Synthetic Aesthetics

Call for Participants

www.syntheticaesthetics.org

February 2010

We seek participants for a research project on synthetic biology, design, and aesthetics. The project will provide funding to bring together scientists and engineers working in synthetic biology with artists, designers, and other creative practitioners. Resources will be made available for 'embedded residencies', in which artists and designers will spend time in laboratories, and scientists and engineers in artistic studios and design workspaces. It is our intention that such collaborations will produce presentable results, although the form these take is entirely open to the participants. Travel and accommodation expenses will be covered by the project.

We aim to construct the groundwork for future collaborations that could inform new types of engineering, new schools of art and design, and innovative approaches to the study of synthetic biology in society.

Further Details

Synthetic biology is broadly defined as the design and construction of new biological parts, devices, and systems, and the re-design of existing biological systems for useful purposes. Design is central to synthetic biology, as the living world becomes a product of design and manufacturing choices, rather than evolutionary pressures alone. Thus, it becomes important to ask what role design–and the related concept of aesthetics–play in this burgeoning field. Other forms of engineering and manufacturing work in close conjunction with creative practitioners: structural engineers work with architects; mechanical engineers with product designers. Can synthetic biology benefit similarly from such collaborations?

The Synthetic Aesthetics project aims to answer this question by setting up these collaborations. We will employ the broad framework of 'embedded residencies'. In these residencies, each participant will host either a synthetic biologist or creative practitioner and then visit and engage with the other's workspace. These exchanges are expected to introduce members of each community to the other's work, develop transferable knowledge and skills, and possibly form the basis for longer-lasting collaboration. The details of these residencies are flexible; participants will have a great deal of control over how resources are employed and the collaborations structured. Members of the Synthetic Aesthetics team will provide logistical support for, and document and study the exchanges. Ultimately, we seek more than simply one-off experiences; it is our intention that such collaborations will produce presentable results, which might be disseminated through electronic media, practitioner workshops, or possibly gallery exhibitions.

The collaborations are intended to be complementary and active experiences. Members of both communities who are part of this project will not just be passive recipients of information; they will engage in each other's work without either practice taking precedence. The process will be equal, and we expect the art, design and engineering to be informed as a result.

These interactions should positively contribute to ongoing work in both communities, as well as develop new spaces for practice, cooperation, and debate. Long-lasting interactions between the two communities would enable more encompassing design concerns to be reflected in synthetic biology projects and products, enabling inclusive and responsive technology development. Collaboration can also contribute to the development of new

schools of art and design, as well as to the fostering of existing artistic and design work with this form of biological engineering. Moreover, we believe that art and design can encourage thought and debate in unique and innovative ways, and promote new avenues for outreach and public engagement.

Application Procedure and Deadline

Interested scientists, engineers, artists, designers, and others involved in synthetic biology or the creative professions should submit the following required documents:

For designers and artists:
1. CV
2. PDF portfolio, including URLs for relevant websites containing your work.
3. Letter of interest (no longer than one page) describing what you hope to get out of the project and what you would like to contribute.
4. One paragraph outlining the projects that you expect to be working on until December, including any institutional affiliations.

For scientists and engineers:
1. CV
2. List of publications
3. Letter of interest (no longer than one page) describing what you hope to get out of the project and what you would like to contribute.
4. One paragraph outlining the projects that you expect to be working on until December, including any institutional affiliations.

Please submit your application documents via email to before the **31st March 2010** to be considered for one of the 12 residencies (6 artists/designers, 6 scientists/engineers), to:

Dr. Pablo Schyfter: p.schyfter@ed.ac.uk

Contact Information

For further information, visit www.syntheticaesthetics.org, or contact:

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Project Team

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