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IN FLUX STRATEGY

The cultural concepts of identity, life and nature are under constant negotiation. The world have been defined as; the given (nature) and the constructed (culture). Without this constructed dichotomy it is more complex. Nature and culture mimic each other’s qualities and as transparencies can hardly be differentiated as they can act and feel alike. Autonomous (hu)man made system have become so complex that we start to perceive them as nature. Although we can not trust our means of technological savoir we deny technological advances its “natural” aspects: mortality, fragility, complex interactivity and dependence on flows of energy and material sustenance. Altering nature is central to humans and the more we learn to control it the more it loses the natural character and enter the realms of culture. Everything is co-evolutionary a copy of a copy and as a designers and artists we must use what has already been shaped. Perhaps success is manifested when we alters existing forces and work counter cultural. Or amplify the directions we are currently rendering. Is it time to reverse our concept of not what is possible and what isn’t, but to accept the impossibility of omnipotent immortality? The world is largely messy and it is not possible, nor desirable, to know what is going on, instead we should be certain that we don’t know and learn how to feel from uncertainty, to try to make sense on how to navigate. Preoccupied caring for ourselves affects the strategy for survival for both humans and non-humans in this entangled universe.

In our present technological reality of conquering the biological, this speculative project is in reference to the uncertainty of our future and the brutal advances that shape human minds. The crisis of being human in the surrealism of our culturally altered nature. The fear of a lost world and our need to reinvent ourselves. A reflection of the contiguity of life between species. Telling the story through an artificial enhancement strategy for solidago canadensis it is about the human hubris worldview and the unique and often troubling realities of the present and the conventional problem-solving/ truth-seeking of the messy, unstable, in flux complexity of nature and culture.

SOLIDAGO LIFE SUPPORT

Living in the extreme times of the weird and wonderful times of nanotechnology, synthetic biology and neuroscience it is now longer about designing the things in the environment around us but designing life itself. Our advances and innovations have huge consequences on what it means to be human, how we relate not only to each other but our coexistence in this sphere.

1. The posthuman, Rosi Braidotti, 2013
3. Lilla drevet podcast, episode 182, 2018

ABSTRACT

Living in the extreme times of the weird and wonderful times of nanotechnology, synthetic biology and neuroscience it is now longer about designing the things in the environment around us but designing life itself. Our advances and innovations have huge consequences on what it means to be human, how we relate not only to each other but our coexistence in this sphere.

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IN FLUX STRATEGY

SOLIDAGO LIFE SUPPORT

seventeen

MOOD
LIVING IN THE EPOCH OF THE ANTHROPOCENE WE, HUMANS, ARE DISCONNECTED FROM AND DON’T DEFINE US AS NATURE. NATURE HOLDS A POWER ARTIFICIALITY DON’T, MANY LIVING ORGANISMS EVOLVE WITH THEIR SURROUNDING IN ORDER TO SURVIVE. WE ADJUST AND CONTINUE TO PUSH THE LIMITS OF OUR OWN SPECIES TO SURVIVE WITH ARTIFICIAL ENHANCEMENT STRATEGIES TO ACTIVATE WHEN OUR NATURAL SYSTEM FAILS. AN EXISTENTIAL QUEST FOR OUR OWN IMMORTALITY. THE PURPOSE OF MY THESIS IS TO ENFORCE THE NEXCESSITY TO THINK AGAIN ABOUT HOW ONE RELATES TO THE HUMAN IN AN THE POSTHUMAN ERA. TO THINK ABOUT THE STATUS OF THE HUMAN AND THE IMPORTANCE OF RECasting subjectivity accordingly, the need to invent ethical relations of survival for other living beings in the surrealism of our times. And the impact of natural and artificial pressure on life and our role in shaping and defining when they interface. Human design has made nature more natural than natural, it is now hypernatural or supernatural. A simulation of our notion of it. Better than the real thing, a little bit prettier, slicker and safer. We no longer have any way to leave a natural reserve alone, to be reserved and natural. Idealizing a distant reality means not idealizing the environment in which we actually live. Accepting that our natural milieu is damaged and that our new nature, is a dynamic entity that is fated to change right along with us, must evolve out of that understanding.

We have been shaping nature for thousands of years, not only to suit our needs, but our most irrational desires. Beautiful flowers thrive on these desires, giving them an evolutionary advantage. We are living in a time in which the constructed and the given are fusing and nature is a subset of culture. We have colonised and modified the earth and focusing on our own survival, having developed tools and technologies they have become progressively more sophisticated, cultivating and caring, first and foremost for our own life. What makes something non-special that makes us commodify and harm so much of our environment. And as our innovations morphs our understanding of everything that we are confronted with therefore shapes our ideas and perception of how we relate to anything and think is plausible.
IN FLUX STRATEGY

[1] Natural habitat

[3] Nature a subset of culture

[5] Artificial strategy

[7] Notion of immortality

SOLIDAGO LIFE SUPPORT

[1] Natural habitat

[4] Nature a subset of culture

[6] Notion of immortality

CULTURALLY ALTERED NATURE
We crave for nature unspoiled by humans, paradoxically, we evolve out of that very same. It is a feeling, a symbol for escape and a place for reflection. It is something we projected as having eternal values and being larger than life. Our notion of it are filtered through paintings, tv-documentaries, pictures and other’s lived experiences. The politicized attitude that nature is harmonious, calm, peaceful, rightful and all-around good for you, never came from nature but from culture. And something we long for precisely because it is beyond our control and we can feel the separation. At the same time, paradoxically, we cannot stand the fact that it is beyond our control and everything we find attractive we feel the urge to get a grip of and control. If we can’t go find nature, we will bring nature to us, various examples like globalisation of the market of cut flowers, listening to rain sounds, wave pools, indoor ski-resorts and engineered tropical islands. Nature is pastoral, noble and spiritual and above all aesthetic. It conveys ideas about our consumption of a believed existence of untouched nature. Our disconnectedness from nature comes from our creation of the artificial, still we must also acknowledge that the ever culturally altered nature involves the coexistence of the artificial. And a way to relate to the so-called new nature is not to make this separation, but learn to navigate within it and understand the right distance to what already exists.

This essay takes the philosophical standpoint, perhaps the only productive, that the divide is not binary (nature is a cultural construct that changes along with us). The loss of an untouched natural world has force us to manage our surroundings as an artificial environment. We are captured by something present and deliberately aware of something missing, which we are eager to understand or know more about. In our thoroughly altered environment where it is impossible to singularize and differentiate what is existing, my focus is on the in-betweeness. And in this in-betweenness things are necessary for the construction of a new self in our society. According to philosopher Walter Benjamin; “We define the aura of natural objects as the unique phenomenon of distance, however close it may be. If while resting on a summer afternoon, you follow with your eyes a mountain range on the horizon or branch which casts its shadow over you, you experience the [breathe] aura of those mountains, of that branch.” And just like being able to study something from a distance, like historical sculptures and paintings, we feel the aura precisely when we are aware of our separation from it since we can never touch or alter their history. The primordial idea that it only appears when it is lost, only a society that is no longer immersed in an environment is able to treat it with a distance. Speculating on a distant future might disclose the path we are currently engineering.

A bird building a nest is natural, but humans building a house we call it culture. Culture and nature are traditionally opposed to each other, now appear to merge or even trade places. Our creations has always interrupted life cycles and the disruption of the natural order reaches back to agriculture or even when humans entered the realm. There is no humanly untouched landscapes anywhere on the surface of the planet. It isn’t somewhere else like an endless archive separated from us until we aim to use it for our desires and purposes. In a sense we are responsible for our desires and for turning anything into anything not knowing the full consequences. The more we learn to control it the more it loses the natural character and enter the realms of culture. In a sense we can not control the complexity of the artificial, e.g. data viruses and traffic jams are not nature but acts as uncontrollable as it. Artificial creations protects us from the forces of nature and gives ride to a next nature, which is just wild, cruel, unpredictable and threatening as ever. While in the sense of trees, plants, animals, atoms, climate is increasingly controlled and governed by humans, it is turned into a cultural category that our technological environment becomes so complex and uncontrollable, that we start to relate to it as a nature of its own. Some level of “normal failure” in technological systems is as “natural” as the sun rising. We have artificialized everything we can grip and we rarely get any dark suspicious feeling nor does it strike us as uncanny.

\[11\] A thousand Plateaus, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, 1980
\[12\] The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction, Walter Benjamin, 1936
\[14\] Oyster conference, Timothy Morton talk, 2018
\[15\] Next Nature: Nature Changes Along with Us, Koert van Mensvoort, Hendrik-Jan Grievenk, 2012
Adjusting to the reality is hard and would mean a more fully humane mental world which has less notional, less delusional, less self-indulgent, and more attentive to the genuine otherness of nature.\textsuperscript{16} We need to acknowledge the mortality of all life on this planet. The following projects by artists and designers have given me valuable insights:

The Common flowers / flowers common project by Shiho Fukuhara and Georg Tremmel is based on the first commercially available gene manipulated flower, the blue-mauve Moondust carnation, developed and marketed by a Japanese beer-brewing company intended purely for aesthetic consumption. Carnations with blue petals were created by inserting genes from other flowering plants into the genome of the Dianthus caryophyllus. However, like any other gene manipulated product it was subjected to strict scientific testing to ensure that the flowers pose no threat to animals and wildlife, and can be kept under control. Creating genetically manipulated plants for merely aesthetic purposes is a nice marketing strategy from somebody who wants to introduce the genetic engineering industry without being regarded as irresponsible. If it’s nice and beautiful who cares how it’s made? Is it actually possible to remove the unnatural gene from the plant? Can this unnatural plant become natural again? Can it be re-naturalized? Therefore they took the next logical step and brought the blue gene manipulated carnation back and released it into nature.\textsuperscript{17,18}

The central work in Eduardo Kac work the Natural History of the Enigma series is a plantimal, a new life form called Edunia, a genetically engineered flower that is a hybrid of the artist and the petunia. The Edunia expresses his DNA exclusively in its red veins invented and produced through molecular biology. It is not found in nature. This work seeks to instill in the public a sense of wonder about this most amazing of phenomena we call “life”. It considers how close we truly are to apes and other non-human animals, particularly those with which it is possible to communicate directly, such as cats and dogs.\textsuperscript{19}

In Revital Cohen and Tuur Van Balen’s project The Immortal, a number of life-support machines are connected to each other, circulating liquids and air in attempt to mimic a biological structure: it investigates human dependence on electronics, the desire to make machines replicate organisms and our perception of anatomy as reflected by biomedical engineering. These objects encompass social debates about the ethics of euthanasia, the quantification of both the value and quality of life, making physical a poetic desire to conquer our own mortality. Designed and created to perform a single most meaningful function, medical devices in decline have clear migration patterns: they travel from the western world to the the third world to veterinary practices. Migration trails indicating which types of machines are in demand in which parts of the world speak of who’s body is defined a national priority. By exploring the medical instruments while detached from the human body and functioning as an independent being, accentuate the distance between the organic and the artificial.\textsuperscript{20}

In Hans Haacke\textquotesingle s work The Rhinewater Purification Plant, 1972 shows a square glass tank, infront of a window, smaller rectangular and cylindrical tanks pump water from the the Rhine river, which is filled with sewage plant, into the large, square glass tank via a small tube. The large, square glass tank is filled with goldfish. A clear tube comes out of the large, square tank into the wood floor. The water pumps through an additional water purification system to water the Museum Haus Lange gardens plants. Our existence is our very own detriment and we seldom think to care for what carries us. Water is a crucial component of life, with our livelihood having a direct correlation to its presence and our ability to value it and we must support it in our beings like second nature.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{[9]} Thesis on the Philosophy of History, Walter Benjamin, 1942
\textsuperscript{[10]} Shiho Fukuhara and Georg Tremmel, The Common flowers / flowers common project, 2009
\textsuperscript{[11]} Eduardo Kac, Edunia Project, 2009
\textsuperscript{[12]} Revital Cohen and Tuur Van Balen, The Immortal Project, 2012
\textsuperscript{[13]} Hans Haacke, The rhine water purification plant, 1972
IN FLUX STRATEGY

[10] Public band-aid

[12] Car clothes

[13] Unspoiled nature

[14] No mistake technology

[19] Escaped from gardens


SOLIDAGO LIFE SUPPORT

nineteen

CARE AS A FORM OF MAINTENANCE
We care first and foremost for our own survival. Maria Puig Dell Bella Casa says: “On the most general level, we suggest that caring be viewed as a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our ‘world’ so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, our selves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web.”

Care is a form of maintenance - work, affection and ethics - but are not necessarily equally distributed in all relations nor without tensions and contradictions. Sometimes care is without affection e.g. care labour workers. Vital maintenance is not sufficient, and affection without maintenance is not sufficient. Preoccupied caring for our own species affects the strategy for survival of non-humans in this entangled universe.

Care as practice historically comes from below as arrangements of power and privilege. Attention to the ways in which care was feminized, devalued, overlooked, or rendered invisible by materially and morally privileging mind over body, public over private, reason over emotion, and waged labor over unpaid care work – that long and all-too-familiar list of intersecting and highly gendered dichotomies. It is not just that care helps things get done, but that more or better or different care could be generative of better survival, politics, and knowledge. The ethics of care starts from the recognition that care is a moral practice, a disposition, a daily need, and a way of living. In opposition to individualism it acknowledges vulnerability, interconnectedness, dependency, embodiment and finitude as basic characteristics of human life. Those considered as traditional carers are constantly moralized for not caring enough, or not caring anymore, or for having “lost” some “natural” capacity to care.

Everything that really matters are complex systems, climate, ecosystem, biology, human relationships and economy. Complex in the sense that the state within the system can change all the time as the result of the feedback loops and the components of the system itself, change as a consequence of the system interactions with its environment and how its evolving. Our agency in the system will change the system and the connection between our cause and effect is effectively impossible to predict. This means that the tool-kit we have for managing complicated systems don’t work for complex systems and are often counterproductive.

The increased complexity emphasises the problem with causality as a mind-set. Nature and culture is messy systems and you can not break a piece and study it without worrying about the rest, the whole is more than the sum of the parts. The totality has qualities that do not exist in the parts. Holistically the entirety affects the parts. To not get caught in an obsession with clarity, with specificity, and with the definite. Systems cannot be treated as a whole in isolation, but must be explored in their context in relation to other systems.

[24a] Soul Matters: The Spiritual Dimension Within Healthcare, Mabel Aghadiuno, 2010
If the climate change renders degrees above one it will threaten water supplies for millions of people, above four degrees one in every five plants is critically endangered and if it reaches plus five degree the earth is a dry rock dying in space.

The anxieties of the anthropocene are better rendered as the affects of what Haraway is now calling the capitalocene, capitalising on nature. Singapore known for excess, artifice is the true nature. The Garden by the Bay is a billion-dollar infrastructure for botanical tourism and is truly an amplification rather than a contradiction between economic growth and sustainability. Two of the world’s largest engineered climate-controlled conservatories makes possible the imperialist impulse to host and luxuriously simulate diverse nature artificially.

Here care is truly its own system, a form of labour, affection and ethics. These gardens simulates and display mixes rare and endangered plants an engineered and ambivalent affective ecology. In this simulation one can see how capital continues to profit from the very extinctions that it drives and do nothing to mitigate the forces which are disrupting and destroying life elsewhere. Migrants from Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, India and surrounding regions whose intensive and precarious physical labours have built this very structure and keep this lush garden flourishing. Their labour are necessary to keep it a thriving fantasy for the affection of visitors. Ironically their low wages prevent them from participating in this spectacular city.

It is the very materialization of a memorial to an already vanishing world, and yet one of the earth’s possible future.  

Flowers care for their very own survival and beauty is their fate as much as their reason for continued co-existence. Flower’s have always had a strong meaning to humans. Flower have a strategy for survival; it’s aesthetics which attracts and coexists with both human and non-humans. Evolutionary trying to be more attractive to the animals and insects to spread their seeds. Always competing; for space, nutrients, sunshine, and water. They are specialized and have to confront each other; they also have ways of detecting each other and a method to compete with their surrounding neighbours - different matters of expression - which ensures and regulates the coexistence of maximum number of different species on the same planet. A flower in its mortality, fragility and complexity shows the closeness we share with other life forms.

Humans have been shaping nature for thousands of years, not only to suit our needs, but our most irrational desires. Beautiful flowers thrive on these desires, giving them an evolutionary advantage. The Solidago canadensis is an herbaceous perennial plant of the family Asteraceae. It is native to north-eastern and north-central parts of North America. An adventive species, having migrated both as an ornamental flower planted in gardens throughout Europe and Asia and commercially cultivated as a cut flower all over the world. Escaped from gardens it is an invasive plant, remarkably adaptable, putting native species at risk wherever they grow.

A reflection of the contiguity of life between species, my work amplifies the direction we are currently rendering. A last desperate try to cling on to the way of life that we have now. It seeks to instill a sense of wonder about this most amazing of phenomena we call “life”, making physical a poetic desire to conquer mortality.

Once a flower is cut, it is slowly dying. An artificial strategy for the flower to exist beyond its natural system. Soil nutrients replicated in a drip bag, humidity, air flow and artificial natural light to imitate the climate. An oxygen mask to supply carbon dioxide, tissue culture to genetically clone in vitro the flower over and over again so it can be grown and kept alive in continuum within the system. A soundscape of the system and acoustic contact microphones that can detect drought stress in the flower. A semi biological tamagotchi most of all dependent on a guardian that provides and control the natural aspects of the artificial system.

Our existential quest for our own immortality means leaving a distant reality behind and accept the impossibility of omnipotent immortality. Flowers and humans share the basic needs to survive within artificial enhancement systems, the questions is what is the quality of that life. It seeks to instill a sense of wonder about this most amazing of phenomena we call “life”. Making physical a poetic desire to conquer mortality.

[28] Humans’ Relationship to Flowers, Paper, Ephrat Huss, Kfir Bar Yosef and Michele Zaccai, 2018
[30] Solidago Canadensis, 2018
[31] In vitro propagation through plant tissue culture techniques, 2018
[32] Trees: Pinus sylvestris: An artistic-scientific observation system, 2018
Solidago life support, installation, Konstfack spring exhibition, 2018

[19] Solidago life support, installation, Konstfack spring exhibition, 2018
The solidago life support is in response to our own constructed specialised homes to live in extreme conditions. The fragility of flowers and their environments and in the systems they exist. How far are we going to push the limits of beings to survive artificially? When we leave the present and speculate on possible futures it is to engage with reflection, critique, provocation and inspiration. The view of (hu)man as the saviour of “nature” is a best naive. It is time to acknowledge the mortality of all life on this planet. Accepting that our natural milieu is damaged and our new nature, is a dynamic entity that is fated to change right along with us. Idealizing a distant reality holding on to the idea that this civilization can be saved is counterproductive. The crisis of being human in the surrealism of our time is a challenge of philosophical nature.

The uncertainty of our future and the rapid evolution of alternative ways for survival. Who benefits from the result of artificiality makes this political. Climate change will cause the likelihood of mass migration of humans and most probable will lead to extinction of various species. We can appreciate the non-humans not capable of migrating on its own regardless of climate, environment, countries or regions but flowers dear to us will continue to coexist in alternative ways. An expression of our skeptical fascination with technology and the different hopes, fears, promises, delusions and the movement of scientific discoveries from the laboratory into life. Are we ready to treat society as a living laboratory?

Our actual world is surrounded by an infinity of other possible worlds constantly expanding and diversifying thanks to the incessant world-constructing activity of human minds and hands. We don’t know how the future will be and we don’t know how to fix the planet and ensure our survival. The fictional nature of this project aim to invite people into a discussion and imagination of how things could be and to think about how we can overcome the feeling of hopelessness by renegotiate our values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviour. Mainly the idea for this possible future is to better understand the present and the crisis of our changing reality. It is hard to imagine how we go from here to there because we have to change our perception of reality which may collide with a preferable future.

However hard to define what that means and for whom. The brutal advances that shapes human minds. The fear of a lost world and our need to reinvent ourselves. As an artist I provide some visual clues but the viewer still has to imagine the world the design belong to and its politics, social relations and ideology. More importantly it is to reconsider what it means to be human and how to manage our changing relationship to nature and our new powers over life. The absurdity of our innovations and our role in shaping an ambiguous future, uncertain of its destiny.

[33] Speculative Everything Design Fiction and Social Dreaming, Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby, 2013
IN FLUX STRATEGY

SOLIDAGO LIFE SUPPORT

Humidifier

Oxygen mask

Acoustic contact microphone

Solidago canadensis

Nutrients drip bag
By using the story of the Solidago life support I want to show the effort and the commitment it takes with the sole purpose to sustain the life of a single flower artificially. To me this project is first and foremost about the crisis of being human in the surrealism of our time. It is time to accept that our environment is damaged and our new nature, is a dynamic entity that is fated to change with us. Idealizing a distant reality, holding on to the idea that our way of life can be saved is counterproductive. And this makes it a challenge of philosophical nature. Plato argued that to philosophize is to learn to die. To accept that this civilization is dead. The trouble now is that we must learn to die not as individuals, but as a civilization. The hope is that is that it can free us up from our need to try to keep things going the way they are going. The more desperately we try sustain the way of life that we have now the harder it’s going to be to adapt to and accept our accountability to the world we have created.

To get the visitors attention at spring exhibition I thought it was important to amplify and provoke the direction we are currently rendering. To create an installation that probes the feeling of uncertainty and caustic thoughts of accepting that we must change with the environment. The life support installation acknowledges vulnerability, interconnectedness and dependency as basic characteristics of life. A last desperate attempt to cling on to the way of life that we have now of sustaining life no matter what the quality of the existence.

The installation has layers. At first it was important to get people to be engage without knowing the story behind it. I think this was particularly successful during the exhibition. Visitors spent time sitting on the bench just enjoying the different medias presented, the flower moving in the wind, the humidity flowing over the flower and the soundscape which embodied the space. Comments of the visuals and aesthetics of the installation was majority of the feedback. The majority got the core of it, keeping the flower alive in a clinical and artificial environment. The next was their feelings and what emotions it evoked. A lot of comments of the feeling of unrest and being uncomfortable since it references hospital and laboratory environment. I somehow wanted to push the anxiety of our future and for some that somehow landed as too dystopian. For some the installation evoked feeling that lead to discussions, either with me or with other visitors which I sometimes overheard. A lot seemed to agree with me on that the challenge we have is more philosophical. In the context of being in a group exhibition the installation doomed a nihilistic future rather than engaging with some kind of hope. And this left visitors feeling anxiety and blame.

And my conclusion is that maybe that design is not the best way to address this. Although it created conversations and discussions it lacked a sense of hope and unity that together we can reshape what our future holds. Although the uncertainty makes it hard to grasp.

[34] Learning to Die in the Anthropocene: Reflections on the End of a Civilization, Roy Scranton, 2015
This project has unfolded with the help from many contributors. First and foremost thanks to my main tutors. Jenny Althoff for invaluable understanding and encouragement to believe and continue to evolve the project further I could not have done it without you. Anna Holmqvist for our talks and for pushing me in the right direction.

My writing tutor Pernilla Glaser for guiding me through the process and for ways of communicating my work. To Martin Avila, Katja Pettersson and Erik Widmark for your reflections and for challenging me. To Erik Berg for your interesting feedback and our discussion after the presentation.

Bo Westerlund, Thomas Laurien and Love Brooms for your thoughts and opinions. Mikael Lindström and Anders Telenius for your vast knowledge. Thanks to Robin Rådenman friend, photographer and sound artist for the collaboration. Everyone else working at Konstfack, workshops technicians, receptionists, janitors, caretakers and the library for your kindness and always being helpful when needed.

Thanks to my family, my late father Jan, my mother Anna-Lisa and my brother Martin for everything. To my friends for understanding. Last to my lovely and inspirational classmates, I couldn’t have done it without you. It has truly been a great time.


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[37] IN FLUX STRATEGY

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