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Art

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Animals have a standing presence in the history of art, whether in domestic genre scenes, pastoral landscapes, romantic painting or natural history photography. However, since the 1960s, artists have been reimagining the terms of representation and expression of non-human animals, so that not only do animals become living actants that challenge the regimented spaces of art, but the domain of ethics itself has entered into the broader field of contemporary practice, becoming integral to its aesthetics and subject matter. Since that time, art has provided an arena of activity between human and non-human animals that attempts to overcome the historical differentiation of species on the basis of language and symbolic life. It has become a medium of ethical negotiation across ontological divides, attempting to create passages between human worlds of meaning and animal Umwelten, the environments that animals inhabit and which set the parameters for interpreting their behaviours, sensibilities, communication and consciousness. While the concept of the Umwelt developed by ethologist Jakob von Uexküll originally referred to an animal's biosemiotic niche, theorists and artists have thickened its implications to come to new understandings of the relationship between perception and self-reflection, interspecies relationships, and the contexts in which art generates meaning.

While contemporary art presents non-human animals in politically charged environments and visual schemas, it nevertheless discloses the conflicts at stake in doing so. In the 1960s and 70s, Joseph Beuys's early performances opened the way to a more expansive and inclusive form of sociality that would include natural and animal beings. But while Beuys imagined alternative forms of communication and representation in which such inclusions might occur, his works also demonstrate a tendency to subsume animals into human social systems. His works therefore articulate ethical struggles with which subsequent generations of artists have continued to grapple. The unwitting process of absorbing animals so that they become a dormant presence that haunts human visuality is evident in the standing preoccupation with the preservation of animal bodies seen with the resurgence of taxidermy in recent decades, notably demonstrated in works by Damien Hirst and Polly Morgan. These works demonstrate the existential pathos of animal lives lived in and as an existential latency while their bodies signify the generality of their species designations and subordinated place in the natural world. Yet these artists also attempt to expose the particularity of those animal bodies and overturn the predominant aesthetic regime by which humans conceal animals in anthropocentric systems of signification.

In a similar vein, Kathy High destabilises human-oriented visuality by scrutinising the terms of vision in scientific laboratories in which animals are used as test

subjects. By emphasising practices of palliative care, High shows how animal lives come into visibility in and as particular valued beings. She therefore attempts to produce an ethical status for animals that restores them from their anonymity within scientific experiments. Pierre Huyghe drives this awareness of animal particularity into a new speculative territory, positing the limits of animal worlds as a ground for reorienting anthropocentric perspectives, and thus calling into question the limits of human visuality. In this way, contemporary art charts an ethical terrain in which artists foreground the ontological difference between human and non-human animals, the metaphysical deadlock of a shared mortality, the emergence of modalities of care and companionship, and finally articulations of coexistence-in-difference. In this way, contemporary artists strive to generate a new form of Umwelt in which art becomes a passage between human and non-human animal meaning.

Social Sculpture and the Non-human Animal as Proposition

Joseph Beuys's three-hour performance *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare* serves as a useful example by which to understand the emergence of an ethical turn towards the animal in art. In 1965 in a gallery in Düsseldorf, Beuys covered his head in honey and gold leaf, tied a piece of iron to his shoe, and then proceeded through the gallery space cradling a dead hare. Visitors to the event arrived at the gallery only to discover that they had been locked out and would have to observe the scene through the front window. They could see Beuys walking with the hare while repositioning it in relation to the hanging pictures as though to give it a good view of them. Beuys whispered to it, at times taking its paw and moving it up and down the vertical axis of a painting, or moving its ears up and down as though to simulate the hare's attention and understanding. Beuys included the honey and gold leaf on his head to reinvigorate the sensual dimensions of the performance and to counteract overly cerebral interpretations of art, which he considered to be deadening. The hare itself was a folkloric symbol of the earth's fertility. Beuys described the performance as a redistribution of energies that would radicalise the definition of art as a 'social design for the future', or what he eventually termed 'social sculpture'.

Ultimately, the performance laid out a set of relational junctures between the human, the animal and art, which Beuys aspired to reconfigure over the course of the event. From one perspective, then, Beuys shows the stultifying parameters of intellectualised art. The dead hare could not be less interested in pictures or Beuys's words about them. The artist creates a parodic re-enactment of the postures of contemplation in the modernist tradition as he carries the hare, supports its body and manipulates its limbs like a puppet. The dead hare therefore embodies a schematic and deadened mode of experience in response to Beuys's cerebral explanations of pictures. From another perspective, however, the performance attempts to reverse the circuitry of 'explanation' through the charged energies of the alchemical and animal agents which resituate art from its traditional discursive framing to the space of relation that would constitute a 'social sculpture', with a sociality that abuts the concept of an ecology. In a 1983 TV interview, Beuys explains, 'One can see the hare as the external organ of the human being . . . ' thus emphasising that humans and animal species share an earthly fabric, and that the purely cerebral understanding of art has lost touch with this corporeal reality.[1] He insists that a true understanding of art is an incorporation of

it, an absorption of the artwork into one's own body. In this sense, to understand art is to 'stand elsewhere' (*verstehen*) by exchanging corporeal positions between himself and the hare, and thereby re-tuning his bodily sensorial system.

Beuys avails himself of an ecological fabric to produce the performance, yet the work nevertheless gives rise to a more fundamental problem with regards to the presence of the animal in the gallery. On the one hand, the hare's dead body provides a plastic morphology and an elemental substance with which to regenerate the social understanding of art; it is a prosthesis that allows humans to imagine 'standing elsewhere' and to understand themselves otherwise, from a perspective produced by an ecology. On the other hand, animals are easily subsumed into the human regime of sense, serving merely to extend the reach of human intention. Explaining pictures to the dead hare is an impossible task of bridging fundamentally distinct sensorial worlds. The tenderness of Beuys's disposition towards the hare's body cannot be denied, but the performance nevertheless exacerbates an ontological divide between human and non-human animals through the presentation of a maximally irreducible state – death. Paradoxically, while Beuys bridges otherwise radically separate arenas of exchange (the natural world and the art world), the exchange is in no way reciprocal. The hare only becomes agential within a broader system of meaning and materiality through the residual vitalism of its dead body, simulated by Beuys himself.

It is therefore appropriate to suggest that while Beuys's oeuvre is not emancipatory for non-human animals, they nevertheless become propositions in contemporary art – agential forces that require speculation and interpretation across the ontological divide between species, generating an understanding of artistic practice as embodied and behavioural, not just representational. In this sense, his work anticipates the theoretical transformations that Bruno Latour charts in his account of a political ecology which aspires to cross the disciplinary divisions between political and scientific forms of knowledge, and instead is directed towards the communication and representation of new ontic entities within a heterogeneous democratic organisation. Latour defines the proposition as: 'an association of humans and non-humans before it becomes a full-fledged member of the collective'.[2] In the same way, while animals remain latent in Beuys's work, they anticipate and aspire towards a world in which the human-non-human animal exchange elaborates the expressive potential of animals, even if these expressions are not formed articulations per se and may even occur as disarticulations within the setup of the artwork.

Such a disarticulation of human meaning is staged in an amusing play on Joseph Beuys's *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare*. The Italian artist, Vettor Pisani, devised a performance called *The Hare Does Not Like Joseph Beuys* in 1976, for the 37th Venice Biennale (it was subsequently performed in a retrospective at the Madre Museum in Naples in 2014). Pisani redistributes the relationship between artwork, artist and animal in order to make these three components confront one another as ontologically distinct entities that stand in alignment, but nevertheless enact a broken circuitry. The performer, a blonde woman, heavily made up and wearing a black dress and collar, entered the room and stood before a red cross-shaped sculpture, and a dead hare (in the re-enactment, the hare is ceramic). Between the two stood an architectonic shape: a cross, parted in half to make a space of division illuminated by two red spotlights. After an introductory period in which Wagner's *Flight of the Valkyries* played, the performer solemnly held up her hand with fingers posed in a mudra (pointer and

pinky finger extended like rabbit's ears, with her two middle fingers folded in). She repeated the phrase in German, 'The hare does not like Joseph Beuys' her voice raising with each repetition, to culminate with her yelling the phrase, this time in Italian. She then issued a shot of hysterical laughter, abruptly followed by silence. The sequence repeated.

Pisani's performance animates and punctuates fundamental difference through voice, light, music and spacing. The divide between species is performed in a stylised and dramatised rejection of relationality between the hare and Beuys. Pisani drives the hare's presence-as-absence in Beuys's work (its conspicuous inclusion in the work as a dead body) towards a defined confrontation with and refusal of the artist. He shows that inasmuch as the hare's body can be instrumentalised as energy, so also can it be deployed to negate the setup of the artwork. Pisani positions the hare as a disruption of the energetic circuitry that Beuys presumes to forge in his appropriation of natural substances and animal bodies. Indeed, he makes the artwork a means by which to formalise the co-implication of human and non-human animals as an irreducible deadlock: a broken circuit of exchange and communication that is constitutive of anthropocentric meaning. Yet this seemingly inevitable occlusion of non-human animals nevertheless presents itself with increasing vigour in art of the late 20th and early 21st centuries, as artists investigate the capacity of animal bodies to upset the formulation of human worlds by reviving the practice of taxidermy.

Challenging the 'Poverty' of the Non-human Animal

Beuys's *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare* raises the dilemma that an awareness of the hare in particular, and the emerging discourse of the animal appears only by virtue of the hare's death, so that an ethical acknowledgement is an effect of its loss and the affective charge of its corpse, rather than a responsiveness to its presence as an existential other. Yet the persistent appearance of dead animal bodies in contemporary art's revival of taxidermy nevertheless signals a disruption of the way in which humans preserve animals in a fundamental state of quiescence in the imagination. Artists re-enact the visual tactics of the traditional natural history museum, which preserves animal bodies as specimens that stand in for a species, and then maps these species in hierarchies that reinforce the supremacy and centrality of human life. The recent preoccupation with preserving animal bodies therefore lays bare the historical distinction between human and non-human animals on the basis of a belief in the human capacity to generate complex meanings (world-making) as opposed to non-human animals' capacity to remain bound and integrated into a closed environmental niche. What is denied in this distinction is not merely the shared anatomical foundations that generate perceptual capabilities, but also the sites at which non-human animals adapt to global environmental change and how they register complex meanings. Contemporary art exposes the disavowal of human animality as well as the lively symbiotic networks through which animals sense, experience and communicate their worlds. The re-emergence of taxidermy confronts the contemporary viewer with the temptation to refuse the animal an interiority, instead presenting the radical exteriority of animals hypostatised as pelts. Yet contemporary artists also attempt to leverage this troubled history out of its basic metaphysical assumptions by honing attention to the particular specimens and the possibility that each one was a life lost.

Consider British artist Damien Hirst's notorious installation *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living*, which exhibited at the 'Sensation' exhibition of the Young British Artists at the Saatchi Gallery in London in 1991. Hirst suspended a dead tiger shark in a glass tank filled with a low-concentration formaldehyde solution. The tank is framed into three even sections and harks back to natural history vitrines. In accordance with the name of the exhibition, the installation is compelling precisely because of its manifest sensuality; the rich turquoise colour of the solution, the abundant reflections off the glass and the satisfying geometry of the vitrine render the exposed shark body visually alluring. The impressive presence of the tiger shark is a catalyst for a panicked and failing attempt to grasp an imagined state of non-consciousness (the impossible thought of one's own death) from a highly stimulated state of self-consciousness. This movement of the mind is carried out through the spectator's attempt to visually fathom the shark's body through its spectacular framing as art. The shark is both indisputably *there*, yet obscured and deferred from clear sight. In other words, Hirst positions the shark's body to occasion a confrontation with the limits of human consciousness.

The installation's staging of the human-animal relationship undertakes a number of reversals: first, the animal is both solid and obtrusive, yet nevertheless elusive. For all its disruptive presence, it remains visually resistant, shrouded within the spectacle of the display. Second, and directly related, spectators restlessly circle the tank to capture a clear view, thus reversing the relationship between predator and prey. The dangerous shark has been pathetically neutralised and transformed into a curiosity for visual consumption. And finally, the shark's body is positioned as both plastic and rigid. It has been moulded and contorted into a threatening pose, with mouth wide open and tail fin slightly angled in mid-sweep as though it is still swimming. But for all the threat of its vital pose, its flesh is stiff and wrinkled, its eye sockets empty, and its body registers only the facticity of the shark's deadness. In short, the installation provokes a specifically human experience of existential dread through the suspension of the animal in a perpetual rigor mortis.

This vexing state of affairs recalls the philosopher Martin Heidegger's nuanced exposition on human consciousness in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*. His insights regarding human consciousness or *Dasein* are predicated on a threefold categorisation: the stone is worldless; the animal is poor-in-world; the human is world-forming.[3] To remain at the level of this brief schema would be to overlook Heidegger's subtle approach to animal life, however. Indeed, the text generated fulsome critical elaborations by Jacques Derrida in his seminars on animality and freedom, published in the two-volume *The Beast and the Sovereign*, and his address at the 1997 Cerisy conference 'The Autobiographical Animal', published posthumously as *The Animal That Therefore I Am*.[4] Derrida calls into question how Heidegger and other philosophers rely on a singular notion of 'the animal' that prevents a thinking of animals in any particularity, and how this designation essentially subjects animals to human law yet also leaves them conspicuously unaccounted for within it. This occlusion also pertains to the linguistic and visual codes of representation in which animals remain generic entities and thus escape metaphysical consideration. Indeed, Heidegger poses the question of the meaning of human Being (*Dasein*) precisely by way of the contradistinction between the animal's poverty and the human's capacity to form a world. Following this trajectory, Giorgio Agamben attends to the terms

by which Heidegger understands animal sensation and representation in *The Open: Man and Animal*.[5] In this vein, he shows that Heidegger is compelled by the deep sensorial immersion by which animals give themselves over to their environmental niche.[6] He recovers these sensorial capabilities as a form of freedom and an availability to humans.

Heidegger's statement that the animal is 'poor-in-world' is therefore by no means simple. His approach to human consciousness maintains that humans pass through an animal condition, whereas non-human animals remain bound up in a perceptual field from which they cannot imagine a beyond or world outside. In this regard, Heidegger was influenced by the biologist Jakob von Uexküll's concept of the Umwelt.[7] He elaborates, however, that while the animal is wholly compelled by the world, it is incapable of perceiving the world *as* a world. Heidegger gives the example of a worker bee that is simply 'given over' to the sun and to the period of its own flight without being able to grasp them as such. The bee is so entirely driven that it is captivated in its behaviour, without being able to reflect on or recognise it. He describes the animal's predicament of being both wholly open to its environment and its state of non-reflection as a way of surrounding itself in a 'disinhibiting ring'. As Giorgio Agamben elaborates, ' . . . the animal is *open* to a *closedness* . . . totally delivered over to something that obstinately refuses itself'.[8]

The condition of obstinate refusal, the paradox of the animal's openness to the closedness of a world, compels Agamben's axiological questioning of animal life. The animal is 'outside in an exteriority more external than any open, and inside in an intimacy more internal than any closedness.'[9] Animal being is both radically exterior and fundamentally withdrawn. Where for Heidegger, the animal is encircled by a disinhibiting ring that prescribes the possibilities of its behaviour while it is given over to sense, this same condition prompts Agamben to wonder how one can know the animal as such, and following that, how one can come to know ones' own animality.

This questing for the site of consciousness in conjunction with a wondering about the animal resonates with British artist Polly Morgan's series *Still Birth* (Figure 5.1). Known for her use of taxidermy, Morgan places animals in scenarios that recall vanitas themes, evoking both earthly wealth and inevitable mortality and decay. For *Still Birth*, a title that plays on the still-life genre, Morgan suspends a pheasant chick by a brightly coloured balloon contained by a bell jar. This suspension relays a state of non-consciousness; it is neither the end nor the loss of consciousness associated with death, for as the title implies, the chick has never lived. Instead, its non-consciousness is a liminal zone: its body was formed, but rather than living and then dying, Morgan locates it in a condition before life and after death, a 'poverty' that precedes and postcedes consciousness. The tension between the floating balloon (perhaps a figure of lofty transcendental thought) and its literal encirclement by the bell jar painfully evokes the animal condition as one of captivation, but more strongly, it does so in such a way that this captivation produces an awareness of consciousness itself as an embodied entrenchment between the events of birth and death. The pheasant chick's positioning in a state of perpetual latency is intertwined with, and even an expression of, the spectator's awakening to her or his captivation between birth and death.

Figure 5.1 Polly Morgan, *Still Birth, Red*. © Polly Morgan/SODRAC, 2016.

Heidegger writes that animal life ' . . . is a domain which possesses a wealth of being-open of which the human world may know nothing at all.'[10] He subtly raises the possibility that the animal's poverty in world is also a human poverty of sensation. Agamben therefore argues for a reclamation of the state of animal openness – its surrender to focused sensations by which it navigates the environment. Yet he does so by repitching human consciousness. He suggests that the human distinguishes itself from the animal only in that the human being is 'an animal that has awakened from its own captivation *to* its own captivation'.[11] That is to say, consciousness itself is defined in and through animality. But if this is so, the question arises, how can we make claims about whether or not an animal is capable of a conscious life?

Where Agamben stresses the fact that for Heidegger, the animal's poverty is also a kind of sensorial wealth, what he calls 'the open', it is also important to remark that for Heidegger, the possibilities of the animal's perception and behaviour are fundamental to its innermost organisation and morphology. Its perceptual field is not fixed but rather supple, in perpetual communication and feedback with the environment. In this light, the seemingly artificial process of taxidermy preservation – the transformation of the animal body into a plastic form – enables a re-envisioning of the interpenetration of consciousness and perception in animal bodies. It is therefore striking how Morgan invests animal bodies with the capacity to be deprived of consciousness, not simply to have perished, but to be animated as though suspended on the cusp of life

and yet having already lost their lives. This liminal condition is corroborated by the elaborate settings she creates for the bodies, often situating them in scenes of baroque luxury: a fox tightly wound in a circle resting in a large champagne glass under a crystal chandelier; a squirrel in a martini flute; a swallow cradled in a spoon. Harking back to vanitas-themed paintings in the Dutch still-life tradition, the ornamented surroundings interweave the bodies with connotations of excess and wealth. Yet each animal is positioned as one would a body at a funerary wake. Rather than standing as supplementary ornamentation, the animals are the focus of mourning. Each one is given an abundant environs that frames its death, appearing elegiac. It therefore recapitulates the dialectical oscillation between captivating sensations and the animal's closedness to the world, while nevertheless acknowledging the animal as a life to be mourned and a death to be attended. In her reframing of animal bodies as the subject of the scene, Morgan redirects the implicit theme of human mortality to the possibility of an animal mortality; to animals as capable of a death as such. She therefore overturns Heidegger's assertion that only man dies; the animal perishes.[12]

Within the tradition of taxidermy, it is standard practice to situate animals within constructed versions of their natural habitats. Thus, as Rikke Hansen points out, traditional taxidermy discloses a deep-seated belief that animals simply *are* their skins; acts of displaying animal skins reveal that the animal has no interiority, nor any particularity.[13] To appropriate animal skins is to absorb animals into a symbolic distinction between the animal pelt (which amounts to being merely flayed meat) and the human skin, which gives contour to and is inextricable from the subject. Taxidermy produces a generic animal. Yet, as Hansen points out, contemporary art troubles this 'animalising' of the skin-border.[14] Morgan, however uses the artifice of baroque environments to interrupt the anthropocentric contextualisation of the animal body and yield new associations. Thus, the critical potential of contemporary art lies in its deft negotiation of central questions about the limits of being (human or non-human animal being) at the very site of the bodily envelope (the skin) of particular animals.

Ethical Concern for Animal Suffering

Contemporary art resituates animals' corporeality, so that rather than reiterating preconceptions of their poverty, animal bodies are illuminated by a new visibility. Another way to say this is that art brings a consciousness of animals through their corporeal precarity. It is with regard to the coextensive physical and political vulnerability of animals that artworks focusing on care and companionship become relevant to the rise of animal studies. When artists bring an animal's vulnerability into view, spectators feel a frisson of their own corporeality. Artists such as Kathy High thereby cultivate an ethical feeling for animals through a sense of an analogical bodily condition. This bodily condition, however, is not pure and transhistorical; it is illuminated through the lens of the biological sciences.

The relationship between witnessing animals in their corporeal breakdown and the emergence of an ethics of care and compassion is explicit in High's *Embracing Animal*, an installation which took place over ten months in a 2006 exhibition at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (Figure 5.2). The installation was a habitat for former lab rats, which the artist purchased from a laboratory that genetically prepares rats and mice to sell to researchers. All the rats were albino transgenic specimens,

Figure 5.2 Kathy High, *Embracing Animal*, 2004–6. © Kathy High, 2016. Image courtesy of Kathy High.

model HLA-B27, which had been injected with human DNA as embryos to predispose them to a family of autoimmune disorders such as arthritis, psoriasis and inflammatory bowel disease. With an average life span of two years, the ten-month exhibition saw the rats through the emergence and progression of the diseases that they had been designed to live out.

High initially took interest in the rats after discovering that rats, mice and birds are not considered 'animals' under the US Animal Welfare Act. Under the law, they are synthetic products, and thus exist in a state of exception, excluded from the legal and political protections granted to large mammals. But the installation does not simply exhibit transgenic specimens. Rather, it is an extended laboratory for the continued observation of the rats, as they are administered different forms of palliative care – a special diet, homeopathic remedies for their seizures, comforting bedding and toys for stimulation. The artwork is therefore set up as a quasi-empirical study of alternative care for the animal body, in accordance with which the artist displays and records the rats' daily activity via video cameras set up in the tunnels, keeping a diary of the progression of their diseases, arranging regular veterinary check-ups, documenting reports from the curators, and narrativising the rats on a blog.

From this initial description, it might appear that *Embracing Animal* risks an overstated empathy for the rats by transposing a level of consciousness on them that they would otherwise be denied when they are being studied under the lens of scientific

research. However, it proposes a more subtle possibility, which is that the rats provide insight into human life: not of the essential value of 'humanity' or even 'consciousness', but rather the prospect that consciousness is not sited in a being (or in a philosophical concept such as *Dasein*) but is deduced through relational behaviours. Moreover, rat behaviours disclose their capacity for complex relationships and sophisticated levels of cognitive activity. In short, the artwork exposes the uncertainty of how to define and locate consciousness as such.

Where contemporary taxidermy art demands a rethinking of the question of the animal's life and death at the site of the skin, *Embracing Animal* demonstrates the commonality of the condition of suffering shared by human and non-human animals alike. In both cases, animal bodies occasion reflection on human limitations: the failure to transcend animality and the captivation of the embodied condition in its restricted capacities to adapt, heal and regenerate. Significantly, the rats were designed to express disorders of rigidity (like arthritis) and weakened immunity; thus their bodies cope with the failure of human and non-human corporeality. Indeed, the rats' dysfunctions were forcibly imposed on them through the insertion of human DNA. They literally incorporate the frailties of human bodies.

The rats' impoverished condition throws into focus shared mechanisms of coping and adapting, be they the behaviours that compensate for states of fatigue and pain – limping, stiffness, favouring aches – or those spontaneous expressions of joy and pleasure from receiving care, satiation and attention. The consciousness visitors see is uncannily familiar, yet it is problematised because it is routed through a chimerical, suffering animal body. The artwork thus answers Donna Haraway's call for an understanding of the laboratory situation not as one in which humans possess animals, but rather as one in which people and animals are both subjects and objects to one another in a material-semiotic intra-action whereby a state of 'shared suffering' would inspire a sense of co-responsibility.[15] *Embracing Animal* alters the terms of the laboratory so that rather than simply using the rats to extract salient information to humans, spectators observe the way in which the rats flourish and respond to care. The artist insists on this kind of care as instrumental in producing scientific knowledge through an ethic towards human and animal suffering alike.

Miscommunications and Zoodramas – Being Indifferent

The rise of animal studies has brought to attention ever more evidence of animals' sophisticated levels of responsiveness and communication with one another and with humans. The philosopher Vinciane Despret demonstrates how animal sociality is negotiated through broader ecological and political assemblages. Her studies of ethological practices show how animals both exceed and disrupt the discursive parameters by which humans define consciousness, culture and social exchange. In her analysis of the ethologist Bernd Heinrich's study of ravens, for example, she crafts an understanding of the raven precisely through its recalcitrant behaviour.[16] That is to say, the raven's notoriously enigmatic activities expose blind spots in the methods of studying animals. Until Heinrich's lifelong commitment to follow their behaviour, ravens were considered to be uncooperative test subjects because they explicitly dismantle the testing grounds and devices on which scientists rely to make claims about their behaviour. In short, ravens knowingly obfuscate the methods of human knowledge

production. Despret examines how Heinrich's study of ravens is entirely contingent on his becoming social with them (his becoming-raven), but equally how this becoming social meant to redefine the terms and expectations of social relations entirely. Not only did his study shift the *dispositif* of ethology to a process of co-communication between humans and ravens, it also opened a way for theorising an interspecies sociality. This sociality cannot be reduced to an ecological or evolutionary symbiosis (though it is that as well), but is born of a process of idiosyncratic adaptations between collectivities of ravens, humans, wolves and other animal species. In this sense, Despret expounds a new orientation for the scientific study of animals that is grounded in a Latourian political ecology, an alternative model of democracy that relies on an expansive and speculative inclusivity.

The question of how to acknowledge and respond to other species across the divides of radical difference – indeed, the very question of the terms by which such differences might be understood – is the ethical crux of contemporary art that centres on animal life (and particular lives). Not only do animals complicate our claims to knowledge, as do the ravens in Despret's narration; they do so through insistent assertions and revelations of their Umwelten, as well as their surprising adaptations to human intervention. Thus, the speculative nature of animal ethics is integral to the aesthetic dimensions of such artworks. The assertion of fundamental difference was central to feminist ethics in the late decades of the twentieth century. French feminist Luce Irigaray challenged and elaborated the tradition of phenomenology that poses questions about how we encounter the other from within a common flesh, shared spaces of bodily interaction and linguistic exchange. The questions that run through her feminist and elemental philosophy are: how do we receive the other from within solipsistic perceptual and symbolic fields? How is it possible to dwell in and through difference; in-differently? In a similar vein, artists have become concerned with the experience of the animal as both a familiar creature and an entirely other being, at the point of fundamental discontinuity or misrecognition from within human schemas of perception, communication and interpretation.

For French artist Pierre Huyghe, indifference is precisely the disposition by which one may speculate about the radically different lifeworlds occupied across species divides. A series of works in the early 2000s makes the artwork a terrain on which the Umwelten of species confront one another, often in ways that provoke a sense of alienation or even threat. In this regard, Huyghe brings the respective biosemiosis of animal and insect species to bear on a new contextuality that forges the meaning of the artwork. Indifference, then, is the experience of non-relationality that occurs between radically separate frames of reference. For example, his *Zoodram* series undoes the primacy of any one species' perspective and produces an uncanny view of both art environments and the limited perceptual territories of species.

In *Recollection: Zoodram 4 after Sleeping Muse by Constantin Brancusi* (2011; Figure 5.3), Huyghe constructed a habitat for a hermit crab and included a resin replica of Brancusi's *Sleeping Muse*, a sculpture of a serene and abstracted female face. Predictably, the hermit crab occupied the replica, turned it into its home, carrying it on its back and animating it with its movements. In a sense, Huyghe reverses Beuys's intervention of bringing the animal into the art institution; instead he drops art into an ecosystem so that it is merely one object among others that is engaged in a variety of indifferent exchanges. He gives the artwork a biological life, a renewed existence

Figure 5.3 Pierre Huyghe, *Zoodram 4*, 2011. Live marine ecosystem, glass tank, filtration system, resin mask/hermit crab, arrow crabs. 60 x 53 x 40 in. (152.4 x 134.6 x 101.6 cm). Courtesy of the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery, Esther Schipper, Berlin and Hauser & Wirth. © Pierre Huyghe/SODRAC, 2016.

in an ecology instead of a life as an object overlarded with modernist significance. Conversely, the crab mobilises a place as the retroactive muse of modern art, the force that moves behind the face that turns it into a mask, and instantiates itself as the object of its recollection inferred by the title of the artwork. The crab makes its home in the mask, and the mask of *Sleeping Muse* resolves its activity into a dreamy, abstract expression.

This resetting of the terrain of both art and the animal's Umwelt occurs in a place of indifference. The crab still knows nothing of art, and art faces the opposite direction of the crab. One might say that where Brancusi argued that 'Simplicity is Complexity Resolved', Huyghe changes the terms of art to become, 'Indifference is Complexity Revealed'. He conceptualises the artwork as a compost heap; a jumble of unrelated things that have no prior intention towards one another. 'The compost is the place where you throw things that you don't need or that are dead.' 'You don't display things. You don't make a mise-en-scène, you don't design things, you just drop them. Things are in themselves, they don't have a dependence on the person. They are indifferent to the public. You are in a place of indifference.'[17]

Huyghe's oeuvre repositions spectatorship by propelling the viewer's perspective towards numerous discrete and possibly competing orientations. His assemblies of Umwelten fragment any unified representation of the world and instead rupture viewers from relational entanglement, while at the same time cultivating the viewer's

awareness of the very borders that adjoin them to other worlds. This awareness is borne out through temporal and affective disruptions: be they anxious confrontations with an unseen threat, or the boredom of a protracted encounter that does not culminate in any synthesis of experience, only in the recurrent awareness of an infinitude of worlds beyond one's own. Rather than feeling in closer touch with the ecosystem, Huyghe fabricates artificial systems, or one might say even institutional systems, in which the boundaries of beings become palpable. Huyghe explains, 'The aquarium is a place of separation, normally a collection of different species of different places around the world that are gathered together in a system supposed to be in nature, similar to a museum. . . . I am interested in the moment of suspension, in boredom or hypnosis in which you can find the equivalence between the encounter and the thing that is in front of you.'[18]

The indifferent space between Umwelten is the condition for which the speculation and interpretation of other species occurs. In this sense, the discourse of the animal in contemporary art has started to attend to what is fundamentally unknown about non-human animals, in spite of deep intertwinement and cohabitation. Huyghe shows that indifference can profoundly change our understanding of the spaces and parameters of the aesthetic experience. For example, his 2011 exhibition at the Esther Schipper Gallery in Berlin convened four artworks: first, an attendant that stood in the doorway of the main room and demanded the name of each visitor, and then loudly announced it as each person entered (*Name Announcer*); second, an attendant with a contagious flu (*Influenced*); third, a group of fifty spiders that moved to the corners of the ceiling and were filmed with security cameras (*C.C. Spider*); and finally a colony of 10,000 ants that nested in small holes made in the gallery walls and created lines of occupation between the nests (*Umwelt, Environment*). The exhibition put multiple disjoined life-worlds into a common space. Each component posed an alienating if not potentially antagonistic relationship to other animal species. The name announcer publicly signals the particularity of each individual to the other beings in the room. It is also a reminder to visitors that there are others to whom they are making an appearance, an assertion of an unknown perspective. The influenza virus introduces a sense of paranoia even though the object of that paranoia is invisible. The ants colonise the expanse of the wall, where art might normally have been hanging. The space therefore becomes primarily their territory, rather than a neutral space of aesthetic experience. But the ants also risk finding themselves in the trap of the spiders in the corners. Each species is absorbed in its own primary orientation, while at the same time each particular being becomes bound up in a broader arena of interaction. The gallery is not so much an organic ecology as what Huyghe calls, following von Uexküll, a *biosemiosis*: a concatenation of biological terms installed in adjacency to one another, though stripped of the assumptions of symbiotic relations.

Huyghe maximised the range of the biosemiotic encounter for his outdoor installation *Untilled* at dOCUMENTA 13 in 2011. Once again, placing disparate ecologies into adjacency, Huyghe built his installation in the section of the property that was used for composting. He made trails out of the compost heap and sowed particular plants in the fertile soil, many of them with pharmaceutical applications, such as foxglove (which contains digitalis), and some of them potentially toxic or mind-altering, such as cannabis, deadly nightshade, and a fungus from which LSD can be extracted. In the midst of this unusual botanical collection was a sculpture of a reclining nude,

the head of which was covered with a living beehive (*Liegender Frauenakt* [Reclining Nude]). Thus the canonical sculptural form, a nude, was distorted and rendered acephalic by the disconcerting colonisation of the head by the hive. The bees flew around the installation pollinating the plants as their hive developed in size. Another component of *Untilled* was the inclusion of a thin white dog named Human, who lived on site and interacted with visitors. Human's front leg and paw were painted pink in an animalian reconfiguration of the hand of a painter, standing as both the agent that colours the artwork (historically, a human role) and the object of the artwork itself (a vital and brightly coloured part of the installation). The components were situated in such a way that they would catalyse one another, while nevertheless producing a curious antinomy in visitors. Human is a friendly and communicative dog, whereas the bees occupied the space in a way that challenged the privilege of human visitors and their interaction with the dog. The beehive produced a sense of anxiety since it appeared on the head of the reclining nude, as though to suffocate it. Yet the bees flew through the area, pollinating the plants, with no particular intention towards any other animal species. For all the disconcertion that the beehive produces in the viewer, the bees themselves are indifferent. The fluctuating valences of interest, from dog to bees to sculpture to plants, level into an alienated assessment of irreducibly different worlds. In this way, Huyghe puts the animal Umwelt into a deconstructive relation with the world that an artwork gathers. Art loses its affordance as a privileged locus and practice of consciousness (Being). Yet it invites speculation about animal worlds on aesthetic terms that point to their withdrawn complexity.

Conclusion: The Art World as Umwelt

Since the late sixties, contemporary art has seen a wellspring of artistic practices that reconfigure the lines between human consciousness and animal behaviour. This reconfiguration attempts to intervene on the performative actions, existential speculation, scientific schemas and ontological divisions that determine the ethical and aesthetic ground of the human world. From these new perspectives, the art world itself becomes an Umwelt, a territory of sensible engagement that shapes the human capability for considering other species within its orbit. Yet the art world has also directed a speculation about its own animalian beyonds: the proliferation of Umwelten about which humans can only wonder and imagine. Such a task, though, is ethically primed from a humbled position in which humans are foreclosed from their historical anthropocentrism and opened to new perceptual capacities. Thus contemporary art initiates a new horizon of being with (and as) animals.

In the same way that Donna Haraway analyses primary scenes of human-animal interaction (the laboratory, the domestic home, animal training schools, in situ ethological studies and beyond) in order to demonstrate the profound intra-action, co-responseabilities, and shared material-semiotic structure, it is worthwhile to probe the art world to understand the new visibility of animals. Where historically, artistic representation has subsumed animals into an anthropocentric symbolic, contemporary art has generated tactics by which to expose these processes of occlusion. It exposes seams of difference, be they the philosophical distinction between perishing and dying; between skin and pelt; or between generic and particular. More than this, contemporary art has become a living arena of relational activity even if it is anti-social (in the sense that

it offers indifference, incomprehensible output, unknown intentions) in the name of an ethical acknowledgement of fundamental difference. Insofar as the art world has become the site of zoodramas, it has become a crucial site at which to explore alternative sensorial capabilities. Indeed, art drives the fundamental ethical question regarding how we might develop a complex sensibility of and for non-human animals.

Notes

1. 'Joseph Beuys im "Club 2"' (1983), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J6pS7H_24CE&list=PL5rv0LxqofNqPIYCG2aV0epxFudQvGiG3&index=4> (accessed 28 August 2017).
2. Bruno Latour, *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), p. 247.
3. Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concept of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, trans. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).
4. Jacques Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign*, vol. 1, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); *The Beast and the Sovereign*, vol. 2, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); and *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, trans. David Wills (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008). For a discussion of Derrida's critique of Heidegger's claim that only man dies but the animal perishes, see Dawne McCance's chapter on 'Death' in this volume.
5. Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, trans. Kevin Attell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).
6. Ibid. p. 43.
7. Jakob von Uexküll, *A Stroll Through the Worlds of Animals and Men: A Picture Book of Invisible Worlds*, in Claire H. Schiller (ed. and trans.), *Instinctive Behavior: The Development of a Modern Concept* (New York: International Universities Press Inc., 1957), pp. 5–80.
8 .Agamben, *The Open*, p. 65.
9. Ibid. p. 91.
10. Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, trans. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 255.
11. Agamben, *The Open*, p. 65.
12. Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1971), p. 178.
13. Rikke Hansen, 'Animal Skins in Contemporary Art', *Visual Art Practice* 9:1 (2010), pp. 9–16.
14. Ibid. p. 15.
15. Donna J. Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), p. 72.
16. Vinciane Despret, *Quand le loup habitera avec l'agneau* (Paris: Les empecheurs de penser en rond, 2002). Sections of this book have been translated into English and published in the journal *Angelaki* 20:2 (2015).
17. Christopher Mooney, 'Pierre Huyghe', *Art Review*, October 2013.
18. Allard van Hoorn, 'Pierre Huyghe: The Moment of Suspension. Interview with Allard van Hoorn', *Domus*, October 2011.