

# Seed Scarification: Serious Taking

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Bartaku

The following encompasses short reflections on the becoming and situating of *Seed Scarification: Serious Taking*, a mixed media installation for *Tanz der Dinge/ Things that dance*, the 2018 annual symposium of the *Gesellschaft für Tanzforschung*, at the Institut für Sport und Sportwissenschaft (IfSS) of the Karlsruhe Institute für Technologie, Germany.

March 29, 2018. I provide a short description of my archive in the proposal for participating in the exhibition part of the symposium:

[...] a small seed scarification<sup>1</sup> installation would be part of this archive. It consists of a self-contained space with Baroa b. appleberry-seed being exposed to pre-recorded sounds from self-strangling humans, producing Baroa b. essence sounds – that originate from a speaker.

## The Space

On Oct. 4<sup>th</sup> the “Kampfsportraum” (fight room) is shown to me by a symposium collaborator: this is the point of departure for the assembling of the installation.

Upon entering, we touch upon semi-soft floor mats, a mirror-wall on the entire left side and brown wooden panels that cover the wall on the right. Twenty-two steps from door to back wall. Eight steps from mirror wall to wood wall. A white painted brick wall connects wood and mirror. Young humans move their bodies on quick beats. Their salty liquids leak into the tissue of the stingy yellow and steel blue mats that cover the entire floor surface. We remove bodies, tunes and mats, to reveal a concrete floor that is painted green. It is divided into sections by white lines according to a line protocol that is unknown to me. This – now stripped – space still smells strongly human. The type of presence that has been growing over time, layer after layer, in the in-between spaces of the reflecting wall: a geological formation of gazes.

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1 Seed scarification: techniques to overcome seed dormancy.

## Air ID

The one-plate-stove rests on top of a left-over wooden pedestal. It stands just left from the center of the back-end of the space, 111 cm from the white wall. Aronia m. Babe's<sup>2</sup> red-to-yellow-to-green colored leaves and purple black fruits fill one third of the pot. Tomorrow, an hour before the arrival of the first visitors, the water will be brought to boil. Then, the essential compounds will mix with the air in the space and permeate the pores of the floors, walls and mirror spirits, skins and minds. In the latter, a mood of fruity familiarity might emerge.

I made use of *smoke* for a similar transformation purpose at the Pixelache Festival in 2016. The notebook says:

*After a while the berryapple-molecules filled the space. Some visitors instantly felt what the microbiologist from Riga said some time before: the Aronia berry is not a berry. It is an apple.*



Fig. 1: Bartaku, Aronia Overture: From berryjuice-dried air pipes and tongues to seeds, installation view, *Symposium Tanz der Dinge/Things that dance*, Karlsruhe, 2018. © Bartaku.

2 Aronia m.: refers to the plant species *Aronia melanocarpa* (Michx.) Elliot (see: The International Plant Names Index <http://www.ipni.org>). Babe and Baroa b. both refer to *Baroa belaobara*, which is how Bartaku feels that the species would wish to be named since September 11, 2013.

## Growth Light

“I will switch off the neon-lights. Can you hold the module and move through the space with it? Just imagine it is your light sabre.” The space is changing appearance whilst being lit up in various places. I tilt the aluminum frame slightly and align it with one of the white lines on the green floor. The black power cord cannot move between tape and concrete. It passes the left-speaker and disappears under the wooden panel until it reaches the socket in the top right corner. The combined fifty-two red and twelve blue LEDs are absorbed by some materials in the space and reflected by others. The result is an overall spatial dominance of a color that is close to what is generally referred to as *magenta*.

I have used similar LED lights in *Red Light Strict* seed-growth experiments at Aalto University in 2016. Would certain amounts of artificial red and blue lead to different concentrations of dark plant pigments? The protocol in the paper “Callus induction and biomass accumulation in vitro in explants from chokeberry” (Calalb et. al. 2014) is followed: the seeds are scarified by scratching their surface with sandpaper; a way of mimicking the digestive system of birds and deer. But the seeds do not germinate. Human failure whilst protocolling or failure of protocol?

## Seedy Scarification

On March 30, 2017 an alternative for the sandpaper scratching is performed in the *Self-Strangling Seed Scarification* experiment. In an anti-echoic chamber at Aalto University, eleven humans encircle eleven Aronia m. Babe seeds that rest on a glass dish supported by a hardly visible pedestal. For eleven minutes they scarify the seeds by producing self-strangling sounds. Still, the outcome is negative: the seeds remain dormant.

## Sound

The space between the two loudspeakers is 2,9 m. We turn them in such a way that an imaginary double triangle is created. The tip of the first triangle reaches the middle of the space between mirror wall and speaker bodies. The woofers and cones are at 55 cm from the LED module and 66 cm from the string of berries. The base of the second triangle aligns with the first third of the adjacent mirror wall. The black speaker cables are pressed down by heavy cotton cloth pressure-sensitive tape. They join for a little while the power cord from the LED module. From the right corner they continue to the left side, where their pins plug

into the holes of the amplifier and laptop. Two digital sound files with differing length are played in loop.

The audio file *IdeaHouse Recording\_edit for tanzDD.aiff* (Vitkauskaite 2016) contains the recording of the Unchoir of the Aronia Overture at the rehearsal space of a youth cultural center in Aizpute, Latvia, on September 16, 2014. The Aronia Overture is the human attempt to assist Baroa b. in expressing its essence and relations to its ambient environment: a former State-run plantation on the edge of a West-Latvian village. This composition is produced to introduce Baroa b. making its qualities speak through musical gestures and musical expressions. For example, it translates the astringency of the berry that dries out the mouth and closes the throat through the use of extended singing techniques for the creation of dry sounds.

For each of the live performed Overtures, an Unchoir is formed: a group of humans that is introduced to a technique directly derived from the choke sensation produced by the appleberry-being-eaten. The combination of a neck-pressurizing finger gesture with fiercely pushing air through the air pipe, generates sounds that tap into pre-linguistic and visceral habits of human existence. The technique is developed by Overture's composer Ruta Vitkauskaite and Bartaku.

*Dripping Aronia Berries.aif* (Jeron 2016): This file contains a recording of the dripping of Aronia m. Babe sap onto electronic sound hardware components. The Aronia Dripping Machine makes use of contact and noncontact-methods for measuring electric fields and the internal processes of the plants. Aronia m. Babe introduces a number of unspecified processes which create an orchestrated aleatoric audio piece. This custom device is assembled by sound artist Karl-Heinz Jeron, in collaboration with composer Ruta Vitkauskaite.

## Seed String, the Becoming

I transport Aronia m. Babes and their seeds from the Aizpute plantation to Karlsruhe in a glass container. I dip them into latex from Mexican rubber trees, align them on a black cotton string of which both ends are guided through the opening of a needle and then press the seeds on the sticky skins. In the following words I describe how the experience *felt* for the berry-being-apple, in human wordings.

*I move up. My skin is touched by a sharp, perforating thing. Air comes in. I leak some drops of my juice. Coldness pushes deeper into my flesh. Touch the seed. More flesh more seed. It comes to the other side of me and I move down and bounce against familiar skin. And before that, I felt the air being replaced by liquid that smells like coming from some other species. Latex. I hang there. We hang there. On a string. Curled up. Moved. Shaken. Time passing. More air. Little holes in the latex. Breathing. Touching hard surface. Light of low energy. Vi-*

bration low. Darkness. Intense energy comes in. Strong light. Goes through. Vibrations go through the skin and the outer layer, and the flesh. It touches and moves, tickles the seeds. The oxygen is not oxygen now. Familiar smell of my-self. Of my other body parts that release familiar smells. Another type of vibrations come in. Of another type. Flesh and seeds are oscillating.

The future of the seeds is uncertain. Either they are stored as-they-are, or, they will be effectively treated and sown in the lab: in gelatin or in soil.

## Essence – Reality – Existence

Around the time of writing this text, I encounter words by Federico Campagna (2018) in his book *Technic and Magic* that fuse the need to be more precise regarding the use of the word “essence (2018: 17).” I mean to refer to the entire reality of *Aronia m. Babe* and capture with that word both the knowable and unknowable object-in-itself dimension. Still, following Campagna, the notion of existence should be introduced:

If we consider existence and essence as the limit-concepts of pointing towards opposite directions of a continuum-line, then we can understand reality as the space stretching between these two limit-concepts. Reality is the space that opens up between existence and essence, that is, between ineffability and language, in itself-ness and contextual presence, solid measureless substratum and the flickering catalogue of measures and so on. [...] Reality is the space that is available to our existential experience of life in the world, oscillating between pure contemplation and pure activity, while never truly reaching either pole. (Campagna 2018: 104 f)

Lastly, one thought: all the science-based seed growing attempts failed. So, there is no proof that these seeds are actually seeds. Until now, they are seed fictions. And the protocols? Fiction.

## References

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