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Planet and Carrot

Alicia Frankovich on Vegetative Idolatry

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Let's take two photographs as a starting point and a source code for what follows.

The first, *Mars* (2016), shows orange peels discarded on what appears to be a stained concrete floor. (Fig. 1) The discarded orange peel has been a recurring motif in Frankovich's artistic practice for some years, originating from her performance *The Opportune Spectator* (2012), which revolves around sport, visibility and exhaustion. To me, it is a striking and emotive visual icon of her work. *But why 'Mars'?* The declared overlay of the vibrant peel – snippets of biodegradable waste – with the pale red dust of the massive extraterrestrial planet that if ever habitable has long lost all traces of life, seems to force together qualities and ontologies that are dissonant if not outright incompatible – not without producing considerable quantities of visual pathos along the way.

The second, *World is Home Planet: This is Purple Carrot* (2016) at first glance looks like a coarse close-up of an interstellar dust and gas cloud: digitally coloured in purple to yellowish tones, it depicts bright agglomerates of matter interspersed with the dark depths of space. (Fig. 2, 3) A closer look and indeed its title reveal, however, that this may well also be the surface of a carrot. *A carrot?* This overlay, now of outer space sublimity and latest techno-scientific achievement with the modest root vegetable stuck in terrestrial soil, again creates a dissonance of register – this time ironic, even comical – that makes me wonder what is at issue here. And isn't the title also odd? Once more, the context seems to be one of *multiple planets* (if there was only one, why speak of a 'home' planet) and the carrot appears to self-identify, of all things, as a *spaceship* ("Mission control, this is Apollo")...

The conceptual space opened up by this strange superposition of earthly foodstuffs with an inter- and exoplanetary imaginary is the dimension of Alicia Frankovich's artistic practice that will be considered in this essay, which focuses on Frankovich's 2017 solo exhibition *OUTSIDE BEFORE BEYOND* at the Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen, Düsseldorf, in conjunction with the performance *World is Home Planet* (2016) for the 12th Performance Project of

LISTE Art Fair, Basel, and the aforementioned *The Opportune Spectator*; other works will be mentioned in passing. As we will see, that conceptual space at once comprises an Earth in the Anthropocene on which no ‘Outside Before Beyond’ – no elsewhere – is left, and the idea of a cosmic cinema that in some sense restitutes precisely this ‘Outside Before Beyond.’ And it harbors acts of vegetative idolatry that nobody could possibly have anticipated.

### *I. Farming on Earth is like Farming on Mars*

In the 2010s, Alicia Frankovich’s performances typically engaged in analyses of neoliberal working societies around issues of leisure, sport, mobility and bodies in public space – see works such as *The Opportune Spectator*, but also *Free time* (2013), *Defending Plural Experiences* (2014) or *Sisyphus Now* (2014). Carefully cast groups of performers here function as sample populations whose collective body is traversed by super-individual social forms and contemporary modes of behavior and collective movement. In this setup, however, and without an obvious motivation, something very different starts to take root: the both incomprehensible and nagging sense that we find ourselves *on a planet* and *inside a planetary system* and that the Earth is in fact not a

singular object but instead must be contextualized in *a multiplicity of other habitable or inhabitable planets* inside and outside the solar system. This exoplanetarianism, as one may call it, is prefigured in works that seem to disarticulate – and hence foreground – the connection of body and planet by undoing the body’s alignment with gravity and positioning it in grotesque postures and angles against the flooring – as in the disarray of the strapping performance *Lungeing Chambon* (2009) or the musicians that bow and play lying down in *Floor Resistance* (2011). Works like *Medea* (2010) and *Man Walked on the Moon* (2011) come to mind too: plants hang upside down in the air; a lunar disk suspended from the ceiling is dragged around in a gesture of walking. It is only in the last couple of years, however, that Frankovich’s exoplanetarianism has come into full bloom. In *OUTSIDE BEFORE BEYOND* it has become entirely paradigmatic.

In the darkened single-room exhibition space of the Düsseldorf Kunstverein, one came upon an ‘optical’ situation that vaguely invoked a planetary system. The ‘central star’ of a robotic spotlight in the center moved along a circular path of visualizations, beaming one by one at a sparse array of objects, images and textiles – a kinetic sculpture of sorts, especially where the beam hit *The Blush* (2015), a round, possibly planet-shaped standing element, and *Even the Jellyfish, it’s perfect* (2017), a

plexiglass ball filled with gym chalk that created beautifully outlandish optical projections. Once a cycle was complete, a 2-channel video was projected onto string curtains on either side of the space. Framed by sunrise and sunset, the first channel represents a ‘day’ setting and focuses onto a planet’s surface, while channel two represents a ‘night’ setting and looks into outer space.

Let’s stick for now with channel one, composed by and large of two sources. The first feels like footage from a film entitled ‘the secret life of plants’ and features plants and flowers illuminated by an artificial sun of film lighting that picks them up from their cosmic darkness, creating quickly moving shadows that gave the impression of a day’s sunlight played in fast motion, while in fact this erratic sun itself keeps moving around. As if not meant to be looked at, the plants are revealed in their existence – clinging to their harboring planet and entirely ‘caught by surprise’ –, beautiful and often shivering slightly from the invisible planetary gas atmosphere that remains foreign to them. The second source is footage expanding on the LISTE performance *World is Home Planet*: five performers with expressionless faces progressed through various heap-style and symbolic formations – often laid out on the floor – that often made no less vegetative an impression than the planets with

which they were cross-cut. While fruit and vegetables played a core part in the performance (see below), *World is Home Planet* was also exoplanetarianist in its own right. Likewise devoid of natural lighting, the venue at Volkshaus Basel created a feeling of outer space vastness interspersed by local stars (spots) that shone light on a planetary surface. A surface, that is, *littered with discarded orange peels*. (Fig. 4) The performers being calm orange-eating creatures, they throw the peels down and perform on the floor amongst them.

It seems, then, that we are indeed back in the scenario of *Mars* (2016). So why this overlay of fruit peel and the surface of an uninhabited and uninhabitable planet? –

Laying things out on surfaces or planes is not an uncommon procedure for Frankovich. As the title of her 2009 work *A Plane for Behavers* suggests, and as has been practiced in performances like *Defending Plural Experiences* (2014) at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne and, most extensively, in *Free Time* (2013) at the Palais de Tokyo, Paris and the Art Gallery of NSW, Sydney, laying behaviors and social forms out on the plane of a museum's or white cube's floor (Fig. 5) – not entirely unlike Lars von Trier's films *Dogville* (2003) and *Manderlay* (2005) – decontextualizes and thus dissects them, puts them on display and scrutinizes them in ways they are usually

spared where they are embedded in their everyday contexts. Frankovich puts to work the analytical power of the white cube's surfaces in their abstractness, artificiality and sterility that, notwithstanding all (justified) criticism, remain a strong suit of that presentational format.

The ultimate degree of these qualities, however, is not even found in a terrestrial surface, but in the surface of an inhabitable planet. A living thing cannot be subjected to a higher degree of abstractness, artificiality and sterility than laying it out on the surface of, say, Mars. Mars' pale red dust is the *ultimate analytical surface* (Fig. 6), because it strips things bare in an ultimate way. In relocating *Free Time* from the Palais de Tokyo to Mars, the performers would be stripped bare by way of immediately dropping down to the floor and suffocating, as Mars lacks an oxygen atmosphere. There they lie. And of course not only air, but also everything else that enables the leisure activities of *Free Time* on Earth is missing on the analytical surface of Mars – from a biosphere of photosynthesizing vegetation to highly differentiated *Homo sapiens* labor societies to industrialized agriculture. The more things are decontextualized and stripped of their enabling conditions, of their support system, however, the more that support system (which usually stays put in the background) *is foregrounded and becomes visible*.

The same holds for the still-fresh fruit peels, lying there in their ultimate exposedness on the surface of Mars. What a proximate support system that could have produced the respective oranges looks like is demonstrated by instances of *extraterrestrial gardening* – from growing food in the International Space Station,<sup>1</sup> to China’s Chang’e-4 spacecraft, which includes a small greenhouse that recently grew cotton seeds as well as “potato, Arabidopsis and rapeseeds, plus a few fruit fly eggs and yeast” on the Moon,<sup>2</sup> to future projects for building up vegetation on Mars.<sup>3</sup> (Fig. 7–9) (Not to speak of Ridley Scott’s *The Martian* [2015]). In putting the peels on Mars, then, *what is actually put on display are these support systems, the functionality of these extraterrestrial greenhouses*, which have to meticulously control factors like gravity, temperature, atmospheric and soil composition, nutrient flow, radiation and toxin levels, and the fresh water supply to keep the plant matter alive. Thus it is no accident that Frankovich’s *Defending Plural Experiences: MOCAP Creation* is in part set in a zoological butterfly enclosure that resembles a greenhouse, clearly reminding us of the *Biosphere 2* project.<sup>4</sup> (Fig 10, 11)

Extraterrestrial greenhouses in turn require a habitable planet and frankly an entire history of life, multicellularity, cultural and knowledge evolution (not least of ecology, the Earth

sciences, and aerospace engineering) to come about. And it is indeed towards *this* planet that I believe Frankovich's impetus is ultimately directed. Oranges and carrots, fruit and vegetables, exemplify an essentially *anthropogenic* biosphere<sup>5</sup> that has become interior to the agricultural niche *Homo sapiens* have developed and expanded for some 10,000 years and which today, in the Anthropocene, has become planetary in scale and leaves no terrestrial ecosystem untouched. By the same token, however, life support systems on Earth are in danger of collapsing. In the vocabulary of Frankovich's work, one could say that the fruit peels *here on Earth* are increasingly in the position of *being on Mars*, that their agricultural niche is increasingly exposed and scrutinized on an ever-more 'red' planet Earth.<sup>6</sup> Many species – both in the biosphere and the agrosphere<sup>7</sup> – have already lost their life support system on Earth and gone extinct.

*This is why farming on Earth today has become like farming on Mars:* As captured by the classic Spaceship Earth metaphor,<sup>8</sup> all parameters of the planet's life support systems today have to be consciously and actively managed.<sup>9</sup> So it is true that the threatened loss of the life support system is the very circumstance that renders it visible. And visible it better become where the ecology of the Earth is turning into a 'spaceman /spacewoman' ecology,<sup>10</sup> *i.e. the ecology of an uninhabitable exoplanet.*

We now have to terraform *the Earth* to be able to continue living on it.

## *II. Cosmic Cinema is the Fruit of Cabbage*

The image *World is Home Planet: This is purple carrot* mentioned in the intro is itself part of *OUTSIDE BEFORE BEYOND*, which translates a live performance to an exhibition. Originally a prop in *World is Home Planet*, it is here included in the middle section of the installation where it is displayed next to *Fruit and Legs: Schwarzwurzeln* (2016) – another (skinned) root vegetable that is however more clearly identifiable. Together, they function as a point of transition between the ‘day’ and the ‘night’ channel of the projection.

Frankovich has been investigating the visualizing quality of fruit and vegetable skin rather heavily since her ‘turn’ to exoplanetarianism. It played a part not just in Basel and Düsseldorf; roughly at the same time as *OUTSIDE BEFORE BEYOND*, it was also at the core of her Le Case d’Arte Milan exhibition *Frutta e Gambe* (2017), which showed repeating sets of images of (in part peeled) fruit and vegetable surfaces that resembled outer space imagery, but also evoked other qualities such as bruised legs or human skin. On the floor, of course,

orange peels. Later, in the billboard pieces of *After Blue Marble* (2018) at the Kunsthaus Bregenz, other foodstuffs come in as well: now it is the microphotography of probiotic water kefir that creates the impression of outer space sublimity. (Fig. 12, 13)

To see what is at stake here<sup>11</sup>, let's start by noting that astronomy and cosmology are contemporary forms not of physics, but of *metaphysics*. Their objects of investigation have no physical reality in the world we observers live in; they are located at other points in space-time, be it the deep past, deep future, or the cosmic elsewhere that is physically dissociated from the Earth through the sheer expansion of space. Hence they cannot be studied directly, but only via *traces*, such as electromagnetic radiation landing on Earth from outer space – a method I have elsewhere called ‘transcendental empiricism,’ which allows metaphysics today to be a *scientific* metaphysics (that is, one not based on Kant's pure reason or religious imagination, etc.).<sup>12</sup>

That metaphysical phenomena *are* studied today more successfully than ever before – providing us with an ever better understanding of big history from the Big Bang to the decay of all material structures in this universe – implies that the present, far from overcoming metaphysics, is in fact a golden age of metaphysical thought – a heyday of thinking the “*great outdoors*, the *absolute* outside,”<sup>13</sup> of which Frankovich's exhibition title

*OUTSIDE BEFORE BEYOND* tells us. This has also been a major issue for the new, ‘speculative’ realisms of the past decade in continental philosophy<sup>14</sup> that have not least played a considerable role in art theory of the past few years.<sup>15</sup> So does Frankovich adopt the Meillassouxian project of breaking the ‘correlation’ and restituting the big outside?<sup>16</sup>

Not quite. Actually, quite the contrary. By having the cosmological ‘great outdoors’ – her title *OUTSIDE BEFORE BEYOND* – printed *onto a carrot* (Fig. 14) and associating the products of scientific metaphysics with a vegetable’s skin, Frankovich makes it plain that the pursuit of scientific metaphysics is nothing but a *physical practice* on the soil of the Earth, and that, from the Big Bang to the deep time of geology, its objects exist nowhere in the present universe *but* as scientists’ cognitive structures on the Earth in the Anthropocene. Frankovich’s take on scientific metaphysics is hence clearly informed by the current New Materialisms (Bennett, Barad, Braidotti etc.), perhaps even by a trace of Latourian Science Studies.<sup>17</sup>

But there is something even more insightful – and hilarious – going on here. The hilarious part is that by addressing scientific metaphysics *via food*, Frankovich seems to highlight the metaphysicians’ vegetative systems. Following Aristotle’s *De*

*Anima*, the *vegetative soul* is the ‘lowest’ part of the soul responsible for living beings’ metabolism and reproduction.<sup>18</sup> While animals and humans are characterized by the additional operations of a *sensitive* and a *rational* soul, respectively, plants are purely vegetative souls and the vegetative soul is what humans have in common with the plant world (reflected in the common etymology of the ‘vegetative’ and the ‘vegetable’ [Lat. *vegetare*, ‘to enliven’], rendering us plant-like where we ‘vegetate’ or endure a ‘vegetative state’). Frankovich comically shortcuts the *vegetative soul of the scientific metaphysicians* with the domain of thought that has traditionally enjoyed the highest philosophical dignity: the supersensible, metaphysical world behind or above our finite existence – once God, now the Jurassic and the Big Bang. While the scientific metaphysicians in their high-tech labs and observatories produce the metaphysical world, Frankovich’s version of science studies wantonly chooses to see only slime-mould-like growth, respiration, metabolism (Fig. 15) – the micro-worlds of bacteria in the metaphysician’s bellies,<sup>19</sup> of water kefir and chewed up fruit inside of them –, brushing aside their sensitive and thinking souls and depicting them as if in a purely vegetative state. That’s the humor. But there is also a historical underpinning to this, namely that it is indeed the *history of agriculture* that forms the cognitive and material context in which

astronomy and cosmology first arise – not least answering to the informational requirements of growing food, the need for calendars etc. – and in which scientific metaphysics starts to be practiced.<sup>20</sup> To exaggerate: The metaphysics of standard-model cosmology through which we contextualize our lives today ultimately comes to us *as much through our crops and fields as through our telescopes*. (Fig. 16) That’s the history.

Part of that history is the cultic and religious impact of astronomy,<sup>21</sup> which has survived into our time as astrology and, not least, the repertoire of stellar constellations it is built upon. Now turning to the second channel of the projection in *OUTSIDE BEFORE BEYOND* – the ‘night’-setting – this is what we are faced with. Given that the signs of the zodiac are the purest of anthropomorphisms, what should we make of it if that projection looks like the Hubble Deep Field *set in motion*, with animated star constellations performing little action sequences, from visualized cell growth to a gymnast’s moves to a spaceship landing to a display of fireworks? (Fig. 17–18) Keeping the straight face of the aesthetic sublime of the Deep Field while in fact administering considerable doses of silliness (a hatching chick as constellation, fireworks, Simone Biles): is this Frankovich rubbing it in that we ultimately remain stuck in a

terrestrial hall of mirrors of our own making?

Anthropomorphism gone haywire? Realism impossible?

Maybe. But there are a couple of clues in the video that may suggest something else. First, it is not entirely convincing to think of the projected action sequences as ‘constellations,’ for where the constellations are based on anthropomorphisms projected onto an otherwise correct depiction of the visible night sky, adding fictitious motions to that sky does not seem to make a whole lot of sense. Also, notice that, besides many other terrestrial objects, one of the moving sequences *shows the surface of the Earth itself*, the outline of its continents. (Fig. 19) But then we should perhaps not take this as a projection from the Earth into the starry skies *but literally as the image of the Earth floating through outer space*. And this is actually how German astronomer Felix Eberty (1812–1884) looked at things. In the two short volumes of his *Die Gestirne und die Weltgeschichte* (1846f.),<sup>22</sup> Eberty spelled out the consequences of the fact that, given that the speed of light is finite, the longer rays of light travel through the universe, the older the events they show us – the further our telescopes focus into the depths of outer space, the further they also allow us to look back in time – which is a core condition of pursuing the scientific metaphysics of cosmology. Conversely, looking back at the Earth from a remote location, *one sees the Earth’s past*.

Were one to modulate one's distance to the Earth at will, one could zoom through the planet's entire history from the beginning up to today. This is what one may call *cosmic cinema* (Fig. 20) – the idea of an archive in flight, an archive stored at the speed of light in the sheer vastness of space, which not only left its mark in early science fiction but also inspired fields like spiritism, futurist theatre and Bauhaus glass architecture.<sup>23</sup> Frankovich makes this tangible by projecting her video on semi-translucent free-hanging string curtains that – as one walks around them – visualize the passage of light through space itself as much as the image contained within it.

Taking Ebert's perspective performs a reversal that I believe is a key to the 'night' setting. Seen from far 'Outside,' *the Earth is now the exoplanet – an exoplanet among exoplanets*, in fact, as the plural in the title of Frankovich's 2018 exhibition *Exoplanets* at Monash University Museum of Art, Melbourne, suggests.<sup>24</sup> Photographs of Earth such as the 1972 'blue marble' (Fig. 21) – to which Frankovich alludes in *After Blue Marble* – and the 1990 'pale blue dot' (Fig. 22) are so fascinating precisely because they introduce us to that exoplanetarian view. Nietzsche already felt the vertigo of this decentering: "What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we not

plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? is there still any up or down? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space?”<sup>25</sup> But then, a major implication of this outlook is the realization that *it is also we who are the aliens*. This self-alienation whereby all exoplanetary imagining *is folded back into the conceptualization of this Earth* is crucial in Frankovich’s recent works, and it links her exoplanetarianism to xenofeminist attempts to develop a positive notion and underline the potentially liberating effects of alienation.<sup>26</sup>

### *III. A Vegetative Exoplanetary Community of Worship (A Speculative Proposition)*

A latecomer to Alicia Frankovich’s work, I first saw the show *Heat death (crazy from the sweat)* at MAVRA artspace in Berlin in October 2015, where I gazed for a while at prints of *Kusozu: the death of a noble lady and the decay of her body*, an anonymous nine-part 18th-century Japanese watercolor series that shows a woman’s artfully decaying body, eaten by foxes and birds, that leaves nothing behind but fragments of her skeleton and, ultimately, a Buddhist memorial stone – *when a pack of athletes, runners and skaters, crashed into the artspace*, which, already full, was

all of a sudden bursting with bodies. (Fig. 23) Heavily gasping, sweating and radiating their bodily warmth, the vital presence of Alicia Frankovich's performers in her time-based contribution to the show – a variation of *The Opportune Spectator* (2012/15) – took me and everyone else by surprise. Given their state of exhaustion, the athletes must have circled the MAVRA neighborhood in the dark for some time without us knowing. The performance we had thus missed was now documented in its vital functions, in the exuberance of vegetative souls (the performers were otherwise mute). Oranges were then shared amongst the pack and the audience, peeled, and eaten. In an air full of the scent of oranges everyone sat and stood quietly, chewing and swallowing orange pulp, all stomachs secretly starting to digest. This again brought in the vegetative dimension, but the passing around of the oranges also activated the cultural memory of religious ritual and ceremony – especially the breaking of bread for the hungry,<sup>27</sup> or even the Eucharist – and immediately created a worshipful sense of communality at the MAVRA space, an ephemeral community of strangers, of vegetative souls. The peels were dropped on the floor. As people left, they remained there, scattered, now fully visible, a final image of *en passant* beauty. (Fig. 24) While Frankovich's performance at the time struck me as a contrast to the uncanny

post-mortem memorialism of the *Kusozu*, I later realized the contrast was merely apparent. For not only were the discarded orange peels themselves the traces of something that had irrevocably passed, they were also instant *nature mortes*, locking into the Baroque tradition of the fruit still life and transporting its symbolism of finitude and the vanity of (post-)human existence into Frankovich's performance. This reverberation is no doubt part of why they seem so inexplicably moving to me. The symbolism is of course grounded in the material reality of perishable goods like fruit and vegetables (a problem not least for a world economy where travel routes require durability, a problem that was not solved until the 20th century by the refrigerators that deliver fruit from around the world, cooled and slightly frozen in time – little everyday *nature mortes*, as it were). And it is grounded in the vulnerability and finitude of our own lives. The vegetative are the mortal souls.<sup>28</sup>

These traits of *The Opportune Spectator* – its relation to finitude, to the vegetative and to fruit, to religious ritual, and to practices of communality – reappear in *World is Home Planet* (and hence in *OUTSIDE BEFORE BEYOND*). Not only did the 'vegetative' performers hold another communal orange Eucharist with the audience, and even deepen a sense of communality by performing various unity symbols with their

collective body. And not only did the work feature, besides the remnant peels, a literal fruit still life on a table, singled out by a spotlight as if it was a planet illuminated by some star in space. It also featured two sections where images were held up in a ritual as sacred objects – among them *World is Home Planet: This is purple carrot*, but also patterned fabrics died with vegetable and plant matter, accompanied by a deictic verbal redoubling: “this is red cabbage,” “this is hibiscus,” etc. Perhaps it would go too far to say that these were Shroud of Turin-style ‘Shrouds of Vegetables’ – but they did not fall far short of that. The ritual was rounded off by the collective utterance of the motto and title, “world is home planet.” All this of course occurred in the exoplanetarian setting described above.

From these elements as well as from the material in sections I and II, and summing them up, what I see as a latent conceptual paradigm in the works of Alicia Frankovich discussed here can now be made explicit. This paradigm is the speculative proposition of a VEGETATIVE EXOPLANETARY COMMUNITY OF WORSHIP.

What does that mean?

I believe that what emerges from Frankovich’s works is the idea of a community that is neither a utopia nor a dystopia, an idea that is neither essentially descriptive (an accurate

representation a current state of affairs) nor proscriptive (a policy proposal) but perhaps best described as an *image of thought* for the Anthropocene – a speculative tool created by art to think about and live in the present (akin to but not identical with Haraway’s impetus of a ‘Story Telling for Earthly Survival’).<sup>29</sup> The strategic overlay of foodstuffs and planets that puzzled me with regards to *Mars* and *World is Home Planet: This is purple carrot* at the beginning of this text is essentially Alicia Frankovich’s artistic means to articulate that proposition. So, what can we say about that community based on the outlines presented in Frankovich’s work plus some minor extrapolations?

First, the proposed community is VEGETATIVE quite simply in the sense that what it aims at (through however cognitive means) is the vegetative, and that what it wants is to do justice to and nurture the world population of vegetative souls. ‘Vegetative’ signals a host of things: the foregrounding of, and the organization of the community around, food production (and thus a common knowledge of the breeding and genetic engineering of plant matter); a vegetative justice that makes sure every vegetative soul at all times receives the calories and nutrients it requires; dealing with issues of food and health, i.e. with quality control, good diet, healthy lifestyle and ultimately with food *as* medication – think of *Exoplanets: Probiotics Probiotics!*

(2018) –, which is the point where the vegetative entirely converges with the dimension of health care. Vegetative justice ultimately implies an averaging out of all differences in life, health and population statistics between all parts of the vegetative community – the community of vegetative souls that exist in a special dimension that is entirely beyond perception and reason, in a layer of reality that consists entirely of growth, respiration, metabolism... Give the vegetative soul what the vegetative soul is due! Make it a happy plant!

Second, the community is EXOPLANETARY, for it is all about the Earth as an exoplanet. It has no business with the idea of space colonization (which will always remain a bad fiction). Instead, it is a hardcore techno-scientific vision in which *the Mars greenhouse on an Earth-become-exoplanet* (via terminal ecological crisis) is the basis and the icon (recognizing the Earth as the planetary petri dish that it is and starting to govern it like one) – not a universalized biodynamic eco-village ‘living in harmony with the planet,’ etc. *No*: this community has reached a maximum degree of *alienation* from the Earth, as it looks at itself from far outside and *perceives itself as an alien community*. Exoplanetary gardening marks a maximally alienated form of existence. What’s more, while the members highlight their vegetative souls, these vegetative souls are themselves aliens (or

exoplanets<sup>30</sup>) inside of them – aliens to their subjectivity, their consciousness, their senses. The community has understood *that pleasing this alien, caring for this alien*, is the crucial political task they are faced with. They even realize that their vegetibility is ultimately *a kind of slime mould inside of them* – Frankovich’s great performance *Corpus* (2016) comes to mind<sup>31</sup> (Fig. 25) – an only temporal community of single-celled organisms (the majority of which do not even contain human DNA<sup>32</sup>); and that their service to the alien is their way of worshipping the streams of *ultravegetative* single-cellular life that throughout billions of years precede and succeed the short spell of multicellularity into which their lives have fallen.

Finally, the envisioned community is one of WORSHIP in the sense of being the exoplanetary techno-scientific atheist equivalent or reimagining of the ancient agricultural religions – their gods, their prayers, their rituals of fruitfulness and rain, their rituals of harvest. In that pagan atheist exoplanetary gardening religion, ‘worship’ signals involvement in an utterly *existential* activity – an activity that is mindful of our finitude – that satisfies the aliens of the vegetative souls and that is executed in formalized (= ritualistic) ways under the eyes of the whole 7.5 billion-member community, *out there in the open* – on the ultimate analytical surface of Mars, as it were. Transparency

is key: it is the transparency of the exoplanetary greenhouse, Spaceship Exoearth. *This transparency* is evoked or at issue in the sacred objects of ritual. Taking up the Christian example (it could be any), what is at issue is the materiality of the host, the sacramental bread, in its fully transparent production – not the host as *carrier* of a symbol or the transsubstantiated body of Christ. No no, the host *is food*. (Fig. 26) But the worshipful quality of the community also and more importantly entails that *every kind of food is a host*, is consumed as a host (a host that communicates nothing but its own production process), and that all eating is of the status of the Eucharist.

Food is, one may conclude, the *idol* of that worship – as the idol is defined precisely as a symbol or object of worship that has assumed an independent reality, i.e. that has lost any relation to the metaphysical or supersensible, and is now purely of this world (of *this* exoplanet) – just as in Frankovich’s community of worship, where nothing exists but the materiality of foodstuffs, a holy obsession with vegetative souls.

Do with that speculative proposition what you like!

As unlikely as this may sound, however, living the vegetative exoplanetary community of worship is thus most certainly an act of ‘vegetative idolatry.’ And as I hope I have

shown, the orange peels that are ubiquitous in Alicia Frankovich's work are the very cypher of that act.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Scoles, Sara: “NASA is learning the best way to grow food in space. Can gardens help astronauts go farther?” *Popular Science*, June 6, 2018, retrieved from:

<https://www.popsci.com/nasa-growing-food-in-space#page-3>

<sup>2</sup> Moskvitch, Katia: “China has grown plants on the Moon. What happens next?”

*Wired*, January 6, 201), retrieved from: <https://www.wired.co.uk/article/china-grows-first-plants-on-the-moon>

<sup>3</sup> Candanosa, Roberto Molar: “Growing green on the red planet,” *ChemMatters*, April/May 2017, pp. 5–7.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Höhler, Sabine: “The Environment as a life support system: The case of Biosphere 2,” *History and Technology* 26, no. 1 (March 2010), pp. 39–58.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Ellis, Erle C.: “Ecology in an anthropogenic biosphere,” *Ecological Monographs* 85, no. 3 (August 1, 2015), pp. 287–331.

<sup>6</sup> See Wallace-Wells, David: “The Uninhabitable Earth: Famine, economic collapse, a sun that cooks us: What climate change could wreak – sooner than you think,”

*New York Magazine*, July 10, 2017, retrieved from:

<http://nymag.com/intelligencer/2017/07/climate-change-earth-too-hot-for-humans.html>

<sup>7</sup> See Kolbert, Elizabeth: *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History*, New York:

Henry Holt and Company, New York, 2014; Gruber, Karl: “Agrobiodiversity: The living library,” *Nature* 544 (April 26, 2017), p. 8.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Fuller, Richard Buckminster: *Operating Manual for Spaceship Earth*, Müller, Baden, 2013.

<sup>9</sup> See Steffen, Will et al., “Planetary boundaries: Guiding human development on a changing planet,” *Science* 347, 1259855 (2015).

<sup>10</sup> A formulation obviously inspired by Boulding, Kenneth: “The Economics of the coming spaceship Earth,” in Jarrett, Henry (ed.), *Environmental Quality in a Growing Economy*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1966, pp. 3–14.

<sup>11</sup> I want to rule out the possibility that Frankovich simply enacts the old trope of a significant ‘likeness’ or an ontological ‘equivalence’ between micro- and macrocosmos – simply because that trope is *baseless*: there exists no single causal principle of phenomena at all scales that would account for the similitude of e.g. cosmic macrostructures, a spider’s web and the neuronal structures of the brain. No, these similarities are superficial and entirely insignificant.

<sup>12</sup> See Falb, Daniel: *Geospekulationen. Metaphysik Für Die Erde Im Anthropozän*, Merve Verlag, Berlin, 2019, pp. 30–32, 79–91.

<sup>13</sup> Meillassoux, Quentin: *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, trans. Ray Brassier, Bloomsbury, London, 2012, p. 7.

<sup>14</sup> For an overview see, e.g., Avanesian, Armen (ed.): *Realismus jetzt: spekulative Philosophie und Metaphysik für das 21. Jahrhundert*, trans. Ronald Voullié, Merve Verlag, Berlin, 2013.

<sup>15</sup> See, e.g., Heidenreich, Stefan: “Freeportism as style and ideology: Post-Internet and Speculative Realism,” parts I, II, *e-flux journal* 71 (March 2016), 73 (May 2016); Malik, Suhail: “Reason to destroy contemporary art”, *Spike Magazine* 37 (March, 2013); and the “Speculation” issue of *Texte zur Kunst*, no. 93 (March 2014).

<sup>16</sup> Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, pp. 50f.

<sup>17</sup> cf. Bennett, Jane: *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, Duke University Press, Durham, NC, and London, 2010; Barad, Karen: *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, Duke University Press, Durham, NC, and London, 2007; Harman, Graham: *Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects*, Open Court, Chicago, 2002; Latour, Bruno and Woolgar, Steve: *Laboratory Life: The Construction of Scientific Facts*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1986.

<sup>18</sup> “[O]ne must speak first of nourishment and generation; for the nutritive [= vegetative] soul also belongs to the others as well. This is both the first and most common capacity of the soul, in virtue of which living belongs to all living things, a capacity whose functions are generating and making use of nutrition.” (415a23–27)

“The capacities we mentioned were: the nutritive faculty, the perceptual faculty, the desiderative faculty, the faculty of motion with respect to place, and the faculty of understanding. The nutritive faculty alone belongs to plants” (414a30–34) Aristotle, *De Anima*, trans. Christopher John Shields, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2016.

<sup>19</sup> See Gallagher, James: “More than half your body is not human,” *BBC News*, April 10, 2018, retrieved from: <https://www.bbc.com/news/health-43674270>

<sup>20</sup> See Pannekoek, Anton: *A History of Astronomy*, Interscience Publishers, New York, 1961, pp. 19–28.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 36–48.

<sup>22</sup> Eberty, Felix: *Die Gestirne Und Die Weltgeschichte*, 2 vols. Verlag August Schulz, Breslau, 1846f.

<sup>23</sup> See Clausberg, Karl: *Zwischen den Sternen-Lichtbildarchive: was Einstein und Uexküll, Benjamin und das Kino der Astronomie des 19. Jahrhunderts verdanken*, Akademie Verlag, Berlin, 2006; Jampolski, Michail B.: “Die Utopie vom kosmischen Schauspiel und der Kinematograph,” *Beiträge zur Film und Fernsehwissenschaft* 34 (1988), pp. 177–191.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Frankovich’s *Exoplanets: Probiotics Probiotics!* (2018).

<sup>25</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich: *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs: Translated, with Commentary by Walter Kaufmann*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, Random House, New York, 1974, p. 181.

<sup>26</sup> “The construction of freedom involves not less but more alienation; alienation is the labour of freedom’s construction.” Laboria Cuboniks, *Xenofeminism: A Politics for Alienation* (n.p.), retrieved from: <https://www.laboriacuboniks.net/>. Cf. Helen Hester, *Xenofeminism, Theory Redux* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2018).

<sup>27</sup> Isaiah 58:7.

<sup>28</sup> Aristotle in *De Anima* 413a4–5 holds that the soul is not separable from the perishable body; however, he seems to make some sort of exception for parts of the intelligible soul (see 430a23–25).

<sup>29</sup> To cite the title of Fabrizio Terranova’s 2016 documentary *Donna Haraway: Story Telling for Earthly Survival*. Haraway herself also uses terms like “multispecies

storytelling” and “speculative fabulation”; see Haraway, Donna: *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, Duke University Press, Durham, NC, and London, 2016, p. 10.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. the audio of *Exoplanets: Probiotics Probiotics!* (2018).

<sup>31</sup> In *Corpus* (see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k2-DY4sP-os>), spots swipe over a huge slanting plane of seatings filled with the performance’s student audience who, immobilized and roughed up by being subjected to seemingly unconscious bodies physically rolling over them towards the stage, appeared more like a bed of single cellular organisms or algae than people – another instance of a combined planetarization and vegetalization.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Fn. 19.

# Images



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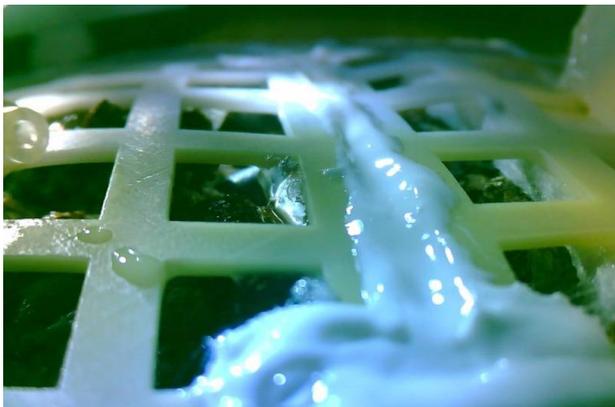
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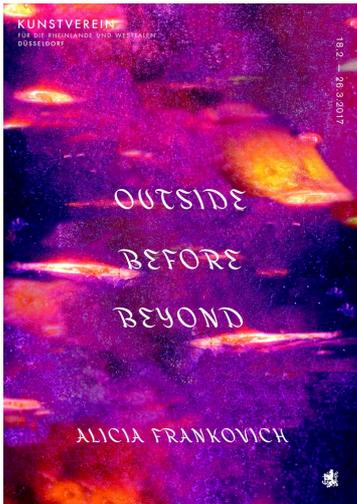
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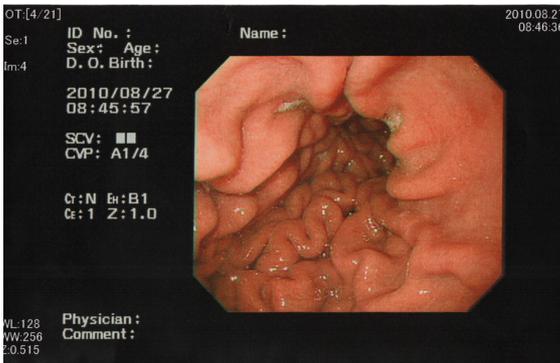
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