

Antennae

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Interspecies

Donna Haraway When Animals Look Back Anthony Hall ENKI Ruth MacLennan Three Films on Hawks and Man Beatriz da Costa Pigeonblog Nicholas Primat Wild Child Snaebjornsdottir/Wilson Radio Animal Pascal Pique The Return of the Animal Man Kira O'Reilley Falling Asleep with a Pig Rachel Mayeri Primate Cinema: Baboons as Friends



Antennae

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EDITORIAL

ANTENNAE ISSUE 13

Interspecies communication is now more than ever a key topic in contemporary academic and artistic debates. Through the propelling enthusiasm and deep anxieties characteristic of recent post-humanism approaches, interspecies communication has become something of a chimerical entity. We all, in one way or another, communicate to animals, especially with our closest pets. The cat and the dog have co-habited with us long enough to allow the development of a shared syntax made of body language, sounds, habits and rituals which enable a bi-lateral communication. Anthropomorphism plays, of course, a part in our communicational exchanges with animals. When do we really see the real animal, or when do we just see ourselves reflected in it? This issue of *Antennae* is entirely dedicated to Interspecies, an exhibition, curated by the Arts Catalyst, that bravely gathered the work of eight artists whose practice is entirely dedicated to bridging of the communicational boundaries between animals and humans. Through an inventive and original set of methodologies, each artist established communicational exchanges with the animal, aiming at overcoming the anthropomorphic format.

The Arts Catalyst deals with many varied areas connected with art, science and society, but when it comes to animal studies and surrounding issues they had a lot to discover. As Rob La Frenais, curator of The Arts Catalyst explains: "When we decided to develop a project to coincide with Darwin 200 and had a few ideas about what was out there. We knew Donna Haraway had moved from cyborgs to biological species (or dogs at least) and were aware of the strong feelings generated with the public by issues about animal experimentation. But, like diving into a deep pool, we became aware of a huge community of interest into whose affairs we were swimming. Thanks, animal studies crowd, for waiting for us to catch up".

That strong commitment to a very charged field of scrutiny has been reflected by the extraordinary efforts of the Interspecies artists. Kira O'Reilly endured extreme weather and sleeplessness in her work *Falling asleep with a pig*, and redesigned a second piece completely, after discussing the work in a pub by Donna Haraway. Anthony Hall struggled to keep his fish alive after a mystery illness killed a few, and kept a unique animal-human communication system going despite great difficulty. Ruth MacLennan spent days and days observing men and their hawks, bringing back extraordinary and intimate footage of their interaction on the Northumberland moors. As for the animals involved, we cannot comment without entering an ethical minefield, but we hope that, in the process, we kept them warm and well fed.

With the existing work by Rachel Mayeri bringing new insights into links between smouldering glances and baboon betrayal and Snaebornsdottir/Wilson's *Radio Animal* caravan injecting a unique social focus to the exhibition by collecting stories about infestation and invasion by animals, Interspecies has offered fresh and original perspectives on human-animal relations for new audiences. The artist who most of all inspired this project, Nicholas Primat has unfortunately passed away. This issue is dedicated to Primat, who died a year ago.

Giovanni Aloï

Editor in Chief, *Antennae* Project

Rob La Frenais

Curator, The Arts Catalyst

CONTENTS

ANTENNAE ISSUE 13

4 When Animals Look Back

Donna Haraway explores the complexities involved in our relationship with companion species in her most recent book When Species Meet. We reproduce here an extract of the introduction from this influential book in order to introduce the works and artists included in the Interspecies exhibition.
Text by Donna Haraway

10 Radio Animal

As urban dwellers we tend to suppress our awareness of the degree to which we share space with other creatures. If we were to make a physical cut — a cross-section through our house for instance, imagine what multitudes we would find embedded in its fabric — and if we were seriously to extend that awareness to our gardens, our sense of being 'outnumbered' would be profound.

Text by Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson

Interview questions by Rikke Hansen and Giovanni Aloï

15 Three Films on Hawks and Men

Gents in a landscape hang above their lands. Their long keen shadows trace peninsulas on fields. Englishness, Welshness, flow blankly out around them. Hawks in good jackets lean into the wind, shriek 'lonely I: This sight is mine, but I can't think I am. (Denise Riley)

Text by Helen Macdonald

24 Enki-Human to Fish Communication

Antony Hall's interactive work, ENKI experiment 3, explores communication between humans and a Black Ghost Knife Fish. The research aims to discover if it is possible to create a harmonious state of interaction that can be of benefit to both species, no matter how different.

Text by Antony Hall

Interview questions by Rikke Hansen

38 Falling Asleep With a Pig

At some point the pig and artist will fall asleep. The work addresses the ethics of human and animal interaction, acknowledging the implicit ambivalences and violence in the appropriation of animals as a resource. Kira and Deliah carried out the performance at Interspecies in Manchester earlier in the year and now undertake the work for a longer period in London. Artis duo Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson, interviewed Kira on Inthewrongplaceness and Falling Asleep With a Pig.

Questions by Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson

31 Pigeonblog

Pigeonblog is a collaborative endeavor between homing pigeons, artists, engineers and pigeon fanciers engaged in a grassroots scientific data gathering initiative designed to collect and distribute information about air quality conditions to the general public. Pigeons carry custom-built miniature air pollution sensing devices enabled to send the collected localized information to an online server without delay. Pollution levels are visualized and plotted in real-time over Google's mapping environment, thus allowing immediate access to the collected information to anyone with connection to the Internet.

Text by Beatriz Da Costa

49 New Directions in Primate Cinema

Primate Cinema is a series of video experiments that translate primate social dramas for human audiences. The first experiment, Baboons as Friends, is a two channel video installation juxtaposing field footage of baboons with a reenactment by human actors, shot in film noir style. A tale of lust, jealousy, sex, and violence transpires simultaneously in human and nonhuman worlds. Beastly males, instinctively attracted to a femme fatale, fight to win her, but most are doomed to fail. The story of sexual selection is presented across species, the dark genre of film noir re-mapping the savannah to the urban jungle.

Text by Rachel Mayeri

54 Nicolas Primat: An Artist Between Species

Nicolas Primat is one of a small band of artists, working on art/science collaborations, who actively questions the accepted approach of assuming that the human species is the focus of creation.

Text by Rob La Frenais

58 The Return of the Animal Man

Nicolas Primat has at least two dreams. The first is to be a prehistoric man, so as to relive and experience the dawn of humankind. The second, which is more recent, is to get some great apes to produce their own work of art by giving them a video camera. These two dreams have a common denominator: achieving a new consciousness of our relationship with the world and to ourselves by restoring our connection to the natural and the animal. And they in turn suggest a third dream, or at least a wish: that this will help us find a way of building an acceptable future.

Text by Pascal Pique

66 Wildchild

We should recognize that nonhuman organisms need not meet every new definition of human language, tool use, mind, or consciousness in order to have versions of their own that are worthy of serious study. We have set ourselves too much apart, grasping for definitions that will distinguish man from all other life on the planet. We must rejoin the great stream of life from whence we arose and strive to see within it the seeds of all we are and all we may become."

— Sue Savage-Rumbaugh

Text by Rob La Frenais

71 Journeys Across Disciplines: The Arts Catalyst

The Arts Catalyst commissions contemporary art that experimentally and critically engages with science. We produce provocative, playful, risk-taking artists' projects to spark dynamic conversations about our changing world.

Text by Nicola Triscott

WHEN ANIMALS LOOK BACK

Donna Haraway explores the complexities involved in our relationship with companion species in her most recent book When Species Meet. We reproduce here an extract of the introduction from this influential book in order to introduce the works and artists included in the Interspecies exhibition.

Text by *Donna Haraway*

"**A**nd Say the Animal Responded?" is the title Derrida gave his 1997 lecture in which he tracked the old philosophical scandal of judging "the animal" to be capable only of reaction as an animal-machine. That's wonderful title and a crucial question. I think Derrida accomplished important work in that lecture and the published essay that followed, but something that was oddly missing became clearer in another lecture in the same series, translated into English as "The Animal That: Therefore I Am (More to Follow)" [1] He understood that actual animals look back at actual human beings; he wrote at length about a cat, his small female cat, in a particular bathroom on a real morning actually looking at him. "The cat I am talking about is a real cat, truly, believe me, a little cat. It isn't the figure of a cat. It doesn't silently enter the room as an allegory for all the cats on the earth, the felines that traverse myths and religions, literatures and fables". (374). Further, Derrida knew he was in the presence of someone, not of a machine reacting. "I see it as this irreplaceable living being that one day enters my space, enters this place where it can encounter me, see me, see me naked" (378-79). He identified the key question as being not whether the cat could "speak" but whether it is possible to know what respond means and how to distinguish a response from a reaction, for human beings as well as for anyone else. He did not fall into the trap of making the subaltern speak: lilt would not be a matter of 'giving speech back' to animals but perhaps acceding to a thinking ... that thinks the absence of the name as something other than a privation" (416). Yet he did not seriously consider an

alternative form of engagement either, one that risked knowing something more about cats and how to look back, perhaps even scientifically, biologically, and therefore also philosophically and intimately.

He came right to the edge of respect, of the move to *respecere*, but he was sidetracked by his textual canon of Western philosophy and literature and by his own linked worries about being naked in front of his cat. He knew there is no nudity among animals, that the worry was his, even as he understood the fantastic lure of imagining he could write naked words. Somehow in all this worrying and longing, the cat was never heard from again in the long essay dedicated to the crime against animals perpetrated by the great Singularities separating the Animal and the Human in the canon Derrida so passionately read and reread so that it could never be read the same way again. [2] For those readings I and my people are permanently in his debt.

But with his cat, Derrida failed a simple obligation of companion species; he did not become curious about what the cat might actually be doing, feeling, thinking, or perhaps making available to him in looking back at him that morning. Derrida is among the most curious of men, among the most committed and able of philosophers to spot what arrests curiosity, instead nurturing an entanglement and a generative interruption called response. Derrida is relentlessly attentive to and humble before what he does not know. Besides all that, his own deep interest in animals is coextensive with his practice as a philosopher. The textual evidence is ubiquitous. What happened that morning was, to me, shocking because of what I know this philosopher can do. Incurious, he missed a possible

invitation, a possible introduction to other-worlding. Or, if he was curious when he first really noticed his cat looking at him that morning, he arrested that lure to deconstructive communication with the sort of critical gesture that he would never have allowed to stop him in his canonical philosophical reading and writing practices.

Rejecting the facile and basically imperialist, if generally well intentioned, move of claiming to see from the point of view of the other, Derrida correctly criticized two kinds of representations, one set from those who observe real animals and write about them but never meet their gaze, and the other set from those who engage animals only as literary and mythological figures (382-83). He did not explicitly consider ethologists and other animal behavioral scientists, but inasmuch as they engage animals as objects of their vision, not as beings who look back and whose look their own intersects, with consequences for all that follows, the same criticism would apply. Why, though, should that criticism be the end of the matter for Derrida?

What if not all such Western human workers with animals have refused the risk of an intersecting gaze, even if it usually has to be teased out from the repressive literary conventions of scientific publishing and descriptions of method? This is not an impossible question; the literature is large, complemented by a much larger oral culture among biologists as well as others who earn their livings in interaction with animals. Some astute thinkers who work and play with animals scientifically and professionally have discussed at some length this sort of issue. I am leaving aside entirely the philosophical thinking that goes on in popular idioms and publishing, not to mention the entire world of people thinking and engaging with animals who are not shaped by the institutionalized so-called Western philosophical and literary canon.

Positive knowledge of and with animals might just be possible, knowledge that is positive in quite a radical sense if it is not built on the Great Divides. Why did Derrida not ask, even in principle, if a Gregory Bateson or Jane Goodall or Marc Bekoff or Barbara Smuts or many others have met the gaze of living, diverse animals and in response undone and redone themselves and their sciences? Their kind of positive knowledge might even be what Derrida would recognize as a mortal and finite knowing that understands "the absence of the name as something other than a privation." Why did Derrida leave unexamined the practices of communication outside the writing technologies he did know how to talk about?

Leaving this query unasked, he had nowhere else to go with his keen recognition of the gaze of his cat than to Jeremy Bentham's question: "The first and decisive question will rather be to know whether animals can suffer Once its protocol is established, the form of this question changes everything" (396). I would not for a minute deny the importance of the

question of animals' suffering and the criminal disregard of it throughout human orders, but I do not think that is the decisive question, the one that turns the order of things around, the one that promises an autremondialisation. The question of suffering led Derrida to the virtue of pity, and that is not a small thing. But how much more promise is in the questions, Can animals play? Or work? And even, can I learn to play with this cat? Can I, the philosopher, respond to an invitation or recognize one when it is offered? What if work and play, and not just pity, open up when the possibility of mutual response, without names, is taken seriously as an everyday practice available to philosophy and to science? What if a usable word for this is joy? And what if the question of how animals engage one another's gaze responsively takes center stage for people? What if that is the query, once its protocol is properly established, whose form changes everything? [3] My guess is that Derrida the man in the bathroom grasped all this, but Derrida the philosopher had no idea how to practice this sort of curiosity that morning with his highly visual cat.

Therefore, as a philosopher he knew nothing more from, about, and with the cat at the end of the morning than he knew at the beginning, no matter how much better he understood the root scandal as well as the enduring achievements of his textual legacy. Actually to respond to the cat's response to his presence would have required his joining that flawed but rich philosophical canon to the risky project of asking what this cat on this morning cared about, what these bodily postures and visual entanglements might mean and might invite, as well as reading what people who study cats have to say and delving into the developing knowledges of both cat-cat and cat-human behavioral semiotics when species meet. Instead, he concentrated on his shame in being naked before this cat. Shame trumped curiosity, and that does not bode well for an autremondialisation. Knowing that in the gaze of the cat was "an existence that refuses to be conceptualized," Derrida did not "go on as if he had never been looked at," never addressed, which was the fundamental gaffe he teased out of his canonical tradition (379, 383). Unlike Emmanuel Levinas, Derrida, to his credit, recognized in his small cat "the absolute alterity of the neighbor" (380). [4] Further, instead of a primal scene of Man confronting Animal, Derrida gave us the provocation of a historically located look. Still, shame is not an adequate response to our inheritance of multispecies histories, even at their most brutal. Even if the cat did not become a symbol of all cats, the naked man's shame quickly became a figure for the shame of philosophy before all of the animals. That figure generated an important essay. "The animal looks at us, and we are naked before it. Thinking perhaps begins there" (397).

But whatever else the cat might have been doing, Derrida's full human male frontal nudity before an Other, which was of such interest in his philosophical tradition, was of no consequence to her,

except as the distraction that kept her human from giving or receiving an ordinary polite greeting. I am prepared to believe that he did know how to greet this cat and began each morning in that mutually responsive and polite dance, but if so, that embodied mindful encounter did not motivate his philosophy in public. That is a pity.

For help, I turn to someone who did learn to look back, as well as to recognize that she was looked at, as a core work-practice for doing her science. To respond was to respect; the practice of "becoming with" reweave the fibers of the scientist's being. Barbara Smuts is now a bioanthropologist at the University of Michigan, but as a Stanford University graduate student in 1975, she went to Tanzania's Gombe Stream preserve to study chimpanzees. After being kidnapped and ransomed in the turbulent nationalist and anticolonial human politics of that area of the world in the mid-1970s, she ended up studying baboons in Kenya for her PhD. [5] About 135 baboons called the Eburru Cliffs troop lived around a rocky outcropping of the Great Rift Valley near Lake Naivasha. In a wonderful understatement, Smuts writes, "At the beginning of my study, the baboons and I definitely did not see eye to eye." [6]

She wanted to get as close as possible to the baboons to collect data to address her research questions; the monkeys wanted to get as far away from her threatening self as possible. Trained in the conventions of objective science, Smuts had been advised to be as neutral as possible, to be like a rock, to be unavailable, so that eventually the baboons would go on about their business in nature as if data-collecting humankind were not present. Good scientists were those who, learning to be invisible themselves, could see the scene of nature close up, as if through a peephole. The scientists could query but not be queried. People could ask if baboons are or are not social subjects, or ask anything else for that matter, without any ontological risk either to themselves, except maybe being bitten by an angry baboon or contracting a dire parasitic infection, or to their cultures dominant epistemologies about what are named nature and culture.

Along with more than a few other primatologists who talk, if not write in professional journals, about how the animals come to accept the presence of working scientists, Smuts recognized that the baboons were unimpressed by her rock act. They frequently looked at her, and the more she ignored their looks, the less satisfied they seemed. Progress in what scientists call "habituation" of the animals to the human being's would-be nonpresence was painfully slow. It seemed like the only critter to whom the supposedly neutral scientist was invisible was herself. Ignoring social cues is far from neutral social behavior. I imagine the baboons as seeing somebody off-category, not something, and asking if that being were or were not educable to the standard of a polite guest. The monkeys, in short, inquired if the woman was as good a

social subject as an ordinary baboon, with whom one could figure out how to carry on relationships, whether hostile, neutral, or friendly. The question was not, Are the baboons social subjects? but, Is the human being? Not, Do the baboons have "face" but, Do people?

Smuts began adjusting what she did -and who she was-according to the baboons' social semiotics directed both to her and to one another. "I ... in the process of gaining their trust, changed almost everything about me, including the way I walked and sat, the way I held my body, and the way I used my eyes and voice. I was learning a whole new way of being in the world-the way of the baboon I was responding to the cues the baboons used to indicate their emotions, motivations and intentions to one another, and I was gradually learning to send such signals back to them. As a result, instead of avoiding me when I got too close, they started giving me very deliberate dirty looks, which made me move away. This may sound like a small shift, but in fact it signaled a profound change from being treated like an object that elicited a unilateral response (avoidable), to being recognized as a subject with whom they could communicate" (295). In the philosopher's idiom, the human being acquired a face, The result was that the baboons treated her more and more as a reliable social being who would move away when told to do so and around whom it might be safe to carry on monkey life without a lot of fuss over her presence,

Having earned status as a baboon-literate casual acquaintance and sometimes even a familiar friend, Smuts was able to collect data and earn a PhD. She did not shift her questions to study baboon-human interactions, but only through mutual acknowledgment could the human being and baboons go on about their business. If she really wanted to study something other than how human beings are in the way, if she was really interested in these baboons, Smuts had to enter into, not shun, a responsive relationship. "By acknowledging a baboon's presence, I expressed respect, and by responding in ways I picked up from them, I let the baboons know that my intentions were benign and that I assumed they likewise meant me no harm. Once this was clearly established in both directions, we could relax in each other's company" (297).

Writing about these introductions to baboon social niceties, Smuts said, "The baboons remained themselves, doing what they always did in the world they always lived in" (295). In other words, her idiom leaves the baboons in 'nature, where change involves only the time of evolution, and perhaps ecological crisis, and the human being in history, where all other sorts of time come into play. Here is where I think Derrida and Smuts need each other. Or maybe it is just my monomania to place baboons and humans together in situated histories, situated naturecultures, in which all the actors become who they are in the dance of relating, not from scratch, not ex nihilo, but full of the patterns of their sometimes-joined, sometimes-separate heritages both before and lateral to this encounter. All

the dancers are redone through the patterns they enact. The temporalities of companion species comprehend all the possibilities activated in becoming with, including the heterogeneous scales of evolutionary time for everybody but also the many other rhythms of conjoined process. If we know how to look, I think we would see that the baboons of Eburru Cliffs were redone too, in baboon ways, by having entangled their gaze with that of this young clipboard-toting human female. The relationships are the smallest possible patterns for analysis; [7] the partners and actors are their still-ongoing products. It is all extremely prosaic, relentlessly mundane, and exactly how worlds come into being. [8]

Smuts herself holds a theory very like this one in "Embodied Communication in Nonhuman Animals;" a 2006 reprise of her study of the Eburru Cliffs baboons and elaboration of daily, ongoing negotiated responses between herself and her dog Bahati. [9] In this study, Smuts is struck by the frequent enactments of brief greeting rituals between beings who know each other well, such as between baboons in the same troop and between herself and Bahati. Among baboons, both friends and non-friends greet one another all the time, and who they are is in constant becoming in these rituals. Greeting rituals are flexible and dynamic, rearranging pace and elements within the repertoire that the partners already share or can cobble together. Smuts defines a greeting ritual as a kind of embodied communication, which takes place in entwined, semiotic, overlapping, somatic patterning over time, not as discrete, denotative signals emitted by individuals. An embodied communication is more like a dance than a word. The flow of entangled meaningful bodies in time-whether jerky and nervous or flaming and flowing, whether both partners move in harmony or painfully out of synch or something else altogether-is communication about relationship, the relationship itself and the means of reshaping relationship and so its enactors. [10] Gregory Bateson would say that this is what human and nonhuman mammalian nonlinguistic communication fundamentally is, that is, communication about relationship and the material-semiotic means of relating. [11] As Smuts puts it, "Changes in greetings are a change in the relationship" (6). She goes further: "With language, it is possible to lie and say we like someone when don't. However, if the above speculations are correct, closely interacting bodies tend to tell the truth" (7).

This is a very interesting definition of truth, one rooted in material-semiotic dancing in which all the partners have face, but no one relies or names. That kind of truth does not fit easily into any of the inherited categories of human or nonhuman, nature or culture. I like to think that this is one treasure for Derrida's hunt to "think the absence of the name as something other than a privation:" I suspect this is one of the thing' my fellow competitors and I in the dog-human sport called agility mean when we say our dogs are "honest:" I am certain we are not referring to the tired philosophical

and linguistic arguments about whether dogs can lie, and if so, lie about lying. The truth or honesty of nonlinguistic embodied communication depends on looking back and greeting significant others, again and again. This sort of truth or honesty is not some trope-free, fantastic kind of natural authenticity that only animals can have while humans are defined by the happy fault of lying denotatively and knowing it. Rather, this truth telling is about co-constitutive naturalcultural dancing, holding in esteem, and regard open to those who look back reciprocally. Always tripping, this kind of truth has a multispecies future. Respecere.

Notes

1. Jacques Derrida, "The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow);" trans. David Wills, *Critical Inquiry* 28 (Winter 2002): 369-418. Further references to this essay are in parentheses in the main text. This essay is the first part of a ten-hour address Derrida gave at the third Cerisy-la-Salle conference in 1997. See Jacques Derrida, *L'animal autobiographique*, ed. Marie-Louise Mallet (Paris: Galilee, 1999).

2. "Confined within this catch-all concept, within this vast encampment of the animal, in the general singular ... are all the living things that man does n: - recognize as his fellows, his neighbors, or his brothers Animals are my concern I will venture to say that never, on the part of any great philosopher from Plato to Heidegger, or anyone at all who takes on, as a philosophical question and of itself, the question called that of the animal ... have I noticed a protestation of principle ... against the general singular that is the animal The confusion of all nonhuman living creatures within this general and common category of the animal is not simply a sin against rigorous thinking ... but a crime of -first order against the animals, against animals" (402, 403, 408, 416).

3. I highlight "once its protocol is properly established" to differentiate the kind of question that needs to be asked from the practice of assessing human animals in relation to human ones by checking the presence or absence of a potentially infinite list of capacities, a process that Derrida so rightly rejected. What is at stake in establishing a different protocol is the never denotatively knowable, for human or nonhuman animals, relation of response. Dc- _ thought Bentham's question avoided the dilemma by pointing not to positive capabilities assessed against one another but to "the non-power at the "non-power" that we share with the other animals in our suffering, vulnerability, mortality. But I am not satisfied with that solution; it is only part of the needed reformulation. There is an unnamable being/becoming with in copresence that Barbara Smuts, below, will call something we taste rather than something we know, which is about suffering and expressive, relational vitality, in all the vulnerable mortality of both. I am (inadequately) calling that expressive, mortal, world-making vitality "play" or "work:" not to designate a fixable capability in relation to which beings can be ranked, but to affirm a kind of "non-power at the heart of power" other than suffering. Maybe a usable word for this is joy. "Mortality ... as the most radical means of thinking the finitude we share with animals" does not reside only in suffering, in my view. (Both quotations come from "The Animal That Therefore I Am;" 396.) Capability (play) and incapability (suffering) are both all about mortality and finitude. Thinking otherwise comes from the ongoing oddities of dominant Western philosophical conversations, including those Derrida knew best and undid so well most of the time. Some kinds of Buddhist idioms might work better here and be closer to what Derrida meant by establishing a different protocol from Bentham's to ask about suffering, but other idioms offer themselves from many varied and mixed traditions as well, some of which are "Western:" I want a different protocol for asking about a lot more than suffering, which at least in US. idioms will regularly end in the self-fulfilling search for rights and their denial through abuse. I am more worried than Derrida seems to be here about the way animals become discursive victims and little else when the

protocols are not properly established for the question, Can animals suffer? Thanks to Cary Wolfe for making me think more about this unsolved problem in this chapter.

4. Emmanuel Levinas, "The Name of a Dog, or Natural Rights;" in *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, trans. Sean Hand (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 151-53. Levinas movingly tells the story of the stray dog called Bobby, who greeted the Jewish prisoners of war as they returned from work each day in a German forced-labor camp, restoring to them knowledge of their humanity. "For him, there was no doubt that we were men This dog was the last Kantian in Nazi Germany, without the brain needed to universalize maxims and drives" (153). Thus was Bobby left on the other side of a Great Divide, even by a man as sensitive as Levinas was of the service rendered by this dog's look. My favorite essay in animal studies and philosophy on the question of Bobby and whether an animal has "face" in Levinas's sense is by H. Peter Steeves, "Lost Dog;" in *Figuring the Animal: Essays in Animal Images in Art, Literature, Philosophy, and Popular Culture*, ed. Catherine Rainwater and Mary Pollack (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 21-35. See also H. Peter Steeves, *The Things Themselves: Phenomenology and the Return to the Everyday* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006). For a full explication of the many ways the dog Bobby "traces and retraces the oppositional limits that configure the human and the animals;" see David L. Clark, "On Being 'the Last Kantian in Nazi Germany': Dwelling with Animals after Levinas;" in *Animal Acts*, ed. Jennifer Ham and Matthew Senior (New York: Routledge, 1997), 41-74, 70. On Derrida and others in the Continental philosophical canon on animals, see Matthew Calarco, *Zoographies: The Question of the Animal from Heidegger to Derrida* (New York: Columbia University Press, forthcoming).

5. The book based on that and subsequent research is Barbara Smuts, *Sex and Friendship in Baboons* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985). I wrote about Smuts in *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 168-69, 176-79, 371-76. See also Shirley Strum, *Almost Human: A Journey into the World of Baboons* (New York: Random House, 1987). When I wrote *Primate Visions*, I think I failed the obligation of curiosity in much the same way I suggest Derrida did I was so intent on the consequences of the Western philosophical, literary, and political heritage for writing about animals-especially other primates in the so-called third world in a period of rapid decolonization and gender rearrangements-that I all but missed the radical practice of many of the biologists and anthropologists, women and men both, who helped me with the book, that is their relentless curiosity about the animals and their tying themselves into knot' to find ways to engage with these diverse animals as a rigorous scientific practice and not a romantic fantasy. Many of my informants for *Primate Visions* actually cared most about who the animals are; their radical practice was an eloquent refusal of the premise that the proper study of mankind is man. I, too, often mistook the conventional idioms of the philosophy and history of science spoken r most of "my" scientists for a description of what they did. They tended to m" take my grasp of how narrative practice works in science, how fact and fiction coshape each other, to be a reduction of their hard-won science to subjective storytelling. I think we needed each other but had little idea of how to respond. Smuts, as well as such people as Alison Jolly, Linda Fedigan, Shirley Strum, and Thelma Rowell, continued to engage with me then and later with a mode attention that I call generous suspicion, which I regard as one of the most important epistemological virtues of companion species. Out of the kind of respect I identify as mutual generous suspicion, we have crafted friendships for which am mightily grateful. See Shirley Strum and Linda Marie Fedigan, eds., *Primate Encounters* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000). Had I known in 1980 how to cultivate the curiosity I wanted from Derrida, I would have spent m much more time at risk at field sites with the scientists and the monkeys and apes, not in the facile illusion that such ethnographic fieldwork would give the truth about people or a_ a subject-forming entanglement that requires response one cannot know in advance. I knew I too cared about the actual animals then, but I knew neither how to look back nor that I lacked the habit.

6. Barbara Smuts, "Encounters with Animal Minds;" *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 8, nos. 5-7 (2001): 293-309, 295. Further page references are in parentheses in the main text.

7. I did not write "smallest possible units of analysis" because the word unit misleads us to think that there is an ultimate atom made up of internal differential relations, which is a premise of autopoiesis and other theories of organic form, discussed below. I see only prehensile turtles all the way up and down.

8. On the creative force of the prosaic, the propinquity of things in many registers, the concatenation of specific empirical circumstances, the misrecognition of experience by holding to an idea of the experience before having had it, and how different orders of things hold together coevally, see Gillian Goslinga, "The Ethnography of a South Indian God: Virgin Birth, Spirit Possession, and the Prose of the Modern World;" PhD dissertation, University of California at Santa Cruz, June 2006.

9. Barbara Smuts, "Embodied Communication in Nonhuman Animals;" in *Human Development in the 21st Century: Visionary Policy Ideas from Systems Scientists*, ed. Alan Fogel, Barbara King, and Stuart Shanker (Toronto: publication of the Council on Human Development, forthcoming).

10. When a run goes awry in agility, I hear my fellow dog sport people say of the canine and human persons, "They look like they have never met; she should introduce herself to her dog." A good run can be thought of as a sustained greeting ritual.

11. Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 367-70.

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RADIO ANIMAL

As urban dwellers we tend to suppress our awareness of the degree to which we share space with other creatures. If we were to make a physical cut — a cross-section through our house for instance, imagine what multitudes we would find embedded in its fabric — and if we were seriously to extend that awareness to our gardens, our sense of being 'outnumbered' would be profound.

Text by *Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson*

Interview questions by *Rikke Hansen and Giovanni Aloï*



Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson

Radio Animal Van on Location, September 2009 © Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson

A component of the project *Uncertainty In The City*, *Radio Animal* operates from a mobile unit — a specially designed caravan that has allowed the artists to travel to various locations in the UK to gather material from people about their relationship to animals. The artists talk to individuals and communities, particularly in Cumbria, Lancashire and the Morecambe Bay area, to get the opinions and stories from those at the front line.

We've been particularly interested in animals that are considered 'unwelcome' visitors but have, for whatever reason, found their way into our homes or what we may consider our own territories.

For our first excursion we were at *Appleby Horse Fair*. We stayed in the thick of it with the travellers and Romanies on Fair Hill and spoke to a number of people on the matter of the relationship between travelling people and their animals. We were interested to know what differences a more itinerant lifestyle had on attitudes towards personal space and the encroachment of other species. In addition to the horses, several had with them dogs to guard their bow-tops (traditional caravans) and pitches and hens for the morning eggs. We discussed the eating of various wild animals including squirrels and hedgehogs and the taboo subject of rats or, as some would prefer, 'longtails'. We also discussed myth, suspicion and the contentious issue of cruelty including the misrepresentation of travellers by some newspapers, which have in recent years hysterically targeted the fair as being host to the ritual sacrificing of horses.

In June we visited the *Broughton Hall Game Fair*. We met with a number of 'animal oriented' people and conducted some interviews. One man we spoke to runs a green pest control supplies store. He shared with us his ideas on how the implications of short-term chemical pest control have moved him to go down this route. We asked him if there was a particular 'pest' he would like to be 'de-classified'. He told us that despite his own work involving their trapping, his choice would be the mole, because the mole is a hard worker and an animal for which he has both affection and admiration and one that 'just gets on with it'.

Many excerpts from the interviews we conducted at these and other venues are available for playback on the website (address above). *A Lamb Baste* was a *Radio Animal* event by Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson held at Grizedale Arts on 13th November 2009 at 7.30pm. The arts organization hosted the meal at which a number of invited people, including artists, curators and arts facilitators, animal studies scholars, and local interested parties discussed the issue of 'animal', other-animal proximity and our mutual borderings.

We want to approach issues of identity in relation to animals, why we are culturally so ambivalent in respect to who we are, and how we should behave in the presence of either the term 'animal' or indeed non-human animals themselves. As human animals, culturally we tend to value those that are not human or otherwise very, very like us, chiefly in relation to their

effectiveness in fulfilling some human function or need, or conversely to eschew them for the threat we believe they might hold to challenge our will or comfort.

Awareness of self, a faculty we (human-animals) believe separates us from other species, has unexpectedly brought us a troubled relationship with non-human animals. Because of this it could be argued, that a strategic psychological distance has been established between ourselves and those species over which we attempt to exercise the most control.

Because so much of what we are in adulthood is inherited or taught, our subscription to this legacy leads us to believe without question in the apparent cultural order of things. Such belief generally is accepting of our dominion over others and the claim of an elevated evolutionary position in relation to other species and thus fails in turn to recognize an intrinsic interdependence between species. An acknowledgement of this might well have helped us avoid many of the more difficult consequences we face today in respect to the environment, and therefore paradoxically our own as well as everyone else's survival.

The bottom line for such considerations is one concerning habitat — all species adapt well or less well, for better or for worse, to different habitats and when those specialist habitats fail, an ability to move or to adapt quickly enough to survive is tested. *Uncertainty In The City* (Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson's project commissioned by Storey Gallery, Lancaster, UK) is a speculative artists' exploration into the relationship between humans and the animals that nudge at and breach the borders of our homes. At the heart of this enquiry is the membrane that is breached, whether this is embodied in the material 'skin' of bricks and mortar, fences and land, or in more abstract, linguistic terms.

Radio Animal has been on the road since early summer 2009, asking questions of people regarding their proximity with other species, and discussing their experiences with others in the home, hidden in the fabric of their home, in the garden and otherwise as they go about their daily business.

At a time when environmental peril is discussed as a global issue and overheard in some form by us on a daily basis, leaving us often with a sense of impotence in the face of an apparent inevitability, artists Bryndis Snæbjörnsdóttir and Mark Wilson are examining what 'environment' might mean in a more intimate and domestic sense - where consideration of this term might trigger a more meaningful and evocative recognition for individuals and where the sharing of space between species and its consequences might resonate more powerfully, allowing some chance of new understanding (and even, new behaviour)."

Rikke Hansen and Giovanni Aloï interviewed Mark Wilson at the opening of the Interspecies show in London in October 2009.



Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson

Radio Animal/Uncertainty in the City, June 2009 © Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson

Giovanni Aloï: We have here Mark Wilson, from the artist duo Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson. Where is Bryndis?

Mark Wilson: Bryndis is currently on her way back from Sweden and so unable to be here this evening. But we're here in the *Radio Animal* caravan. It's our itinerant studio for this project and a mobile radio unit that we also use for conducting interviews and for live broadcasting. It is in here that we have spoken with people up and down the UK, mostly about animal encounters.

GA: What is this noise I hear in the van?

M: It is a recording of bats, various species of bat made using a bat detector, which picks up the sound of each animal and simultaneously lowers the frequencies of their sounds so that these become audible to us.

GA: What is the significance of these sounds?

M: We find them very interesting, as these are the sounds of animals perceiving space through sound, something rather difficult for us humans to conceive because it is very different from our own way of navigating the world. Bats have the capacity to

understand and navigate through space in a very sophisticated way by means of eco-location, which is what we are hearing here. They sometimes make very rapid noises, at other times, much slower sequences and single signals. When they hunt, the frequency of the signals will increase. It is a method that is very alien to us (humans) and so allows us the possibility of imagining an altogether different experience of space, transit, hunting and engaging with the world.

Rikke Hansen: Mark, you and Bryndis are travelling around in this caravan inviting people in to speak to you about their animal experiences. How does this effectively work?

M: The caravan has been reworked inside and out by Bryndis and myself. On the outside there are large and striking images of 'pests' (so called), including a wasp and a mole. We have taken the caravan to animal events around the country, including hunting or farming gatherings. Interestingly enough, many of the subjects we have been finding out about through our interviews are what seem to be 'contentious animals' – those that some people love and others seem to hate or be suspicious of and that therefore provide an illustration of ambivalence and contradiction in human response. It's interesting for us to hear about the relationships



Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson

Radio Animal Van on Location, September 2009, van/green pest control at Broughton Fair © Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson

that people develop with animals. Sometimes these are working relationships, as in the case of pest-control agents with whom we've worked quite a bit in this project and who themselves act as intermediaries between these animals and those people who call on them to intervene when tolerance is thin or non-existent.

RH: When people narrate their stories in this caravan, which is a rather intimate place, does the environment influence their storytelling?

M: It seems that people find the caravan very relaxing and that helps them to drop their guard. Let's not forget of course that most of the time, we are talking to people that we have never met before. They'll talk about both domestic and professional encounters with animals. We've met a few hunters who'll profess to be conservationists, describing their intimate knowledge of the habitat and terrain of their quarry. At the same time, because they have to be quiet for long periods, they become very good observers and listeners. They develop a very specific understanding of an environment and the dynamics involved in it. From one perspective this is a very contradictory relationship and one that we are very interested in understanding.

The caravan itself and Radio Animal has no set agenda, in the way that people are free to talk of different animals and different types of relationship. There is however an overriding theme of contested space, but that too can be manifest in many ways. Many forms of contact or co-habitation between animals and people are very positive and enriching. Largely this process has been about testing or recording people's tolerances, intolerances and affections and gathering disparate responses to a range of encounters with animals.

RH: The project Radio Animal extends beyond the caravan and has an on-line reality too. Could you tell us something about that?

M: Yes, we have a website (<http://www.radioanimal.org/radioanimal/>) where many of the interviews we have recorded are available for streaming, creating the opportunity to share these stories with a wider audience. There also is a 'listen live button', which allows national and international audiences to tune in when we broadcast live from an event. People who go onto the website are also invited to log on and contribute their own reflections and stories, videos, audio content or photographs...



Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson

Giovanni Aloï in Radio Animal Van, October 2009 at Interspecies opening © Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson

The project Uncertainty in the City will conclude with an exhibition in September 2010 at the recently refurbished and reopened Storey Gallery in Lancaster, UK.

Bryndís Snæbjörnsdóttir & Mark Wilson conduct their collaborative practice from bases in the north of England, Iceland and Gothenburg, Sweden. With a strong research grounding, their socially engaged projects explore contemporary relationships between human and non-human animals in the contexts of history, culture and the environment. The practice sets out to challenge anthropocentric systems and thinking that sanction loss through representation of the other, proposing instead, alternative tropes of 'parities in meeting'. The work is installation based, using objects, text, photography and video. Mark Wilson was interviewed by Rikke Hansen and Giovanni Aloï in October 2009
Antennae

THREE FILMS ON HAWKS AND MEN

Gents in a landscape hang above their lands. Their long keen shadows trace peninsulas on fields. Englishness, Welshness, flow blankly out around them. Hawks in good jackets lean into the wind, shriek 'lonely I: This sight is mine, but I can't think I am. (Denise Riley)
Text by *Helen Macdonald*



Ruth Maclennan

(Fig 1) *Three short Films on Hawks and Men*, HD video, 2009, video still, © Ruth Maclennan

Hawks, real or imagined, have occupied a troubling political space in twentieth-century art. Often they function as mirrors of the self, revealing hidden totalitarian urges against which a man might battle, as in T.H. White's *The Goshawk* (1951). Sometimes they are fascism personified, as in Henry Williamson's frightening nature-fable *The Peregrine's Saga* (1923) or more general exemplars of the world-as-will, of which Ted Hughes' 'Hawk Roosting' is perhaps the best known. Its manners are tearing off heads. Hawks generally figure as placeholders for dreams of power, vision, and control, for a space where sentimentality and morality is absent, and the world is male, male, male. "I fly up" says Hughes' hawk, "and the world revolves around me. It is all mine". [i]

In more recent works, from 1997's *The Falconer*, Iain Sinclair's experimental biopic of infamous filmmaker and falcon-breeder Peter Whitehead, to the recent works of artist-as-shaman Marcus Coates, hawks have been used to interrogate notions of personal transformation, empathy, obsession, and the place of wildness in contemporary culture. The grand themes of vision and power are still central but here they are often bound in a more playful or subversive manner to the persona of the artist. In 1999 Marcus Coates had himself tied high up the trunk of a scots pine in an attempt to experience the phenomenal world of a goshawk. The documentary photograph *Goshawk (Self Portrait)* shows a tiny man with bent legs attached to a distant tree; it is clear he should not be there; the attempt is rich with pathos; hubristic, ridiculous, agonising in practice, remorselessly mocking our desire for omnipotent vision. [ii]

The negotiation between hawk and human examined in these works has rich historical precedent; it has been conducted for millennia in the practice of falconry, the use of trained hawks to catch wild game. From her films on eagle-falconry in Kazakhstan (*Valley of Castle (Hunting Eagles)*) [iii] to her new piece *Three Films on Hawks and Men* (2009), the films of Ruth Maclennan have investigated this negotiation; the bond between (male) handler and hawk; and the masculinisation of the spaces through which the hawks fly. Maclennan's hawk films are enriched by their repeated use of the same visual lexicon: hawk, man, landscape; and therewith, male power, avian and human vision and an exploration of their spatial geographies. She is aware of how falconry is related to the construction and maintenance of

male identity. For masculine qualities often considered in danger of being lost or marginalised in modern culture — wildness, power, strength, self-reliance and so on — have long been projected onto hawks. Through the psychologically charged identifications of hawk and trainer during the training process, the falconer is able to repossess these qualities while the hawk at the same time becomes 'civilized'. Needless to say, there are few female falconers, and they do not feature in Maclennan's work.

Maclennan has taken the notion of hawk-as-subject perhaps further than any other artist. Rather than possess or become the hawk, as in the field of revisionist taxidermy, or in the transformative rituals of Coates, she has instead sought to lend the hawk a degree of agency in the work. In *The Hawk and the Tower* (2007-9), Maclennan resists the lure of the pastoral with glorious panache. A small camera is harnessed to a trained Harris hawk. Its handler flies it back and forth from fist to rooftops around Archway Tower in north London. The resulting footage is a disorienting collage of air and punctuated urban landscape. The inability of the hawk-as-director to afford us the viewpoint we imagine and desire—that of the transcendental subject—is pointed. The signal is blurred; the images jerky, incoherent. The side of a building slides across the screen. Snowy interference. The frame rises and falls spasmodically as the hawk beats its wings. Colours saturate and bleed. Pigeons clatter up in alarm; the viewer is bewildered by the alien nature of an urban nature-film filmed by nature.

Less formally experimental, *Three Films on Hawks and Men* is a more sustained investigation into the various subjectivities offered through the relationship of hawk and handler, landscape and filmmaker. *Fell*, which I will discuss in detail, follows a party of men, hawks and a dog hunting rabbits in rushy moorland. These falconers occupy the high places, where the gaze down upon lower ground mirrors the view of the 'hawk ...and the helmeted airman' [iv], and where such elevation implies knowledge and control [v] [figure 1].

The second film, *His Brilliant Eye*, brings the lens close to hawk and owner, wondering at the forms of intimacy such a relationship might take. We see a goshawk and its owner talking to one another — the man in slow, reassuring tones, the hawk in expressive twitters and yelps. The mirroring of hawk and man and the pace and pause of shots that cut between hawk's head and the expression on its handler's face leave us in no doubt that love is being shown here, though the



Ruth MacLennan
(Fig 2 & 3) *Three short Films on Hawks and Men*, HD video, 2009, video still, © Ruth MacLennan



Ruth MacLennan

(Fig 4) *Three short Films on Hawks and Men*, HD video, 2009, video still, © Ruth MacLennan

precise form of this attachment is of course obscure [figures 2 & 3].

It would be simple to read this as a narcissistic gaze in which hawk is a mirror of its keeper. Yet this is not entirely the case. There is much more to be said on the gendering of hawks, but perhaps it is enough here to draw attention to a 1936 quote by the falconer Gilbert Blaine which shows how goshawks have long been marked as female. Blaine had no time for this species. He reported that he couldn't put up with their moods and tempers. They were neither ladylike nor English, but foreigners, madwomen, incomprehensible murderers who slayed for the fun of it. Blaine disdains these versions of outlaw femininity:

One cannot feel for a goshawk the same respect and admiration that one does for a peregrine. The names usually bestowed upon her are a sufficient index to her character. Such names as 'Vampire', 'Jezebel', 'Swastika' or even 'Mrs Glasse' aptly fit her, but would ill become a peregrine^[vi].

Garden, the final film in the trilogy [figure 4] shows us just that: an empty garden populated by tethered hawks, plants in ericaceous pots, and bright cagebirds, resembling nothing so much as those fantastic assemblages of birds in

seventeenth-century Flemish oils. On the lawn, hawks loaf and bathe. This is a place of leisure. It is where hawks become not-hawks, where they discard their familiar meanings. No longer exemplars of the lethal, aristocratic gaze, these birds bathe and slosh around in baths, beat their open wings to dry, luxuriate in preening damp feathers [figure 5] "The infant Tarquin" wrote T.H. White in surprise as he watched his hawk bathe for the first time, "had suddenly become a charlady at Margate".^[vii] Garden is also noteworthy in that one of the hawks shown is a half-blind Siberian goshawk [figure 6] a kind of Tiresias of the mews. We might consider what a blind goshawk might be, in our understanding of the categories of animal; like a bloodhound with no sense of smell, it forces consideration of what we presume an animal to be made.

Importantly, there is no death in these films. No visible death, that is. Death is the films' hidden motivation, but we do not see it, or indeed at any time an animal dies. There are traces. We see blood matting the hawk's face, fur on the beak of the goshawk. But when the rabbit breaks cover and the hawks pursue, we see no rabbit, we see no kill. In this way Fell rejects the narrative arc of the genre of the hunting film. It refuses us that expected resolution. Our inability not [\[AD1\]](#)



Ruth MacLennan
(Fig 5 & 6) *Three short Films on Hawks and Men*, HD video, 2009, video still, © Ruth MacLennan



Ruth Maclennan

(Fig 7) *Three short Films on Hawks and Men*, HD video, 2009, video still, © Ruth Maclennan

compulsion to empathise with the figures on screen while they search for something hidden to us is of course precisely the point [Figure 7]. Our helpless investment in the narrative of the hunt as we yearn to see what they are looking for, following their gazes — all this forces us to consider our allegiance to the desire for power and how vision is implicated in such desires. But we are disallowed this single view: Maclennan moves her camera from the following shots to one where the lens looks up from a refuge in rushes. We are forced to take the rabbits'-eye view. Looking up, never down. Hiding, not hunting [Figure 8].

What we also learn from watching is that hawking involves particularly careful kinds of movement across a landscape, certain forms of wordless understanding that are rather beautiful to watch, and a fierce quality of attention shared between hawk and man. The bond between human and bird is palpable: they mirror each other's bodily attitudes. As they near the presumed hiding-place of the quarry both assume similar changes of shape: standing tall, anticipating, peering into the rushes, waiting for the rabbit to bolt [Figure 9].

The desire of the documentary-maker to give us a disembodied view from nowhere is

repeatedly questioned in relation to these hawkish dreams of narrative power. Most often the camera follows the falconers at a distance. Their backs are towards us. They are filmed and followed as if animals themselves; wary, impatient with interruption. They look as if they are looking for something lost. Only slowly is the quality of attention apparent. It is the quality of attention attendant on hunting. Searching. There are periods of intense stillness. The falconer looks at the hawk, the hawk at the ground. As the location of a rabbit is suspected, narrowed down, the movements of the men slow until time is almost suspended; there is a slow movement to crisis by figures half-obscured by reeds.

And then at 2:01 the dream of disembodied observation is shattered as the second falconer turns to check what effect the camera operator will have on the hunt. He is assessing Maclennan's presence in terms of whether, if a rabbit breaks, its behaviour will be affected by her position. And whether she will be able to record what happens. The camera is not innocent; it falls straight into the geometries of masculine hunting geography it seeks only to record. The documentary maker will change the shape of the flight; affect the outcome, in a landscape now comprised of the imagined



Ruth MacLennan
(Fig 8 & 9) *Three short Films on Hawks and Men*, HD video, 2009, video still, © Ruth MacLennan

reactivity of the quarry. For a fellside rabbit, rushes are for hiding. And people—in that lovely 1930s phrase—have danger valency.

Again and again, Fell plays similar games with our easy identifications and assumptions. The lost object is always there; sometimes we become it – as in the rabbits' eye view – and sometimes we are thrown into the persona of the outlook-geographer, the possessor of the hawk's keen eye. The notion of an ahistorical, aestheticised wild landscape is gently prised away in a panning shot that slows and holds on the landscape until it becomes a framed paean to wilderness. Yet the scars and patterns on those distant moors are not cloud shadows but the signs of rotational heather burning for grouse management. There is no innocence in these landscapes: they have been created and shaped by the demands of a sporting elite. Three million acres were converted from pasture and forest to moor in the nineteenth century, a period in which, as John MacKenzie has shown, "the progressive restriction of social access to hunting and the elaboration of its rules and etiquette had a tendency to transform hunting into a predominantly male pursuit."^[viii] To complicate matters further, in these landscapes of driven shooting interests, raptors are generally viewed as vermin, rather than hunting partners.

The contested myths of landscape and nature are ultimately the subject of these films, mediated particularly strongly by MacLennan's abrupt changes in camera angle that work to disarticulate our notion of what a hawk is, and what documenting a hawk might be. The camera looks up, worm's eye view, at a Harris hawk on the fist, white under-tail coverts fanned, crow-coloured wings half-open. Or down onto a goshawk, lens inches from its broad mantle as it pulls at a rabbit leg. Sometimes MacLennan gives us the organising, surveying consciousness of the planner, as in the 360-degree panning shot around the garden. And sometimes she is — and we become — the hidden animal, the hidden subject of death upon which all these formations and geographies of hunting and maleness coincide.

We might also conclude from this film that the relationship between humans and animals in hunting cultures is complex. These hawks cannot be seen merely as tools, nor solely as naturalisations of male vision and power, however deeply they may be involved in this mythos. It is important, I suspect, to consider the kinds of hawks and the kinds of men involved, and to look beyond easy concepts of hunting in which the animals are always the oppressed. For example the

captive-bred Harris hawks in Fell are a species which hunt cooperatively in family groups in the wild, ^[ix] and one might consider the hawking party to be a more equitable group in which the hawks have recruited humans and dogs in their hunting practices, just as the humans have recruited the hawk and trained the dog. Agency runs both ways, as in *The Hawk and the Tower*. Perhaps we might go so far as to say that in its resistance to a single viewpoint and in its generosity of approach, MacLennan's work presents the hawk-falconer relationship as being between human and non-human persons, as in Siberian Yukaghir society, for example, where persons can take on a variety of forms, of which human beings are only one. ^[x] This decentring of the human is perhaps the most radical element of these films, and reveals MacLennan as an artist unafraid to approach difficult political and philosophical terrain with an open, hawk-like eye.

Notes

[i]-Ted Hughes, 'Hawk Roosting', in *Lupercal*, Faber and Faber, London, 1960.

[ii] A reproduction is available at <http://tinyurl.com/ykvd1jw>

[iii] Valley of Castle (Hunting Eagles) is at: <http://www.slashseconds.org/issues/003/001/articles/rmaclennan/index.php>

[iv] W.H Auden, 'XXX' in *The English Auden: Poems, Essays and Dramatic Writings 1927-39*, Faber and Faber, London, 1986, p.46

[v] For an excellent review of the ideology of 'outlook geography' see David Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*, Reaktion Books, London, 1999.

[vi]- Gilbert Blaine, *Falconry*, Philip Allen, London, 1936.

[vii] T.H. White, *The Goshawk* (2007), *New York Review of Books*, New York, p. 76. First published by Jonathan Cape in 1951.

[viii] John M. MacKenzie, *The Empire of Nature: Hunting, Conservation and British Imperialism*. Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1988, p. 21.

[ix] see Bednarz, James, 'Cooperative hunting in Harris Hawks (*Parabuteo unicinctus*)' *Science* 25 March 1988: Vol. 239. no. 4847, pp. 1525-1527.

[x] See: Rane Willerslev, *Not Animal, Not Not-Animal: Hunting, Imitation and Empathetic Knowledge among the Siberian Yukaghirs*, *The Journal of the Royal*

Anthropological Institute, Vol. 10, No. 3 (Sep., 2004), pp. 629-652

Three Short Films on Hawks and Men

video, shot in HD video, 14 minutes, 2009

Three Short Films on Hawks and Men was filmed in Northumberland, a particularly wild part of England, on the border with Scotland. Fell, the first of the three films follows three men and their hawks as they hunt on the fell. 'Fell' has many meanings—mountain, skin, deadly, piercing. His Brilliant Eye is a quote from The Peregrine by J.A. Baker, in which the author obsessively pursues peregrine falcons, almost becoming one in the process. Here, the focus is the 'focus' and the tension and connection between bird, dog and hunter. Garden is a view of the hunter's garden, his constructed natural habitat, home to his captive goshawks, peregrines and budgerigars.

Three Short Films on Hawks and Men is the latest work in a cycle of films working with birds of prey and their handlers. Grouped together in The Department of Eagles, the series explores the physical and symbolic dimensions of birds of prey and examines the cultural role that falcons and eagles play in the world today.

In particular speed and flight are two of the modernist tropes that are laid bare in their relation to killing, but also as modernist tropes. Film can't keep up with real speed. The Hawk and The Tower and Capture explore how an object/building/place or combination of animal/object might perceive its surroundings, and how the recording of this perspective has the potential to transform our relations to space and to what we see.

Three Short Films on Hawks and Men is filmed in Northumberland in the North of England, and shows three perspectives on relations between humans, birds of prey and their habitats. The film examines the construction of landscape and garden, the ritual performance and lethal focus of the hunt.

Ruth MacLennan's collaborative art project Polytechnical Institute for the Study of the Expanding Field of Radical Urban Life, interrogates the present and speculates on the future through writing, performance, film, and events in the city. (www.archwaypolytechnic.org).

Ruth MacLennan has a Masters in Fine Art from Goldsmiths' College. Her work is shown internationally in exhibitions and film festivals. These include Central Asian Project, Cornerhouse, Manchester, and Space, London, touring Central Asia; New York Underground Film Festival, Medicine Now, Wellcome Collection; The Body. The Ruin. Ian Potter Museum, Melbourne; State of Mind, LSE, London. Artists' books include, Re: the archive, the image, and the very dead sheep with Uriel Orlow (London, Double agents: 2004), and Style/Substance—The MaxMara Coat Project with Volker Eichelmann (MaxMara, 1999).

She is currently developing a new video project in Kazakhstan, commissioned by Film and Video Umbrella and John Hansard Gallery, Southampton for a solo touring exhibition in 2010

ENKI – HUMAN TO FISH COMMUNICATION

Antony Hall's interactive work, ENKI experiment 3, explores communication between humans and a Black Ghost Knife Fish. The research aims to discover if it is possible to create a harmonious state of interaction that can be of benefit to both species, no matter how different.

Text by *Antony Hall*

Interview questions by *Rikke Hansen*



Antony Hall

Black Ghost Knifefish © Antony Hall



Antony Hall

Enki, Experiment 3 mixed media © Antony Hall

ENKI is a series of experiments in bio-interfacing between humans and certain types of Electrogenic Fish. Ultimately, this is achieved through psycho-acoustic audio and visual entrainment as a means of modulating human emotional state. Electrogenic fish use electric fields in order to navigate and communicate. They naturally emit either a continuous frequency or electrical pulses, which they modulate in order to communicate and interact with other fish. Because of this complex and unique ability, proportionally these fish have a similar brain-to-body-mass ratio as humans, which gives them the ability to see electrical images, to see in complete darkness, to learn and memorize certain tasks. ENKI is designed to work with any species of 'weakly' electrogenic fish. During this process bio-electrical activity is monitored and used as a means to create a feedback loop between organism.

The research aims to study interaction between tiny bio-electrical fields of both species [human and fish] specifically the way in which these fields modulate and the means of controlling them. It also aims to discover if it is possible to create a harmonious state of interaction that can be of benefit to both species, no matter how different. Since 2006 over 400 participants have taken part in four different versions of the experiment.

ENKI exploits several natural physical human responses to sound light and translates these into signals the fish can relate to. The human, under the effect of these stimuli, returns information back to the computer and the fish through a system of biofeedback; either GSR (Galvanic Skin Response) or/and neurofeedback via an IBVA. It also uses direct electrical connections to the fish. In experiments the human participant wears a combination of headphones and light frames (used to expose the eyes to controlled bursts of light) so immersing the human test subject for 15-30 minutes in controlled light and sound. This has the effect of an intense psychedelic experience. Later experiments use sound stimuli only. Although the specific technology used is only a little different from the early electronic mind machines of the 70s, the difference is that the fish is in control of any sound and light the human is exposed to. Mind machines use sound (binaural beats) and light to induce deep states of relaxation, concentration or altered states of consciousness; mind states traditionally associated with meditation, and shamanic exploration. The process exploits what is known as 'brainwave synchronization' or 'entrainment'. This uses the brain's 'frequency following' response while listening to binaural frequencies. These are commonly believed to have psychological and physiological effects.



Antony Hall
Enki, Experiment 3, fish tank, details, mixed media © Antony Hall



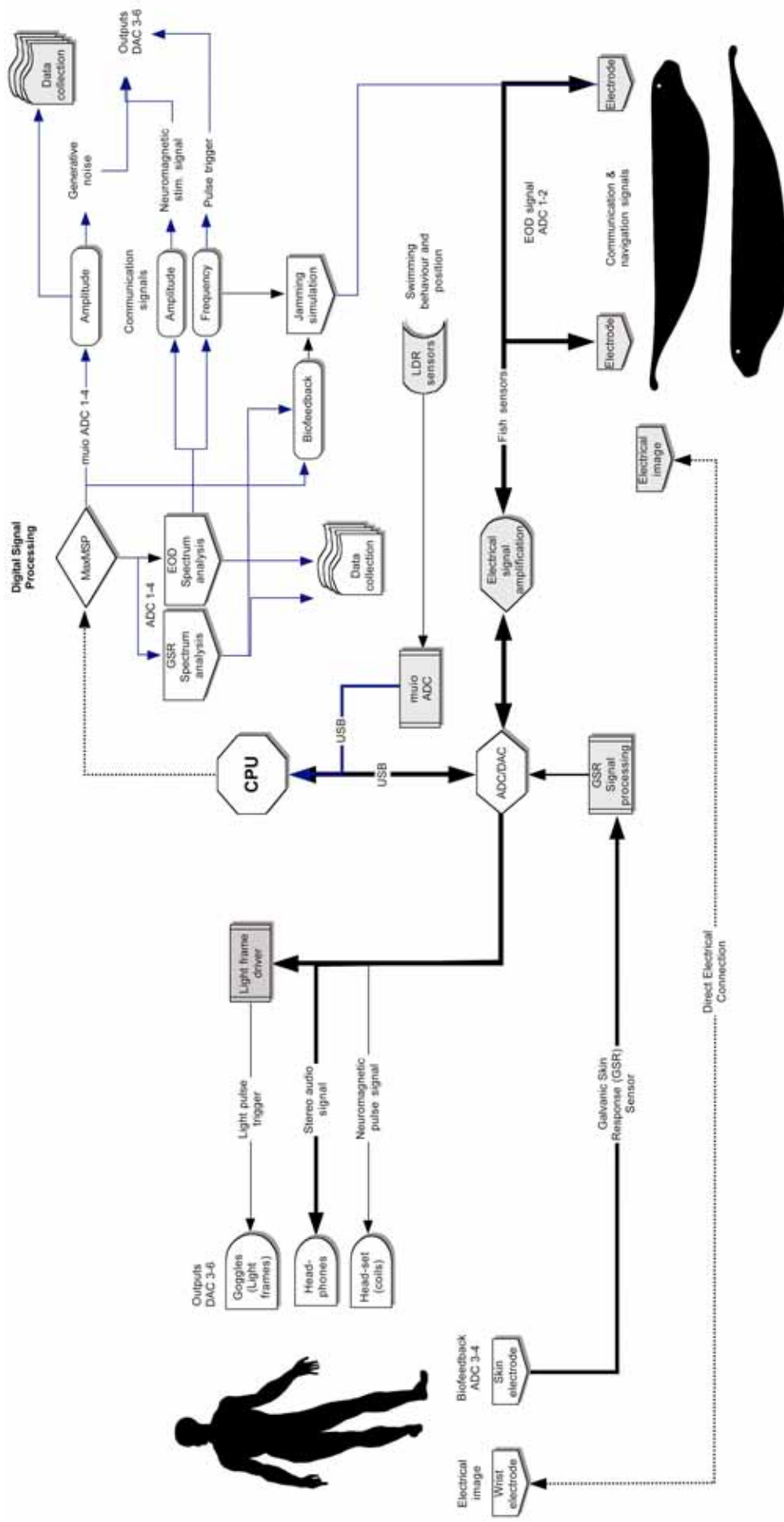
Antony Hall

Enki, Experiment 3, mixed media © Antony Hall

The Black-ghost Knife-fish generate 410 - 440Hz EOD frequency, in the Millivolt range. When interacting with the ENKI system or each other they naturally begin to modulate these frequencies communicating with small modulations called chirps. They create a binaural frequency of 4-20Hz. Theoretically by listening to this binaural tone, a human brain could sync with the frequency modulations of the fish. Central to the ENKI system is the capture of live electrical signals from the fish, and the analysis and replay of simulated signals back to the fish. Controlled communication between the fish is made through the ENKI system via electrical connections across the tanks. This creates an electrical image using the biophysical properties of the human body. The investigation looks at how this affects the behavior of the fish and if it is possible to create a biofeedback loop based on intercommunication brain states and biophysical states, between species.

To measure the effect this process has on the human test subject an EEG monitor or neuro-graphic interface [the IBVA] is used. In theory, through analyzing the frequencies generated by the fish we should see a synchronous relationship in the brain-wave data. As well as the graphics data obtained, the behavior and particular chirping activity of the fish must be taken into account. In a later experiment we used a GSR sensor as a means to detect the emotional

response stimulus. Historically, there is a deep connection with electric fish and medical healing technologies. The project makes reference to the status of these electric fish and the ethics of their use as neurological research tools; as research specimens they become sacrificial to the greater purpose of furthering human knowledge. The phenomenon of "animal electricity" was first documented in early Greek and Roman texts. For hundreds of years physicians were routinely employing the use of electric fish electrotherapeutically to treat a multitude of ailments. Later, in the late 1700s and with the development of batteries in the late 19th century, electrotherapy became a medical panacea; able to cure almost anything from cancer to baldness. The earliest methods of treatment used the direct application of electrical Torpedo fish to the human body; placing the affected painful area into a pool of water containing fish. The resulting electrical shocks stunned the nervous system allowing an immediate and residual numbness in the extremity. The deeper motivation for this project relates to a long-term interest in aquariums both public and private. A typical tropical aquarium is a multicultural space consisting of farmed and wild-caught species. Aquariums are installed as calming objects, though on closer inspection the contained environment is one of aggressive conflict, tolerance and submission. The skill



Antony Hall

Enki, Experiment 3, mixed media © Antony Hall



Antony Hall

Enki, Experiment 3, mixed media © Antony Hall

of the aquarium keeper is to create harmony among fish and through this craft an impossible window into an otherwise wild world by creating a controlled illusion of it.

Rikke Hansen interviewed the artist at the opening of Interspecies in London to discuss audience reaction to *ENK*.

Rikke Hansen: *Can you tell us what ENKI Technology is about?*

Antony Hall: This is a project I have been working on for a few years now, and it involves my pet fish from my studio. These are rather common black-ghost knife-fish, which is an electrical fish. I have created this interface, which works with them, so I can establish system of communication that capitalises on electrical impulses. The fish are connected to a circuit, which will allow me to measure the fish's responses and those of humans too. The electrical signal from the fish is here being transmitted to the human body and it creates an electrical image for the fish to use. A recent research [study] discovered that these fish could recognise electrical images as they have quite large brains. My work allows for the introduction of a human within that electrical image, so the project effectively tries to see if the fish can at least identify the difference between the human image and the rest.

RH: *And how is that measured?*

AH: Through their body language. I see if they respond to stimuli and will be rewarding them with food when I plug in a human and then plug in a human without giving any rewards and see if there is a difference in their behaviour. I look for very subtle changes in their behaviour. I also record any change of behaviour through the emission of modulations from the fish and what I found is that when the fish is presented with new objects, they at times respond with modulations. I then carry out an audio analysis of these signals.

RH: *In the press release for the piece you state that: "In order to communicate with a fish, we must first attempt to stop thinking in human terms". How could this be achieved in your views?*

AH: Well, it is not really possible. It is more a kind of ambiguous notion that aims at preparing the human part of the experiment to keep an open mind about the project. I think the key here is to think more in terms of emotional states than through language.

RH: *What is the response from the people who have sat through the project?*

AH: They find it to be a very relaxing and enjoyable experience.

RH: *In the press release, you also state that there is a level of 'healing' involved with project. Could you explain this?*

AH: Well, there is. For a while I was involved with electrical acupuncture and its beneficial aspects, so the project involving fish also overlaps with this notion.

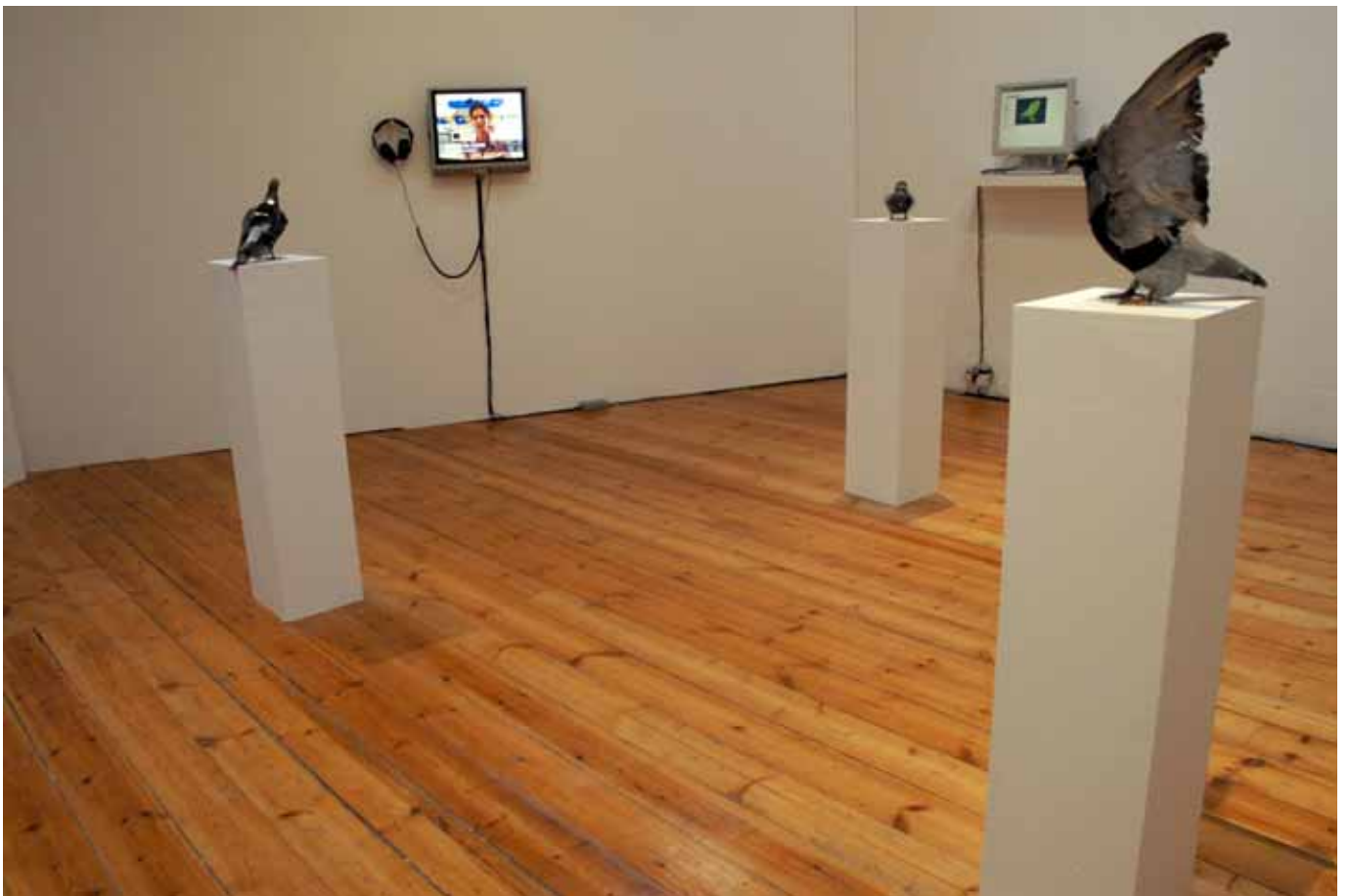
Antony Hall often works within contexts such as universities and museums, in collaboration with scientists. Projects include; Artist in residence, University Manchester Institute for Science and Technology - 2002-2003. Artist in residence, Manchester Museum 2004-5. Biotech Art workshop Art Catalyst/Symbiotica, Kings College, London 2005. Commission for Foundation for Art and Creative Technology, Liverpool 2006. The ENKI project has been shown at Manchester Museum of Science and Industry, UK. Dutch Electronic Arts Festival, V2, Rotterdam, NL, Bios4, CAAC, Seville 2007. ENTER 3, International festival of art/science/new technologies, Prague, and the European forum for emerging creation Luxembourg. He is also a founding member of the 'Owl Project' (with Simon Blackmore & Steve Symons), who have performed & exhibited in the UK and Europe, including: SCALA, London. Garage04 Festival, Germany. 'Sonic Undergrowth', Cornerhouse, Manchester 2005. Festival Emergence, Paris 2005, Ultrasound, Huddersfield 2005, WORM, Rotterdam 2005. 'Home fires', London. Futuresonic 2006 & Sonic Arts Network, Expo 2006, Commissions for Lovebytes festival, Sheffield, and London Architecture week 2007. Music protokol, Graz, Austria, Trondhiem electronic arts festival, Norway & most recently runner ups for Share Prize 2008, Torino, Italy.

Antony Hall was interviewed by Rikke Hansen at the Interspecies opening in London, October 2009 © Antennae

PIGEONBLOG

PigeonBlog is a collaborative endeavor between homing pigeons, artists, engineers and pigeon fanciers engaged in a grassroots scientific data gathering initiative designed to collect and distribute information about air quality conditions to the general public. Pigeons carry custom-built miniature air pollution sensing devices enabled to send the collected localized information to an online server without delay. Pollution levels are visualized and plotted in real-time over Google's mapping environment, thus allowing immediate access to the collected information to anyone with connection to the Internet.

Text by *Beatriz Da Costa*



Beatriz Da Costa

PigeonBlog, mixed media © Beatriz Da Costa

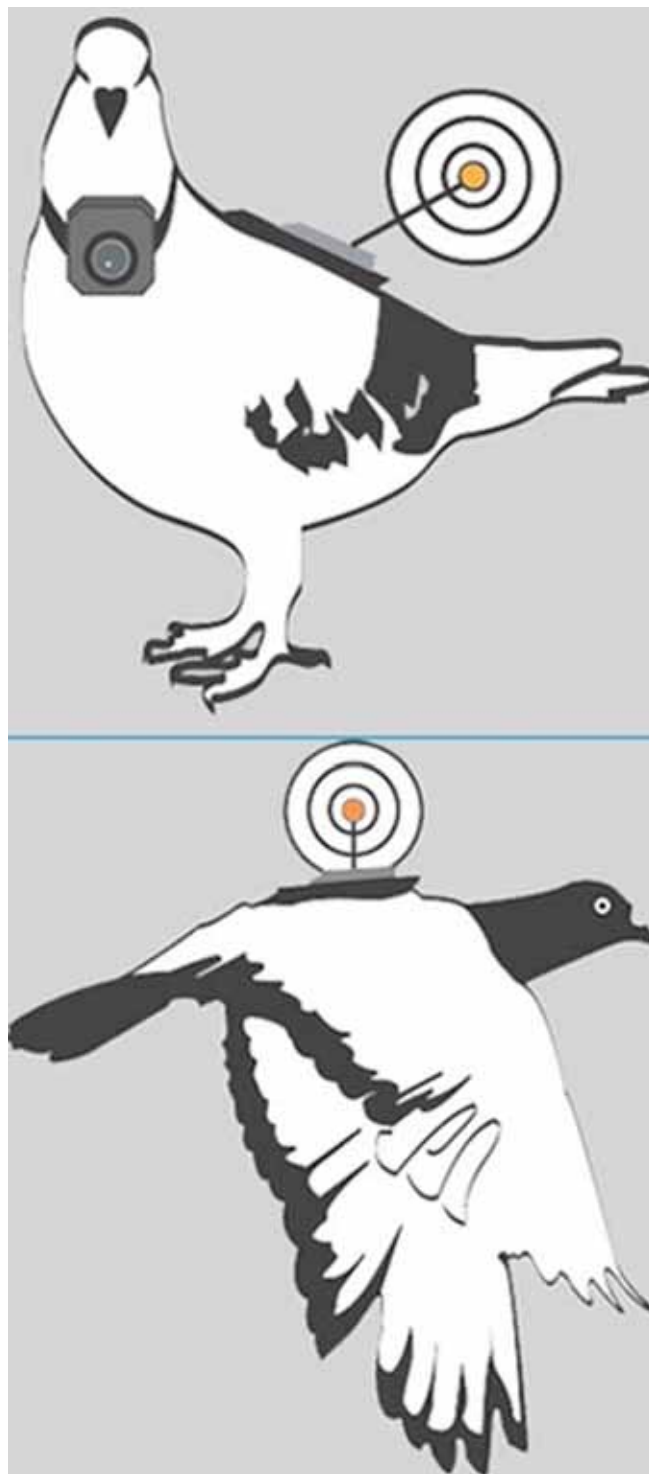
PigeonBlog /2/ was a collaborative endeavor between homing pigeons, artists, engineers and pigeon fanciers engaged in a grassroots scientific data-gathering initiative designed to collect and distribute information about air quality conditions to the general public. Pigeons carried custom-built miniature air pollution-sensing devices enabled to send the collected localized information to an online server without delay. Pollution levels were visualized and plotted in real-time over Google's mapping environment, thus allowing immediate access to the collected information to anyone with connection to the Internet.

PigeonBlog was an attempt to combine DIY electronics development with a grassroots scientific data-gathering initiative, while simultaneously investigating the potentials of interspecies co-production in the pursuit of resistant action. /3/ How could animals help us in raising awareness to social injustice? Could their ability in performing tasks and activities that humans simply can't be exploited in this manner, while maintaining a respectful relationship with the animals?

PigeonBlog was developed and implemented in the southern California region, which ranks among the top-ten most polluted regions in the country. *PigeonBlog's* aim was 1) to re-invoke urgency around a topic that has serious health consequences, but lacks public action and commitment to change; 2) to broaden the notion of a citizen science while building bridges between scientific research agendas and activist-oriented citizen concerns; and 3) to develop mutually positive work and play practices between situated human beings and other animals in technoscientific worlds.

When thinking of pigeons, people tend to think of the many species found in urban environments. Often referred to as "flying rats," these birds and their impressive ability to adapt to urban landscapes isn't always seen in a favorable light by their human co-habitants. At least by association then, *PigeonBlog* attempted to start a discussion about possible new forms of co-habitation in our changing urban ecologies and made visible an already existing world of human-pigeon interaction. At a time when species boundaries are being actively reconstructed on the molecular level, a re-investigation of human to non-human animal relationships is necessary.

The project was inspired by a famous photograph of a pigeon carrying a camera around its neck taken at the turn of the twentieth century. This technology, developed by the German engineer Julius Neubronner for military applications, allowed photographs to be taken by pigeons while in flight. A small camera was set on a mechanical timer to take pictures periodically as pigeons flew over regions of interest. Currently on display in the Deutsche Museum in Munich, these cameras were functional, but never served their purpose of assisted spy technology



Beatriz Da Costa

PigeonBlog, © Beatriz Da Costa

during wartime. Nevertheless, this early example of using living animals as participants in early surveillance technology systems provoked the following questions: What would the twenty-first century version of this combination look like? What types of civilian and activist applications could it be used for?

Facilities emitting hazardous air pollutants are frequently sited in, or routed through, low-income and "minority" dominated neighborhoods, thereby putting the burden of related health and work problems on already disadvantaged sectors of the population who



Beatriz Da Costa

PigeonBlog, mixed media © Beatriz Da Costa

have the least means and legal recourse (particularly in the case of non-citizens) to defend themselves against this practice. Recent studies also revealed that air pollution levels in the Los Angeles and Riverside counties region are of high enough magnitude to directly affect children's health and development. /4/ With homing pigeons serving as the "reporters" of current air pollution levels, *PigeonBlog* attempted to create a spectacle provocative enough to spark people's imagination and interests in the types of action that could be taken in order to reverse this situation. Activists' pursuits can often have a normalizing effect rather than one that inspires social change. Circulating information on "how bad things are" can easily be lost in our daily information overload. It seems that artists are in the perfect position to invent new ways in which information is conveyed and participation inspired. The pigeons became my communicative objects in this project and "collaborators" in the co-production of knowledge.

PigeonBlog also helped to provide entry into the health and environmental sciences. The largest government-led air pollution control agency in Southern California is the South Coast Air Quality

Management District (AQMD), covering Orange County, and the urban areas of Riverside and Los Angeles Counties. Despite AQMD's efforts, in addition to major air quality improvements achieved over the past thirty years, pollution levels in the region still surpass national regulatory health standards. In 2005 ozone levels exceeded the federal health standard for ozone eighty-four nearly one quarter of the calendar year.

Besides the actual numbers, it was the way in which air pollution measurements are currently conducted that the project hoped to address. The South Coast AQMD controls 34 monitoring stations in its responsible district. These are fixed stations at an approximate cost of tens of thousands of dollars per station. Each station collects a set of gases restricted to its immediate surroundings. Values in between these stations are calculated based on scientific interpellation models. Stations are generally positioned in quiet low-traffic areas, not near known pollution hotspots, such as power plants, refineries and highways. The rationale behind this strategy is to obtain representative values of the urban air shed as opposed to data "tainted" by local sources in the immediate surroundings.



Beatriz Da Costa

PigeonBlog, mixed media © Beatriz Da Costa

PigeonBlogs birds had the potential of validating these interpellation models. Not only were they collecting the actual information while “moving” around, but they were also flying at about 300ft altitude, a height that has proven difficult to assess through other means. Most flying targets are a source of pollution themselves. Airplanes in particular have this problem, as it is obviously quite dangerous to fly at such a low altitude. Recent behavioral studies of pigeons revealed that in addition to the commonly accepted theory that pigeons orient themselves in relation to the Earth’s magnetic field, they also use visual markers such as highways and bigger streets for orientation. /5/ Flying about 300 feet above the ground pigeons are ideal candidates to help sense traffic-related air pollution, and to validate pollution dispersion in those regions. Depending on the location of the initial release, the pigeons could also report on ground-level information at locations where AQMD sanctioned monitors were not available.

The pigeon “backpack” developed for this project consisted of a combined GPS (latitude, longitude, altitude) / GSM (cell phone tower communication) unit and corresponding antennas, a dual automotive CO/NOx pollution sensor, a temperature sensor, a Subscriber Identity Module (SIM) card interface, a microcontroller and standard supporting electronic components. Designed in this manner, we essentially ended up developing an open-platform Short Message Service (SMS) enabled cell phone, ready to be rebuilt and repurposed by anyone who is interested in doing so. While the development of the basic functionality of this device took us about three months, miniaturizing it to a comfortable pigeon size took us three times as long. After some initial discomfort, many revisions, “fitting sessions” and balance training in the loft, the birds seemed to take to the devices quite well and were able to fly short distances (up to twenty miles). The pigeons who worked with us on the project belonged to Bob Matsuyama, a pigeon fancier and middle school shop and science teacher, who became a main collaborator in the project. He volunteered his birds for *PigeonBlog* and helped the pigeons train and interact with us.

After many trials and test flights in southern California with Bob and his birds, we now felt ready to introduce the project to a larger audience. The pigeons flew on three occasions. Once as part of the Seminar in Experimental Critical Theory, an event sponsored by UC Irvine’s Humanities Research Institute. And twice as part of the Inter Society for Electronic Arts (ISEA) Festival in San Jose. All three of these events took place in August 2006 and the observing human audience members got a chance to interact with the birds and retrieve the collected pollution information. The birds who worked with us in San Jose belonged to a local San Jose pigeon fancier.

The reactions to *PigeonBlog* were diverse. While being embraced and applauded by many, there were also critical comments made by the People for

the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), who accused *PigeonBlog* of animal abuse and conducting non-scientifically grounded experiments. PETA’s campaign didn’t result in action beyond the public statement issued by the group, but it tainted the experience for a brief moment. Animal abuse was not “practiced” as part of the project, nor was animal rights a topic that the project was hoping to create public dialogue around. *PigeonBlog* was not animal rights in action, but political cross-species art in action and the collaboration with the birds was organic to the project. However, on a more positive note, PETA’s critique also raised important questions regarding the legitimacy of arts/science experiments. PETA’s accusations were built on the assessment that *PigeonBlog* was not scientifically grounded, and should therefore cease its activities. Is human-animal work as part of political action less legitimate than the same type of activity when framed under the umbrella of science?

In addition to technophile “fans” of the project who simply admired the “coolness factor” of putting electronics on birds, *PigeonBlog* also received inquiries from environmental health scientists with questions about the technology used who wondered if the device could be used for their own research, which for the most part was geared towards tracing personalized pollution exposure to humans. /6/ Another group of people who inquired about the project were ornithologists (professional and hobbyists) looking for cheap and feasible ways to track birds of all kinds. Then there were the many emails from pigeon fanciers around the country wanting to become involved in the *PigeonBlog* project itself, as well as green/environmental activists simply being supportive of the project’s goals.

All of these inquiries had a logic to them. Whereas the technophile approach to anything electronic was certainly the least interesting or relevant to the project’s ambition, that community is at least partially linked to the type of work technoscience artists engage in. The specific questions regarding the technology and its potential usefulness for other research endeavors made sense, after all the project did produce a very small, light-weight and inexpensive device that couldn’t be purchased commercially.

However, we also received an invitation to participate in a Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) grant geared towards the development of small autonomous aerial vehicles designed around the aerodynamics of birds, /7/ as well as inquiries regarding the feasibility of “measuring pulmonary artery pressure in birds during flight.” How could *PigeonBlog* possibly be of help to these people? Isn’t it obvious from this work that a DARPA grant is the last thing that its author would want to be involved in and that she is neither a biologist nor a veterinarian? Why was I suddenly being associated with areas of expertise that I was in no way qualified to respond to?

PigeonBlog received a lot of media coverage. Both national and international major newspapers covered the project as well as national television news



Beatriz Da Costa

PigeonBlog, mixed media © Beatriz Da Costa

channels. In nearly every instance, I was being referred to as “Beatriz da Costa, researcher at the University of California, Irvine.” “Researcher” seemed to imply “scientist” in many people’s minds, rather than “creative,” “social” or “artistic” researcher. Suddenly I was put under a similar scrutiny and questioning that scientists have to go through after publishing their work, and the association of the “political technoscientific artist” as a “specific” intellectual, seemed to have gone one step too far.

This realization and thoughts about the future of *PigeonBlog* made me pause for a while. Did the project lose its political potential by becoming too closely associated with the university and myself being an actor within it? How should *PigeonBlog* continue? Should *PigeonBlog* data be linked to existing air pollution models in order to justify the project’s scientific validity to criticism raised by groups such as PETA? And what would this approach entail? Would large amounts of money now have to be raised to conduct a “scientifically sanctioned” study? Would pigeons have to be flown for several years, eventually accumulating enough data to publish results in a scientific journal, rather than at an arts festival? Wouldn’t this end up creating the same trap of eventually developing expertise over time while becoming less accessible to a non-expert public?

At this point, *PigeonBlog’s* future remains uncertain. Perhaps the most inspiring and gratifying inquiry came from the Cornell Lab for Ornithology who asked me to serve on the board of their current “Urban Bird Gardens” project, which is part of their citizen science initiative. /8/ The citizen science initiative involves bird observation and data gathering conducted by non-expert citizens, ranging from the elderly to schoolchildren. Unlike other “outreach” programs conducted by universities around the country, Cornell’s citizen science initiative actually uses the collected data as part of their research studies. Several projects conducted under the citizen science agenda, such as “PigeonWatch,” “Urban Bird Studies” and now the “Urban Bird Gardens” project overlap in their aim and audience with the ambitions the *PigeonBlog* project set out to address.

Rather than dedicating myself to a scientific justification of *PigeonBlog* built within the university research environment and its related publication venues, I am hoping that this approach will be more true to *PigeonBlog’s* original aim in situating itself between the academy and non-expert participants.

Notes

[1] Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 148.

[2] [PigeonBlog](#)

[3] Another example is the [Zapped! project](#) by Preemptive Media.

[4] Nino Künzli et al., "Breathless in Los Angeles: The Exhausting Search for Clean Air," *American Journal of Public Health* 93, no. 9 (Spring 2003): 1494-1499.

[5] Hans-Peter Lipp, "Pigeon Homing along Highways and Exits," *Current Biology* 14, no. 14 (27 July 2004), 1239-1249.

[6] Preemptive Media's "AIR" project addressed the pollution exposure to humans in more detail. For more information, see: www.pm-air.net

[7] This inquiry came from a major research university in Arizona.

[8] [Cornell's citizen science initiative](#)

Beatriz da Costa is an interdisciplinary artist and researcher who works at the intersection of contemporary art, science, engineering and politics. Her work takes the form of public participatory interventions, locative media, conceptual tool building and critical writing. Da Costa has also made frequent use of wetware in her projects and has recently become interested in the potential of interspecies co-production in the pursuit of resistant practices. Her work has been exhibited at the Andy Warhol Museum, the Zentrum fuer Kunst und Medien in Germany, and the Natural History Museum in London. Da Costa is an Associate Professor in the Arts, Computation, Engineering graduate program at the University of California, Irvine and was recently awarded the prestigious US Creative Capital award. www.beatrizdacosta.net

FALLING ASLEEP WITH A PIG

At some point the pig and artist will fall asleep. The work addresses the ethics of human and animal interaction, acknowledging the implicit ambivalences and violence in the appropriation of animals as a resource. Kira and Deliah carried out the performance at Interspecies in Manchester earlier in the year and now undertake the work for a longer period in London. Artis duo Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson, interviewed Kira on Inthewrongplaceness and Falling Asleep With a Pig.

Questions by Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson



Kira O'Reilly

Falling asleep with a pig, 2009, Cornerhouse, London © Kira O'Reilly

Can you describe your performances with pigs
inthewrongplaceness and *Falling sleeping with a pig*?

I have now made 6 versions of *inthewrongplaceness*, all somewhat different depending on the space and context. It is incredibly simple. The work is made with a female pig cadaver weighing approximately 48 kgs that has been slaughtered for food consumption, so the internal organs have been removed. There is a ten-minute encounter with my body and the pig's body with one 'audience' member at a time (an exception was in Mexico where 3 people at a time came in).

The audience or viewers, or in this case perhaps participants, are given a written invitation before entering the piece that they can touch the human animal and the non-human animal. They are also given latex or vinyl gloves with which to do this and are told that they must spray ethanol on their gloves upon entering the room where I am.

Inthewrongplaceness was originally commission by HOME, a live art space in London that is also a domestic space lived in by the curator Laura Godfrey Issacs and her family.

The work has evolved over the various versions in regard to my actions but generally speaking over the course of the piece, 4 – 6 hours, I move the pigs body, I lie on her, I hold her, I insert parts of me inside her through the abattoir cuts and cavities, I try and fail to mimic the positions of her. I reposition our bodies again and again in relation to one another. The people who come into the work touch, look, move and sometimes they speak to me. Of course they are all individual and so they frequently push the encounter into various and unexpected directions.

Falling asleep with a pig creates a situation where a human animal (myself) and a non human animal (a pig, specifically Deliah, a Vietnamese Potbellied pig) share a specially designed and constructed dwelling for 36 hours (this first version was in one of the galleries at Cornerhouse, Manchester, January 2009) or 72 hours (this second version was outdoors at the A Foundation, London, October 2009). The dwelling mimics the white, clinical, modernist vocabulary of the art gallery, the gallery as laboratory. It tries to appropriate and deploy the obvious construction and conceit of this 'neutrality', impartiality and objectivity and to play with it as a mechanism and structuring device in which to arrange and to think about these two bodies in situ together. The duration of the work allows for Deliah and myself to enter into periods of sleep together, and for the positioning of us, two entirely similar mammals, to be considered in this most basic and fundamental of states common to mammals.

I find myself wondering about how 'other' and mysterious humans are in slumber in near proximities, how they appear to depart and be utterly in unreachable places within sleep states, states that point to dreams, transience, alterities. This commonality

between mammals of spending so much time in sleep modes makes me wonder about dreams, about difference, about metamorphosis, about slippage, what do piggies and piggy girls dream about? Luke aged 4 reckons Deliah is dreaming about rockets. He doesn't think that there is much difference between human animal and non-human animal dreams, he dreams about rockets. I think to tell him about HAM and other space monkeys and forget. I have been teasing Nicola Triscott about pigs in space, who knows.

The two versions of *Falling asleep with a pig* set up two very different scenarios in terms of the pigpen architecture and its placement inside and outside. These differences governed entirely other behaviours for both myself and Deliah and the viewers' interactions. The gallery construct created a very gentle and private scenario: it was warm; slumber and proximity were very available. Outside was far more exposed to both the elements and the public; the focus was more diffused; the enclosure was a slight border that seemed to invite conversation and direct engagement, breaking the ready withdrawal into relaxation and sleep, for me at least. Deliah frequently and delightfully obscured the audience's view of herself, seeking warmth under the hay bedding.

The idea of the two species, two bodies, and two individuals, entirely other, being discursive bodies, continually being bound and moving in relation to the multitude and manifest governing and orchestrations was of immense importance to my thinking toward this work and also the reality and practicalities of how it was developed and produced. This includes everything from ideas of display, exhibition, living bodies as art works, power imbalances, consent, ethics to animal welfare, DEFRA rulings on the movement of animal live stock around the country, practices of containment and contagions, hazards and waste.

The work inthewrongplaceness has been performed in many locations, one being within the context of a church in the side chapel at Ex Teresa Arte Actual in Mexico. The ecclesiastical space invokes notions of the sacred and conversely, the profane. Can you tell us something about your instincts and/or rationale regarding this site for this work?

All the variations of *inthewrongplaceness*, including Ex Teresa Arte Actual have been the result of an invitation, so really I didn't select the sites although I had a say in whether I did wish to use them. Much of my work happens this way in regard to non-art spaces and sites. The site is like a contextual envelope that the performative processes can interlace with to varying degrees of intricacy and because I am not always the person initiating where the performance occurs, it allows a collaborative and frequently unexpected factor to enter into my process, moving the performance into modes and areas that I could not have anticipated or created by myself.

In the case of *Ex Teresa*, the performance



Kira O'Reilly

intewrongplaceness, 2005, Commissioned by Home, London, photography by Manuel Vason © Kira O'Reilly

space was a side chapel. Initially I was responding to the idea of the exhibitions rationale, my work being seeing alongside artists like Polona Tratnik, Paul Vanouse, and Adam Zaretsky, who work with varieties of living materials, technologies and emerging media. As the work had its origins in animal research facilities and the discourses of the technoscientific body, that made a lot of sense to me. *Intewrongplaceness* came out of an intense period of research whilst I was an artist in resident at *SymbioticA*, the arts and science research laboratory at University of Western Australia, where I had been learning basic tissue culture techniques including creating primary cell culture of pig skin.

For me the utilisation of touch (touché), the tactile dimension, intersects with the visual, and cannot be emphasised enough. The senses mix to create an altogether other interface and encounter, a sensuous feedback of flesh, albeit through the latex or vinyl glove, of temperature, weight and texture. I have a childhood memory of putting a digit into the velvet lined hole in a statue of Christ – the wound in his side – my intrepid Doubting Thomas moment; and of touching the cold, stony hands of a small, dead nun laid out in a side chapel at the convent I went to school at for a while – a dare I daresay. And the folds of skin encircling another Doubting Thomas's finger, in Caravaggio's painting. These are heady and fleshy tropes that cascade through these actions.

*On your website you say that an email from someone in response to *intewrongplaceness* prompted you to perform a work with a living animal as opposed to the dead one. To what extent, for you, did the second work function as a redemptive act in relation to the first?*

No not at all. The notion of staging a redemptive act seems somehow trite and unconsidered, as if these were acts of finality rather than experiential processes that are highly considered and thoughtful. In my mind notions of redemption would come from a Judeo Christian paradigm and organisation of morals, which I do not think my work or process does at all. Of course people engaging with the works might wish to make those readings but they would not accord with my doings and thinking.

Actually I had been thinking about this work for a long time. The notion of living with pigs came from observing pigs and their living conditions in the large animal research facility at University of Western Australia. I was curious about their life and the obvious care that was involved in their wellbeing, as well as the complexity of the issue of animal experimentation. I thought about living with the pigs for a while. Of course this was not an option, however this was the seed for this work. It became the beginning of a conversation with *The Arts Catalyst* commissioning and producing body, shortly after my return to the UK from Australia,

and we developed the idea of how it would work for Interspecies. The email was written in response to a media storm of misinformation that surrounded the Tract version of *inthewrongplaceness* in Penzance. The story replicated in viral media fashion from the local to the international, incorporating statements from *PETA* and right-wing blog commentaries on a work that none of the commentators or reporters had witnessed or seen. Hence a very different kind of work was speculated on and the opportunities to create a meaningful public discussion on ethics, care and relation was lost for quick newspaper selling and a knee-jerk reaction. It meant that I received a huge amount of highly aggressive emails to which I didn't respond. The one I did respond to was a really gracious and highly critical email from someone in the USA who runs a pig sanctuary. I corresponded back and they were surprised by my take and withdrew much of their anger, but also made the suggestion that I work with live pigs. I found this really encouraging, especially considering where the conversation was coming from and how invested this emailer was. These works are not in any way meant to make ultimate statements. but are provocations to attempt to reframe and therefore cultivate other possibilities of perspective, consideration and conceptual spaces.

Can you describe for us your experience of sleeping with a pig?

Soft, sleepy, warm, cosy, two bodies at their most basic. Dreams and touch, cold and warmth. The falling, watching as an eye feels the pull of sleep gravity and is unable to resist that tumble into sleep state, as my eye also makes that tumble. The pig eye of Deliah becomes altogether familiar from the strange and the other. There is continually a flickering between known and recognised, identifying with and non-recognition.

What is the role of surrogacy in both the performance works inthewrongplaceness and falling asleep with a pig?

My research at *SymbioticA* was concerned with investigating creating a tissue-cultured fabric of living alce from my own skin cells. There were quite a few complex steps to take toward this, from applying for ethical approval, to working from my own skin cells and of course learning the actual techné of tissue culture myself. As a biopsy was going to be taken from me from which a culture of skin cells was to be cultivated, I needed to practice the process of biopsy and cell harvesting. This I did from pigs who were being sacrificed for asthma research. The lungs would be removed and then I would cut skin from the still warm pig's body, take it back to the lab and harvest cells from it. Both *inthewrongplaceness* and falling asleep with a pig emerged as responses to these animal research and lab processes on my return to the UK.

Tissue Culture and Art Project have referred themselves as scavengers when they have, on occasion,

worked with primary cells' cultures (cells harvested directly from bodies as opposed to cell lines that are being used primarily for other purposes). However, I was curious about articulating another relationship to the pigs I worked from. I felt more that I was operating closer to the scientific animal model, where the pig was physiologically similar and therefore useful to develop my cell cultivating skills. However, my relationship was also one of identification. This excerpt of text describes the doubling:

performing or rather rehearsing that scenario four times with a pigs cadaver; using the pig as dummy, stand in, double, twin, other self, doll, imaginary self; making fiercely tender and ferocious identifications with the pig, imaginings of mergence with the pig, co-cultured selves, and to cultivate and nurture pig bits for months. Taking a cutting of 'something' that feel like someone dying and keeping a little bit of it living and proliferating for months - like a plant.

You stupid, stupid cow! [1]

Was it ever a question of what animal you might involve, or was a pig always right for these works? If so, what drew you specifically to a pig?

For both of those works it had to be a pig for the reasons previously described. And pigs have such currency. At the time there was a public consultation whilst I was in Australia about xenotransplantation, and of course pigs are and would be one of the primary animals that would be utilised. So pigs and their presence, consumed and enmeshing with increased and more complexity with humans was and continues to be key. Their obvious intelligence, physiological similarity, embodiment of so many conflicting cultural values, and to a great extent my tissue culture heart break and wonder, were main drivers in the works.

After falling asleep with a pig you and the pig both left the enclosure, but the staged environment was left in the gallery with the addition of a video documentation of the performance. This is how the work was experienced for those visiting the gallery for the remainder of the show. This was obviously a very different experience to that of witnessing the actual performance – what are your thoughts on that shift? Yes, it was entirely different. In many ways it was very valuable for me to have the opportunity to make a work that could extend beyond the live but it is



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Inthewrongplaceness, 2009, 13th International Festival of Performance Art. "Accidentes Controlados", Ex Teresa Arte Actual, Mexico City.
Photography Antonio Juárez © Kira O'Reilly



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Inthewrongplaceness, 2009, sk-interfaces, Casino Luxembourg, photography, Axel Heise © Kira O'Reilly

of course difficult. Similarly, in sk-interfaces in Casino Luxembourg, the site of the most recent and perhaps last version of *Inthewrongplaceness*, there is now an installation of taxidermied animals, natural history samples, freshly cut flowers and photographic prints taken of the live performance. It's hard. I want the work to extend the short life span of the performance and I find the slide into representation, trace and residue interesting, because of course these things cannot convey the event and its eventfulness. But with falling asleep with a pig I felt that the dwelling construct, the gallery created for us, was also important. Its shell was like a governing system of display and behaviours for both of us (Deliah and I) and the public. I found it an intriguing set up that I was interested to leave. The shortness of the live performance also commented on the wrong "placeness" of the gallery for life and living, that it really is a place for dead or inanimate things. I think George Gessart writes about this in relation to his art works that are live flowers. The 21st century gallery is severely limited in its possibilities and it imposes its own discursive mode for bodies be they human, non-human animal or across both animal kingdoms and interkingdoms.

When looking at the environment created for falling asleep with a pig one noticed an implicit hierarchy between human and animal in that a raised platform, accessible by ladder, had been provided for you but the pig was left beneath, without access to the raised platform. Why was this and what effect did this have conceptually on the work in your estimation?

There was a platform, but it did not have a ladder. It was low enough that I could get onto it easily but high enough that it could give Deliah a space to be under. The original vision for the work was two bodies lying beside one another on the same level and indeed that was realised much of the time in both versions. The designers had included a platform in the design and I thought it a good idea as it allowed some clear space if Deliah was stressed or unhappy and visually suggested the idea of a bed. What didn't occur to me and what should have was that a hierarchy was then suggested. This was really counter to what the piece was trying to do. Therefore I was really pleased when this was addressed in the second version by the addition of a ramp that allowed Deliah access to the platform area. Donna Haraway initially suggested the ramp so we



Kira O'Reilly

Falling asleep with a pig, 2009, Cornerhouse, London © Kira O'Reilly

called it the Haraway ramp. But I felt very embarrassed and frustrated about my blind spot. I had spent so much time sleeping on the ground with Deliah under the platform that somehow the hierarchical readings had escaped me.

Your work explores amongst other things the merging of human animal through the contact of human and non-human animal skin – the pig's skin and your own. The audience are however denied that same experience as they are made to wear latex gloves and provided with ethanol spray for their hands.

Can you explain your thoughts behind this decision?

The latex and vinyl gloves are a reference to lab work and behaviours, rituals of containment and contagion, practices of aseptic technique. They are also asked to spray the gloves with 70% ethanol as in a tissue culture lab. Sometimes these practices are necessary and founded on principle and function of protocols in the laboratory setting, but not always. Sometimes they are behaviours that preserve an environment or attitude but are not strictly necessary. Within the work the gloves function like a residue, as the environment is never explicitly that of a science setting (although that would be great to do). It also suggests protection, sex, condoms, the one on one situation of the piece... our nakedness sometimes means that an audience will

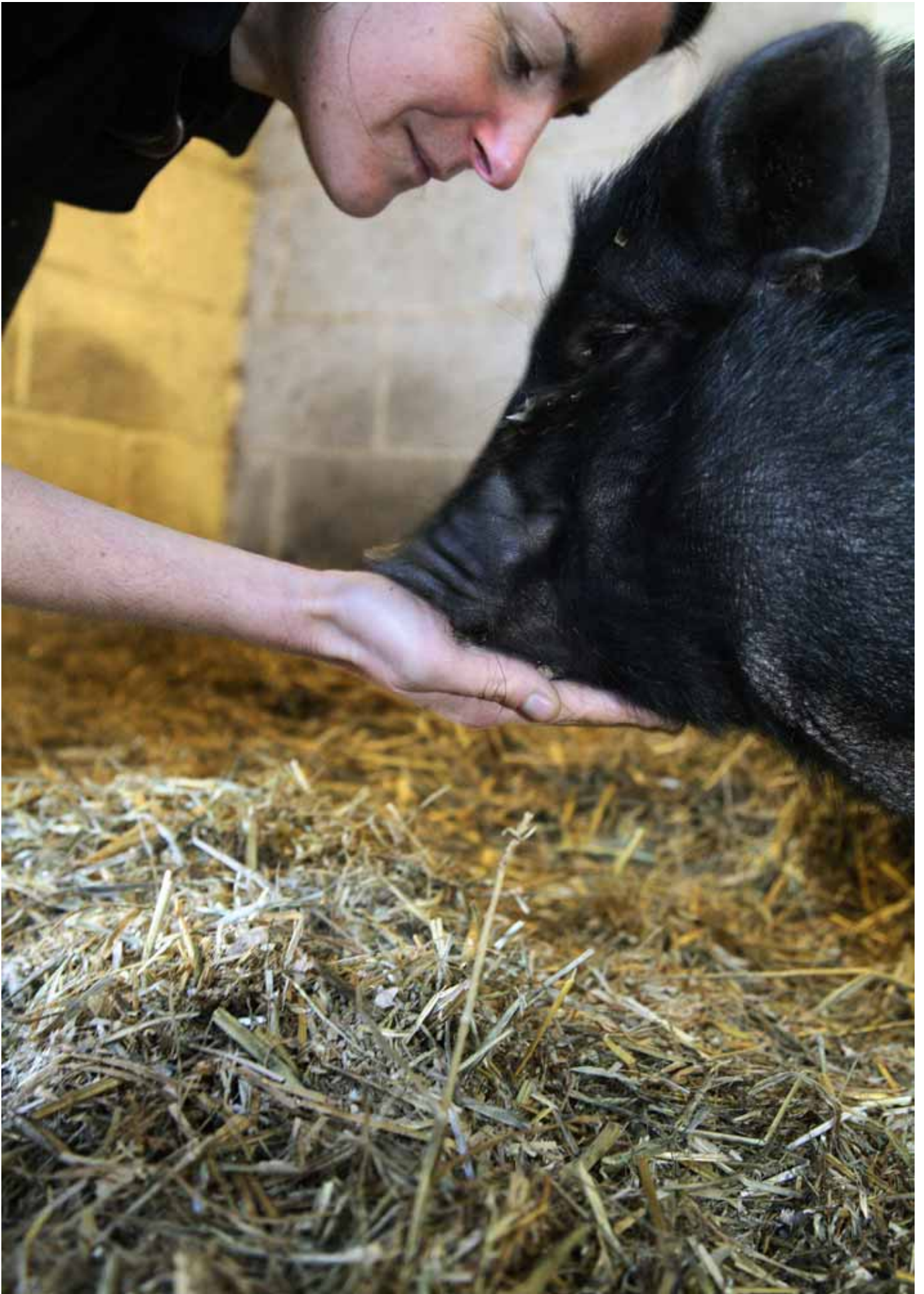
gravitate more toward a sexualised encounter or reading. The work will enter slightly into sex scenarios or sex work scenarios. There is the easy awkwardness of a supposed intimacy.

In inthewrongplaceness you manipulate the corpse of the pig – is this sense of control behind the decision that you should offer yourself to be manipulated by your audience?

I didn't offer myself to manipulate but the person coming into the room, they are invited to touch the human animal and the non-human animal. It is also made clear to them that they do not have to do that, and indeed that they do not have to do anything that they do not want to do. But of course control and power are at issue here. Coercion and manipulation of bodies, but also tender and soft actions of embrace and thoughtfulness, care and caring, are played out by myself and the individuals who enter into the work.

I do not think of the moving of the body of the pig as manipulation – of course it is but I embrace, hold, carry, and lie on, under and in the body.

Both inthewrongplaceness and Falling asleep with a pig can be said to reference another two seminal works in the history of performance art – Meat Joy by Carolee Schneemann (1964) and Joseph Beuys' I Like American and America Likes Me (1974). Was this a conscious



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Falling asleep with a pig, 2009, Kira and Deliah meet, commissioned and produced by The Arts Catalyst, photography by Kristian Bus
© Kira O'Reilly



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Falling asleep with a pig, 2009, Cornerhouse, London © Kira O'Reilly

decision at the outset and either way, what became possible for you by this association?

Both works are lodged as major works in my own cultural legacy as early influential works from when I first read about them as a foundation student. The references were not conscious but that is not to deny their profound and enduring influence. Since making my works I have been revisiting both these works and my position within a lineage that emerges from these practices. However, the works that I was thinking more consciously about were *Embracing Animal* by Kathy High and *Workhorse Zoo* by Adam Zaretsky. Also Marie Darrieussecq's *Pig Tales* was of immense importance to me. Anthony Howell, who was a lecturer and artist when I studied made a work creating sculptures for a pig. Also key were works by artists such as *Tissue Culture and Art Project* and their *Semi Living Worry Dolls*, and the highly dynamic environment of *SymbioticA*. Within this milieu ethics and the play of power across bodies, their appropriation and manipulation in the life sciences were always being discussed and contested. All these works and this context were incredibly inspiring and enabled a

continuation of my working as I had before with *The Body* and my own experiential lived in body, but to be more explicit relation to other bodies – non human animal bodies and therefore other resultant emerging bodies.

Pig Tales allowed me to think through some of the ideas of shifts and transitions, especially in regard to gender and sexuality. At the time of reading I was beginning to write, and the linkage of fleshy metamorphosis and text, the idea of text and flesh mixture(ing) was key. Zaretsky's *Workhorse Zoo* so clearly allowed the references to the laboratory and specific ecologies that are cultivated and facilitated within life science research culture to be examined with a huge degree of risk and intelligence. Just knowing about this work was essential to my being able to begin to approach making both of my works. *inthewrongplaceness* was also born of a most awful feeling of failure and the traumatic transgressions of taking biopsies from freshly sacrificed pigs (again as I type, Deliah's gentle snores move again into my hearing consciousness and I become reminded that I am sitting on hay under the heat lamp within in our extravagant pig pen here in the heartland of the East End, strange

almost baby like snuffles, the baby that turns into a pig in the arms of the Duchess in Alice in Wonderland). Creating primary cell cultures from a freshly killed pig that I was able to sustain and keep in a dividing and thriving state for some time was astonishing and difficult in the most visceral and bodily way. It held a sway of emotions and realisation that mere knowing couldn't convey. *In the wrong placeness* came from this as did the subsequent falling asleep with a pig. It came from the wretched and curious, passionate and perverse questioning of: how do I begin to address this knowledge, this power? How and where do I position myself in relation to these power chains, and how do I being to navigate and negotiate them in relation to these animals I am working from/on/with/about? How do I articulate desire and curiosity that takes me into these situations and their embrace? How do I create poetic and conceptual spaces that allow an/other, you, the audience/viewer/reader/participant/paramour/collaborator/spectator/toucher, to also engage, encounter and trouble this fraying? And – where do we stand?

On your website you make a reference to I Like American and America Likes Me referring to the dead pig arriving on a trolley as Beuys arrived for his 'cohabitational' performance, with a coyote, at the René Block gallery on an ambulance trolley: two very different beings – a dead female pig and a male artist-shaman-hero. Can you say something about the respective roles of gender and domesticity in your 'cohabitational' work falling sleep with a pig?

For some reason I'm finding your question about gender very difficult to answer. I'm not sure why this is, as issues of gender have always been at stake and at play in my work. This is curious but I have often described my art works as occupying spaces where I am 'lost for words'. Of course this domain of absence of words is not absolute and words are at play continually, be it at the edges or interlacing after the event.

I didn't think of falling asleep with a pig as cohabitation or occupying a domestic register. It was more to do with placement. In many ways it is disarmingly simple and clumsy to feel for a kind of poetic language; two bodies sleeping next to one another and the possibility of dreams, both materiality and metaphorically; where words are at the tips of tongues and language and material meet and enmesh across bodies and the most ancient narratives of metamorphosis can come into play in a contemporary context. Somehow I am trying to find that language – a poetic one perhaps that is not reductive in the art work or my commentaries that can facilitate another kind of spaciousness.

In A Thousand Plateaus, Deleuze and Guattari talk about the function of aging as the first step of understanding the process of becoming animal. [2] You have talked about

forcing your 40-year-old body into the unfamiliar and difficult contortions of dance. Do you see a relationship between the issues of gender and aging and becoming animal?

To clarify the dance reference, it was more to do with being untrained as a dancer, making movement work and how daft that is at such a late age, and yet how freeing that is. I will never be able to be an accomplished dancer and of course that is not what I am interested in. It is the "inexpertise" and yet claiming a ground with mastery and applying the same diligence and hard work to that area that I do to others. However mine is not a trained dance technique, although it is highly informed by a serious yoga practice.

I did read this question with a panic in that I have not yet read Deleuze and Guattari's *Becoming Animal*, and so, here in the pig pen, within the parameters of falling asleep with a pig, I have begun to dip into it and the referenced paper *Following The Rats* by Lawler as I sit beneath the heating lamp that has been provided for Deliah and I. However it is important for me to acknowledge other modes of developing knowledge that are not always in reference to theory and philosophy, but that find their way via the body, actions, doings, materiality, but also film, literature and other art works. Gender and aging, I don't know, the status and shape of gender is transitory. I always feel I am becoming something else, that gender slips and slides, becomes somewhat undone and redone as I move and as physicality and it's tremendous permeability revolve in relation to without. This malleability is subtle and inexact; these art works are perhaps brief framings of it for an imprecise encounter.

The incremental, tiny consistencies of body shifts, skin textures altering from smooth to infinitesimally wrinkling, strata of fatty deposits shifting, lumping into areas of cellulite, drying, bulging, sagging, stiffening, many, many moments of startlingness. As I performed *Stair Falling*, 17 days of daily four hour backward and achingly slow fallings down a Victorian stone staircase naked, the caress of stone and skin, the effect of gravity and gaze burdened and unburdened my body. It was as much a dancing of becomings and molecular shifts as anything. It was upside-down hangings and slidings, flashings of pink bits and eye holdings, feelings and touching of irons and stone through soft leather skin gloves, hairs catching and muscles softening. Tits and arse askew. (As I write this Deliah the pig snores softly, she goes to bed earlier than I, I feel I am baby sitting, a quiet solitude of working late but in quiet companionship, see saw between the alone not alone, minding, caring).

These miniscule transitions of physicality are similar if not exactly the same as the interpenetrations of borders, membranes and selves that falling asleep with a pig frames, being within the pigpen as part of it's ecology, a tinkering with kingdoms and interkingdoms of mammals, insects, bacteria. The inter is not just between the discrete entities of Deliah and myself but

also the vast movements of our 'selves' as interior and exterior attendant micro organism congregations, not to mention the hay and whatever it was hosting that were brought into proximity and relation with one another.

In the context of contemporary art are there particular, even unique things that you believe working with an animal can reveal?

Absolutely, but I am cautious right now of saying with any certainty what they are. In some respects this is because these art works I make are in communication with another, you, the audience, viewer etc. So I am curious about how someone else might answer that question with regard to my work and how it sits within this given context. I would say that working with an animal always reveals limits and limitations – of human animal, of myself. However when I consider works by the other artists in Interspecies or those I've mentioned who so informed this work, then I am convinced of a kind of alternative to that position that suggests a more interesting set of possibilities and potentials.

Notes

[1] O'Reilly, K, *Marsyas - Beside Myself*, *Sk-Interfaces: Exploding Borders - Creating Membranes in Art, Technology and Society*, ed., Jens Hauser, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008.

[2] Lawlor, L. *Following the Rats: Becoming Animal in Deleuze and Guattari*, *SubStance* # 117, Vol.37, no.3, 2008 pg. 169-189

Kira O'Reilly is a UK based artist; her practice employs performance, biotechnical practices and writing with which to consider speculative reconfigurations around The Body. Her work has been exhibited widely throughout the UK and Europe, Australia and China and featured in the recently published in Sk-interfaces: Exploding Borders - Creating Membranes in Art, Technology and Society, edited by Jens Hauser, Liverpool University Press, 2008.

Kira O'Reilly was interviewed by Antennae in October 2009 © Antennae

NEW DIRECTIONS IN PRIMATE CINEMA

Primate Cinema is a series of video experiments that translate primate social dramas for human audiences. The first experiment, Baboons as Friends, is a two channel video installation juxtaposing field footage of baboons with a reenactment by human actors, shot in film noir style. A tale of lust, jealousy, sex, and violence transpires simultaneously in human and nonhuman worlds. Bestly males, instinctively attracted to a femme fatale, fight to win her, but most are doomed to fail. The story of sexual selection is presented across species, the dark genre of film noir re-mapping the savannah to the urban jungle.

Text by Rachel Mayeri

The mirror test, a common experiment in the study of animal behavior, is used to see if an animal has self-awareness. If an animal recognizes itself in a mirror, then, researchers imagine that the animal can distinguish between itself and others. This self-awareness is linked to having a “theory of mind,” understanding that others have a mentality – desires, knowledge, and beliefs – different from one’s own. Considering another’s mindset can be used for understanding and getting along with others. A theory of mind can also be used to deceive and manipulate others. It is presumably central to social life in human animals and nonhuman animals like chimpanzees, orangutans, dolphins, and elephants.

Observing animals is something like a mirror test: how much do we see ourselves, how much can we see another? What do we do with the knowledge that we have of another animal’s mentality? How do we deal with the fact that we are not the only animals in the universe?

Donna Haraway has written that primatology, whether it is successful or not, is dependent on the construction of mirrors. She is referring in her 1989 book *Primate Visions* to the projections that primatologists make upon their fellow primates – cultural assumptions about social structure, gender, politics, violence, and the closeness or distance between human and nonhuman primates. Scientists’ stories about nature – reflected in popular media – have important social consequences because they so often are used to justify arguments about human

potential. They also have consequences for the lives of animals.

Cinema has been likened to a mirror. In the dark space of the theater, we lose ourselves and find ourselves in surrogates on the screen. Following the gaze of a character through the placement of a camera eye, we see reaction shots as if they were intended for us. We get to vicariously watch social life from another person’s point of view. Just how we identify with or create distance between ourselves and characters on the screen is a point of much debate in film studies. Regardless, we seem to be riveted by and surrounded by screens.

Observing others – whether human or animal – is cinema primeval. Shirley Strum and Bruno Latour, in their chapter in *Primate Politics* (1991), make the case that all primates are primatologists. Primates need to constantly keep track of social alliances, hierarchies, conflicts, and behavioral patterns – or risk the consequences. The human fondness for virtual representations of social life in cinema, television, and social network sites like Facebook is a good adaptation. We get to learn about social life from a safe distance.

In the video experiments I am making for the project *Primate Cinema*, I want to tease apart storylines about human and animal nature. Exploring the genres of film noir (in *Baboons as Friends*) and wildlife documentary (in the video installation *How to Act like an Animal*) I was curious about the formation of identity and affiliation through cinematic devices: we are like them (zoomorphism), they are like us



Rachel Mayeri

Baboons as friends, 2007, two-channel video, 2.5 minute loop © Rachel Mayeri

(anthropomorphism). Rather than merely translating one story from baboon or chimp to human, I wanted to see how different genres work as prisms – how they diffract and produce patterns, when one species is projected upon another.

Primate Cinema: Baboons as Friends

The first video experiment in the Primate Cinema series, *Baboons as Friends* juxtaposes footage of baboons taken in the field with a re-enactment by human actors, shot in film noir style in a bar in Los Angeles. A tale of lust, jealousy, sex, and violence transpires simultaneously in nonhuman and human worlds. Bestly males, instinctively attracted to a femme fatale, fight to win her, but most are doomed to fail. The story of sexual selection is presented across species, the dark genre of film noir re-mapping the savannah to the urban jungle.

Baboons as Friends is presented as a two channel video installation. One side shows raw field footage of baboons in Kenya, shot by primatologist/cognitive scientist Deborah Forster. The other side shows a re-enactment I scripted and directed with actors. The soundtrack combines actual vocalizations of the baboons with the ambience of a bar. One can attempt to decode baboon behavior by watching the two species side by side, or by listening on headphones to a commentary by Forster on the behavior of primates.

This project began in San Diego four years ago when Deborah Forster introduced me to her advisor Shirley Strum, who has studied baboons for thirty years and was between her twice-yearly trips to Kenya. Strum wondered how to present the soap opera of primate life so that baboon personalities and stories would be as easy to follow as an episode of the sit-com *Friends*. I thought this would be an interesting experiment. Watching *Friends*, the viewer can instantly identify the characters, and quickly enters into the plot. But for the untrained eye watching baboons, it's impossible to distinguish individuals and recognize behavioural patterns.

Watching baboons myself for the first time along a road in Uganda, their groupings and movements seemed mysterious and complex. Many books on the study of baboons understandably begin with a quotation by Darwin in his 1838 Notebook, "He who understands the baboon would do more towards metaphysics than Locke."

In the nineteen-forties and fifties, baboons were the favoured model for human evolution – the man-as-hunter model of early human society. Moving from the protection of the trees to the open savannah, baboons, presumably like our human ancestors, would have to fight off predators, and hunt and forage for food. Males would protect females, and aggressively fight amongst themselves for rank and reproduction. The entry of women into the field



Rachel Mayeri

Baboons as friends, 2007, two-channel video, 2.5 minute loop © Rachel Mayeri

of primatology coincided with a change in emphasis in the study of social organization (Haraway, 1989; Strum and Fedigan, 2000). In the nineteen-sixties and seventies, new primatologists found baboons to be organized matrilineally: males of breeding age left the troop, while females bestowed rank upon their young. Strum (1975), Smuts (1982), and others studied alliances, grooming, and negotiation—in addition to aggression and hierarchy—in the large, intensely social groupings of baboons. Observing the canny exercise of politics in the lives of social primates, cognitive scientists postulated that the pressures of social life itself might have shaped the evolution of cognitive abilities in human beings. Thus, despite the fact that chimpanzees and bonobos have become more popular models for human nature among the general public, for scientists, baboons still present an intriguing case of social complexity.

Strum's idea of baboons as *Friends* is a primatologists' in-joke. What binds individuals together in baboon society is what she and other primatologists have called "friends" (Smuts, 1985). Savannah baboons are "promiscuous," mating with many members of the opposite sex. But friends, in baboon society, are not on a brief adventure on the road to monogamous pairing or nuclear family. Baboon friendships are long-term bonds between males and females; they are sometimes sexual, but not exclusively with each other. They hang out with each other during the day, grooming and foraging together, and they sleep together at night. Baboon friends seem to provide comfort for each other in a society that is otherwise fraught with competition for food, sex, alliance, and rank. Friendship and the bond between mother and infant are the glue of baboon society, constantly renewed through greetings, staying nearby, supporting one another in conflict, and watching and touching each other as the dramas of the day unfold.

Friends, the popular television sit-com, reminds us that human beings will often choose to watch simulated social interaction instead of engaging in real, proximate relationships. *Friends* is a variation on the women's television genre, the soap opera. The audience for soap opera, the now-mythical full-time home-maker, could watch inter-family, inter-generational drama unfold day after day, year after year, while her own family was at work or school. The significance of the impulse to observe social relations in long-term studies such as *Days of Our Lives* and *As the World Turns* has not been lost on self-reflexive primatologists. Anthropologist/evolutionary biologist Robin Dunbar (1998) postulates that human language skills evolved because of the advantages of gossiping. Whereas nonhuman primates must constantly monitor alliances visually and refresh them through grooming

and contact, human primates are freed from this constant effort through language and other symbolic communication, such as media.

We can maintain social connections despite separations in time and space. Watching *Friends* and other entertaining primate studies, human primates can learn different strategies for political advantage and conflict resolution. We get to enjoy the dangers and rewards of sociality from a safe distance.

Cognitive scientist Deborah Forster and I looked at her video data of the group dynamics of baboons. From the complexity and sheer numbers of baboons involved, I chose a clip I imagined could provide a short, simple story with a conflict and a resolution, with a relatively small cast of characters. Despite menacing appearances, there is no violence, only theatre.

Unlike situational comedy, film noir works without dialogue. One finds plenty of nonverbal communication: the leering gaze, the downtrodden posture, and the threatening gesture. Film noir enabled me to play with the gaze, an important way of signalling attention and aggression in both human and non-human primates. Femme fatales, leading men to their doom, play a central role in plots with jealous husbands, fall guys, and those professional voyeurs, private eyes.

Film noir's "hard-boiled" visual style contrasts with the "raw" field footage of baboons. Film narrative applies a lens to nature, which lacks protagonist and plot. Through actors' eyes and bodies, viewers of *Baboons as Friends* can begin to distinguish the unique personalities of individual baboons – their fears, desires, and social strategies. Clichés provide a shortcut for understanding the soap opera of baboon life, yet they point back to the fact that representation is always situated within historical and cultural context. The conventions of film noir enable a reading across species but at the same time foreground their incommensurability.

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How to act like a animal, workshop, Cornerhouse Gallery in Manchester © Rachel Mayeri

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Note: *Primate Cinema*, by Los Angeles-based artist Rachel Mayeri, is a project which began in 2006 and consists of videos, performances, and installations. As part of the exhibition, Mayeri taught workshops on *How to Act like an Animal* in Manchester and London. The essay about *Primate Cinema*, adapted for *Antennae*, was originally published by the *Pomona College Museum of Art* in fall 2009.

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NICOLAS PRIMAT: AN ARTIST BETWEEN SPECIES

*Nicolas Primat is one of a small band of artists, working on art/science collaborations, who actively questions the accepted approach of assuming that the human species is the focus of creation.
Text by Rob La Frenais*



Nicolas Primat/Patrick Munck

Portrait de Famille, 2004, Video Still photography and Photoshop Giovanni Aloï © Primat/Munck

Society is now at a point in scientific and medical development where, while it is even more dependent on research involving animals to cure once-incurable diseases and to make advances in neuroscience, scientists are finding out that some animals - especially the higher primates - have more highly developed consciousness. The area of animal research itself is particularly polarised, with the interests of acute patients and people with disabilities appearing to be positioned against the animal rights activists - those who believe the lives and welfare of all other species to be sacrosanct. Many believe that humans, themselves primates, have abused their power as top species.

Can artists' work with different species be a form of collaboration, or simply centred around the interests of the artist/human? The American philosopher Donna Haraway has recently challenged our thinking about interspecies relations in her lectures and book *Where Species Meet*. In her exploration on the 'companion species' (i.e. dogs), she posits, half-humorously that "reversing the order of invention, humans didn't invent dogs, dogs invented themselves and adopted humans as part of their reproductive strategy." In her lectures she shows a cartoon slide of several wolves in a forest, one of whom is wearing tracking equipment. "The telemetrically-equipped wolf is being introduced to the wild pack by her mentor, the mentor is saying We found her wandering at the edge of the forest. She was raised by scientists."

Nicolas Primat, in his intuitive work with baboons, monkeys and higher apes, reflects this wolf-boy reversal in the way he has worked with troops of such primates intensively over a period of time (his name, Primat, is real and coincidental, although this must have unconsciously affected his work). Primat started to work with farm animals at the age of 14 as a young farm-worker and thus made early intuitive contact with sheep, cows horses and goats. From being a child he had a strong contact with animals, and was quite shocked by the behaviour he saw between humans and animals, human farm-workers seeing animals only in terms of their profitability. He continued as a farm-worker while studying art and became aware of the symbolic use of animals in art, from animist beliefs and shamanism. He sees his rural background and early intuitive contact with animals as integral to his work, and finds it difficult not to see the animal in all of us. As he points out, once you start working with monkeys you can see the monkey in every human.

This initial close contact with animals affected his work as a student and as a postgraduate, resulting in his earlier 'psychopompic' work such as *Natascha Hostesse De L'Air*. This somewhat shocking and visceral work involves computer manipulation of images of a deceased baboon who started her life at Toulouse zoo and ended it at the Primatology research station of CNRS Marseille. The baboon, who was pregnant with twins when she died (it is not specified how) is poetically resurrected by electronic means by Primat,

the twins in a loving death-embrace and the mother arising with newly grown wings and flying aloft. In working with the miraculous re-animation of animal carcasses, the influence of Joseph Beuys comes as no surprise (the artist is half-German, half French).

Primat began his work in interspecies communication with other primates than human through working with a group of Bonobo apes in a zoo in Holland, in which he found, despite working through a glass barrier, he was able to become accepted, via gestures learnt from studying the apes, as a potential sexual mate by a female ape. (The video of this was shown at the exhibition at Taurines, although the mating sequence was cut because he and the organisers were concerned that the public would misinterpret this as a decadent flirtation with bestiality, or zoophilia. It is ironic that in his collaboration with performance artist Emilie Berthon human sexuality itself is parodied, with Primat and Berthon cavorting naked and brandishing a giant penis and vagina in a burlesque manner around the rooms of the chateau and with cows in a neighbouring field. In this rural context, the suggestion of interspecies sex is considered more shocking!)

Primat's interspecies work began seriously when he became the resident artist at CNRS Marseille where he worked in a facility with a troop of baboons which were the subjects of neuroscience research, producing the work *Portrait de Famille* where the artist is shown being groomed by the troop after many months of gaining acceptance by them. The resulting images are, in my opinion, some of Primat's strongest works, showing as they do the artist sitting passively while the baboons move about his body, posing themselves in gestures indicating acceptance. It makes this project even more poignant knowing that these are lab animals, some of which may be sacrificed in the name of curing human diseases. It is interesting that Primat was accepted as an artist in residence here, showing the openness of the institution, but also putting the artist into a highly challenging situation. Experimental animal labs like this are among society's 'dark places' which are shielded from the public for social and cultural reasons. Like abattoirs, they are places run by specialists undertaking a necessary function for society but with a cultural stigma made almost untenable in places such as Britain, where animal rights activists mount permanent pickets on such places. Primat is one of those artists who, although emotionally involved, does not make initial judgement, rather preferring to work with the immediate situation in which he finds himself, leaving the inevitable debates for later.

He went on to work with a group of Saimiri monkeys at the *Pasteur Institute* in Guyana where he created a science fiction movie with the primates, the space launch facility of Kourou forming a backdrop in his most ambitious work so far *Les Petits Hommes Verts*. Almost as fascinating is his 'making of' video which shows him and his colleagues working collaboratively



Nicolas Primat/Patrick Munck

Portrait de Famille, 2004, Video Still photography and Photoshop Giovanni Aloï © Primat/Munck

with the monkeys, using play techniques with the primates to create the illusion that they were voyaging on the surface of Mars using a primitive planetary rover. One could perhaps criticise *Les Petits Hommes Verts* by saying Primat is reverting to using the monkeys as performers, tricking them into the artists own fantasy, that they have stowed away in a rocket and discovered an ancient monkey civilisation on Mars. The 'making of' video shows the collaborative aspects of the work, but it is still ultimately controlled by Primat's team of humans.

I am sure Primat is well aware of this and his new work now has the intention of reversing that aspect, in attempting to hand over the creative power to the other primates, in this case those with more highly developed consciousnesses. It has recently been discovered that higher apes such as bonobos, gorillas and chimpanzees have developed communication skills in the wild previously undetected by humans, such as leaving markers pointing towards migration trails.

But this is also a controversial subject in many ways, as conservationists are deeply divided on the subject of interspecies communication between humans and primates, in that human knowledge skills would irreparably compromise and contaminate the

primate species, being passed through the generations into the ape culture. Many debates on the ethics of inter-species communication are sure to follow this new work.

Finally it should be underlined that Primat has also created some extremely interesting participatory projects with humans. At AFIAC, a site-specific event taking place yearly in the Midi-Pyrenees village of Fiac, directed by resident artist/organiser Patrick Tarres, ten artists work intimately with ten families to create a public project. It is a unique environment where it seems anything is possible, and in the year that Nicolas Primat was chosen, one family turned their entire house into a combination of a primatological research station and cave-dwelling in the work *Loft Préhistorique*. Working with artist Edwige Mandrou and the family, a couple who worked in special needs education with children and adults. They lived for three days dressed in skins and cooking on an open fireplace, not communicating in words. The whole village became absorbed in the work and at one point even the local priest joined in.

In another participatory work in Taurines, he invited the public to bring their own animals to the space. In return he visited professionals who work with

animals to find 'another, poetic way to be with their animals', placing himself with sheep and cattle farmers, zoo-keepers, wild bird conservators, beekeepers and hunters for two to three days.

During the enlightenment Rene Descartes proposed in his Discourses that animals were no more than intricate machines: "it seems reasonable, since art copies nature, and men can make various automata which move without thought, that nature should produce its own automata, much more splendid than artificial ones. These natural automata are the animals. This is especially likely since we have no reason to believe that thought always accompanies the disposition of organs which we find in animals". [1]

In these works Nicolas Primat attempts to publicly challenge Descartes' view of humanity and animal, which justified human society operating animals like machines, with profitability as the only driver. Today, with the relationship between human and animal even more complex and contestable, with transgenic technology, lab-created species and industrial cloning on the horizon, Primat's intuitive vision of human-animal contact becomes even more relevant.

Notes

[1] Descartes, R. *Discourse on the Method*, 1673, Chapter 5, p 27, 1637

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THE RETURN OF THE ANIMAL MAN

Nicolas Primat has at least two dreams. The first is to be a prehistoric man, so as to relive and experience the dawn of humankind. The second, which is more recent, is to get some great apes to produce their own work of art by giving them a video camera. These two dreams have a common denominator: achieving a new consciousness of our relationship with the world and to ourselves by restoring our connection to the natural and the animal. And they in turn suggest a third dream, or at least a wish: that this will help us find a way of building an acceptable future.

Text by Pascal Pique



Nicolas Primat

Demo Bonobo (Interspecies Communication), audience watching video at Cornerhouse, Manchester, March 2009 © Primat

While Primat is in the process of making these first two dreams come true in his art, the third still lies ahead. It concerns us all, individually and collectively. Indeed, it represents one of the great challenges of the twenty-first century. Humankind needs to reposition its existence in the chain of life in order to redefine its place in nature and the cosmos. Doom-mongering aside, it is a matter - in the long or even medium term - of the survival of the species, our own species, but also and above all the survival of all life forms and of the environment that nourished our own evolution.

One of the preliminary requirements in such an undertaking is to reconsider the notions of nature, humanity and animality. This challenge in trilogy form could hardly be more topical. It is at the heart of the art of Nicolas Primat and at the centre of the exhibition, *Démo bonobo*, that he conceived for the Château de Taurines in 2008.

Démo bonobo: beyond good and evil

The scenario dreamed up by Primat for the two floors of the château related to the natural and cultural environment of Aveyron, in which cattle farming featured prominently. The main idea was to subvert the man/animal duality, as a way of putting our own behaviour into perspective, especially our relation to others and to the environment. Initially, the artist drew on the ideas of the primatologist Frans de Waal, who, in his latest book, *Our Inner Ape*, argues that we do not descend from the apes but still are apes.^[1] For example, he points out that we share – and exceed – both the violence of the chimpanzee and the altruism of the bonobo. That, in fact, is why the exhibition has been conceived in two parts.

The first floor, which was dedicated to altruism, presented reinterpretations of courtship displays and of the birth of Venus; the second, dedicated to aggression, began with the wilderness of addiction and continued with a room of monsters. But for Primat this division has nothing to do with repeating the moralising distinction between good and evil. Quite the contrary, for the whole exhibition was built on interconnections and reversals in which man's animality is made manifest in the revelation of his biological behaviour, his sexuality or his addiction to artificial paradises (drugs, alcohol, media, coffee, tobacco, etc.). Conversely, animals – in this case monkeys – seem to acquire a degree of real humanity which we observe in their looks, postures, social behaviour and modes of communication.

By questioning the notions of "humanity" and "animality," Primat is testing the idea of nature elaborated by the West over the millennia. These are important issues, for this work is undoubtedly contributing to a better understanding of our instincts and our behaviour.

Making the idea of nature unnatural

With this set-up in which the figures of man and animal intersect instead of being diametrically opposed, Primat is encouraging us to stand our ideas about nature and human specificity on their heads. The artist is thus participating in one of the great enterprises of contemporary thought and philosophy, which, precisely, is all about "de-dualising" the classic opposition between the universality of nature and the contingency of human action. And this encourages us to redefine the very notion of humanity through the phenomenon of de-naturalising that is its characteristic.

This is what the philosopher Clément Rosset did when he revealed the thousand year-old workings of our physical and mental construction of the world in his book *L'Anti-nature*.^[2] He shows how the opposition between the "naturalist" and "artificialist" conceptions that is the basis of all Western thought is itself founded on an anthropocentric vision of the world that we very urgently need to replace with a new cosmology. For is not this system, in which the human is at the centre of the world, in a relation of mastery and domination to its environment, the root of the great ecological and political problems we are now facing? And has not the recourse to the divine, in its monotheistic forms, allowed us to mask the truth of the random nature of existence, while evading the anxiety that such an awareness may provoke, to the extent of making humanity irresponsible?

This is why the critique of the idea of nature is fundamental. It makes it possible to rethink man's relation with his environment, to his history, and to his own action of anthropomorphising the world. But we still need to get beyond our relation to this artifice represented by the very idea of nature.

This is what happens as a result of "de-naturalising" thought. To think through the "de-naturalising" of man requires us to make a double movement. First, to de-naturalise the idea of nature itself, that is to say, to critique it and rid it of the weight of conventions and pretences that obscure a more authentic conception of life. Second, to think through de-naturalising also means rereading what has been and still is played out in the purported separation of man and nature. This twofold movement makes it possible to reposition the human in the chain of life as an animal species and not as the culmination of an evolutionary process. It also obliges us to reconsider our relation to the animal and to animality.

Man as bipolar monkey

This is the radical revision attempted by Frans de Waal in his comparative study of man, chimpanzee and bonobo, in which he applies to human behaviour what he has observed in primates. Having established the specific characteristics of the two species of primate, he



Nicolas Primat
Demo Bonobo (Interspecies Communication), video stills collection, 2005 © Primat

then observes that human nature results from the "turbulent combination of the two." The bonobo thus has a highly developed sense of empathy that is expressed in an erotic pacifism whereby social life is organised around the resolution of conflicts through sexuality. The chimpanzee, in contrast, is much more brutal, ferocious and hierarchical. The difference between the two is that the former resolves questions of power by means of sex and the second resolves questions of sex by means of power. That said, if at different levels of intensity, we find manifestations of compassion, altruism, aggression and violence in both species.

De Waal also shows how the revival in the bonobo's critical fortunes corresponds to the decline of the prudish vision that for many years ruled out any kind of connection between social life, sexuality, empathy and affectivity. It is interesting to note his observation that the tyranny of the concept of the violent ape, which dominated the twentieth century, paralleled a moment when the debate on human evolution was dominated by the question, "Is war written into our genes?" The ethologist's answer is that it is still very difficult to distinguish between innate and acquired. Moreover, war is not an irresistible drive but an option. He also observes that the West has privileged a culture of out-and-out competition, domination and individualism justified by invocations of a merciless nature and its "law of the jungle," to a degree that makes it an insult to the animal kingdom. The fact remains that this vision still informs the foundations of law, economics and political science, as these are practised by the great majority of nation states on this planet.

De Waal's analysis of human and animal behaviour concludes with a vision of man's dual, Janus-like nature, obeying the opposing forces of rivalry and cooperation, egotism and sociability, dissent and harmony. All these are contradictions that can be balanced out when man manages to overcome the conflicts inherent in his nature. De Waal adds that for primates the survival of both individual and group implies the sharing of gains. Cooperation collapses when the rule of sharing and reward is ignored. The observation is worth thinking about.

What is to be done with animality?

Thus, human psychology can indeed be mapped as an extension of that of animals in terms of violence, empathy and even morality. The very notion of culture, which for so long we refused to recognise in the animal kingdom, is now beginning to be acknowledged there, especially among the great apes and social animals. Likewise with the idea of animal thought. These new approaches stand in contrast to the theories of human exceptionality that make man a superior species whose destiny it was to rise above an animality deemed evil because it is wild and therefore dangerous.

That is why it is important, as De Waal realises, to unveil the hidden self-images that mankind has projected onto his closest fellow species. Take for example the image of the "murderous monkey" that came to the fore after the Second World War, as if to explain the atrocious human violence that had just expressed itself in the barbarism of genocide. Far from trying to forget our real capacity for destruction, De Waal brings out all the complexity of the man-ape relation at the same time as he de-demonises the notion of animality – an animality that is neither good nor bad but very much present and even heightened in mankind, for better and for worse.

But, once we have re-identified and re-evaluated this animality that is within man, what next? This once again raises the question of the boundaries between man and animal, and especially that of the real nature of humanity in relation to inhumanity.

According to the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben, too, there is an urgent need to reconcile man with his animal nature while rethinking their fundamental divergence. [3] At issue here is mastery of the conflict of the humanity and animality in man. That is why the question of humankind and humanism needs to be posed in a new way, without simplification or bowdlerisation. This means coming back to the separation, the disconnection of man and animal. How was humankind separated from the non-human? What obscure zone is covered by this caesura? This approach runs counter to our cultural tradition and traditional science which, ultimately, have always reduced this difference within a unifying order of things. And, in a sense, this false separation betrays itself in the relation of superiority, mastery and order that man always cultivates with regard to nature and animals. For Agamben, we need to stop avoiding and artificially filling this void. On the contrary, we need to take the risk of entering its gaping vacancy. It is in this way that conflict may be abated. In fact, this is the new, vital phase envisaged by Walter Benjamin: "As a species, mankind reached the final point in its evolution millennia ago, but humankind as a species is still only at the beginning of its own evolution."

Regressing the better to advance

While it will seem difficult to say the least to relive the transition from animal to human, it may be possible to find out something about this transition by undertaking it in reverse. According to ethno-sociologist Michel Boccara, the black hole of myth offers "the image of the passage that a still-animal mankind took in order to become a man. And so it is that, reaching the other side, he stands up and sees nothing, or rather, nothing but darkness. A black hole of memory! The black hole of the psyche, the original black hole of matter... To become an animal, he will go down into the depths of the hole and, based on his mythical experience, elaborate social relations that will enable him to link the



Nicolas Primat
Demo Bonobo (Interspecies Communication) mixed media, 2005 © Primat

subjects together, to construct the social." [4]

For some years now, Nicolas Primat has been exploring this gap between man and animal. He puts himself at risk in that gaping space in order to experience the in-between state, body and soul. Such is the profound meaning of his artistic adventure: to retrace the path from man to animal by going back to the animal state.

The entire exhibition at Château de Taurines was informed by this principle. The *Démo Bonobo* video, especially, is representative of the multiple experiments in inter-species communication that he has carried out in various laboratories and zoos around the world (bonobos, baboons, saimiris). Here, the artist puts himself in a state of regression, but also of immersion, empathy and communication with the world of primates. These experiments conducted in collaboration with scientists are extremely powerful. Beyond language, beyond articulated language, they enable us to touch on a part of reality that is difficult to identify and name, to touch on what constitutes the shared identity of man and ape. These unforgettable, precious moments give us a glimpse of a community of behaviour and spirit which goes beyond the frontiers between our respective species, especially when, as it does in certain situations the animal seems to share with man a kind of humour that one would usually think of as the exclusive preserve of humankind, and as one of the specific attributes of "civilised" beings.

However, seen from a wider angle, these experiments are all the more important because they free up a different space of reflection, of consciousness and action at the crossroads of art, of poetry and of science. This is the new space that Nicolas Primat constructs, sculpts and explores. To this end, since 1999 he has followed a twofold method that he has conceived in the form of a protocol. This hybrid method has as much to do with empathy and affectivity as it does with rationality and science. The artist plays on both the pure imaginary of myth and on conventions taken from the sciences in what are genuine "artistic-scientific" experiments. Here, the "regressive" aspect of the work is to be related to a prospective dimension that is only just beginning to be formulated. It concerns a new approach to knowledge in line with the perspective adumbrated by Michel Boccara, leading toward a new "scientific mythology." At issue is the renewal of scientific practice through the rethinking of its relation to the imaginary in a coming-together of research and art, poetry and literature. In other terms, it is important to reconsider certain symbolic dimensions while taking symbolically different approaches. Nicolas Primat is already applying this vision to art and to his own culture as a human via his animal "regressions."

Totems without taboos

This regression to the joint sources of the human and the animal inevitably has consequences, especially when, as in Primat's case, it articulates the resources of both logical reason and the imaginary. It is, then, difficult to suspect the artist of extravagance or exacerbated mysticism. However, attacks on 'perversion' and such like could easily arise. This can be seen from the most prominent local newspaper, whose columns willingly echoed some of the comments in the exhibition visitors' book so as to stoke a polemic that would have divided the village into two camps. It is true, certainly, that *Démo bonobo* left no one indifferent, to put it mildly, and this was particularly true of the works on the floor dedicated to altruism, where, in homage to the bonobos, human sexuality was very straightforwardly evoked in the form of inflated, erect members in action. Although kept within the admitted limits, the representation of genital organs and the scientific deformation of the human being as a sensory homunculus shocked quite a few visitors. In contrast, the wilderness of addiction strewn with cactus-totems bristling with fag ends and beer cans, evoking the aggression man turns on himself via all the authorised dangerous products, inspired a certain jubilation. And what of reactions to the video *Démo bonobo*, in which the scantily clad artist mixed it with his simian friends? Of course, suspicions of zoophilia soon raised their head, even if, in agreement with the artist, the final version of the film was adapted so as not to shock the most observant spectators, in a move that some may have seen as an act of censorship or self-censorship.

Questions can indeed be asked and worry expressed about the increasingly restrictive limits proposed for or imposed on artistic expression. But overall, all this remains fairly normal, or rather very human – to the extent that it illustrates an essential message of the exhibition: an impartial vision of our own animality undermines many of the more flattering narratives of our origins and nature. The comparison between man and animal is instructive and can be disturbing when it reflects an image we were not expecting. However, and to quote Franz de Waal on humankind, "Since this animal has gained dominance over all others, it's all the more important that it should take an honest look in the mirror so that it knows both the arch-enemy it faces and the ally that stands ready to help it build a better world." De Waal also notes that, like artists, primates can make us nervous when they send back a very frank and unvarnished image of ourselves. It is true that Nicolas Primat goes to considerable lengths with this mirror effect, becoming both guinea pig and observer of his own experiments.

Note however that aspects of this artist's work that may seem transgressive or sometimes provocative in terms of sexuality, aggressiveness or addiction are never anecdotal, but are produced by an economy of research, invention and creation. For him, transgression is never gratuitous; it is technical, vital and inquiring. He

acts like an advanced researcher who must question his earlier conclusions in order to progress. Where humanity and animality are concerned, this means that the most commonly allowed representations of these subjects are overturned. That is also one of the functions of the artist: not to be detained by taboos, and even to reveal their workings.

Seeing the shaman

In the time and space of our planetary culture, the shaman is the supreme figure of the man-animal hybrid. For Michel Boccara, the shaman is someone who goes back in time and establishes a link with the animal world by reliving primordial states. The shaman goes directly back to the origins of the purported separation between man and animal, some time between 400,000 and 250,000 BCE, when speech left the domain of myth to enter that of technology. His knowledge, his "mythic reason", represents one of the rare paths that can take us to the joint sources of humanity and animality. The shaman, indeed, is someone who, even in our own times, perpetuates the animal form of the earliest humanity. He "dreams" and "sees" by drawing on our subjective and imaginary capacities. He sees the medicinal properties of plants and the illnesses within the body. He communicates by thought with other dimensions. He modifies physiological states. And, above all, he talks with animals.

It is hard, here, to ignore the disturbing coincidences and correspondences with the energy that Nicolas Primat brings to bear in his work. Many of the figures, postures and operations that he implements argue for a sensory, subjective and affective approach to the real, especially in the "empathetic" projects that he carries out with monkeys. But it is important to see how he goes beyond the simple cognitive and communicational dimensions. For his works are also imbued with a kind of mythic and magical thinking that invites us to consider them as ritual practices founded on the same principles of mutation, compensation, offering and even healing that are observed in shamanic societies.

In the exhibition, the cycle devoted to Venus is inscribed on the double territory of myth and rite. The artist reawakened Botticelli's Venus by recreating the scene of the goddess's birth in the gardens of the Hôtel Dieu in Toulouse. He got his model to pose once again in a magnificent scallop shell (the emblem of Saint James) sculpted in memory of the pilgrimage to Compostela. For the duration of this image, the giant talisman that had lain desperately empty for so long now acquired a new soul in an astonishing symbolic, cultural and temporal conflation that continued during the opening night dinner with a Vénus action. Conceived by way of dessert, this performance by the artist consisted in him pouring cascades of fruit, vanilla cream and chocolate on his model as if in a libation in homage to the mother-goddess. When this fertility rite had been performed, the onlookers were invited to

taste the new recipe.

For Nicolas Primat, the ritual dimension is not limited to performance. Not only is it present in his gestures but it is part of the deep meaning of his artistic engagement. Witness his acting as psychopomp to accompany the spirits of the dead animals that he worked with to the place of the dead. At Taurines, for example, he paid homage to the ducks from the farm that took part in a man-animal workshop.

Extending the spirit of these rites linked to love and the dead, the very architecture of the exhibition alludes to one of the shaman's key functions, which is to eroticise death. At various moments in the ritual of his or her journey (or flight), the shaman will act out or embody the sexual act in the fusion of male and female principles. The function of this phenomenon would seem to be to ensure the passage into the other world, but also the return therefrom. The two floors of the château play this score together in a two-way dynamic of the celebration and propitiation of the contradictory forces that govern our lives and our survival.

Towards the old future

The revival of interest in shamanism is a recent phenomenon. What does it mean, beyond the quest for a new religion? Even if it is controversial, the increasing reference to it by scientists indicates a renewal in modes of thought and the opening up of striking perspectives for the knowledge of our own mental structures – and no doubt, too, knowledge of nature and the evolution of life forms at a time when the definitions of animality and humanity are more problematic than ever.

Since the invention of the first cellular automata, the lines delimiting the "living," the "organic" and the "technological" have lost their validity. At the same time, the dichotomies between natural and artificial, animal and artefact, domestic and wild, no longer apply.

Any attempt to set definitive frontiers seems doomed to failure. Rather, what is at stake is seeing and determining how these states overflow each other. It is in fact what happens between them that is important – the interaction and joint codetermination of internal and external worlds within a perpetual actuation.

For the philosopher and ethologist Michel Lestelle, [5] it is in these terms that we need to rethink our relation to animality – that is, by developing spaces at the interface between life forms, action, identity and community, while remembering to divest ourselves of our mindset as the imagined owners of what is around us.

As, day after day, we find out a bit more about our objective biological proximity to animals, so we are developing a subjective knowledge of a kind of generic animality to which we belong. This new perception of the time and space of our nature may perhaps enable us to rethink the animal and human societies of the future.

Echoing this, Michel Boccara formulates one of the major challenges of the twenty-first century: finding a way back to primitive affective states that give access to other forms of consciousness, while pursuing the adventure of science: "I would argue that man's future lies in perfecting that animal part that he first denied. In becoming even more human, man becomes even more animal, and in developing logical reason, he deepens the dreams of mythic reason."

That is why we need to come back to the shaman and the artist. The shamanic journey in the Other Space, that of the dead, the goal of which is to regulate the earth's fertility, has a temporal dimension as well: "The shaman is also the master of time. To travel in the kingdom of the dead is also to travel in the Other Time, where present, past and future are one, enabling the seer to expand time and see 'the old future'. Time is experienced in a spatial mode; it has neither beginning nor end. This is also the conception of space-time held by the Australian (aborigines)."[6]

Nicolas Primat is developing a perception and consciousness of space-time that is in every way comparable. His latest piece, a film entitled *Les petits hommes vers...*[7] allegorises this abstraction and founding myth. A group of primates, the saimiris of French Guiana, somehow end up as stowaways on an Ariane rocket launched in order to send a probe to Mars. Arriving on the Red Planet, they discover the vestiges of their own civilisation, but at a much more advanced stage than their own. We imagine that this civilisation was forced to leave Mars in order to survive and colonised Earth, where, forgetting its origins, it regressed. The film ends in a kind of dance or cosmic trance by a saimiri shaman who is the guardian of his species' memory, at the end of which he sheds tears on Mars, causing life to return.

The message is a fairly simple one. In his technological development and future evolution, the human animal must not forget his origins, that which connects him to the universe, but must regenerate it. By reincarnating the motif of the shamanic flight and dance, Nicolas Primat re-establishes a connection between past, present and future in order to free temporalities from their confinement. This brings to mind the idea of impermanence in the thought of Krishnamurti, for whom the regeneration of humanity requires the radical extirpation of any kind of identification with closed circuits. In other words, the future of humanity depends from this moment onwards on what each one of us does to this end.

Cycles and epochs depend on consciousness...
Cycles are measured by the consciousness of humanity,
And not by nature.
Krishnamurti [8]

Notes

- [1] Frans de Waal, *Our Inner Ape*, Penguin, 2005.
- [2] Clément Rosset, *L'anti-nature*, PUF, 2004.
- [3] Giorgio Agamben, *The Open, Man and Animal*, Stanford University Press, 2003.
- [4] Michel Boccara, *La part animale de l'homme, esquisse d'une théorie du mythe et du chamanisme*, Anthropos, 2002.
- [5] Michel Lestelle, *L'animal singulier*, Seuil, 2004
- [6] Boccara, op. cit.
- [7] The title, literally "little worm-men" can be heard homophonically as the more habitual "petits hommes vers ...", i.e., "little green men" - Trans.
- [8] Aryel Sanat, *The Inner Life of Krishnamurti*, Quest Books, 2000.

Translation Charles Penwarden
Pascal Pique is the Director of Contemporary art at the Modern and Contemporary Art museum Les Abattoirs, Toulouse, France.

WILDCHILD

We should recognize that nonhuman organisms need not meet every new definition of human language, tool use, mind, or consciousness in order to have versions of their own that are worthy of serious study. We have set ourselves too much apart, grasping for definitions that will distinguish man from all other life on the planet. We must rejoin the great stream of life from whence we arose and strive to see within it the seeds of all we are and all we may become."

— Sue Savage-Rumbaugh [1]

Text by Rob La Frenais



Nicolas Primat/Patrick Munck

Portrait de Famille, 2004, Video Still , photography and Photoshop Giovanni Aloï © Primat/Munck

The journey began, for me, listening to primatologist Sue Savage-Rumbaugh at the 1998 conference *Toward a Science of Consciousness in Tucson* on chimpanzee intelligence, the work of Jane Goodall and the way bonobos have been found to use complex trail markers to communicate silently. I knew then that somewhere out there would be artists wanting to make a work about this subject at the frontier of understanding the mind.

The journey finished — to some extent — saying goodbye to French artist and monkey-man, Nicolas Primat, about to undertake treatment for depression in Toulouse in December 2008, followed by a text telling me of his apparent suicide in February 2009. Along the way I have strong memories of Nicolas and myself haunting draughty and deserted English zoos after closing time, peering in at bonobos and gorillas (always sideways, never directly, as Nicolas instructed), of Nicolas and primatologist friends laughing at the ape-like antics of London private-view goers and engaging in lively discussions about apes and ethics, while watching him enact grooming procedures on his friends. Author Will Self's fantasy fiction *Great Apes* lived on in the life of Nicholas Primat, who always looked happier among different species of primate other than human and whose name exemplified the principle of nominative determinism — the theory that a person's name is given an influential role in reflecting key attributes of his job, profession, or general life (his name really was Primat). [2]

The Arts Catalyst in its work has always managed to stumble across some individuals, who with their impossible dreams as artists, seem to sum up a whole mode of thinking about a scientific subject. Thus nuclear artist James Acord was able to change whole paradigms of thinking about ways to engage with the nuclear industry with his provocative proposals to build monuments with real plutonium rods (which he had purchased). Likewise, when I first saw video footage of Nicholas Primat in labs with baboons and spider monkeys swarming all over his semi-naked body, in defiance of health and safety, I felt the ground shift beneath my feet in my views about the human-animal interface and realised this was a new kind of artist.

I was introduced to Nicholas in an interesting co-incidence. I had recently started living in a village along the Tarn Valley in France and was invited by curator Pascal Pique to a festival in a nearby village in which 10 artists were invited to make new work with 10 local families

(Si-Affinité FIAC, near Toulouse 2003).

In *Loft Préhistorique*, Nicolas had persuaded his allotted family to turn their neat villa into a prehistoric cave and live with the artist and his partner dressed in animal skins for the duration of the performance as pre-vocal humans, communicating only in grunts and cooking meat over an open fire for the duration. Nicolas showed me this work and also *Portrait De*

Famille (2003) — his key work made in close proximity with monkeys in a lab in Marseille. He also showed me some rather disturbing pieces such as 'Natasha — Air Hostess' (2001), in which a dead monkey, pregnant with twins, is transformed into a shamanic being. This kind of work might be a bit more difficult to present.

In the UK, arts organisations were being encouraged to dream up projects for Darwin's Anniversary and I had the chance make a pitch for new project for the Natural History Museum, which turned out to be the 'Interspecies' exhibition and event on which this special edition is based. In a lecture at the Royal College of Art, I invited Nicolas to show his work, at which a representative of the museum was present. I'm not sure if Nicolas's work affected our pitch positively or negatively, but in the end we found ourselves taking 'Interspecies' elsewhere, perhaps with more freedom than we would have had at the Museum.

In the event, we had an ambitious plan for Nicolas Primat's new idea, which was to make video with chimpanzees, using advances in knowledge about face recognition among higher primates, based on the famous mirror test done by Gordon Gallup in the 70's in which a sleeping gorilla was given a facial mark, then awoken. The gorilla proceeded to wipe the mark off, thus apparently proving self-recognition. In the middle period of my journey with the monkey-man, Nicholas persuaded me to drop everything and attend the 2008 International Primatological Congress in Edinburgh, attended by thousands of primatologists of all shapes and sizes, emerging from lab, lecture room and jungle from all over the world.

For the curator of *The Arts Catalyst* this was the equivalent of first contact with a whole new world, equal to the world of astronauts and space agencies, the nuclear industry, or the world of genetic engineering. But for Nicholas this was an area he had been hanging around, always the outsider at the feast, for many years. Now, in the run-up to Darwin Year, with public outreach and participation now de rigeur, people were prepared to listen to the artist who wanted to be with monkeys. Out of the primatologists — some seeming to be directly emerging with backpacks from studying primates in the wild — came an ebullient expert in face recognition who had worked with Nicolas during her PhD studies years earlier in Marseille, Dr Sarah Jane Vick. Sarah was enthusiastic about the Budungo Trail at Edinburgh Zoo, where one of her students, Betsy Herrelko, was working on a 'Chimpcam' and trying to persuade a group of chimpanzees to start using it (shown recently on BBC2's *Animal Planet*). With Sarah and the Arts Catalyst a project was developed where Nicolas would start the process of becoming habituated to a group of individual chimps, then see if the attachment to his image could be transferred to a video screen, then continue to camera use. But as always, there were delays and delays, hence Nicolas and I started on a



Nicolas Primat/Patrick Munck

Portrait de Famille, 2004, Video Still, photography and Photoshop Giovanni Aloï © Primat/Munck

series of visits to smaller private zoos to look for places where his interspecies dream could come true.

Ironically, it was shortly after Edinburgh had accepted his proposal and funding looked imminent that Nicolas entered his treatment for depression (apparently undergoing a trial of a new drug) and during a weekend break, took his own life. It is a matter of debate as to whether this was deliberate, an accident or the result of professional negligence on the part of those who prescribed this drug. He certainly sometimes had problems in the world of human primates. He left behind many unhappy friends and colleagues who were all convinced his life as one of the few primatological artists in the world was just about to start, not finish.

Rachel Mayeri was at one of the previous International Primatological Congresses and recorded the celebrated Jane Goodall performing a pant-hoot for a video work. Her work *Baboons as Friends*, juxtaposing a baboon drama of sex and deception and replicated in film-noir mode, was shown in Interspecies along with Nicolas's work (see essay by Mayeri in this issue). Although she never met Nicolas, she spoke

alongside Nicolas's close collaborator, Patrick Munck at the Interspecies symposium and Sarah Jane Vick, the primatologist who was about to work with Nicolas. Rachel Mayeri's 'How to Act like An Animal' workshops certainly re-enact Nicolas's art-life philosophy that everyone has a hidden monkey inside them.

Rachel is hoping to continue Nicolas's ideas (with Sarah Jane Vick), not by replicating them, but by re-imagining how chimpanzees might appreciate cinema. Interestingly, Nicolas was obsessed with acting chimps, the type used to sell PG tips tea and so on. Rachel now has a plan to create Cinema for Primates aimed and directed at former acting chimps in 'sanctuaries' or to be blunt, chimp retirement homes. Nicolas, the monkey-man, the 'wild child' or enfant sauvage (he was a former farm-worker who became an art student) might have appreciated the irony in this detournement of his project.

Pant-hoots and groomings, Nicolas.

Notes

[1] Kanzi: The Ape at the Brink of the Human Mind. Sue Savage-Rumbaugh and Roger Lewin (Wiley 1994)

[2] For the conversation about the notion of 'nominative determinism' I must thank Interspecies participants Mark Wilson and Bryndis Snaebornsdottir (Daughter of a Snow-Bear)



Nicolas Primat - Obituary

Nicolas Primat was the only artist in the world who specialised in working with monkeys and apes. This long-standing interest included ongoing residencies at the Primatology station, CNRS, Marseille, working with baboons (*Papio anubis*) at the Pasteur Institute, Guyana, working with squirrel monkeys (*Saimiri sciureus*) and at Apenheul, Holland, working with bonobos (*Pan paniscus*).

Working to enrich the lives of monkeys in captivity, Primat showed a sensitive and intuitive approach to the animals he collaborated with. Noting that primate caregivers always wore footwear, he would venture into the habitat of the monkeys barefoot, letting them crawl over him and play with him. This playful nature informed his work, but it had a serious intent behind it. Primat used artistic interpretations of his interaction with other species to provoke thought into our attitudes and understanding of other species, in terms of how we might communicate with one another and what this revealed about similarities and differences and how this related to our attitudes to medical research and other uses of animals.

Primat started working with animals at the age of 14 as a young farm-worker. He saw his rural background and early intuitive contact with animals as integral to his work. Primat's work began with a residency at CNRS Marseilles, working with troops of baboons. His short film *Portrait Du Famille* showed the artist being groomed by the tribe after many months of gaining acceptance. He spent long periods of time with the animals learning to communicate with them in order to be accepted. Primat's practice included video, sculpture, photography installation and performance. He exhibited internationally, most recently in the exhibition 'Neo-Futur' at the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Les Abattoirs, Toulouse (2008), a major one-person show at the Chateau De Taurines, Aveyron (2007), curated by Pascal Pique, and finally in *The Arts Catalyst* exhibition Interspecies, at Cornerhouse, Manchester. He stimulated a new debate in the world of art and science about the way we humans regard our closest relatives and was an inspiration for the Interspecies exhibition.

JOURNEYS ACROSS DISCIPLINES: THE ARTS CATALYST

The Arts Catalyst commissions contemporary art that experimentally and critically engages with science. We produce provocative, playful, risk-taking artists' projects to spark dynamic conversations about our changing world.

Text by Nicola Triscott

Since 1993, *The Arts Catalyst* has worked nationally and internationally to promote understanding and cooperation between people from different disciplines and cultures. We seek new ways to involve artists, scientists and the wider public in a discourse about the direction and impact of science in society, and to explore new ideas and possibilities. We explore, generate and share ideas through contemporary art exhibitions, events, workshops, residencies, conferences, publishing, research, and learning and participatory projects.

The primary focus of our activities is the commissioning and presentation of new artists' projects. We work closely with artists, enabling them to realise their visions. Our commissioning programme has included the creation of new works by Aleksandra Mir, Tomas Saraceno, Marko Peljhan, Critical Art Ensemble, Carey Young, Stefan Gec, Simon Faithfull, Brandon Ballengee, Jan Fabre and Ashok Sukumaran. Our commissions and events are presented in a range of venues: art galleries, museums and other public spaces.

Provoked by subjects and places that we, as non-specialists, "cannot" do, access, understand or affect — particularly where they impact profoundly on our lives and futures, we work with artists to create contexts and opportunities for them to work at the frontiers of scientific investigation and application (including genetics, nuclear physics, space science, ecology, neuroscience and new materials) and in hard-to-access environments, such as biotech labs, experimental reactors, space agencies, zero gravity and remote environments. We are interested in the new

forms and techniques of artistic expression that these engagements can activate and in the dialogue and cultural shifts that these interventions provoke within science, within art and in society.

Our work with artists is underpinned and interwoven with other strategies and activities — workshops, networks, meetings, interventions, symposia - that bring together people from different disciplines, cultures and nationalities, to provoke new ideas and alternative perspectives on science and culture.

Our role as an arts organisation is to provide opportunities for people to create meaning for themselves out of the art we present, in the sense that Beuys meant when he said "every human being is an artist" and that Brecht intended: that his works should provoke self-reflection and a critical view. Integrated with this is our commitment to bringing the ideas, processes and environments of science to people's attention. We believe that everyone should be able to have a role in the direction of scientific and technological research in terms of its impact (positive and negative) on society.

As a publicly funded arts organisation, our aim is to contribute to a participatory culture. Thus we strive to create events that encourage and enable the visitor, the viewer, to be an active participant in the creation of meaning in the art process, as well to be part of an ever-widening non-specialist constituency that is able to express its own thoughts — in a multitude of ways — about the transforming forces of science and technology in society and culture. As well as bringing science out the lab, we often take art

outside the gallery — presenting it in public buildings and open spaces - to be encountered, to startle, to reach a wide audience, and to remove it from the preconditioned expectations of the white wall gallery setting.

Through our work, we seek — as the international curator Declan McGonagle has strongly advocated — a model of connectedness and negotiation and multiple viewpoints: “believing that art is made as much in the research and negotiation process and in the post-production, distribution process, as it is made in the studio, in the production process.”

Our task is to investigate intersections, meeting places between art, science and society — existing and on the edges of possibility — and to develop and test models of practice where those meeting points can be explored and extended. It is not possible to pre-define what forms of activity and artistic practice will best explore these places. In a way, that’s the whole point of *Arts Catalyst*: that it is in investigating those intersections that new forms of practice will emerge: new forms of artistic expression, new ways for people to engage with art and ideas, and new forms of institutional practice.

Our interest in the developments in the new biosciences was in place from the start of *The Arts Catalyst* in 1993. It was clear at that time that fast-evolving fields such as genetics, molecular biology, neuroscience and pharmacology were going to have profound effects on our world and our sense of identity. From initial conversations with artists and scientists, we commissioned three projects in 1994 from the artists Helen Chadwick, Letizia Galli and Donald Rodney, with the intent of critiquing or commenting on developments in the biosciences; and it made sense that as far as possible this critique should be informed by hands-on experience in scientific working environments. So we set about enabling the artists to work in residencies in various laboratories — assisted conception, neuroscience and genetics — and directly utilising the technologies of modern bioscience: an early exemplar of the current trend of “biological art” or “bioart”. The resulting exhibition *Body Visual* opened at the Barbican Centre in 1996.

Some years later, in 2002, our *CleanRooms* exhibition, with its accompanying programme of artists’ residencies, performances, workshops and discussion events, included a new commissioned interactive installation *Silvers Alter* by Gina Czarnecki in which the audience was able to exert selective choice in the artificial evolution of a group of humans; performances of *Critical Art Ensemble’s GenTerra*: a participatory performance work exploring the implications of transgenics; and the *Working with Wetware* forum, which brought together some of the leading practitioners of “biological art” in the world, including Oron Catts from *SymbioticA* in Australia, artist Marta de Menezes, Steve Kurtz of the American arts

collective *Critical Arts Ensemble*, and Brandon Ballengee.

In 2005, we jointly organised a biotech art workshop led by Oron Catts, an intensive week-long practical workshop for 20 professional artists to gain some of the techniques of biological art and explore the arising issues, ethics and aesthetics. From this seeding, new ways of working or ways of seeing are gradually emerging in some of the participant artists’ practices. Its success means that we are considering similar workshops to provide artists with bridges to other new scientific processes and ideas.

The story of Steve Kurtz of the US art group *Critical Art Ensemble* will not be new to many people reading this paper, however it is worth retelling, as it serves an interesting case of the hazards of working across specialisation boundaries, particularly when working outside established research institutions, and has implications for artists accessing scientific technologies, for amateur scientists, for those wishing to criticise the US government, and also for professional scientists wishing to share research and resources.

On the 11 May 2004, Steve had woken to find that his wife of 24 years, Hope, had died in her sleep (of congenital heart failure). Police who responded to his 911 call noticed his home biology lab, became suspicious and called the FBI. The following day Kurtz was detained by FBI officers and representatives of the Special Task Force on Terrorism. He was detained for twenty-four hours and interrogated at length. His house was seized by the FBI and sealed as a crime scene. Investigators in sealed white suits searched the house for three days, followed by three days of testing for biohazardous materials (the house was clear). They seized Kurtz’s art materials, computers, research materials and equipment, including his home-lab equipment, and his passport and personal documents. A week later, Kurtz’s CAE collaborators were served with subpoenas ordering them to appear before a grand jury to investigate possible violations of the law regarding biological weapons.

A federal grand jury met in July 2004. The jury refused to bring any ‘bioterrorism’ charges against Kurtz, as requested by the FBI, but it did indict him on criminal mail and wire fraud charges. The charges stemmed from an exchange of \$256 worth of harmless bacteria with Dr. Robert Ferrell, Professor of Human Genetics at the University of Pittsburgh, who was the consultant for a number of CAE projects. Dr Ferrell was charged in the same way. The charges carried a potential jail term of 20 years.

The case dragged on for four years, as the FBI continued to try to press charges relating to bioterrorism against the artist and scientist. In October 2007, Kurtz’s scientific collaborator Dr Robert Ferrell pleaded guilty to misdemeanour charges, a plea deal made due to the stress of the case and severe illness (Ferrell had cancer). In April 2008, Kurtz had the mail

and wire fraud case against him completely dismissed by Federal Judge Richard J. Arcara.

Despite four years of investigation under FBI suspicion of being a bioterrorist, Kurtz was able to reconstruct his research and produce the project *Marching Plague* with *The Arts Catalyst* during the investigation. The project was filmed in Stornoway on the Isle of Lewis, Scotland, in October 2005, and the film was first shown at the AV Festival in Newcastle in March 2006, and at the *Whitney Biennial*, New York.

The area of work for which *The Arts Catalyst* is probably best known is air and space exploration, which we have been investigating since 1997. We have organised a number of interdisciplinary 'zero gravity' laboratories with the Russian space agency (specifically the Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Centre in Star City). We are a founding member of the MIR network, and have presented a string of exhibitions and public events between 1999 and 2007, including two International Artists' Airshows, which presented breakthrough projects including a real-life artist's flight in his own vehicle by Ben Blakebrough, an experimental solar dome by Tomas Saraceno and the following extremely risky and almost impossible project — *Escape Vehicle No. 6*.

Simon Faithfull's *Escape Vehicle No. 6* is a wonderful example of a simple, profound project that uses ingenuity and low-tech solutions to enter a restricted territory and provoke new imaginaries of space. *No. 6* consists of a full-scale chair suspended beneath a weather balloon with a camera and transmitter positioned so that the lens frames the chair dangling in mid-shot. This apparatus was released from a launch pad on an extremely windy day from Southern England on the occasion of our first artists' airshow and rapidly rose above the earth ultimately into the blackness of the stratosphere on the edge of space. With the naked eye, the audience on earth at Farnborough watched the balloon and chair recede and disappear into the sky, but they were then immediately able to follow the rest of the journey on a giant screen via a live video downlink from the escape vehicle.

The chair can be seen precariously swaying beneath the balloon on its desperate journey into the void - desperate because ultimately the journey will end in heroic failure. As it reached the edge of space, the pressure dropped, the balloon burst and the chair fell back to earth on a red parachute, landing in the vicinity of Wye in Kent (tracked by GPS). The faltering image of the empty chair, transmitted increasingly weakly

back to earth, asks the viewer to imagine occupancy. But at the same time, rather than offering conceptual escape, the madcap vehicle ultimately presents a chilling vision of a kind of death. Even before the collapse of the balloon, with the temperature reaching minus 600c and oxygen long since thinned, to imagine occupying the chair is to imagine a realm beyond life.

(Simon Faithfull)

In 2005, the *European Space Agency* (ESA) awarded us a contract to carry out a study into possible future cultural utilisation of the International Space Station. The study set out to investigate and focus the interest of the cultural world in the International Space Station, to generate a policy for involving cultural users in the *International Space Station* programme. The main focus of our work with ESA has been the negotiation of a dialogue between the space agency and the contemporary arts world, and the nurturing of understanding of what it is artists actually do these days. The initial study we carried out in 2005-6, involved wide consultation with the European arts community. Our final report included several recommendations on how to involve the cultural world in space activities and proposed a series of strategic initiatives that could extend the programme across the agency, including an artists' residency programme, a scientist-artist network, artists partnering astronauts, and partnerships with cultural organisations. We also made preliminary feasibility assessments for a number of possible pilot projects, selected from an open international call. We are currently working with ESA to develop further some of these initial recommendations.

In 2006, we commissioned three large-scale durational artists' projects for *Space Soon*, a 5-day exhibition and event that took place at the Roundhouse in North London. The three works were by Aleksandra Mir, Danish architects N55 and artist Neal White, and *London Fieldworks*. *London Fieldworks'* piece *SpaceBaby* looked at inverted sleep patterns and the effect on human genes, referencing research interests of space agencies in human hibernation. Artists Jo Joelson and Bruce Gilchrist slept through each of the five days of the *Space Soon* show in specially constructed "space tubes", while a team of scientists from Leicester University's Department of Genetics monitored the effect the reverse sleep pattern had on their genes through the regular taking of blood samples from the artists. The project had an international dimension and was developed during a series of workshops with students at Srishti School of Art,

Design & Technology in Bangalore.

We have followed a journey of finding and opening up inspiring and critical meeting places between artists, scientists and society, and exploring how we can work with our constituencies (artists/collaborators/audiences/interest groups) to investigate and find meaning in those places. The artists that we work with embark on journeys of discovery with scientists, engineers and technologists, with other artists, and with the public.

We like to feel that we are developing a new form of creative and active curatorship that is not afraid to probe equally into both the enlightened and the shadowy places of science and society. Through our programme, we aim to enable and empower curious minds to have stimulating, social and thought-provoking experiences, encounters and learning opportunities that transcend traditional boundaries of art and science, encouraging exploration and experimentation, developing creative and artistic skills, and helping to deepen understanding of the relationship between science, culture and society.

Big problems and polarising conflicts do not have single-discipline solutions, but rather require critical reflection and purposeful integration of many different perspectives. We need interdisciplinary approaches to engage people — non-specialist citizens as well as experts in multiple fields — in contemplating the Really Big Questions, whether that is the origins of the universe, how and why we should build new lifeforms or enhance human abilities, or what to do about climate change.

Polarising views are celebrated by the popular media, but they distort the nature and value of the divergent views, ambiguity and uncertainty that underpin the construction of knowledge and meaning. If we want a participatory democratic society, a society that can identify and act on solutions to its huge problems, we need a society that respects scholarship, is accustomed to ambiguity and can embrace complexity.

Nicola Triscott is a cultural producer and writer. Nicola is the founder and Director of The Arts Catalyst, an interdisciplinary arts organisation commissioning artists' projects that experimentally and critically engage with science. Nicola speaks regularly at international conferences on the interrelationships between art, science, ecology and society in a global context, and cultural perspectives on space exploration. Her essays have been published in several journals and books and she is an accredited coach with the Cultural Leadership Programme and Performance Coaching Training.



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