

PLANT HOTEL IN NORDES 2015

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ABSTRACT

Plant Hotel in Nordes 2015 is a hotel for plants, where the local members of Konstfack check in their plants and the conference participants water the plants. Each plant owner, who would trust the setup of the conference and its participants, brings their plants. In addition each plant giver will be asked to choose the 'right' school amongst all the participant schools to specifically water his/her plant, and the reasons would be noted and also exhibited with the plant. The participants from the chosen school are asked to take care of the plant during the conference. With '*Choose the right school for your plant*', we aim to provide an interactive and collective platform between the hosts and guests, and also among all the members of Nordes community.

It is a participatory project that gives the focus on the social and discursive aspects. Plant is positioned in the centre of an exploration of collaborative care. The social meanings that are created from the interactions of collaborative care of the plants would be investigated. The boundary is challenged as its normative relation with its owner is pushed toward a more open space. Whilst a type of new relation is created as it requires care from the people who are not the owners. And what new relation is created, how and what does it mean for both types of participants? Inspired by the contemporary art approach 'relational aesthetics' outlined by Nicholas Bourriaud(2002), this project attempts to explore new social relations among different social groups through plant as the medium.

INTRODUCTION

This exhibition has two parts. One is the exhibition of the previous Plant Hotel we opened last year in a Helsinki neighbourhood. The other one is the new Plant Hotel we are opening for the conference *Plant Hotel in Nordes*, by engaging the local members of Konstfack and the conference participants.



Figure 1: The Plant Hotel in Helsinki neighbourhood in 2014 summer

This concept is about a hotel for plants. People check in their plants when they are away and other people including strangers who are around take care of the plants. With this concept, in 2014 summer, we piloted Plant Hotel in a neighbourhood gallery space in Helsinki (seen in Figure 1). People brought their plants to the gallery space when they went for their summer holidays and the local passers-by watered these plants. In order to create a dialogic platform, we provided a dialogue board attached to each plant (seen in Figure 2). One side 'Plant story' was for plant owners, who could leave messages, including watering tips, wish list and stories. The other side 'Care list' was for visitors to write down what they just did to the plant. During the one-week pilot project, we received 42 plants from 22 owners, and none of the plants died.

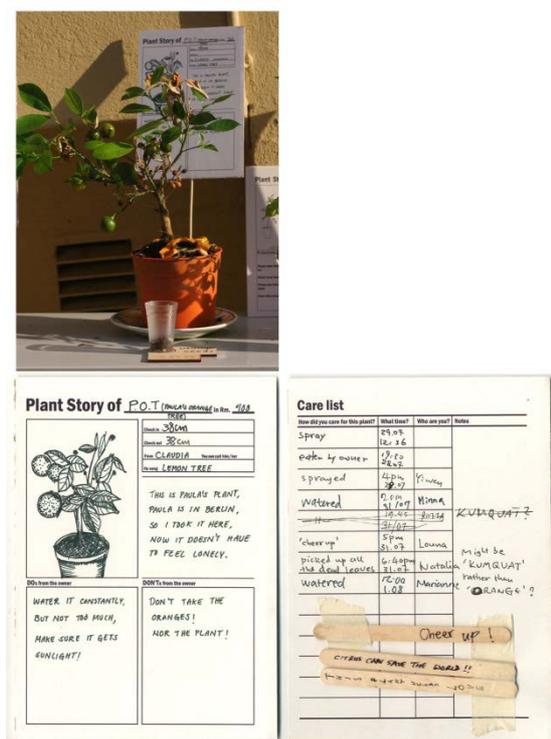


Figure 2: The 'Plant Story' of one checked plant

This demonstration of collaborative care of plants was not to develop or test a solution to any daily problems. Rather, by positioning plant as a central medium, we aimed to explore new social relations that formed between the distinct social groups of the plant owners and care givers, and also to engage participants with the new possibility of collaborative care.

For the Nordes conference exhibition, we are opening a Plant Hotel, targeting the Konstafack community and the Nordes community. By engaging the conference participants in the care of the plants from the members of the host university, we wish to create a collective platform for the distinct social groups coming together. With a proposal of 'Choose the right school for your plant', we ask the local members to check in their plants if they trust the conference participants. Each plant giver shall choose a school among all the participant schools as a care giver for his/her plant. And the Nordes conference participants from the chosen school are asked to take care of the plant during the four days of the conference. By taking the plant outside of its private domestic or office space into a public space, the normative relation with its owner is challenged. By asking each owner to choose the 'right' school and present the reasons, we wish to open up an opportunity that encourages some dialogues and social relations to develop among the Nordes community. As an inquiry, we intend to investigate what it means for the groups by bringing in their own plants and by watering others' plants in this particular context.

FROM 'RELATIONAL AESTHETICS'

Plant Hotel is largely inspired by the contemporary art approach, 'relational aesthetics' outlined by Nicholas Bourriaud (2002). He argues art should aim to create new social relations in a participatory manner, functioning as experimental models of sociability and conviviality. Relational aesthetics, which puts participation in the centre, is a response to the passive consumption of the masses paralyzed by the spectacles of capitalistic system (Bishop, 2012). Thus, art should move toward social relations away from beautiful objects, and toward active participation from passive process of presenter-spectator. These art practices can offer an alternative to the service design that usually has roots in User-Centred Design and at the same time borrows from the commerce and economic exchange.

SERVICE AS A DISCURSIVE AND RELATIONAL AGENT

We follow the agenda of designing for a society of participation and collaboration. Our approach refers to the discussions among the artists in the relational field. Taking more social and collective directions, the design approach we are proposing here is related to designing a form of social relation, a discourse, or even a piece of culture. In this project, we propose service can serve in a discursive and relational way. First of all, it serves as a discursive agent, aiming to provoke debate and reflection, like the practices of 'design for debate'. Furthermore, it aims to be more open and relational that provokes people's response in a dialogic and participatory way. It means dialogue takes place when participants negotiate their ways of interpreting, reconstructing, developing a stance and act toward the service. In a way it provides a process of value finding for the participants.

In all, we suggest this kind of constructed service can take the following roles: 1), provoking people to think, reflect and discuss; 2), shaking up daily norms and engaging them directly with new possibilities of doing things; 3) providing a dialogic process for participants to speak back by negotiating the ways to interpret, interact with the service and find meanings.

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