FRUIT BELT

MARTIN LLAVANERAS

Ideografic_vs_nomothetic_sample_002, 2017

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"Fruit belt" is the term used to refer to areas that provide an ideal microclimate for fruit growing. They are places with vast tracts of agricultural land, industrial cold storage warehouses, and networks of paths connecting to major distribution roads. They are also the point of departure for this research project in which Martin Llavaneras explores food processing and investigates the life cycle of raw materials. *Fruit Belt* focuses on the long process of fruit production, which involves a series of energy transfers and logistical processes that end up making their way into our bodies.

Taking the natural respiration process of apples as a point of reference, this project by Martin Llavaneras revolves around a series of "post-harvest" technologies used to store and transport the fruit, designed to control the ripening status and delay deterioration. Through these artificial stabilisation measures, the apples — no longer anywhere near the tree — enter a state of hibernation that extends their lives for months. This is possible by modifying the atmosphere around the fruit, increasing carbon dioxide (CO_2) levels on one hand, while decreasing oxygen (O_2) levels on the other. As well as protecting the fruit from possible decay through contact with fungi and bacteria, this system also allows it to be exported further afield.

The exhibition is organised around two main interconnected pieces. On entering the space, we see a structure that cuts through the room, covered with plastic sheeting that isolates the air inside from the usual atmospheric conditions of Espai 13. Inside, various moisture devices, which are automatically switched on at regular intervals, share the space with a series of objects (wrought-iron plant supports, fruit boxes and controlled atmosphere fruit growing bags). Different sediments (clay, caramelised sugar, and plastic) marked with tyre tracks are spread on the ground around these elements.

The second piece consists of a series of tanks filled with protective fluids used to coat apples. These liquids are carried through the exhibition space by means of a system of hoses, water pumps, and timers that periodically turn on and off. Various smaller recipients are arranged around these devices, containing extracts of fermented plants. These are plant

chemicals used to stimulate the diversity of micro-organisms and bacteria that inhabit soils, made out of "weeds" that Llavaneras himself grew and fermented.

Through these elements, *Fruit Belt* presents a kind of conceptual, sculptural essay on the interactions between human culture as an atmosphere-modifying agent and the contexts that live on its margins, in this case the tiny ecosystems that are generated through oxidation processes. Halfway between the biological and the technological, Martin Llavaneras connects two imaginaries of production: the agrochemical industry on one hand, and small-scale practices like horticulture on the other.

The exhibition as a whole invites visitors to rethink the divisions between human beings and our surroundings. It is a way of comparing and bringing things that are unfamiliar to us — like the sun's light energy ripening an apple — closer to something as commonplace as biting into it and absorbing its sugars. When applied as a global logistic process, this small-scale gesture of atmospheric modification implies atmospheric change on a planetary scale. Because, as it happens, the gases released by fossil fuels during the transportation of raw materials create the very same conditions as the breeding ground in which fermentation and oxidation processes prevailed millions of years ago.

O'Fresh, 2017

NOTES ON *FRUIT BELT*, BY MARTIN LLAVANERAS

SIRA PIZÀ

What is the difference between an apple and a piece of plastic in a world where apples are modified, produced, adapted, and closer to the demands of their commodity status than to their biological past? In a world where plastic has been with us for so long and is so ubiquitous as waste that it has almost become a new mineral of the earth's crust? In this new world, the terms that formerly established the differences between "natural" and "artificial" are obsolete. Now, as ever, the definition of these terms or realities comes down to the question of whether "nature" and "synthetic" are *concepts* or whether they exist per se, regardless of who formulates them. The articulating voice of anthropocentric man, who made a distinction between the course of nature and that of his own species, is consciously shifting. He is now starting to recognise himself as an active element in juxtaposed systems, and to understand that in influencing them he causes disruptions that are affecting his own capacity to survive.

What appears as nature may not be so: even small family gardens and farms are no longer simply horticulture or agriculture — the "domesticated nature" which some theorists see as the start of the "anthropocene". Instead, they are industry: part of the mechanism that, as the title of this exhibition series *Un peu fora (One Foot Out)* suggests, connects the inside and the outside — the centre and the periphery. This mutually dependent relationship establishes the centre as the mass consumer of what is overproduced in rural areas, so plants, fruit, vegetables, and animals are part of a cycle regulated by fluctuating political economies. Martin Llavaneras finds materials used for controlled production on his family's farm and observes them on the same level as the products that they help generate. Fruits and vegetables which will travel, be eaten, digested, and absorbed into human bodies; human bodies which will decompose and become part of the soil, in a multiple, permanent synthesis. Synthesis is prescribed in our "organic coding". As a combination of things and processes that create new things and processes, symbiosis is present in each of our cells. And these cells are equally made of their own elements as they are of foreign ones. Millions of years ago, the bacteria that now lives inside of us unintentionally created an environment

that it had to survive. The result of their respiration (oxygen and its atmosphere) generated the conditions required for the existence of new aerobic beings: organisms, animals, and humans. Timothy Morton compares this primeval "bacteriocene" with today's anthropocene:[1] the creation of what we might call a self-inflicted catastrophe which has the potential to wipe out our species, but which at the same time seems to operate according to a similar interrelational synthesis. The voluntary or involuntary association of disparate elements is the creator of "artificial" life, "artificial" intelligence, and of manipulated, "synthetic" nature. The same bacteria that inhabits our bodies is used in controlled environments to extend the shelf life of fruit, a strategy of modern post-harvest technologies for the sake of worldwide supply, the flip side of which are the ecological consequences of a global production machinery probably capable of annihilating that same world population.

In *Fruit Belt*, a reference to the strip of the planet with the ideal conditions for global "super-farming", Llavaneras reproduces the atmosphere for the induced hibernation of apples: "breathing" more CO_2 than O_2, they live longer before they enter a state of decomposition. Simultaneously, this mechanism's necessary components alter the living environment of the end consumer. Farming and greenhouse land exploitation, transport infrastructure, and labour requirements have effects on the system as a whole, modifying an array of conditions: from the atmosphere to human rights, from the notion of the individual consumer to the water supply, language, weather phenomena, or future residual sediment.

Llavaneras takes the potential mobility of fruit once their atmosphere has been altered and makes it an example of all flows of synthesis: movement and mixture are at the base of the proliferation of new life forms, and are neither new nor exclusive to the human race. The mass agricultural methods which, together with the use of chemically developed medicines, allowed for the development of urban centres as well as colonial expansion in the form of replicated biological environments are at the heart of capitalism. Animal and plant migrations, which disseminated microbes and parasites around the world, generated environmental

and genetic modifications, and with them the interdependent relationships that fuel the global system as we know it today.[2]

We step inside of the refrigerated exhibition: resins look like clay leaves, apples look like plastic. In the post-truth era, when the potential effects of images and words are more powerful than their relationship to whether they are rooted in reality, when anything can be digitally created or genetically conceived, we tend to seek the authentic or real as something that was there in the beginning and that we must restore. In the era of post-morality, when individualism is the bedrock of economies and states, all of our decisions are dictated by moral equivalency — from freedom of choice, respect for gender, race, the environment or sexuality, to the invention of animal rights, spiritual sport or organic consumption as part of the path to self-realization, the ultimate goal of the post-moral subject.

In the era of post-national realities, our lives are affected by systems, entities so huge that we are unable to see them: the Internet, globalisation, climate change. Conversely, in our day-to-day environmental consciousness we are forced to adopt a scientific point of view in which every little action contributes to a planetary crisis. But this consciousness is based on technical formulas that measure and calibrate the damage done to ecosystems and their tolerability. This constitutes an "ecocracy"[3] that presupposes certain global threats and sets up transnational institutions to fight other global entities that created those risks. In other words, ecological consciousness becomes an added value in the competition for economic survival.

In *Fruit Belt* there are sprinklers, containers, pipes, hoses and groundsheets, liquids and materials for farming and conservation, the traces of transport, movement, and expansion, and the remains of the life cycle of organic substances:

1 Timothy Morton interviewed by Alex Blasdel, "'A reckoning for our species': the philosopher prophet of the Anthropocene", *The Guardian*, 15 June 2017. Available online at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jun/15/timothy-morton-anthropocene-philosopher [retrieved: 6 September 2017]

2 Manuel de Landa, *Mil años de historia no lineal*, Barcelona, Gedisa, 2012, p. 111.

3 "World Risk Society as Cosmopolitan Society? Ecological Questions in a Framework of Manufactured Uncertainties," *Theory, Culture & Society* 13, no. 4 (1996), pp. 1—32; reprinted in id., *World at Risk*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2009, p. 83.

rubber and tire marks, weeds, resins, grills, wooden boxes, apples converted into sugar. Here, rubber and sugar appear as opposite poles of the food chain: rubber is made of petroleum by-products containing bacteria that absorb carbon dioxide and release oxygen; while sugar is created by the oxidation of fruit, which results in a nutritious substance that has been a key element in the consolidation of warm regions as the producers of the food surplus that supplies Western cities,[4] and it is a crucial component of the industrialised food system, the "fruit belt". Wrought iron, commonly used for plant pot holders adorning country houses — decoration of controlled nature — appears next to plastic, aluminium and wood — technological objects — as an organic element in an "ecology without nature":[5] a perception of all things as materials in different stages of a continuous flow; a succession of biodynamic effects that includes mankind and its actions but which does not begin or end with it.

Morton's "ecology without nature" is what Beck described as the end of the history of nature:[6] Llavaneras's lithographic stones, depicting typical drawings of early botany, are now fossils of science. Removing ourselves from the position of centrality that we used to occupy, nature becomes a memory of something that no longer exists. Something that we have to restore, rediscover, and take care of.

4 Manuel de Landa, op. cit., p. 115.

5 Timothy Morton interviewed by Roc Jiménez de Cisneros for CCCB Lab, "Timothy Morton: Ecology without Nature", 13 December 2016, http://lab.cccb.org/en/tim-morton-ecology-without-nature/ [retrieved: 10 September 2017].

6 Ulrich Beck, "Subpolitics: Ecology and the Disintegration of Institutional Powers", *Organization and Environment* 10, no. 1 (1997), p. 64.