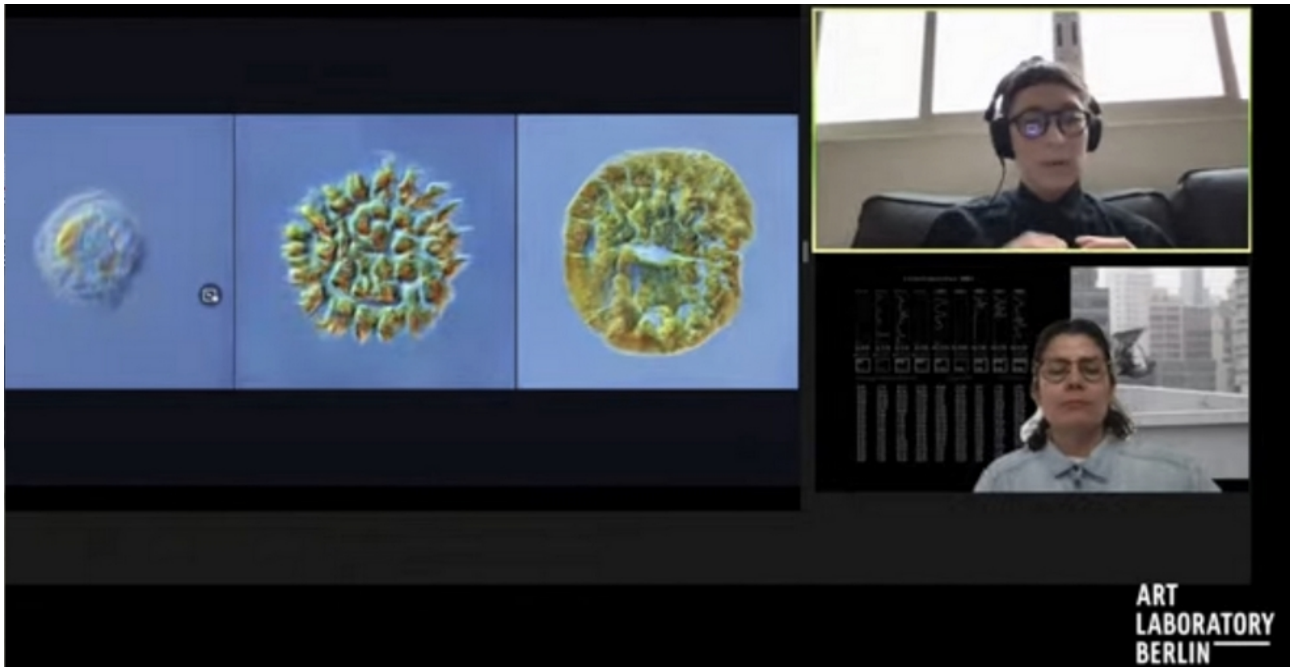
Cammack Lindsey, musician and artist, introduced the cyanobacteria section of this conference by singing a song. Her stories and songs reflect “entanglements between ecosystem failure and the exploitation of labour from humans and non-humans alike under extractive capitalism”. In her talk [‘Holobiont: Relics from the Revolution’](#) she compared cyanobacteria with the working classes’ exploitation for profit. As is well known, cyanobacteria are some of the oldest living creatures in existence and they developed photosynthesis, as a result of which oxygen was produced. Reproduction of these cyanobacteria resulted in a sudden increase in oxygen levels around 2.5 billion years ago, causing a fundamental change in living conditions on Earth and establishing the basis for life on Earth today. They can survive in extremely hot and cold temperatures and can synthesise food for themselves. Lindsey spoke about both positive and negative aspects of this bacteria. On one hand it is a known relic of symbiosis in the human body, but now, during climate change, it manifests as vast toxic blooms in places like the Gulf of Mexico. Like the lab-grown meat industry, it is also being exploited by industry to create new food products. Her talk was followed by Irene Agriviva, co-founder of the [HONF \(House of Natural Fiber\)](#) in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, who spoke about experiments using rice wine as a power source and Durgā, the Javanese goddess of fertility, source of life and food.

Some interesting scientific research on the ability of cyanobacteria to exist in darkness was presented by Shujie Wu, biologist and plant pathologist, summarising her paper [Diversity of Far-red Cyanobacteria in Extreme Environments](#). Her research answer is yes, photosynthesis can happen in dark places. Her experiments use something called far-red light to regulate shade responses. This has important implications for growing food on long-term space missions such as Mars and also on the planet itself.

Sonic Cyborgs

Here the conference mainly shifted to the Americas, starting with Constanza Piña Pardo’s work on the Quipu project, the Inca recording devices fashioned from strings, quipu being the Inca word for knot. These devices, containing thousands of strings and knots, could be seen as early computational

devices, similar to the Jacquard Loom in Europe. They are also seen as astronomical devices. She got an [honorary mention for this work in Prix Ars Electronica in 2020](#). Nayeli Vega in [Codes In Knots](#) also pointed out the significance of the use of textiles in pre-Columbia civilisations to store data. In her own project she creates a fictional feminist language, creating connections between precolonial and modern-day knowledge systems in the digital knots she creates. She also points to the string games in indigenous Australian cultures as a form of communication. As artists, she said, we have to reconsider and create our own systems and languages.



Interspecifics. Screenshot from the online conference

Leslie García and Paloma López of Interspecifics are aiming, in their new work presented here, towards an understanding of algorithmic 'life' through creating 'recipes' based on actual bacteria from extremophiles. Interested in working with "these highly specialised agencies that have evolved for millions of years on the same planet where we live.," they synthesise these lifeforms via training a network of 'companion' softwares and actual AI simulations of the bacteria, predicting what would happen they came into contact with water and creating an eco-system of algorithms from observations in the lab. They eventually hope to create a whole synthetic genome. In doing so they begin to shift subjectivity away from the human, challenging colonial, white conceptions of artificial intelligence, understanding themselves through these 'affectionate networks'. It follows on from [the large mobile lab project they have developed in Mexico City](#) mapping brains from different shamanic, herbalist, meditation and therapeutic traditions. The work with AI lifeforms is a departure from their usual haptic practice of 'getting their hands dirty'. In creating this transition from nature to the lab, every thing becomes hyper-clean, in terms of contemporary science and the economics of control.

Finally [Maro Pebo](#), short for Mariana Pérez Bobadilla, also of Interspecifics, brought into the mix notions such as cyborg kinship, moist media and trans-species thinking. She emphasised the importance of materiality – literally warming up the bio-reactor – and giving flesh to the ideas of Donna Haraway and the renewal of kinship and affectionate ties to non-human others. This blended neatly into the final discussion which asked if the work presented today succeeds in actually embodying the ideas originally proposed by Haraway in the essay [A Cyborg Manifesto](#) in 1985. It was agreed that this seminal writing, which has inspired so many artists, lacked a non-white perspective, although it was understood that later on Haraway critiqued her own figurations as part of her flow of ideas. Now we can add to the mix ethno-computing and indigenous computing to the networks of kinship and care that Haraway proposed, 'walking to the future looking backwards', challenging

colonial systems while taking care not to romanticise indigenous practices. Constanza Piña Pardo emphasised the importance of using the senses in exploring systems like the quipu and knot systems, the haptic element of touch. The Rice Brewing Sisters talked about a 'red thread' passing back to older knowledge systems and their elasticity. Finally Regine Rapp talked about thinking and living while embracing non-anthropocentric species and metabolic systems from many points of view, including philosophic, performative, deconstructive and anthropological positions, including older, pre-columbian systems of thinking. In this process of social fermentation here, there was a red thread, as mentioned before, that went through most of the presentations. This dialogue of biotech criticism would be continued, with a discussion of elasticity, during the walks the following day.



Panel Walk – A Hacking Food Narratives. Credit Art Laboratory Berlin



Panel Walk – Discussing Symbiotic Elements, along-the-River-Panke. Credit Art Laboratory Berlin

<https://www.makery.info/en/2022/06/05/english-fermenting-the-social-along-with-the-physical/>

Soziale Fermentation - Hackers, Makers, Thinkers bei Art Laboratory Berlin von Carla Hartlieb (publiziert am 26.05.2022)

Collective Experiments in Social Fermenting lautet der Untertitel der aktuellen Ausstellung *Hackers, Makers, Thinkers* der mehrfach ausgezeichneten Kunst- und Forschungsplattform Art Laboratory Berlin. Die Ausstellung erstreckt sich über zwei Ausstellungsräume in der Weddinger Prinzenallee - den von Art Laboratory Berlin und den von OKK. Vorgestellt werden künstlerische Forschungsprojekte, die sich mit verschiedenen Spielarten der Fermentation bzw. der Gärung als Unterart davon beschäftigen.

Im Alltag ist der Prozess der Fermentation vor allem als Vorgang zur Lagerung und Konservierung von Lebensmitteln bekannt. Es geht um Stoffwechselprozesse, um die mikrobielle Umwandlung organischer Stoffe durch probiotische Bakterien, Zellkulturen oder Pilze, wodurch Säure, Gase oder Alkohol entstehen.

Bei dieser Methode handelt es sich um ein seit Menschengedenken erprobtes Verfahren, das überall auf der Welt praktiziert wird und weit über seine biochemischen Wandlungen hinausweist. So erstaunt es nicht, dass sogar ein *Fermentations-Manifest* (Hannah Janz, Online-Redaktion Goethe-Institut Tokyo) existiert, in dem es über die Vielgestaltigkeit der Fermentierung heißt: "Wir gehören uns nicht selbst: Nur etwa die Hälfte der Zellen unserer Körper sind menschlich, die anderen sind mikrobielle Gäste, zum Beispiel aus Fermenten. Fermentation ist ein gut sichtbarer Verweis in die Vergangenheit, dass die Kooperation von Mikroorganismen die Evolution bestimmt hat, und der Verweis in die Zukunft, dass die Menschheit ihr Eingebundensein in die großen Umweltzusammenhänge kooperativer denken muss. Wir sind keine autarken Entitäten." In diesem Sinne umkreisen ein soziales Miteinander, Einblicke in die Menschheitsgeschichte oder evolutionstheoretische Untersuchungen die Begrifflichkeit der Verstoffwechselung.



Rice Brewing Sisters Club (Aletheia Hyun-Jin Shin, Soyoon Ryu and Hyemin Son), TERRESTRIAL-CELESTIALS (Detail), 2022, Foto: kuag

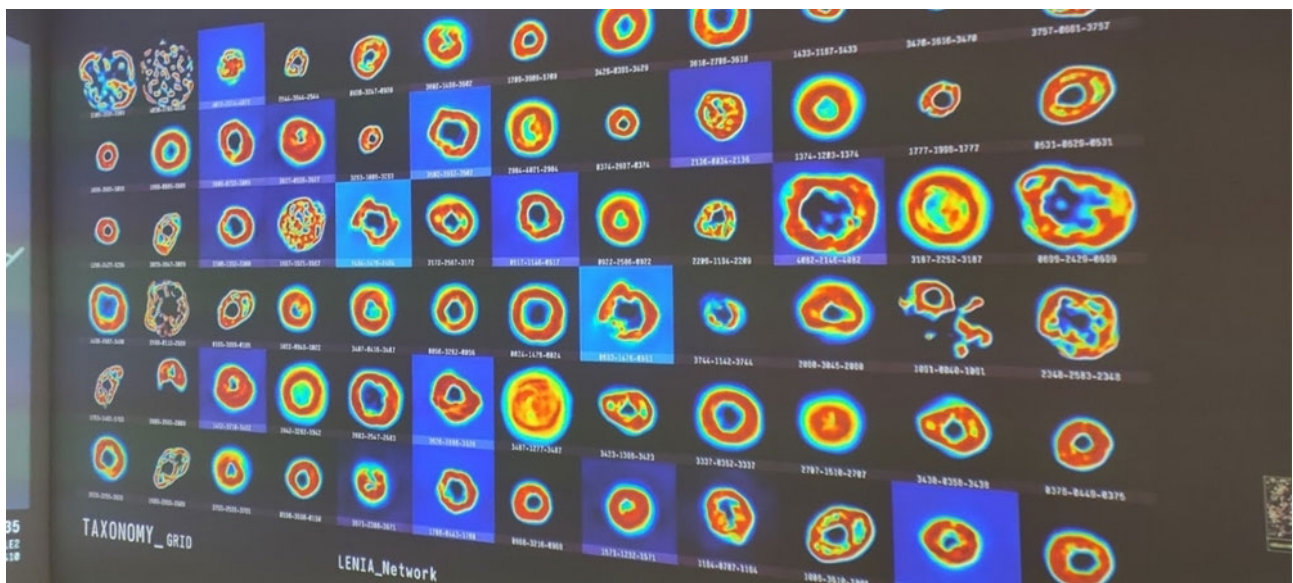
Hört sich theorielastig an, ist aber vor Ort von erstaunlich sinnlicher Präsenz. Beim Betreten des Ausstellungsraumes von Art Laboratory Berlin sticht als erstes eine auf drei flachen Tischen mit bunten Stoffen umhüllte Figuration ins Auge. Für die Installation *TERRESTRIAL-CELESTIALs* hat der Rice Brewing Sisters Club (RBSC) - ein Kollektiv bestehend aus Aletheia Hyun-Jin Shin, Soyoon Ryu und Hyemin Son - den Bereich der "sozialen Gärung" untersucht. Unter den Stoffen befinden sich Schalen mit Reisbällchen auf Pflanzen oder Erde gebettet, "in denen nach Phasen des Wachstums, Erhitzens und Mischens die Mikroorganismen zu Nuruk werden - dem koreanischen Fermentationsstarter - und Seokkeottuumbi - der koreanischen Kompostierungsmethode, die wiederum die einheimischen Mikroorganismen aktivieren", soweit der Wandtext. Im Raum riecht es erdig und zugleich nach Essensverwertung. Das Sinnliche steht in dieser Arbeit mit dem Beziehungshaften in Verbindung, denn das Projekt entstand in Zusammenarbeit mit Gärtner*innen aus lokalen Gärten, u.a. vom Tempelhofer Feld. Der Rice Brewing Sisters Club (RBSC) versteht sich als offene Plattform, durch die sich Menschen und Wesen aus verschiedenen Regionen, aus der Vergangenheit, der Gegenwart und Zukunft treffen und durch Kochen, Gärtnern, Schreiben oder Geschichtenerzählen synergetische Netzwerke bilden. Insofern manifestiert sich in der Installation *TERRESTRIAL-CELESTIALs* ein Moment des Werdens und Vergehens, der seine Stärke aus dem sozialen Miteinander zieht. Womit wir wieder bei dem *Fermentations-Manifest* wären, in dem es heißt: "Fermentation ist eine besondere Form des Stoff-Wechsels. Ein Stoff wird in einen anderen überführt, der langlebig ist und in seinen Eigenschaften verbessert wurde. In Gesellschaftsformen, die auf Konsum ausgerichtet sind, kann diese Idee zum Beispiel auf einen bewussteren Umgang mit Ressourcen verweisen. Oder vielleicht ist Umami, der intensivierte Geschmack durch Fermentation, auch das Schlagwort für unsere künftige Kulturpraxis? Wir wollen uns gerne zu Gemüte führen, was im kooperativen Austausch ohne willkürlich gezogene Grenzen zu besonderer Inhaltsdichte geführt wurde... und so weiter."



Irene Agrivina, Entangled Beauty. A Perfect Marriage, Foto: kuag

Auch die indonesische Künstlerin Irene Agrivina arbeitet an der Schnittstelle von Kunst, Wissenschaft und Alltag. Ihre Installation, die einer laborartigen Versuchsanordnung ähnelt, trägt den Titel *Entangled Beauty. A Perfect Marriage*. In drei kleinen Bassins vermischen sich Wasserpflanzen und Cyanobakterien (Blaualgen), ihre Symbiose führt zu einem fotosynthetischen Prozess, der als Biodünger, Wasserreiniger, Nahrung oder Biokraftstoff funktioniert. Die Prozesse werden unmittelbar vor Ort elektronisch ausgewertet und akustisch vermittelt. Als Zeichnung im Hintergrund thront eine asiatische Fruchtbarkeitsgöttin, die aus dem Himmel auf die Erde fällt und sich in verschiedene Pflanzenarten verwandelt. Symbolisch scheint sie auch den Vorgang im Ausstellungsraum genau zu verfolgen.

Traditionelle landwirtschaftliche Praktiken spielen in dieser Arbeit ebenso eine Rolle wie kulturelle und ökologische Herausforderungen. Fermentationskultur wird hier nicht ausschließlich anthropozentrisch verstanden. Es geht vielmehr um alternative Lebensweisen und die Interaktion oder das Potenzial symbiotischer Beziehung zwischen lebenden und nicht lebenden Organismen.



Interspecifics, Codex Virtualis, Foto: kuag

Die dritte künstlerische Position im Ausstellungsraum von Art Laboratory Berlin trägt den Titel *Codex Virtualis* und stammt von dem 2013 in Mexiko-City gegründeten Künstler*innenkollektiv Interspecifics. Dieses Mal wird die "Fermentation als eine besondere Form des Stoff-Wechsels" an der Schnittstelle von Künstlicher Intelligenz und Kunst ausgetragen. Auf drei großen Screens zirkulieren unter einem sphärischen Sound am Klang orientierte Resultate, die auf der Basis von Algorithmen Muster aus Biosignalen und der Morphologie verschiedener lebender Organismen beruhen. Vergleichbar mit Verfahren des Maschinellen Lernens zum Beispiel bei der Material- und Wirkstoffforschung. Wie bei Irene Agrivina steht nicht das Anthropozentrische im Vordergrund, sondern experimentelle

Forschungswerkzeuge - sogenannte Ontological Machines -, die eine nicht-menschliche Kommunikation ergründen. Natürlich ist alles höchst spekulativ.

Wie eingangs erwähnt, erstreckt sich die Ausstellung zusätzlich auf den Projektraum von OKK (Organ Kritischer Kunst). Hier ist die Arbeit *Virophilia* der taiwanesischen Künstlerin und Designerin Pei-Ying Lin zu sehen. Sie befasst sich mit der Beziehung zwischen Menschen und Viren, die ambivalent konnotiert ist. Anhand eines Künstler(rezept)buchs dokumentiert sie ihre Forschung mit Lebensmitteln, deren Genom durch Viren verändert wurde. Eine Videodokumentation vermittelt das Konzept und die Forschung zu dem Projekt, dazu schlängeln sich zwei große Papierrollen an der Decke des Ausstellungsraums entlang, auf der eine lange Liste von Viren aufgezählt wird.

Im hinteren Raum kann die musikalische Science-Fiction-Installation und Performance *Holobiont: Relics from the Revolution* von Cammack Lindsey erlebt werden. Man taucht ein in eine imaginäre Fabrik, in der Toxine aus Cyanobakterien extrahiert werden. Durch das Singen eines Liedes von Bertolt Brecht - schließlich handelt es sich um eine musikalische Science-Fiction-Installation - wird die menschliche Stimme mit den Daten der Cyanobakterien verwoben. Normalerweise tragen Cyanobakterien (Blaualgen) zum ökologischen Gleichgewicht bei, indem sie Kohlendioxid in Sauerstoff umwandeln. Umwelteinflüsse sorgen jedoch dafür, dass sich Cyanobakterien mitunter zu stark ausbreiten, Giftstoffe produzieren und das Ökosystem belasten. Lindsey geht es um Beziehungsgeflechte zwischen Ökosystemen und darüber hinaus um kapitalistische Strukturen, die der Ausbeutung von Arbeitskräften zugrunde liegen.



Constanza Piña Pardo, Khipu (Detail), Foto: kuag

Auch die chilenische Künstlerin Constanza Piña Pardo verknüpft in ihrer Installation *Khipu* verschiedene Formate wie Tanz, Installation und Klangperformance. Eindrucksvoll sind 180

Wollfäden versehen mit Kupferdrähten, die an einen elektronischen Schaltkreis angeschlossen sind, im Raum verspannt. Durch die Bewegung von Besuchenden im Raum verstärken sich elektro-magnetischen Veränderungen, was klanglich erfahrbar ist. Die Arbeit verweist zugleich auf ein politisches und kulturelles Phänomen: Khipu waren - wie wir aus dem Wandtext erfahren - textile prähispanische Geräte der Inka zur Aufzeichnung von Informationen, die aus Baumwoll- oder Kamelidenfasern bestehen und Daten in Form von Knoten codiert speichern. Insofern scheint es nicht übertrieben, wie behauptet wird, dass Khipu als prähispanische Computer gelten.

Der letzte Abschnitt im oben zitierten *Fermentations-Manifest* trägt die Überschrift *FERMENTATION IST EIN MINDSET*. Dem lässt sich nach dem Besuch der Ausstellung *Hackers, Makers, Thinkers* nichts entgegensetzen. Die äußerst reizvollen Denkansätze lohnen, sich zu vertiefen. Dazu bietet nicht nur die Ausstellung Gelegenheit, sondern das umfangreiche Begleitprogramm, das zahlreiche [Workshops](#) und eine [internationale Konferenz](#) (hybrid | on-site mit Livestream) vermittelt.

Künstler*innen: Irene Agrivina | Interspecifics | Pei-Ying Lin | Cammack Lindsey | Constanza Piña Pardo | Rice Brewing Sisters Club

Kurator*innen: Regine Rapp, Tuçe Erel, Christian de Lutz, Tengal Drilon

Veranstaltung | Konferenz

HACKERS, MAKERS, THINKERS

Collective Experiments in Social Fermenting

Internationale Konferenz (hybrid | on-site mit Livestream)

In Kooperation mit: Prof. Michelle Christensen, Prof. Florian Conradi(UdK Berlin/
Weizenbaum Institute, TU Berlin / Einstein Center Digital Future)

27. - 28. Mai 2022

artlaboratory-berlin.org

www.youtube.com/artlaboratory

HACKERS, MAKERS, THINKERS

Collective Experiments in Social Fermenting

Ausstellungsdauer: 21. Mai - 10. Juli 2022

Ausstellungsorte:

Art Laboratory Berlin

Prinzenallee 34, 13359 Berlin

OKK

Prinzenallee 29, 13359 Berlin

<https://www.art-in-berlin.de/incbmeld.php?id=6021>

**Festival für „Soziales Fermentieren“ von "Kultur in Berlin: Was tun am Wochenende?
Die Kulturtipps der Berliner Zeitung" in Berliner Zeitung (publiziert am 20.5.2022)**

Festival für „Soziales Fermentieren“

Kunst: Nach zwei Jahren der relativen Isolation widmet sich das Art Laboratory Berlin jetzt der Frage, welche Möglichkeiten sich im Sozialen wiederbeleben lassen. „Hackers, Makers, Thinkers“ will verdorrte soziale Beziehungen zum Klingen bringen. Dem Projekt, das Berliner Event-Orte und Künstler:innen aus Südamerika und Südostasien verbindet, geht es um Kunst, die auf Kooperation beruht. Dazu zählt etwa eine Gruppenausstellung, eine interdisziplinäre Konferenz sowie zahlreiche Künstlerworkshops und Performances. Es ist das, was die Macher:innen des Festivals „Soziales Fermentieren“ nennen.



„KHIPU DIALOGUES“ von Constanza Pina Pardo

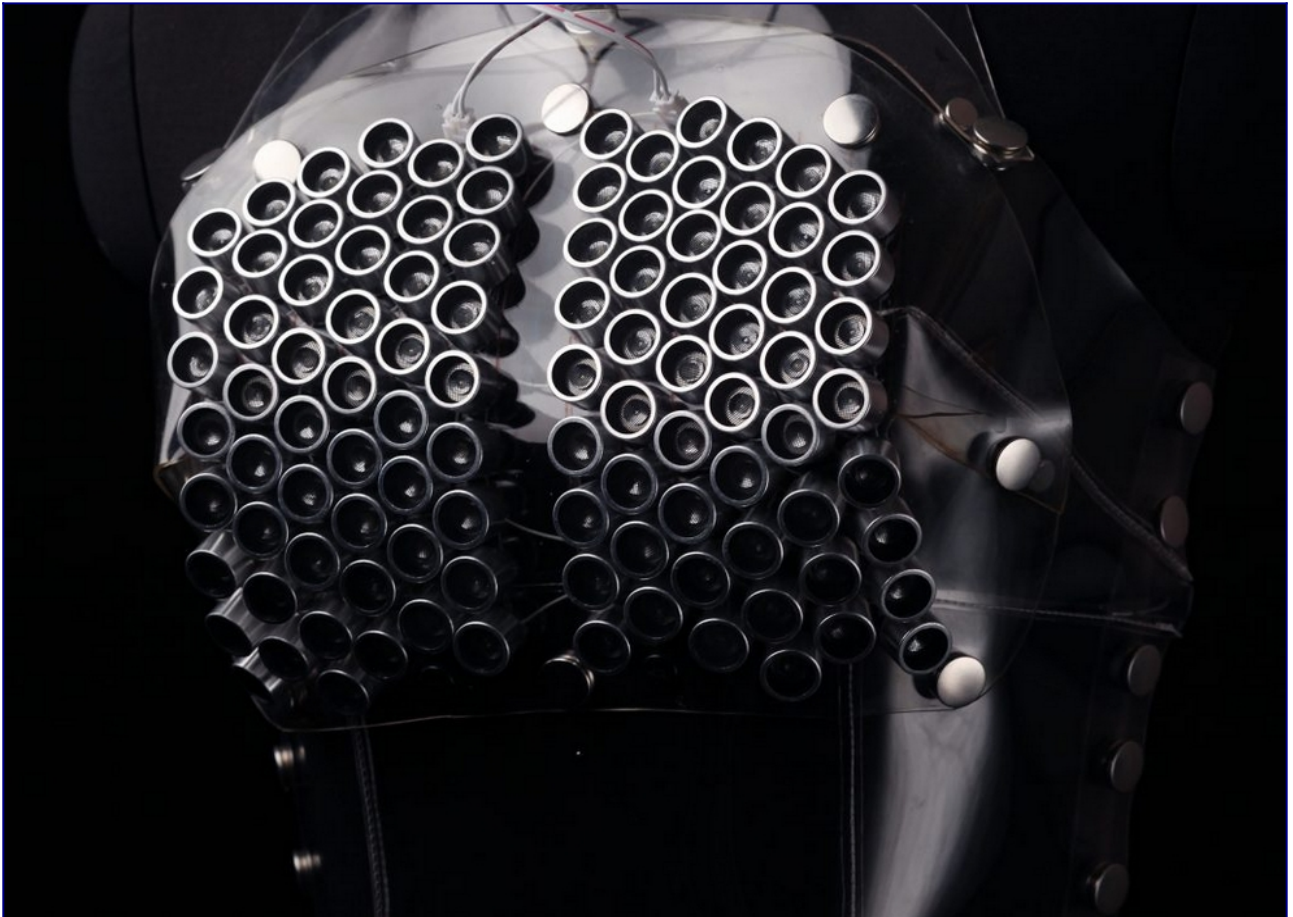
Das Projekt „Entangled Beauty. A Perfect Marriage“ der indonesischen Künstlerin Irene Agrivina verbindet etwa landwirtschaftliche Praktiken, Kunst und Biologie. Mit ihrer Installation, die eine Biobatterie beinhaltet, kombiniert die Künstlerin Wasserpflanzen mit Cyanobakterien. Die Installation „Codex Virtualis“ des mexikanischen Kunstkollektivs Interspecifics ist eine ästhetische Reise durch ein Ökosystem aus neuronalen Netzen und Algorithmen und schafft einen künstlerischen Rahmen für die Erkundung spekulativer Lebensformen. Die taiwanesischen Künstlerin Pei-Ying Lin interessiert sich für Viren – insbesondere für solche, die für das menschliche Überleben entscheidend sind. Ihr Projekt „Virophilia“, das ebenfalls an diesem Wochenende zu sehen ist, ist sowohl Kunstbuch, als auch als Installation.

„Hackers, Makers, Thinkers“: an verschiedenen Orten, Eröffnung am Freitag, 20 Uhr im Art Laboratory Berlin, Prinzenallee 34. Mehr Informationen unter:
www.artlaboratory-berlin.org/de/

<https://www.berliner-zeitung.de/kultur-vergnuegen/kultur-in-berlin-was-tun-am-wochenende-kulturtipps-berliner-zeitung-li.228222>

CLOT

VIVIAN XU & BENJAMIN BACON, virtual societies, disruptive technologies and material ecologies by Lyndsey Walsh (publiziert am 25.01.2022)



Skin Series & SonicSkin, Vivian Xu (2018)

Vivian Xu and Benjamin Bacon have been working together to navigate entangled networks spanning across digital, **organic, and physical realms for close to a decade**. Together, Xu and Bacon have set out to explore emerging topics and formulate critical discussions about major societal and cultural issues present within virtual societies, disruptive technologies, and material ecologies. While both Xu and Bacon's practices have been heavily influenced by their design background, their works and projects often fuse together and take influence from other aspects of their creative practices and professional histories, such as music and sound, film, and writing, to craft narratives and probe into the emerging possibilities about our future.

In 2015, Xu and Bacon founded the interdisciplinary and hybrid lab called Dogma Lab in Shanghai, China. Growing out of the unique ecosystem and environment of Shanghai, Dogma Lab has since gone on to venture into projects with focuses and outputs ranging from design and commerce to entertainment, art, and culture, as well as projects that fit within research and educational scopes. Working on both personal projects and commissions, Dogma Lab has produced events, installations, devices, sculptures, and research projects in both China and around the world.

More recently, they have taken their working model and research interests, which are deeply embedded in their work at Dogma Lab, and have applied it to their work in helping to create and drive research and educational programs at the Duke Kshan University's transdisciplinary media and arts labs in Suzhou, China. At Duke Kshan University, Bacon is an Associate Professor of Media and Arts and the Director of Signature Work and Xu is an Assistant Professor of Media and Arts. Individually and on personal creative level, Xu and Bacon have also explored these transdisciplinary areas of interest and research in their own creative practices, which has manifested in a wide portfolio of transdisciplinary works that sit at the intersections of art, science, design, and technology.

Xu's **Skin Series** is one of these works. The series investigates potential future possibilities of human perception and how wearable technologies can change a wearer's relationship with their environment. Currently, the series features two wearable devices called *Electric Skin* and *Sonic Skin*, which when worn can augment touch and sound. *Electric Skin* seeks to extend a wearer's ability to sense electrostatic flux in their environment by translating this information into touch sensation by using vibration motors that stimulate the wearer's skin. *Sonic Skin* creates a type of sound armour around the wearer by projecting direction sound from the contours of the wearer's body in a similar manner to how a bat's or whale's sonar system would work.

Bacon's PROBE Series II: Subaudition follows a similar interest in the connections between technology and the environment. The work builds off of his previous work titled PROBE I: Averso Specillo Di Ducendum and presents itself as an investigation into speculative futures of space exploration. The series take inspiration from the Panspermia hypotheses, which suggests that life exists in outerspace and has travelled and landed on a receptive earth to inhabit. The Probe Series imagines a

future where alien conscious machines venture out from their home planets or origins to survive in the harsh conditions of space travel with the aim of probing and exploring the hostile conditions of our earth. *PROBE Series II: Subaudition* features a binary set of extra-planetary machines that have set out to explore subaudition by applying machine learning methods and text-to-speech recognition. Through this process, spoken language is degraded and its meaning is decoded into kinetic energy, information transmission and visual representation, which includes the use of lights, patterns, colour, and reflection.

Both Xu's *Electric Skin* and *Sonic Skin* and Bacon's *PROBE Series II: Subaudition* were exhibited in together in Art Laboratory Berlin's exhibition titled "[Under the Viral Shadow: Networks in the Age of Technoscience and Infection](#)", which was curated by Regine Rapp and Christian de Lutz. The exhibition itself explored the complicated and messy ways that the language of the virus has infected our culture in these uncertain times. In the scope of the exhibition, Xu's and Bacon's work highlighted the interconnectedness of technological networks with both their environment and the living systems that they interact with.

While our future may be uncertain, Xu and Bacon's creative explorations work to provide us with crucial and fascinating insights into the realm of possibilities and material visions that may or will emerge out of our technological, biological, and cultural networks.



PROBE Series II: Subaudition, Benjamin Bacon (2021)

For any of our readers who might not be familiar with your work, when did you meet and what do you find drives you to create?

Benjamin Bacon: We met in 2011 in Beijing at a workshop I was organizing with Tsinghua University that was part of the Weather Tunnel project in the TransLife New Media Triennial curated by new media curator Zhang Ga. At the time, both he and I were professors at Parsons the New School for Design in New York, and this was a collaborative project between Parsons, Tsinghua, and the National Art Museum of China. Vivian was one of the participating artists in this project.

Vivian Xu: We didn't start systemically collaborating as a team until 2014 when we founded Dogma Lab, an interdisciplinary design lab and consultancy in Shanghai. And since then, we've been working together as a duo more and more. We both have a film BA in undergrad and a Design and Technology MFA from Parsons, and we both work in higher education. We currently both teach at Duke Kunshan University in the Media Art and Digital Media programs. We've worked on many different types of projects, such as experimental performances, conceptual installations, educational programs, commercial design work, large-scale public art, and now more recently, design research and design and technology R&D.

BB: What drives our projects are often interesting questions and topics. We both have diverse interests that often fall in the intersections of design, technology, art, science, and education. These investigations often lead to projects that are at times art, but at times not. We learn a lot through these projects engaging with different people. I guess the process of learning new things is what drives us.

VX: We bounce ideas around a lot in our creative process, and so we have this ecosystem of ideas between the two of us. I think in recent years, we realized, why not just work together more. Especially today, with many topics being highly interdisciplinary, two people with different perspectives and skillsets, but also a shared vision really helps make our collaborative work richer and deeper.

You both exhibited work and took part in Art Laboratory Berlin's Under the Viral Shadow exhibition and accompanying conference. Vivian, your works Electric Skin and Sonic Skin featured two wearable devices that explored possibilities for technologically aided perception, and Benjamin, your work PROBE SERIES II featured a binary set of extra-planetary machines that set out to explore subaudition using machine learning methods of speech to text recognition. Can you tell us a bit about how you relate your works to the exhibition and how you think networks (technological, biological, and social) are changing and shifting in response to current events and technological advancements?

VX: I didn't really begin my development of the *Skin Series* thinking about networks. This was a body of work that I've been working on for the past few years mainly because I was interested in wearable technology and how this emerging area could really redefine our bodily relationship with the surrounding environment.

When I began designing and developing this series of work, I was really inspired by studies in sensory ecology and the parallels I saw with systems design in sensory technologies. My past work really

focused on investigating the boundary between natural and technical systems, and the *Skin Series* continues in this vein through the development of wearables. I took more of a design approach to this work where I was looking at the sensory pathways of non-human animals and seeing if there was a potential to map these senses onto the human body through wearable technology, and what that would feel like for the wearer of the suit. The *Electric Skin* looks at animals such as electric eels and certain bacteria, these species can receive and even send electric signals. They experience the world around them through a layer of electricity. I thought, with today's society so saturated with digital signals, I wondered if it was possible to create a suit that tries to bring that layer of reality to the human experience, and what would that type of a reality feel like. The development of the suit was a long process for me because I was learning and developing myself. The suit works on a minimal level right now using capacitive touch technology but is not really the wireless communication approach I had originally imagined. I learned that antenna design is a very complicated thing, and I may not be able to achieve that in this project.

Similarly, the *Sonic Skin* looks at the auditory perspective of reality, referencing animals such as whales and bats that use sonar to communicate through long-distance in dim environments. At the time, Ben had developed a little directional sound gadget for an auditory workshop. I had not worked a lot with sound in the past, and the way you could hear directional sound travel in space was really fascinating to me, and I thought, I want to incorporate this into my suit. The sound design for the *Sonic Skin* was also by Benjamin.

BB: For me, I sort of came of age at the dawn of the personal computer and the early World Wide Web. I got my first computer when I was 15 in the 80s, and I have since then always thought through the lens of systems and networks, especially how these systems and networks work, and so machines, in general, have always interested me because everything can in a way be defined as a conceptual machine.

Another influence that's affected me has been the area of space exploration and the idea of alternative ways of being and living in alien habitats. Specifically, with the *Probe Series*, I was investigating different spaceship and machine designs that could break through the physical limitations put on carbon-based life forms on earth when travelling through space. The concept of panspermia originated from the biological realm in thinking about how microbes in space can generate on planets, but this perspective has also been incorporated by physicists like Michio Kaku in thinking about the most effective ways to build space probes.

The *Probe Series* follows this train of thought where each instalment of the larger series investigates one aspect of sensory perception (i.e. vision in *Probe I* and sound in *Probe II*) and data collection and analysis. In designing each probe or probe set, I consider the human sensory system and try to imitate and modify it in the machine system design with the assistance of ML models. In the case of *Probe Series II: Subaudition*, the two machines together imitate the human ear and language processing system in the brain in how we pick up sound signals, translate that into electrical signals, and then reinterpret that into an internal language to our bodies, in the case of the machine, binary language expressed through tapping. In the actual execution of this process, environmental sounds, the mistranslation in the machine, and glitches of the ML models due to data training limitations all influence what is stored and expressed through the machines.

This creates an interesting dynamic where the machines almost exhibit their own interpretation of what human language is. During the exhibition, Regine, Chris and their team noticed that the machines kept picking up the *Sonic Skin's* noises as if it was language. This was really a pleasant surprise to me, because you have all these ideas and then work to design these machines, but it's always hard to know

how they will behave in the wild. This really made me think about how AI models could be investigated as dynamic and complex archives for human culture, and how reliable or unreliable these archives may be.

While you have worked together on numerous projects, your recent collaborative work *Horologic Solum* is an exploration and a case study about media memory. Can you tell us about the inspiration for this work and the process of making it?

BB: We were approached by new media curator Iris Long towards the end of 2020. She and artist/curator Qiu Zhijie were working on an exhibition with the Shenzhen government called *The Final Prophet* reflecting on the past year under the pandemic.

Earlier in Spring that year, Vivian and I had been working on a digital archive initiative called the COVID-19 Memory Archival Project with students in documenting pandemic experiences through interactive media-rich personal narratives utilizing the GIS Storymap platform that had just been released not long ago. I presented this project at a conference at Duke, and we later co-authored a book chapter reflecting on memory and media.

VX: In relation to the pandemic, this question of culture as living experience passed down, and limitations of media to capture became an idea that we thought a lot about during 2020. For example, there were so many factors that caused the forgetting of the last great pandemic post-WWII, which was only 100 years ago. We had to relearn that experience in 2020 because we had forgotten. This really led us to think about the breakdown of communication beyond individual people and generations, communication that needed to happen over vast stretches of space and time.

BB: Building on that, the case of Voyager's 1977 Golden Record then became really interesting, because it was really conceived as a snapshot of civilization at the time and sent out for the purpose of communicating with potential aliens. But if you really breakdown this event and its implications, you will find that it really asks the question: Are we all alone in time and space? Which is a very isolating thought and almost makes you feel sad. If this artifact ever reaches other types of living forms, and if it does, will it still be intact, and if it's intact, will they be able to access the information, and so on... It seems the chance of sending a message into the future is very small. And even if it reached someone, what would it matter, because our civilization could be long gone by then.

VX: It seems that at the point where the original record was sent off into space, that snapshot of humans diverged along two paths, where the actual golden record artifact and its cultural memory began moving further and further away from each other both literally and metaphorically. The concept of the Golden Record through history passed through the tape decks that transmit that information is broken up into 5 layers of time in the installation: the time of the content recording, the internal time of the machines playing the content, the time of tape loop cycles, the time when the tape snaps, and the time and space of the audience. At any point, communication can break down and the piece or performance could be over.

BB: The production of the piece was very low tech. We chose to use Japanese tape decks from the early 80s. This was an intentional choice because for most people, they have a concept of what the late 70s early 80s feel like, but it's not until you look at a piece of technology from that era that you realize how far we've come from that in just a few decades. By choosing tape decks, you are viscerally brought back to the time of the original recordings. We are so used to the digital age that we often don't think of the materiality of mediums anymore in a visceral way and what archives mean physically.

VX: There was a lot of experimentation for creating the decay system for the tapes. This decay system would slowly smooth away the tape over a period of 8 hours until finally, it broke, and the sound piece ended. Ben probably anticipated this, because he's worked with sound for much longer, but what I found really fascinating was the points where the tape wasn't yet broken but the meaning of the sounds disappeared and became just white noise. It was really random because it depended on how the material rubbed off.

Together you both also founded the transdisciplinary design lab called DOGMA Lab where you have engaged in a variety of projects spanning education, branding, product, wearables, audio, research, and more. What has been your favourite project that you have gotten to work on together and are there any challenges that you run into when working together?

VX: As mentioned before, we founded Dogma Lab in 2014. Between 2014-2017, we worked mainly on commercial projects through the lab. One of these projects was the Xintiandi Christmas installation we did in 2017. For this project, we built a 15-meter tall 2 level Snow Globe playground with over 1500 meters of interactive lights controlled by custom design touch panels that allowed audiences to engage with the installation. This project was a big challenge for us. This was a large budget production that spanned between March 2017 till January 2018. We managed a multi-continental team in designing and developing this project.

BB: We had experience with interactive work in the past, but we've never built an interactive building before, or a building at all. We had to learn about construction and building regulations on the job. We were very lucky to have a stellar construction team supporting us. And friends who had extensive experience working in commercial design gave us advice and support. I wouldn't say this is our favourite project, but definitely, one where we were pushed most out of our comfort zones and where we learned the most.

Additionally, you both work on your own and together with extensively different aspects of technology and sound. Your collaborative work "Bio-harmonic Quartet" links musicians and artists via a biofeedback network and generates music and soundscapes in collaboration with an AI. How do you see the role of technology continues to shift and alter the ways in which we produce music and sound and how was your experience of collaborating with an Artificial Intelligence?

BB: This project started as a conversation with a musician friend B6 (Lou Nanli) when talking about music production. Prior to this project, I had given a TED Talk in Ningbo about how new technologies

developing under the umbrella of Industry 4.0 is currently revolutionizing the music industry. Compared with the third industrial revolution that was tied to the personal computer, the fourth industrial revolution is moving productivity away from the creation of information and things into the area of re-defining methods and processes of production. This project was heavily influenced by these ideas.

VX: Before this project, Ben had done several works exploring the possibilities of AI-generated music. In this project, we expanded on that and played with the idea of a decentralized human-machine network that could collaborate in music-making. We were very lucky that our friend B6 invited us to be part of his solo concert *Flowers* and we got to engage with performers from the Shanghai Philharmonic. We presented preliminary experiments at the time. We would like to develop some of these ideas further with more time.

What are some things that you are working on now and what are some of the ideas that fascinate you that you would want to explore more in the future?

BB: For my individual research, I'm currently continuing my explorations on machine logic and system design with the *Probe Series* and another new series called *Conditionals* that will explore logic building blocks in computational systems. I'm also getting back into BCI interfaces and experimenting with this technology as a creative medium.

VX: I'm continuing development in the *Skin Series* in creating a third wearable looking at bioluminescence. I'm also getting back to another older unfinished project that looks at silkworms and their relationship with human labor and weather through the form of an artist book.

BB: We are also working on several new initiatives and projects together. One of these projects is a design research project in collaboration with another colleague at Duke Kunshan University, Dr. Yajuan Lin, who is a biological oceanographer. We are working with data and research provided by her lab and collaborators that look at the biodiversity and carbon flux of micro-planktons in the Antarctic Ocean. Her research seeks to understand how changes in these communities can indicate changes in the larger ecological environment of this region. We are working with her to design and develop ways to bring this knowledge to a wider public through VR experiences.

VX: This is a project we're really excited about, and it's been helping us think more deeply about mixed reality networks on a global and ecological scale, and how these realities can be brought into the digital space through data.

What's the chief enemy of creativity?

BB: Trends.

VX: Assumptions.

You couldn't live without...

Both: Curiosity.

<https://www.clotmag.com/interviews/vivian-xu-and-benjamin-bacon-virtual-societies-disruptive-technologies-and-material-ecologies>

Presseartikel über Art Laboratory Berlin

(Stand: 22. Dezember 2022)

2022

Insight: 'Radyo Somatodelia', experiments in sonic animism im CLOT Magazin (publiziert am 7. September 2022)
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