KELPIES AND CASPECIES

Two excerpts from Dr. Barbara Rauch,
Rauch, B. *Surface eruption: Machine creativity and emotive data objects.* In Lee, Yeseung (ed.) Surface and Apparition: The Immateriality of Modern Surface. London; New York: Bloomsbury. In Print.

"… [The] potential of synthetic worlds … drives artist Georg Mühleck's practice. Mühleck's print works — usually on mural-sized paper — are generated by algorithms that he employs, which are mathematical formula that mimic natural life. As one of the algorithms employed for his work about artificial life is called 'Life' — the best-known rule of cellular automata — we cannot help but ponder about digital iterations as an evolution of life forms. The digital algorithm remains in an in-between state that can offer an infinite number of potentials. Comparable to Flusser and Bec's synthetic speculation, Mühleck's work is the result of the artist-algorithm combination, and the theme, fittingly, is about genetic manipulation and imaginary habitats. Mühleck (2019) describes a series entitled kelpies as 'mind creatures' which are 'symbiosis of plant, animal and human being'. Similarly, the artist's statement for another series entitled caspecies illuminates his intentions:

> The word 'CASPECIES' consists of Cellular Automata and SPECIES. These species are organisms comprised of Cellular Automata. They nourish of algorithms. In the process of creation, cell cultures go through hundreds to thousands of generations before they freeze into a large artificial micro-still. Rather than simulating real life, caspecies evoke the possibility of creatures of yet unknown origin and scale.
> (Mühleck 2019, interview with the artist.)

By creating the speculative objects — caspecies or kelpies — Mühleck seems to unsettle existing boundaries between human-creator and manmade machine. While cellular automata rules are abstracted processual simulations employed in several scientific disciplines, in Mühleck's work, it is pushed to create imaginary hybrid life forms. Although the creatures only exist in an artistic context, some synthetic biology lab results do not look too dissimilar to the examples presented here."

"… As the boundaries between the analogue and the digital become increasingly blurred, machine- and hand-made objects now occupy a controversial yet shared space. When asked about what a work may gain or lose as it leaves a computer monitor for a paper substrate, Mühleck remarked that the digital file is animated with potential, while the physical print on paper is a 'still life', representing only a slice of possibilities. On the other hand, Mühleck also admits that working on a digital file does not involve his dynamic responses, and that he finds this 'removed' work process frustrating. It is for this reason that he usually extends the work to a printout, making specific choices of paper substrates and the qualities of wide-format printing. Working on a tangible material meets the artist's desire to hold the work in his hands. The work comes across quite differently when the 'digital creature' (Mühleck's term) is transported on the paper surface, as it seems to gain a certain haptic quality. The printed creature looks as if it is coming alive, to the point that the viewer may be triggered to touch and lift it off the printout."

Rauch discusses Vilem Flusser's collaboration with scientist/artist Louis Bec. Their work 'Vampyroteuthis Infernalis' is an early example of such synthetic speculation. Flusser, Vilém and Louis Bec ([1987] 2012) Vampyroteuthis Infernalis, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.