



NIR NADLER

## Natural Acts

### On ethics and aesthetics of interspecies relations

“The Animal”, cries the French philosopher Jacques Derrida, “What a word!”

*In this word lies the origin of logocentric humanism. Animal is a word that men have given themselves the right to give. At the same time reserving for humans the right to the word, the name, the verb, the attribute, to a language of words, in short to the very thing that the others in question would be deprived of, those that are corralled within the grand territory of the beasts: the Animal.<sup>1</sup>*

Is it possible to look at nature without imposing social or political meanings on it? And can the ethical and political coincide when integrating animals in artwork? These key questions occupy

critics, animal rights activists and artists, such as my partner Chaja Hertog and me. In this essay I hope to shed light on the topic and share some of my own work experience, thoughts and doubts concerning the relations between ethics and aesthetics in the context of working with nonhumans in art projects.

Throughout history man has sought to define and control nature in order to justify his own existence. We (agri)cultured the land and domesticated wild animals to become our beasts of burden,<sup>2</sup> guards, pets and food source. We harvest animals' meat in mass quantities—an endeavor that heavily damages the very environment we live in. What often serves as an emotional alibi for these indifferent undertakings, is the stories we tend to tell ourselves, and our children. Stories that are anchored in the idea of a separation between 'us' the civilized humans, and 'it' the wild nature with its entire animal kingdom.

Our dialectic interspecies relationship with animals knows several schools of thought with dissimilar outlooks; philosophical, scientific and spiritual. René Descartes, the father of modern philosophy, described animals in the 17<sup>th</sup> century as 'beast machines'. By stating, "I think therefore I am"<sup>3</sup> he argued that other living being don't feel pain and that feelings are attributes reserved to humans.<sup>4</sup> Descartes' philosophical doctrine, the 'natural automata',<sup>5</sup> implies a

2 A draught animal, such as a donkey, mule, llama, camel, horse or ox, which is employed to transport heavy loads or perform other heavy work (such as pulling a plow) for the benefit of humans.

3 Descartes, "I think, therefore I am." *The philosophical works of Descartes* 1.

4 Cottingham, "A Brute to the Brutes?": Descartes' Treatment of Animals." 551-559.

5 Descartes' perception of animals as automata or soulless beings confirmed the biblical dualistic division between humans, made in God's image, and other living beings implicit in the injunction to "...have dominion over the fish of the sea, and the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth" (Genesis 1:28).

fundamental difference between animals and humans and assumes that animals are machines who have no soul or mind. According to Darwinism, the biological theory developed by the English naturalist Charles Darwin and others; all organisms develop through natural selection. Thus, opposed to Descartes who distinguished between human and nonhuman beings Darwin claimed that there was no separation between humans and nonhumans but a gradual interspecies evolution. Zen Buddhist ethics, on the other hand, relies on the premise that animals and humans share the same essential nature.<sup>6</sup> It is believed that neither class nor ethical rules separate us, humans, from nature, thus we should avoid causing suffering or death to any other living being.

In the following pages I will address the most essential issues and manifestations of interspecies relations through these three schools of thought—detachment, hierarchy and harmony. This paper is an exploration of how they are reflected in various artworks relevant to my artistic practice.

#### NATURE IS A LANGUAGE, CAN'T YOU READ IT?

While strolling with Mika, my six-year-old daughter, through the Amsterdam zoo she surprised me by stating that she hates wolves. When being asked for the reason why; she determinedly answered, "Well, wolves are dangerous and inheritably mean". I listened quietly and shortly after responded that this assumption is, in my opinion, incorrect. Mika looked at me perplexed, as if I just told her the world was flat, and demanded an explanation. I lingered on it for a few minutes and then I elaborated that a wolf would not harm any other living being unless it's either hungry or scared. Unlike people, who can sometimes do horrific things to animals and to each

6 Cozort, and Shields, eds., *The Oxford handbook of Buddhist ethics*.



other, wolves only attack for survival reasons such as hunger or to protect themselves and their cubs. As a matter of fact, I continued, the wolf's 'cruelty' is nothing more than an allegory for the viciousness of mankind.

Remarkably, animals play an important role in the world of children, their imagination and subconscious. According to various researches most of children's dreams revolve around animals, and as we grow older, they gradually 'disappear' to make way for fully human protagonists. Adults dream of animals mostly when they play a significant role in their waking lives as pets or farm animals.<sup>7</sup>

As children we are primarily exposed to wildlife in folk stories and fables. Walking, talking animals populate children's books and TV shows; animal characters decorate clothes and lunchboxes, and stuffed animals are tucked into bed at night. In the stories we tell our kids, animals for the most part, are fully humanized; they go to school, drive cars, and go on with the same daily routine as we, humans, do. Anthropomorphism<sup>8</sup> has made a long way; from the wolf dressed in grandma's clothes in *Little Red Riding Hood*, the White Rabbit clad as a British gentleman in Louis Carole's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* to more contemporary looking Walt Disney's *Mickey Mouse* and Robert Crumb's *Fritz the Cat*. Ascribing human characteristics and features to nonhuman beings or things,

- 7 Researchers argue that animals appear more often in kids' dreams than in adults' as it's a pattern that reflects life at that age. See: Barrett, *The committee of sleep: Dreams and creative problem-solving*; Bulkeley et al., "Earliest remembered dreams." 205.
- 8 Anthropomorphism is the late mid 20<sup>th</sup> century flowering of the extreme Cartesian view of animals as automata, beings that respond in a prescribed way to pre-determined incentives. See: Moore; *Ecology and literature: Ecocentric personification from antiquity to the twenty-first century*.

is proven to be an effective method to submerge children in the story and educate them with life lessons about the 'real world'.<sup>9</sup>

As much as anthropomorphized animals govern children's books, in adult literature they hardly play any prominent roles.<sup>10</sup> Could that consequently be one of the reasons they play a lesser role in our daily lives and (sub)consciousness?

Yet, in a way, animals are around us (or at least their images) on a daily basis in our natural habitat—they are embedded into our immediate surroundings in the form of consumer logos and corporate or political identities. Our human perceptions of animal characteristics are used to full advantage to give us an idea about a product or a company. Depending on the type of animal chosen, a brand is strong, luxurious, caring, mysterious and countless other traits. Car companies, for example, frequently use animals such as horses and fast cats, indicating speed; a company logo depicting an elephant indicates something sacred or 'larger than life'. The association between certain animal species and different kinds of products or corporations is a crucial element in the relationship between memory and identity. Some of the best logos not only stick in your head because they are iconic, they tap onto an emotional connotation; perhaps childhood memories or affection to a particular children's book character.<sup>11</sup>

- 9 Dunn, "Talking animals: A literature review of anthropomorphism in children's books."
- 10 One remarkable exception in adult literature, which makes similar use of anthropomorphisms as children's books often do, is George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945). Orwell's allegorical novella stages animals as humans in order to comment on totalitarian regimes and enforced social hierarchical systems, which exist also in liberal societies that (allegedly) believe in equality.
- 11 Lloyd and Woodside, "Animals, archetypes, and advertising (A3): The theory and the practice of customer brand symbolism." 5-25.

In fables, children's books and advertisements we often depict animals as humans. At the same time we tend to animalize humans in metaphorical idioms such as "eat like a pig", "die like a dog", "fuck like bunnies" and "led like sheep to the slaughter".<sup>12</sup> Recently it was common to address refugees as 'swarms' coming from the Middle East and Africa, they were reported to be treated 'like animals' when approaching Europe's national borders. Supposedly, such animalized idioms are mostly intended to diminish but they serve not only as an insult to humans, but to nonhumans as well, as it places them into stereotypical categories and advocates a narrow-minded subject-object perspective.

Could it be possible that in this linguistic definition lays the friction of our interspecies as well as our inter-human relationships. Perhaps when we stop treating animals 'like animals' and instead accept them for what they really are, then we can begin treating humans like humans, regardless of their ethnicity, skin color, gender and/or socio-economic status.

#### BIRD'S EYE VIEW

The anthropomorphic approach, which attributes human traits to nonhuman entities, has a flip side of the coin—attributing animal traits to humans—and by doing so, dehumanizing them.

"I am not an animal! I am a human being!" shouts out a severely deformed man when surrounded by a curious crowd in a public toilet in late 19<sup>th</sup> century London. This heartbreaking moment in David Lynch's *The Elephant Man* (1980), which portrays the life of

12 The phrase "like a sheep being led to the slaughter" is originated in the Old Testament (Isaiah 53:7). Years later that same phrase has been meta-articulated by Jacques Derrida, amongst other authors; comparing modern farming practices to the WWII genocide. See: Weil, "Killing them softly: Animal death, linguistic disability, and the struggle for ethics." 87-96.

Joseph Merrick, insinuates the subject-object correlation Descartes' philosophy introduced.

One of the earliest-known zoos in the Western Hemisphere, that of Montezuma in Mexico, consisted not only of a vast collection of animals, but also humans such as albinos and hunchbacks. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century colonial exhibits became popular in the western world with showcases that not only included artifacts but actual people. Human zoos, also known as ethnological expositions, were initially designed to accentuate cultural differences between Western and other civilizations. These shows could be found, amongst others, in progressive cities such as Paris, Hamburg, Barcelona, London, Milan, and New York.<sup>13</sup> Set up in mock "ethnic villages", indigenous men, women and children were brought oversees from all parts of the colonized world<sup>14</sup> to perform their "primitive" culture for the gratification of eager masses that most likely got a sense of racial superiority.<sup>15</sup> Even into the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the practice of human zoos endured and in 1958, for instance, the Brussels World's Fair featured a Congolese Village.<sup>16</sup>

In 1871, Charles Darwin wrote, "[There] is no fundamental difference between man and the higher mammals in their mental faculties [...] The difference in mind between man and the higher animals,

13 Abbattista, Iannuzzi, "World Expositions as Time Machines: Two Views of the Visual Construction of Time between Anthropology and Futurama".13 (3).

14 In his 1908 autobiography, Carl Hagenbeck, a human rarities agent, bragged that during a ten-year period, he alone brought more than 900 indigenous people to the U.S. and Europe for exhibition, in which some were detained amongst the great apes. See also: Rothfels, "Savages and beasts: The birth of the modern zoo".

15 Lewis et al., *Understanding humans: Introduction to physical anthropology and archaeology*.

16 Boffey, "Belgium comes to terms with 'human zoos' of its colonial past".

great as it is, certainly is one of degree and not of kind”.<sup>17</sup> In her book *Animals in Translation* (2005) Temple Grandin outlines the similarities between people with autism, such as herself, and other sentient beings. Grandin’s theory is that the brain function of a person with autism falls “between human and animal”.<sup>18</sup>

A great deal of Grandin’s autism is sensitivity to details, which enabled her to notice animals’ traumas caused by humans and the farming industry.<sup>19</sup> She goes on to explain that all animals are more intelligent and more sensitive than humans assume them to be. In his book *Are We Smart Enough to Know How Smart Animals Are?* (2016) primatologist Frans de Waal pursues a similar line of thought, showing that there is no clear behavioral division between ourselves and other animals. Language, self-recognition, tool making, empathy, co-operative behavior, mental time-travel, culture and many other traits and abilities have turned out not to be exclusively human, as De Waal explains with his empathetic approach to animals.<sup>20</sup> This is hardly surprising, given that we evolved from an ape ancestor not so long ago. Thus, we share behavior with our relatives, just as we share anatomy.<sup>21</sup>

17 Penn et al. “Darwin’s mistake: Explaining the discontinuity between human and nonhuman minds.” 134 & 152.

18 Grandin and Johnson, *Animals in translation: Using the mysteries of autism to decode animal behavior*. 20.

19 Farmelo, Graham, “Was Dr Dolittle autistic?”

20 De Waal, *Are we smart enough to know how smart animals are?*.

21 Cobb, “Are We Smart Enough to Know How Smart Animals Are? by Frans de Waal – Review.”



WHO'S AFRAID OF THE BIG BAD WOLF?<sup>22</sup>

In his graphic novel, *Maus* (1997),<sup>23</sup> Art Spiegelman portrays his father's experiences in Auschwitz death camp during the Holocaust. The novel depicts Jews as mice,<sup>24</sup> Germans as cats, and Poles as pigs. By using anthropomorphic motifs of children's books, *Maus* raises awareness to the horrific history, as well as to his dad's personal survival story.<sup>25</sup> In Nazi Germany, prior to the outbreak of WWII, signs on entrances to cafés, restaurants and other shops read 'No Entrance to Dogs & Jews'.

By dehumanizing the Jewish population, turning them to 'animals', the Germans could emotionally detach themselves from the inhuman acts that were later committed. The anti-Semitic discrimination was later validated and rationalized by the Nuremberg Laws and during the Holocaust;<sup>26</sup> as a result the Jewish population was swiftly 'relegated' from dogs to pests. In the apocalyptic Nazi vision, they were represented as parasitic organisms such as leeches, lice,

22 Title of a popular song featuring in the Disney cartoon *Three Little Pigs* (1933). In her book *Adolf Hitler: a Psychological Interpretation of his Views on Architecture, Art, and Music* (1990) Sherree Owens Zalampas writes that early in his political career, Hitler enjoyed being called The Wolfsschanze, (Wolf's Lair) by his associates and had the habit of whistling the familiar Disney tune "Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?"

23 Spiegelman, *The Complete Maus*.

24 According to Spiegelman what inspired him to draw Jews as mice was the German "documentary", *The Eternal Jew* (1940), which portrayed Jews in a ghetto swarming like rats in a sewer with a title card stating the "vermin of mankind." Remarkably Zyklon B, the gas used as the killing agent in Auschwitz and elsewhere, was a pesticide manufactured to kill vermin (such fleas or roaches). See: Art Spiegelman in conversation with Hillary Chute.]

25 This landmark project led literary critics and International audiences toward seeing comics as a serious art form. See also: Chute, "Comics as literature? Reading graphic narrative." 452-465.

26 Heideman, "Legalizing hate: The significance of the Nuremberg Laws and the post-war Nuremberg trials." 5.

bacteria, or vectors of contagion.<sup>27</sup> In that light the mass exterminations of the Jews of Europe; Hitler's Final Solution, was presented as a sanitization to a global epidemic.<sup>28</sup>

The flexibility of the term 'animal' was always loaded with emotive connotations and representations. Throughout Hitler's regime the definition of the word 'animal' remained ambiguous for binary purposes; when referring to the Jewish population, it was degrading and associated with overwhelming plagues. whilst when referring to the German folk the concept of human-animal was associated with a natural predator; an imperial eagle or a wild wolf that is committed to the pack and its virile bloodline; on the one hand a degradation of one human species and on the other a declaration of evolutionary achievement and inborn superiority of another.<sup>29</sup>

Despite the Nazis' inhumane cruelty towards certain ethnic groups, Adolf Hitler and his top officials rejected anthropocentric reasons for their actions<sup>30</sup> and even went as far as to pass several progressive laws for protecting them. Under the Animal Protection Act<sup>31</sup> it was forbidden to mistreat animals in any way. The law also provided protection to animals in circuses and zoos, and people who neglected their pets could be arrested and fined.<sup>32</sup>

27 Smith, *Less than human: Why we demean, enslave, and exterminate others*.

28 Browning, *The origins of the final solution*.

29 Fisk, "When Words Take Lives: The Role of Language in the Dehumanization and Devastation of Jews in the Holocaust."

30 Anthropocentrism, also known as homocentricism or human supremacism, is the grounding for some naturalistic concepts that claims of a systematic bias in traditional Western attitudes to the non-humans. See: Norton. *Environmental ethics and weak anthropocentrism*. 131-148.

31 German: Tierschutz im Nationalsozialismus Deutschland. Till this day Germany's animal protection regulations are based on the laws introduced by the Nazis.

32 Arluke and Sax, "Understanding Nazi animal protection and the Holocaust." 6-31.

How do you reconcile love for animals and racial fanaticism? Animal protection measures may have been a legal veil to blur moral distinctions between animals and people, and by doing so justified the prosecution of Jews and other ‘undesirable species’, who were considered a threat to the Aryan purity.<sup>33</sup> When the Nazis described Jews as ‘Untermenschen’ (meaning, sub-humans) they didn’t mean it metaphorically, but literally. The arbitrariness and contradictions of the Nazi regime regarding animals and humans, animal protection next to ethnic cleansing, indicates that the Nazis were not necessarily the inhumane monsters as history books describe them but merely ordinary human beings living by diverged morals and ethics dictated by society.<sup>34</sup>

In 1994 an estimated 800,000 Rwandan Tutsis and moderate Hutus were murdered in the course of 100 days. In the years preceding the 1994 genocide, Tutsis in Rwanda were often called by the slang epithet ‘Inyenzi’ (meaning, cockroaches). The animalized slang was not only the word on the streets but actually utilized by organs of state and mass media, which consistently conveyed the Kafkaesque message that part of the population were actually ‘cockroaches’, and by doing so they laid both the foundation as well as the justification of the Rwanda genocide.<sup>35</sup>

#### CONTEMPORARY NATURAL AUTOMATA

In the late sixties Jannis Kounellis, a key figure associated with Arte Povera,<sup>36</sup> brought a dozen horses into the gallery L’Attico in

33 Figueira, *Aryans, Jews, Brahmins: theorizing authority through myths of identity*.

34 Mann, Michael, “The dark side of democracy: Explaining ethnic cleansing.”

35 Ter Haar, “Rats, cockroaches and people like us: views of humanity and human right.”

36 Arte povera (Italian: poor art) was a radical Italian art movement from the late 1960s to 1970s whose artists explored a range of unconventional processes and

Rome. By being fixed to the wall, eating hay indifferently, the exhibits in *Untitled (Cavalli)* (1969) became an extension of the gallery’s architecture. Recalling the Dada movement, such artistic intervention can be seen as homage to Marcel Duchamp’s concept of the readymade.<sup>37</sup> The crucial difference, however, is that Kounellis’ readymade sculpture consisted of live animals and not a mass-produced object like a urinal carrying the artist’s signature.<sup>38</sup> Despite the fact the horses were taken care of just as in any other stable, when *Untitled (Cavalli)* was restaged in New York in 2015, it stirred a much-heated debate than it did in 1969 regarding animal cruelty and triggered countless protests around the venue.

Is it ethics or just aesthetics? This fundamental question comes to mind regarding artworks in which animals literally sacrificed their lives so that the maker would gain fame and fortune. *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* (1991) is one of Damien Hirst’s most celebrated sculptures; it consists of a tiger shark preserved in formaldehyde solution in a vitrine. The shark, a near-threatened species, was caught off Hervey Bay in Queensland, Australia, by a fisherman who was commissioned to do so, because Hirst wanted something “big enough to eat you”.<sup>39</sup> With this sculpture Hirst reflects on subjects of life and death, and addresses the tragic fate of all human attempts to preserve life. Through the nineties Hirst carried on making his controversial ‘pickled animals’ series, which raised ethical questions regarding

non-traditional ‘everyday’ materials. See: Poli, *Minimalismo, arte povera, arte concettuale*.

37 The term readymade describes artwork made from manufactured objects. It was first used by French artist Marcel Duchamp in 1913 and applied since then more to works by other artists made in this fashion.

38 *Fountain* (1917) is a readymade sculpture by Marcel Duchamp.

39 Barber, “Bleeding art.”

treatment of animals within the art market, but at the same time earned him a place of honor in the pantheon of most influential, and richest, artist alive today. This friction between form and content is perhaps what makes him such a significant player in the history of modern art; he is presented to us as the ‘bad boy’, the anarchist that ‘swims against the current’, but in fact his enterprise is capitalist by nature.<sup>40</sup>

In Douglas Gordons’ video installation *Play Dead; Real Time (this way, that way, the other way)* (2003) a four-year-old Indian elephant called Minnie was brought to the highly regarded Gagosian Gallery in New York from the Connecticut Circus. While shooting the video in the gallery, a professional film crew recorded her carrying out a series of tricks such as ‘play dead’, ‘stand still’, ‘walk around’, ‘back up’, ‘get up’ and ‘beg’. The work documents Minnie as well as the conditions of her captivity, which force her to perform anthropomorphized actions unrelated to elephant behavior in the wild. Like many of Gordon’s protagonists, the elephant is subjected to greater forces, beyond its control. The artist has remarked that the work lies somewhere between “a nature film and a medical documentary”, which allowed him to “get close enough or under the skin of the elephant [...] to see] a sense or sensibility that doesn’t actually physically exist”.<sup>41</sup>

When I experienced Gordon’s video installation ‘Play Dead’ for the first time I thought it was absolutely brilliant. Today, however, I see it differently. The affiliation with the entertainment industry makes the work inherently problematic, considering the aggressive training the endangered animal had to undergo to ‘learn’ these circus tricks. Additionally, the fact that the elephant was brought into one of the most commercial galleries in the world to pose on

command—for the sake of an artwork—is disturbing as it reinforces the exploitive correlation to the art market.

Another kind of art that examines the bizarre relationship between mankind and its fellow creatures is of artist-prankster Maurizio Cattelan, whose controversial work often employs (black) humor and the grotesque. Drawing inspiration from children’s books and pop culture, Cattelan’s satirical installations often consist of taxidermied animals tangled in absurdist narratives, such as *Bidibidobidiboo* (1996),<sup>42</sup> which portrays a crime scene wherein a squirrel is slouching over a kitchen table after committing suicide, with a gun laying on the floor.<sup>43</sup> He later made a whole sculpture series of taxidermied horses that included a hanged one in *The Ballad of Trotsky* (1996), a dead one in *Untitled (Inri)* (2009), and multiple headless ones in *Untitled, Kaputt* (2013). Other animals that guest starred in his surreal world included stuffed domestic dogs, a donkey carrying a TV-set, an ostrich burying its head in the gallery floor (denoting a familiar anthropomorphic idiom), a gang of 2000 pigeons overseeing the central pavilion (Palazzo delle Esposizioni) at the Venice Biennale in 2011, and an elephant (in a room) that happens to be dressed in a white Ku Klux Klan cape. Cattelan is often described as a Shakespearian fool, expressing universal truths about themes such as power, death and authority through what appears to be jokes or stunts. Despite the evident political connotations of his work he refuses to take a stance and claims to be an idiot who doesn’t know what his work means.

40 Enhuber, “How is Damien Hirst a cultural entrepreneur?.” 3-20.

41 Gordon, “Douglas Gordon on Working with Elephants.”

42 Maurizio Cattelan’s work title is directly derived from the novelty song “Bibbidi-Bobbidi-Boo”, which was written in 1948 by Al Hoffman, Mack David, and Jerry Livingston, and featured in the 1950 film *Cinderella* (also known as “The Magic Song”).

43 Cattelan and Portinari, “Bidibidobidiboo: details of deception and irruptions in Maurizio Cattelan’s inventions.”



Personally, I find that exploitive artistic practices such as Damien Hirst's pickled animals or Cattelan's cartoonish interventions tap the box of human superiority Descartes philosophized back in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. But on a different, yet similar, note; it is impossible for me to discuss artistic taxidermy without mentioning its strong correlation with photography. Both practices freeze objects/subjects in time and by doing so 'mummify' them. In that respect, I find that the work of Hiroshi Sugimoto is worth mentioning, specifically his Dioramas series that began in 1974 and spans over four-decades. As a visitor to the American Museum of Natural History in New York, I myself admired the stuffed wildlife in the dioramas. Staged before a craftily painted backdrop, they looked impressive but at the same time seemed completely fake. Yet, when these dioramas are captured through Sugimoto's architectural lens, as I later saw in large black and white prints at the Neue National Galerie in Berlin, these mummified animals come to life. They appeared as if photographed on location, in the wild, and not in front of a two-dimensional representation of it.

#### THEY LIVE<sup>44</sup>

In recent decades the practice of incorporating living animals in artworks became increasingly common. Echoing Darwinist ide-

44 The title refers to John Carpenter's film *They Live* (1988), a Sci-Fi thriller about greed and propaganda. Based on Ray Nelson's short story *Eight O'clock in the Morning* (1963) The plot revolves around a wanderer who discovers a pair of sunglasses, capable of depicting the world the way it truly is. Through these spectacles he perceives capitalist consumers as aliens while mass media, adverts and billboards deliver blunt subliminal messages such as "OBEY," "MARRY AND REPRODUCE," and "NO INDEPENDENT THOUGHT."

as, this particular practice by some artists is aimed to juxtapose between nature and culture, and enhance a sense of displacement when inserting wildlife into domestic/public spaces.

In May 1974 German conceptual artist Joseph Beuys flew to New York and was directly taken by an ambulance to a sealed room in the René Block Gallery where he shared the space with a wild coyote for eight hours over three days. Beuys believed that “everyone is an artist”<sup>45</sup> with the agency to transform the world around them. His coyote performance was an example of what he called ‘social sculptures’; actions intended to change society for the better.<sup>46</sup> While the work’s patriotic title *I Like America and America Likes Me* refers to the US as a “melting pot” where everyone can co-exist, Beuys ironically related to America as he saw in the seventies—a divided nation whose white population oppressed indigenous, immigrant, and minority populations. Despite the coyote being represented as an aggressive predator by European settlers and their descendants, who sought to eliminate it, for Beuys it was America’s spirit animal and by sharing space with it, he attempted to connect with what it represents.<sup>47</sup> Thereby, establishing a national dialogue between the diverse cultures inhabiting it.

In Doug Aitkens’ multi-channel video installation *Migration (empire)* (2008) Indigenous North American migratory animals were inserted into roadside motel rooms across the industrial

landscapes of the United States. Removed from their natural habitats but drawing on their natural instincts, these wild animals interact with the room’s furniture and utilities. One of the vignettes entails a horse watching a herd of wild horses on TV as they gallop freely through a landscape. Other scenes include a beaver indulging himself in a bathtub, an owl hypnotized by a rain of feathers coming out of a pillow, and a buffalo that completely trashes the motel room. Despite the absence of humans in the rooms, their presence is implied through the scenography; Televisions, coffee machines, refrigerators, lamps and an alarm clock are all turned on. Similarly to Beuys’ performance with the wild coyote, Aitkens’ work explores the complex relationship between America’s wilderness and its extensive man-made environment; the displacement of wildlife within urban interiors serves, in my opinion, as an allegory to the lost freedom of a bygone era and ambivalence to their approaching extinction. As much as I can relate to the message Aitkens wishes to convey in his video vignettes, I do wonder about the conditions that made them possible. Is it really the ideological and critical artwork it appears to be or is it once again an embodiment of human’s detachment from ‘other’ animals, reminiscent of Descartes’ philosophical argument?

Other influential artists working today undertake methods of provocation, which question their position between Descartes and Darwinist perspectives. In Marco Evaristti’s installation *Helena & El Pescador* (2000) ten goldfish were swimming in circles, each within the constraint of a blender. Visitors were given a choice of either killing the exhibits in a click of a button or sparing their lives. Evidently, by placing the goldfish in a blender, Evaristti refers to the contemporary food industry and emphasizes a sense of responsibility we (should) have as a society and as consumers. This, in turn,

45 Beuys’s famous phrase, “Everyone is an artist”, is borrowed from Novalis, a poet, author, mystic, and philosopher of Early German Romanticism. See: Michely and Mesch, *Joseph Beuys: the reader*.

46 Beuys. *What is art?: Conversation with Joseph Beuys*.

47 The coyote is a prominent animal in the Native American culture; often it represents the figure of the trickster or an artist of a sort. See: Bright, *A coyote reader*.

led museum director Peter Meyers to be charged with animal cruelty (but found not guilty).<sup>48</sup>

The 2018 controversy revolving around the exhibition *Art and China after 1989: Theater of the World*, led to protest from animal rights activists worldwide. The show at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York marked the rise of newly powerful China to the world stage and presented works by 71 key artists and groups active across China and around the world. People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) President Ingrid Newkirk stated, “People who find entertainment in watching animals try to fight each other are sick individuals whose twisted whims the Guggenheim should refuse to cater to.”<sup>49</sup>

Consequently, several works were removed from the show including Huang Yong Ping’s *Theater of the World* (1993), an enclosure in which live insects, amphibians, and reptiles fight and eat each other; a video documentation of Peng Yu and Sun Yuan’s performance *Dogs That Cannot Touch Each Other* (2003) that displays restrained mastiffs walking toward each other on treadmills, and Xu Bing’s *A Case Study of Transference* (1994), which features a boar and a sow stamped with the artist’s trademark fake Chinese characters, mixed with Roman letters, in the act of mating. World-famous artist Ai Weiwei, who served as an advisor for the show and curated its film component, defended the show by stating, “When an art institution cannot exercise its right for freedom of speech, that is tragic for a modern society [...] Pressuring museums to pull down artwork shows a narrow understanding about not only animal rights

48 Boogaerd, “‘Helena’ by Marco Evaristti.”

49 Telonis, “Protest of Controversial Art in New York City Museums in 2017-2018: Reactions, Responses, and Legal/Ethical Obligations of Museums in the Age of #MeToo, #BlackLivesMatter, and Activism on the Internet.”

but also human rights.”<sup>50</sup> Sometimes art doesn’t necessarily reside in the object, but in the conversation around it. While such works are arguably ethically irresponsible and even exploitive, they do uncover what the public perceives as ethical and unethical—thereby provide an opening to a discussion on interspecies relationship.

Another issue altogether is highlighted through Tania Bruguera’s participatory performance *Tatlin’s Whisper #5* (2008).<sup>51</sup> Staged at the Tate Modern in London, two policemen mounted on horseback regulate the movement of museum visitors through the Tribune Hall. The performers, who were in fact members of the Metropolitan Police, practiced crowd control techniques. The visitors were herded in various directions and formations through the space, as the mounted police officers either surrounded or divided them into smaller groups. By infiltrating the museum with the presence of authorities, Bruguera deprives the audience of their ‘safe zone’. Unknowing whether they are witnessing an actual police regulation or participating in an artwork they become both the subject and object of the performance.

#### A DOG’S LIFE

The cast of *Going to the Dogs* (1986),<sup>52</sup> a four-act theater play by Dutch artist and TV persona Wim T. Schippers, features six German shepherds in a domestic living room scenography. Following

50 Pogrebin and Sapan, “Guggenheim Museum Is Criticized for Pulling Animal Artworks.”

51 *Tatlin’s Whisper #5* (2008) is the fifth segment of a performance series that aims to activate viewers’ participation by decontextualizing dynamics of power, Tate Modern, London.

52 An idiom describing a sense of disgrace and a verge of social deterioration. See: Gehweiler, “Going to the Dogs? A Contrastive Analysis of S. th. is Going to the Dogs and jmd./etw. geht vor die Hunde.”

its premiere at the notable Stadsschouwburg in Amsterdam, which was completely sold out, the play drew national attention and provoked much controversy.<sup>53</sup> Meanwhile, in the Dutch parliament, questions were raised regarding whether such an absurdist play is eligible for government subsidies. A lasting effect of the performance has been the inclusion of a painted portrait of the leading performer, the female German shepherd Ilja van Vinkeloord (1981–1996) in the Stadsschouwburg's hall of fame as part of the significant actors in Dutch theatre; hence acknowledging the nonhuman performer as equal to humans.

Under similar circumstances as Wim T. Schippers, the artist Guillermo Vargas Jiménez (aka Habacuc) portrayed 'man's best friend' in an unconventional light and received immense backlash. At the center of Vargas' exhibition at the Códice Gallery in Managua, Nicaragua, stood a stray dog tied by a short leash to the wall, without food or water. Various images of the exhibit *Exposición N° 1* (2007) circulated the web and triggered an outrage. The allegations that the dog had starved to death spread internationally, followed by a petition that received over four million signatures.<sup>54</sup> Vargas has not only endorsed the petition and even signed it himself, he claimed that the work was intended to draw attention to the unfortunate lives of animals and comment on the amount of dogs that starve to death in the streets of his hometown San José, without human intervention to save them.

Several years later a similar work of his titled *Axioma* (2013), was exhibited in a gallery in Heredia, Costa Rica. Especially for this show Vargas began a blog documenting the starvation of an

emaciated dog (named Axioma) until the end of the Costa Rican elections in February 2014. The photos aimed to demonstrate the passing of time through the dog's condition as a metaphor that mirrors the state of the nation. As a result of a global online controversy the blog was taken down and the Costa Rican National Animal Health Service investigated the case, finding the dog in good health. Vargas later clarified he had found a street dog in poor condition and documented its recovery. The photos of the dog's rehabilitation were, in fact, posted over time in reverse order.<sup>55</sup> By doing so Vargas exposed the social mechanism of disinformation and the tendency to express opinions online regardless of the truth.

Pierre Huyghe is arguably one of the leading contemporary artists that incorporate animals and other living organisms in their oeuvre. A frequent collaborator of his is an albino Podenco hound with a striking pink foreleg that answers to the (anthropomorphized) name 'Human'. Like Vargas's dog 'Axioma', 'Human' is presented as a living artwork and makes guest appearances in video works or on sites where Huyghe's work is exhibited. The only difference between these dogs, however, is that 'Human' is not tied by a leash to the gallery walls but wanders freely between them, accompanied by an animal handler who oversees her safety and needs. At the LACMA (Los Angeles County Museum of Art) 'Human' had been examined by animal welfare organizations, obtained a permit as a 'performer' for her inclusion in the exhibition, and even got her own web page. Nevertheless, it is not so much empathy for animals that Huyghe seeks to engage in his work, but rather an

53 Schippers, "Show Went To the Dogs (Literally, One Might Say)."

54 Couzens, "Outrage at 'starvation' of a stray dog for art."

55 Montero, "Habacuc: obra pretendía mostrar rescate de perra en orden invertido."

Following pages:

Hertog Nadler, *The Four Riders 2010*, Production still from 4-channel HD video installation



uncanny sense of wonder by nature and the indifference it has regarding man's desires. *A Journey that Wasn't* (2008), for example, is an elaborate reenactment of an expedition to an unknown island in the Antarctic Circle. The reenactment is staged with a music concert and light show in the middle of New York's Central Park, where the main protagonists are a species virtually unknown to science: the albino penguins.<sup>56</sup> The sculpture *Untitled* (2011-2012) is a statue of a reclining female nude with an actual beehive mounted on her head, while in *Zoodram 5* (2011) a hermit crab, living in an aquarium, is confined in a replica bust of Constantin Brancusi's *Sleeping Muse* (1910). His eerie video *Untitled (Human Mask)* (2014) stars a monkey-waitress, wearing a wig and a traditional Japanese mask, wandering aimlessly in an abandoned restaurant in a post-apocalyptic setting in Japan.<sup>57</sup> The waitress occasionally rests by a window and touches her smooth human white mask in a disturbingly sensual way. The video was inspired by the 2011 man-made disaster triggered by a natural one, in the Fukushima nuclear plant reactor.

Animals displayed in the context of the arts introduce an authentic aspect within an artificial context; they disrupt the expectation of a controlled agency by their spontaneity<sup>58</sup> and their "resistance to being represented".<sup>59</sup> They are indifferent to what the camera,

56 The *Aptenodytes albus* are a fictional penguin species described by explorer William Dyer; a character created by science fiction author H. P. Lovecraft. They are six-feet-tall, the tallest and heaviest of all living penguin species. In that light, the 'discovered penguin' could have been with animatronics. See: Lovecraft, *At the Mountains of Madness: The Definitive Edition*.

57 Higgie, "Take One: Human Mask."

58 Manuel, "Theatre Without Actors: Rehearsing New Modes of co-Presence."

59 Georgelou & Janša, "Janez Janša's Camillo 4". 83-89.

the audience or art critics may think of them and their mannerism, or shall I say animalism.<sup>60</sup>

Personally, what I find inspirational in Huyghe's work is that the animals take on human features or cultural references but at the same time remain 'themselves'—they are not performing but appear to be going about their everyday activities. The artist constructs a framework and the way in which the nonhuman animal inhabits it becomes the artwork. Despite the fact that amongst the three schools of thought Huyghe's work fits best to Zen Buddhism, I do wonder whether his endeavor of incorporating live organisms in his artwork is indeed as harmonious as it presented to be. As much as I find Huyghe's interdisciplinary sculptures intelligent and multi layered, they also seem to discourse with the old tradition of imperial zoos and curiosity exhibitions that set nonhumans under human gaze. This is, in my opinion, the paradox of Huyghe's practice—he devises an artificial scenario to explore 'the real' but simultaneously assumes superiority of man over nature by wisely blurring boundaries of animal ethics to satisfy human whims.

#### DOUBLE TROUBLE

Since 2006 I have operated as part of the artist-duo Hertog Nadler, together with my life partner Chaja Hertog. In our work we continuously engage with relations between the natural and the artificial; between politics and poetics. In each new project we first set out to create a 'universe' with an inner logic before intervening in it. Our goal is to make each work in a way that it is capable of reflecting onto multiple topics simultaneously, so that the viewers

60 Animalism is a philosophical and ethical stance that emphasizes the value of all sentient beings. See: Blatti and Snowdon, eds., *Animalism: New essays on persons, animals, and identity*.

do not only 'get the message' but also reflect on their own life experiences and fill in their own meanings. In each new process we look for the balance between being in control and totally letting go; in the same way as nature maintains a close connection between order and chaos. On the one hand we highly value craftsmanship and strive for accuracy, and on the other hand embrace having a factor of uncertainty—as though things can dissolve or fall apart somewhere along the way.

Our video *Harvest* (2013) opens with a wide shot of an orderly olive grove in a Mediterranean landscape. The serene scenery is suddenly interrupted when one tree, among a thousand others, starts shaking its branches. This lone action provokes a chain reaction amongst neighboring trees. As this movement spreads on to other orchards, a riot police squad rallies through the landscape seeking to suppress the rebellion. Our departure point for this project was the ancient olive harvest methods in which aggression and cultivation come together (i.e. beating the trees with sticks); this ambiguous duality between what seems harmful to the observer but in fact beneficial to the trees inspired us greatly. We invited choreographer Aitana Cordero to collaborate on this project because we both consider dance as a consequence of committed actions, rather than an accumulation of steps and formations. The choreographic goal in this process was initially to find the relations between the different bodies; the olive trees and the anti-riot police officers. Our intention, in terms of choreography, was to carefully study and explore the possibilities of movements that lie within the olive harvest, alongside with riot police formations in urban environments and crowd psychology. Throughout the process we continually considered how do the trees 'fight back', express their resistance, and how does the fragility of the police officers manifest itself.

Filming outdoors, in Andalusia, Spain, had been a challenge due to natural restrictions of daylight and weather conditions, but having nature as our theatrical podium has a magical quality simply because it is unpredictable and has a will of its own. Furthermore, during the production of the film and later during exhibitions and screenings we found ourselves in conflict with some of the spectators who had trouble with the idea of hitting harmless olive trees for no apparent reason (which was the whole idea in the first place). While some of the spectators took offense by the images of beaten trees, the farmers had no issues with our undertaking on their orchards. "These trees have been here for hundreds of years", they claimed—thus in the course of time our endeavors, which may seem aggressive, have no actual consequences for the trees. It is as harmful as bees penetrating flowers to collect nectar (and spreading pollen along the way).

Fundamentally, I see parallel relations between colonialism—man's desire to dominate other cultures, and agriculture—man's desire to cultivate nature. In that respect, 'Harvest' has a double meaning or reading. On the one hand it deals with the impossibility of taming the wild and addresses mankind's relationship with nature. At the same time, it serves as a social metaphor on the absurdity of enforced ideologies and power structures between authorities and civilians. Other interpretations are welcome.

Flora and fauna are the main (f)actors in earlier works such as in the immersive video installation *The Four Riders* (2010), which juxtaposes the tamed and restrained with the wild and grotesque. Initially inspired by Albrecht Dürer's woodcut *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* (1498)<sup>61</sup> the work deconstructs horse anatomy into

61 Dürer's woodcut referred to the figures in Christian faith, appearing in the New

massive landscapes of moving flesh and shiny hooves. Four large panels, hanging in mid-air; on each a horse's body is projected. A white horse with fringes on his legs, long hair that waves beautifully with every step; a black eventing horse with slender legs, which makes you wonder how it can even carry its body weight; a grey Arabian horse, slender and slightly smaller than the rest; and a brown draft horse, a stocky Belgian one, with short, broad and strong legs. The video is filmed close to the skin so that you can see all their folds contracting, muscles trembling, veins swelling, pointy ears twirling and noses nostril breath impatiently. Everything indicates that the horses can jump forward at any moment.<sup>62</sup> A soundscape of dark ambient noise and stamping hooves increase the anticipation. The four separated panels are edited in such a way that the horses seem to move almost synchronously. That slow, almost mechanical swinging of those chests, left right left right. Slowly the tempo increases and the tension builds up, you almost expect them to burst out in a gallop and storm forward out of the screens and straight towards the audience. A bolero for four horses, larger than life size, restlessly drifting and grinding and walking and trotting, endlessly.

Another significant inspiration source for this work was early studies of animal anatomy in motion, and the horse in particular. In June of 1878 by the racing tracks on the Palo Alto Stock Farm the innovative photographer Eadweard Muybridge and his companion, the industrialist and politician Leland Stanford, carried

out a public experiment that would settle the theory about equestrian gait, and prove once and for all whether the horse's limbs are completely aloft when galloping. Across the track they mounted a white backdrop with a dozen cameras lined up. The cameras were connected to 12 wires in an electrical circuit, tripping the shutter of the attached camera when a horse with a two-wheeled cart raced down the track. It was the first time in documented history that a horse was captured in motion, and the first time that the human eye could pick out the position of its legs at such speeds. Some claim that this is also the day motion pictures were introduced into the world.<sup>63</sup> Muybridge's dialectic correlation between art and science undoubtedly influenced our method and process when working on *The Four Riders*. In early stages of the work we extensively consulted with scientists and researchers from the Utrecht University who have at their veterinarian clinic a treadmill designed for medical use. Eventually we filmed at 'Centre Européen du Cheval de Mont-le-Soie' in Belgium and at 'Tierklinik Hochmoor' in Germany. Both locations had a special orthopedic conveyor belt designed for horses and other large animals. The cooperation with doctors and assistants at 'Centre Européen du Cheval de Mont-le-Soie' was valuable due to their personal interest and constructive input to the project. We filmed in a circular space surrounded with cameras that are capable of capturing every single movement on the conveyor belt from 360 degrees simultaneously.<sup>64</sup> This method provides them

Testament's final book, Revelation, an apocalypse written by John of Patmos, as well as in the Old Testament's prophetic Book of Zechariah, and in the Book of Ezekiel, where they are named as punishments from God. The Christian apocalyptic vision is that the Four Horsemen are to set a divine end time upon the world as omens of the Last Judgment. See: Cunningham and Grell, *The four horsemen of the Apocalypse: Religion, war, famine and death in reformation Europe*.

62 Spaink, "De vier ruiters."

63 Clegg, *The Man Who Stopped Time: The Illuminating Story of Eadweard Muybridge* "Pioneer Photographer, Father of the Motion Picture, Murderer."

64 Such innovative technique was first introduced in the sci-fi blockbuster *Matrix* (1999).

Following pages:

Hertog Nadler, *The Four Riders*, 2010, Production still from 4-channel HD video installation



with insight on the animal's medical condition and traces where it may feel pain or inconvenience. The reason the doctors were fascinated by our project was because it offered a new perspective on the horse's anatomy they hadn't explored before: frontal, beneath its hooves, and in slow motion.

If *Harvest* portrays olive trees as rioting civilians, then *The Four Riders* portrays horses as mechanical organisms (it is not called 'horsepower' for no reason). Similarly to *Harvest*, we received some criticism from animal rights activists who expressed their concern for the horses' well-being, who were forced to perform for the sake of an artwork. It is true that the film was shot without the performers' consent, but what is in fact the moral difference between filming a horse running on a treadmill for an art project and horse-back-riding? And what about horses performing tricks under the circus tent, competing at the Olympics or the racing tracks? In essence, all activities are imposing an action the animal did not approve of. So, what is the link between nature and culture, when is it ethical and when is it just aesthetic to incorporate animals in artwork? These questions occupied us during the process of earlier works and accompany us in the development of our future project—this time with camels.

#### COLLISIONS

In 2018 we were invited to participate in the 6<sup>th</sup> Çanakkale biennial in Turkey and conduct a field research for a new work. During our stay we drove through countless landscapes around Çanakkale, the location of ancient Troy. We visited all the archeological sites and studied ancient Troy's history and mythology. While touring various villages in the outskirts of the Marmara region we stumbled upon the local tradition of camel wrestling. Originated among ancient Turkic tribes over 2,400 years ago, Deve Güreşi as it is locally called,

is a sport in which two male Tülü camels<sup>65</sup> contest in response to a female camel in heat. The camels fight one another by using their necks as leverage, forcing their opponent to fall. A camel is declared the winner when his competitor falls to the ground or flees the scene.

Together with the curators, Seyhan Boztepe & Deniz Erbas, and with the assistance of craftsmen of Mahal Art center in Çanakkale we plan to construct various scale models of cityscapes, which will be tailor-made to fit onto camels' backs like body extensions. In a two-channel video we will follow two camels' processions marching towards each other through different landscapes. The miniature cities they carry on their backs will be filmed from various up-close perspectives; using drones and custom-made camera-rigs mounted onto the models. The two processions will eventually come together at the point the camels engage in battle, causing the cityscapes to gradually erode leaving dusty ruins on the camels' backs. We envision the city-models to be made from ceramics, a material that is part of the local economy and can collapse beautifully. We visualize these models to be constructed in generic, universal forms, to prevent them from being affiliated with the victory or defeat of any particular civilization. The city ruins that survived the collisions are intended to be displayed in a separate room to the video installation as archeological relics.

Normally, I share my thoughts and aspirations only after a work is completed and not during the process of its formation. In this particular case, however, I make an exception because I still didn't fully resolve the ethical matters in the context of this work. Therefore, I

65 A Tülü Camel is a breed of camel that results from mating a male Bactrian camel with a female Dromedary. The resulting camel is larger than either a Bactrian or a Dromedary, and has traditionally been used as a draft animal. Tülü Camels have a single large hump instead of two or one smaller ones.

think it may serve as a study case that can potentially recapitulate some of the notions I addressed so far. *Collisions* (working title) is a commentary on the absurdity of war. It deals with the destructive nature of mankind and explores the relations between 'man-made' and 'sculpted by nature'. Through combining these two related components, materialized in video and sculpture, the principle of 'creation through destruction' is explored. With this project our main objective is to contemplate on some of the most fundamental aspects of human nature; namely violence, destruction, patriarchy and cruelty. At the same time, we hope to emphasize a sense of wonder by nature—accept it as it is and highlight the dread hidden underneath its facade of beauty.

The truth of the matter is that we do not know what is best for nonhuman animals, but I think that at least we can recognize our abusive actions towards them. By acknowledging our misconduct towards nonhuman animals, we can begin to change our behavior and interaction with them.<sup>66</sup> When it comes to including living (or dead) creatures in artworks, I principally consider a difference between wildlife and domestic species. In the case of wildlife, I think the artistic intervention should be reduced to the minimum, thus interference with their natural course of life should be prevented as much as possible. In other words, the artwork and the artist should avoid causing any anxiety or affecting their natural conduct. Working with domestic animals, on the other hand, is slightly different in my opinion. This distinction has largely to do with the fact that throughout history domestic animals have evolved alongside humans; they have become accustomed and familiar with our world, to the extent that it constitutes part of who they are. Having said that, I do not mean to endorse nor justify mankind's venture of taming the wild. I do,



Hertog Nadler, *Collisions* 2021, Still image from simulation for 4K video installation

66 Weil, *Thinking animals: Why animal studies now?*. 16-17.

however, acknowledge its existence. Throughout thousands of years, camels played an important role in the Turkish rural lives. During the ottoman era camel caravans crossed the landscapes, transporting jewels, food supplies, spices and woven finery. Apart from carriage the Turks used camels for transportation, warfare and sport. According to archaeological evidence, camel wrestling has at least 4,000 years of history in Turkey.<sup>67</sup> As much as camel wrestling may sound cruel and to some extent anachronistic, it is important to bear in mind that camels wrestle in the wild.<sup>68</sup> Thus, these traits occurred ages before nomads placed them in the framework of a competitive folk sport. Nowadays, camel wrestling venues are still real folk festivals that take place only during mating seasons, they do not involve cheating, match fixing or gambling.

There are two fundamental questions that initially occupy me when considering incorporating animals in the context of an art production. Firstly, I ask myself what is the genuine purpose of the work? Secondly, and equality important, how do I prevent any suffering, be it physical or psychological, in my undertaking? As a maker it is essential to clarify for myself the key motivations before making a work. It is only when I am convinced that my intention derives from an honest and poetic place that I would carry on with the plan with full conviction. And on the contrary, when I feel that my motivations are driven from greed, ego, profit or personal gain, then better to let it go because most likely nothing good will ever come out of it. In regards to that, before starting production of our upcoming project in Turkey we plan to further investigate the subject matter of camel wrestling and make sure that in the course of our artistic endeavor no suffering, physical injury or

67 Yilmaz and Ertugrul, "Camel wrestling culture in Turkey."

68 Trefler, "Fodor's Turkey". 242.

mental distress is caused to the camels. In case we realize otherwise, we'll undoubtedly seek alternative ways to get the visual result we strive for, without harming them (such as Computer-Generated Images or filming the collapsing cityscapes with hyper close ups without harming the camels).

#### ANTHROPOMORPHIZE THIS

As stated in the beginning, interspecies relations are largely divided to three schools of thought. The philosophical attitude relies heavily on Descartes's anthropocentric views of animals as automata and humankind as the center of existence. The scientific doctrine is predominantly based on the Darwinian evolution theories, which claim that mankind had evolved and transcended from animals—hence, our superiority. And the spiritual approach, that originates in ancient religions like Hinduism and philosophies such as Buddhism, which thrive on the conviction that we are part of nature and that all living beings should be treated equally. But perhaps (an)other approach is viable; one that could allow to rethink our relationship with nature and as a result would gain us a better understanding of our own human nature (and nurture).

*According to the natural sciences, man is included in nature.*

*And if man is included in nature, all his actions are included, too.*

*Ant colonies, foxholes, lion dens, turtle shells. Like wheat silos, like workmen's dormitories*

*Everything is natural; nothing but rules and material, process and product.*

-Meir Ariel<sup>69</sup>

69 Meir Ariel (1942-1999) was an Israeli singer-songwriter. He was known as a "man of words" for his poetic use of the Hebrew language. The cited text is my own

The way nonhumans are represented in artwork not only tells us about our own nature, it reveals our evolutionary (hi)story and in some cases validates our hierarchical position in ‘the food chain’. Scientific developments enable us a much better understanding of animal minds and possibly other organisms. At the same time technological advancements push us closer to intelligent machines. Algorithms learn to read our mind, and soon will be able to anticipate a thought before it had even occurred.<sup>70</sup> Does this begin to sound like an Orwellian prophecy or more like the Cartesian theory attached to the ‘other’ (nonhuman) beings? Either way, I believe that these developments pose the fundamental question—Are we entitled to presume our superiority in relation to other species?

Cave paintings, gladiator shows, horse racing, trophy hunting, big-game fishing, cockfights, dog grooming, fur wearing, meat eating, cat-videos, equestrian displays, circus, safari, rodeo, bullfighting, zoophilia, animal sacrifice, scientific experimentation, species preservation, taxidermy and (post)modern art.

Where do we draw the line between ethics and aesthetics? When is art considered poetic, and when is it considered an immoral, inhumane provocation? The truth of the matter is that I don’t have all the answers. Despite researching and writing this essay I still feel that there is so much to learn, and as a working artist I still find myself in a dilemma when it comes to working with sentient beings in the context of an artwork. If this essay is successful, it will hopefully assist in navigating through several chapters of the public discussion on interspecies relations in contemporary arts.

translation to an excerpt from Ariel’s song “What’s New in Science” (Hebrew: מה חדש במדע).

70 Carr, “Is Google making us stupid?”

We live in a critical point in which, I believe, art should address mankind’s relations to animals and the environment appreciably more. What I personally think is required at this point is making a shift from a ‘humanist’ anthropocentric perspective, to one that is inclusive of all species. We may strive to detach ourselves from ‘the others’ but ‘they live’ in our (selfish) genes;<sup>71</sup> there is no need to ‘go back to nature’ because it already resides in us, there is no escape.

No creature, human or nonhuman, was mistreated or killed for the purpose of making this essay

71 *The Selfish Gene* (1976) is a book on evolution by biologist Richard Dawkins, in which he builds upon the principal theory of George C. Williams’s *Adaptation and Natural Selection*.

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- Bing, Xu** *A Case Study of Transference* (1994)
- Brancusi, Constantin** *Sleeping Muse* (1910)
- Bruguera, Tania** *Tatlin's Whisper #5* (2008)
- Cattelan, Maurizio** *Bidibidobidiboo* (1996)
- Cattelan, Maurizio** *The Ballad of Trotsky* (1996)
- Cattelan, Maurizio** *Ostrich* (1997)
- Cattelan, Maurizio** *Untitled (Inri)* (2009)
- Cattelan, Maurizio** *Untitled* (2007)
- Cattelan, Maurizio** *Untitled, Kaputt* (2013)
- Cattelan, Maurizio** *If a Tree Falls in the Forest and There Is No One Around It, Does It Make A Sound?* (1998)
- Cattelan, Maurizio** *The others* (2011)
- Duchamp, Marcel** *Fountain* (1917)
- Dürer, Albrecht** *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* (1498)
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- Hertog Nadler** *The Four Riders* (2010)
- Hertog Nadler** *Collisions* (upcoming)
- Hertog Nadler** *Harvest* (2013)
- Hirst, Damien** *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* (1991)
- Huyghe, Pierre** *A Journey that Wasn't* (2008)
- Huyghe, Pierre** *Zoodram 5* (2011)
- Huyghe, Pierre** *Untitled* (2011-2012)
- Huyghe, Pierre** *Human* (2014 - ongoing?)
- Huyghe, Pierre** *Untitled (Human Mask)* (2014)
- Kounellis, Jannis** *Untitled (Cavalli)* (1969)
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**Sugimoto, Hiroshi** *Dioramas* (1974-2012)

**Schippers, Wim T** *Going to the Dogs* (1986)

**Yong Ping, Huang** *Theater of the World* (1993)

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