

## The Garden

One early evening last summer I took a seat in front of one of the new stages at Arteleku.

It was a very good seat. It provided excellent views and whenever I wanted to, I could reach out and actually touch the characters currently performing on stage. A lazy wind played in the leaves of the newly planted trees behind me. These trees are planted in parallel straight lines and it became obvious that this arrangement is there to facilitate for the wind to easily find its tune in the trees. So this evening, not only was I facing the new stage, I was also accompanied by the new orchestra located in the garden behind Arteleku.

The new garden is next to the cloister garden in which I fantasised about Gregor Mendel, the monk who experimented on heredity in pea plants. The fact that the neighbouring building hosts nuns and not monks, never really bothered me much. In my imagination, I have seen Gregor with his round glasses in the cloister garden, methodically growing, studying and organizing his peas. In my fantasy I have also perceived something like a timeless zone over there where he cultivated his peas. Somehow this timelessness seem to reflect, or simply emphasise, the fact that it took 75 years after his research was published for the world to even begin appreciate his discoveries. It is right next to this timeless zone that I find myself this evening. It is wonderful to experience the separate stage which has been built for nature next to Gregor's scientific and experimental garden.

The new stage is built of straw bales, neatly arranged in a huge grid to constitute a platform. This is something which obviously makes the stage slightly elevated. When seated it gives the viewers the advantage of interacting with the characters almost at an eye to eye level. This naturally provides a very exciting angle. It is here that we can begin to observe the entwined and all embracing tangle of nature. And of culture\*.

»

\* The garden as theatre has inherited some historical roots. In 1640 John Parkinson published *Theatrum Botanicum* inspired by the riches of the Americas, Asia, Africa and Europe. He saw the tremendous potential for man's new (global) gardens performing on a stage.





The Garden was designed by **IÑIGO SEGUROLA** (2002).



“Culture” is something we are learning to buy and to consume.

» In this text I'd like to explore some possible new meanings and implications of culture. Culture, originally the word stems from cultivation, from horticulture, from growing things. At a recent *Ars Electronica* symposium in Linz, advocate Jeremy Rifkin spoke about the increasing conflict between culture and commerce. Making an obvious analogy to the Internet, he explained that the market place as it looks today can be characterised as a type of network. The absolute aim of this networked market place is to keep up its constant activities. In comparison to the traditional market places where for example there may be no trade on Sundays, or simply closing time at 6 o'clock, the goal of the current market place is non-stop global exchange and delivery of services and information. But Rifkin also pointed out that in this networked global market there no longer exist, as in the traditional market, a steady buyer/seller relationship. Instead, we are presented with the constant flow of time-shares without clear beginnings and ends. It is as if ownership is becoming less interesting. What we want is immediate access. Even if we are buying a book at let's say Amazon.com, it takes in Rifkin's opinion way too much time for it to be delivered. Our culture rewards instant delivery, delivery by the 'speed of light', and that is where the market place aim its trading right now. If, upon the suggestion of Rifkin, we take a look at the way in which Lego are conducting their businesses these days the time share relationship becomes clearer. When you buy Lego in the store today there is less to build than when you bought Lego some years back. What you buy now is a ready 'vehicle' and there is not so much to build anymore. What you buy is a ready tool with which to play the game. And this is where it is getting really interesting. Instead of building block toys, Lego are now fabricating and distributing "stories" belonging to already built vehicles. In other words, the "script" or "instruction" of how to play with the vehicle, the actual game, will now have to be download from the Internet. It is precisely this downloaded story which determines how we "play" with Lego these days, The downloaded story animates the object, gives it history and future, memory and powers. Currently you may download the stories for free, you pay only in the store for the vehicle. For the "toy" which carries the game. It's easy to foresee that it is only a matter of time until this relationship will be reversed, and that what you will pay for will be the online information, the storyline. This is such an interesting marketing tool which obviously does not only have serious implications in terms of what it does to human fantasy and play, but it also challenges narrative structures in a surprising way. 'Culture' is something we are learning to buy and to consume. It is stored online and activated via a vessel. The games we play can be delivered by the speed of light.

But let's go back to the stage behind Arteleku, the garden which functions as an extension of this cultural centre\*. I find the parallel between what is going on at the garden stage and what is going on in society at large worth exploring. In the garden behind Arteleku another type of culture is evolving. This culture is currently less steered by market activities and values but nevertheless, it is culture. I would like to stay with the idea of culture and it being delivered via a vessel, via an object which can be activated. As it were, switched on or off.

If when playing with Lego we are being directed via a script, the idea of larger parts of human life being directed in the same manner unavoidably comes to mind. I am interested in the fact that since we began research into the human genome a new sense of narrative has sprung up. From the human genome project we are learning that genetic information no longer passes in a one-way linear path from one generation to the next. Rather, it is being rewritten as information, message, code or sequence. Lego is only one of many companies making use of this new narrative structure. Genetic information has become a material. It is flexible to combinations not only within the garden neighbouring Mendel's, but also within other species. We already know about the mice who expresses human genes, about plants that express genes from fish, and sheep who produce human proteins. The idea of linearity in terms of genealogy has gone through a tremendous change and I am curious to see how this may further manifest itself within our culture.

The play taking place on the stage of nature will soon, via seed banks and copyright laws, be presented courtesy some large corporation. Just like the stories accompanying Lego, genetic information will also be downloaded and performed via readily consumable vehicles. The question is then, are we humans going to be the consumable vehicles? In the end it may come down to gene banks in which we can implant desired information and to the messages we would like to grow in a new type of culture. The stage behind Arteleku is indicating it is time to take a real close look at nature and at culture. And to really think about the seeds we are planting and the stories we harvest. ❧

CECILIA ANDERSSON is a freelance curator. She is currently working at FACT (Foundation for Art and Creative Technologies, [www.fact.co.uk](http://www.fact.co.uk)) in Liverpool, and at the Wellcome Trust ([www.wellcome.ac.uk/en/1/sci.html](http://www.wellcome.ac.uk/en/1/sci.html)) in London.

\* This is not necessarily a new idea. For example, when man scientifically studied the natural world during the sixteenth and early seventeenth century, most gardens were linked (often physically) to cabinets of curiosity containing natural and artificial rarities. This in order to collect the world's natural as well as artistic creations in one place. At times, the garden was also connected to a laboratory.

[www.comp.lancs.ac.uk/sociology/sfranklin.html](http://www.comp.lancs.ac.uk/sociology/sfranklin.html) [www.biotechcentury.org/](http://www.biotechcentury.org/) [www.lego.com](http://www.lego.com)