



ROAR

ROAR

Edited by Rosanna Greaves and Marina Velez

Conceived and edited by Rosanna Greaves and Marina Velez

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INTRODUCTION

This book was conceived by artists Rosanna Greaves and Marina Velez as part of broad aesthetic and critical conversations about sustainability. The design of this book speaks of interconnections and movement, acting as a nexus, linking ideas and allowing for new connections to be made. The title of the book, ROAR, refers to both a primordial expression and a voice that deserves to be heard. This title encapsulates in a monosyllabic blow complex questions about what happens when things such as nature, landscape, animals and humans are deprived of their own voice. This voice, like the title suggests, need not be a representation of displaced human attributes to non-human agents but a call for recognition of other voices, other knowledges and other ways of being in the world.

The artists, curators and scholars invited to contribute to this book have expanded this conversation by addressing issues related to borders, survival, animals, gender, geopolitics, decolonisation, domination, exploitation and environmental justice. The contributions not only explore each subject in depth through research, imagination and critical thinking, but also question the idea that these issues operate in separate territories. By overlapping, linking, mapping and layering, these works generate, in visual and literary ways, questions which tangentially address the complexity of sustainability: What are the indicators that point out when labour turns to exploitation? At what point does the survival of one species mean the extinction sentence of another? How can the history of those who have no voice be told? How can energy be used as a transgressive metaphor and as a messenger for the politics of positivism?

The conversation has, relatively speaking, just begun, but climate change, pollution, year zero scenarios and doomsday mathematical projections bring an inescapable urgency to the situation. There is no time for rhetoric detours or for spins of the mind and procrastinations of the soul. ROAR is an urgent, raw, poetic and complex contribution to this complex conversation.

WE ROAR

Rosanna and Marina

ECHOS OF THE VOID
ECHOS OF THE VOID



MARIA REBECCA
BALLESTRA
WITH CAMILLA BOEMIO

In an epic geologic tale, Maria Rebecca Ballestra develops a singular incursion into the desert, creating a fluid atlas composed of geographical distances and assonances from Namib to Gobi, from the Arctic to Patagonia, and from California to Rub' al-Khali. Ballestra's lifestyle is dictated by an ongoing investigation into what it means to embrace spaces and participate in our culture today.

The desert is, however, one of the final frontiers in a world assumed to be crowded and globalised. Its themes conjure visions of radical natural structures in an eclectic landscape that inspires a distinctly embodied form of sensory perception and an unexpected dissolution of ecological and social structures, in a magical, meditative state of insight designed to forge mystical revelations.

In this far-flung area where the unexplored codes, migrations, and extensions of conflicts coincide, transhumances of new social orders are formed and the ecological corrosion left to the bulwark of negligence.

In these places, precarious conditions collide with a voluntary suspension of voluntary interest for the West. Time seems to stop, slowing the ability to decode the signs of ecological change and humanitarian crises.

People are being pushed to the 'ends of the earth'.¹ What is therefore demanded is a logical inversion of spatial politics, not in ways that continue to prioritise geographical demarcations over human content, thereby concealing pre-existing bio-political assumptions about the human condition; but rather to examine the way the body itself provides critical insight into new geographies, which have long since abandoned centuries of topographical awareness. Such insight was always a mask of mastery for containing and mapping out the body politic, setting in motion bio-politically determined configurations of oppression and subjugation whose markings are still evident today.

Geographical demarcations would prove to be completely insignificant were they not underwritten by political and philosophical claims of habitus. It is life that bestows particular meaning upon the otherwise empty signifiers of spatial integrities and habitual residency. Space in this regard is always occupied and overlaid with certain meanings and attributes, which point directly to

Echoes of the Void is an ongoing global project by artist Maria Rebecca Ballestra in which she has investigated deserts and barren lands through geological, cultural, spiritual, environmental and political approaches. Ballestra has explored these lands with the help of local communities, who facilitated each trip. The series of images that compose Ballestra's work for this book were selected from the vast collection which document her field trips and in which different levels of topographical and ecological transformation are addressed. Through this project, Ballestra has been witness to desertification by industrialisation and pollution and extractive models of using the earth's resources, which she registers in her images as well as trans-disciplinary projects with local communities.

assumptions made about its inhabitants. But such meanings are never static, since the ground upon which they are inscribed is constantly in the process of ecological transformation².

In a new morphology of the earth's structure, Charles Darwin's theory is very timely. If natural selection is the basis of adaptation processes, a species' evolution, and how a species will react to a new era, then it also marks a more concrete evolution in society, even altering its geographical borders.

Adaptation is the totality of the characteristics – both physical and behavioural – which were favoured through natural selection, as they increased the possibility of survival and reproduction of an organism in its natural habitat. Adaptation, therefore, is the consequence of changes in the genetic pool that occur within a population following selective environmental pressures, and favour individuals with more advanced and varied characteristics. Variations in the genetic pool can result from natural selection, but can also come from genetic drift.

Ongoing climate change and the new desertification will lead us to re-examine the world as we know it. A new natural order is starting in these inaccessible areas, forgotten by most and dismissed as marginal.

Ballestra's practice provides an objective lesson on possibilities and artistic commitment, placing itself in a radical perspective through an exploration of the desert.

It is this spirit that Ballestra seeks to channel, by juxtaposing works whose intellectual rigour and experimental ethos are inextricable from their physical expression. Her modus operandi is rich in concepts articulated via non-linguistic modes, and the research teems with intricate patterns and esoteric geometries. These broader formal considerations are rooted in conversations that emerge between individual works by subjecting them to an abstract sense of order.

The compromise between a morphology of art and the interaction with natural elements creates new forms of artistic practices, as well as a new process of organisation, which creates new conditions and leads to evolution.

Throughout much of this project, art follows nature, guided by its innate compositional drive and responding to its sense of proportion. Site-specific installations and works combine extremes of hardness and softness, rigidity and flexibility, and structure and ornament. They not only suggest that the most powerful innovation might in fact be a radical act of synthesis, but remind us that the physical world in which we live is constantly inventing ways to unify and balance itself.

Written by Camilla Boemio

Camilla Boemio is a writer, curator, university consultant and theorist.

In 2016, she was the curator of *Diminished Capacity the first Nigerian Pavilion* at the 15th International Architecture Exhibition La Biennale di Venezia; and in 2013 she was the co-deputy curator of *Portable Nation. Disappearance as work in Progress – Approaches to Ecological Romanticism*, the Maldives Pavilion at the 55th International Art Exhibition La Biennale di Venezia.

She is a member of AICA (International Association of Arts Critics).

Maria Rebecca Ballestra

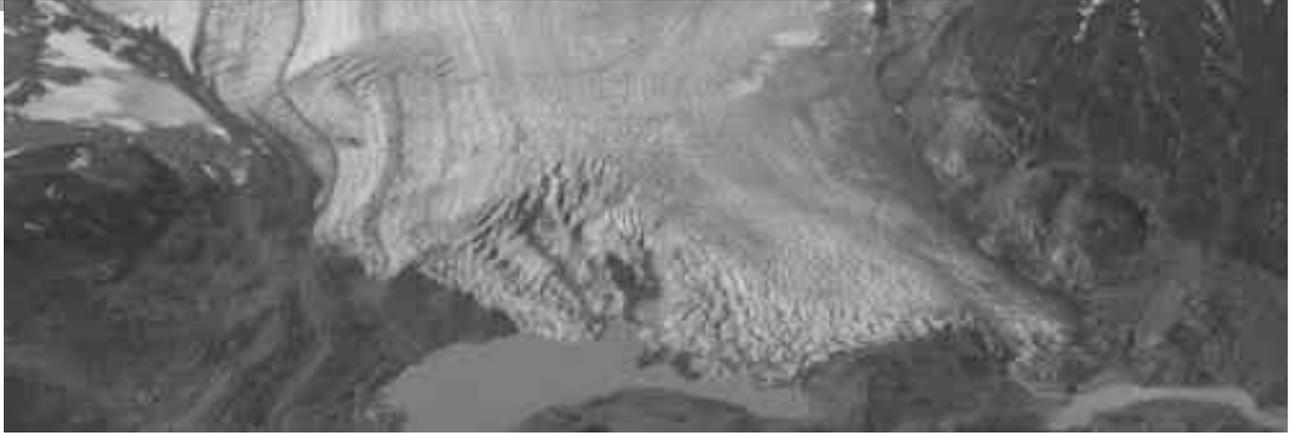
Visual Artist, Associate Curator presso CCANW; Co-Curator presso Unimediomodern Gallery; Owner and Director Festival for the Earth.

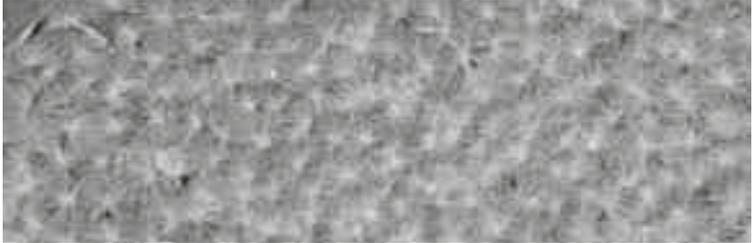
All images © Maria Rebecca Ballestra

1 Exibart, 'L'immaginario colonizzato, tra storia, rifugiati e social media. Una conversazione con il filosofo Brad Evans' Curatorial Practices section curated by Camilla Boemio, July, 2017, <http://www.exibart.com/notizia.asp?IDCategoria=245&IDNotizia=44504> (accessed July 17 2018).

2 *ibid.*













*BECOMING
SPECIES*



FIONA PARRY

Introduction

As she brings her lecture to a close, novelist Elizabeth Costello, a character in JM Coetzee's *The Lives of Animals*, rationalises with her audience: 'If I can think my way into the existence of a being that never existed, then I can think my way into the existence of a bat or a chimpanzee or an oyster, any being with whom I share the substrate of life.'¹ There is something disarmingly reasoned about this sentence, uttered no less by a fictional character. Despite the limits of human perception, if you hurl all your imaginative and empathetic capacities at the task, if you really try, it is possible to enter – or at least get an inkling of – the experience of another animal, to see and feel their world as they do. The artists I am going to discuss here, Marcus Coates, Pierre Huyghe, Marguerite Humeau and Diana Thater, all deal with this attempted leap of imagination. They engage with the lifeworlds of other species, whilst in their diverse ways acknowledging the barriers to doing this very thing.

In his seminal 1977 essay *Why Look at Animals?* John Berger wrote 'everywhere animals disappear,' referring to our separation and alienation from other species in industrial and post-industrial societies.² Today his words speak an even more disturbing truth: animals are disappearing. Animal populations have declined by 38% since 1970, as reported by the World Wildlife Fund in 2016, largely due to human-caused climate change and habitat loss. Not only do we no longer live in close connection to other species, we are blindly destroying their habitats and hope of survival. As we slowly wake up to this reality, a whole range of artists are turning their attention to our relationships with animals. As well as addressing urgent issues of extinction and environmental degradation, they are challenging the anthropocentric framework through which we view the world, and therefore other species.

Art has always been closely entwined with how we conceive our complex relation to other species. 'What distinguished man from animals was the human capacity for symbolic thought,' wrote Berger.³ 'Yet the first symbols

were animals.'⁴ 'The first subject matter for art was animal,' painted on to the walls of prehistoric caves.⁵ Paradoxically, 'what distinguished men from animals was born of their relationship with them.'⁶ Ancient humans reached to the creatures that surrounded them to give shape to their words and images, to their human qualities and characteristics. But, as animals have become increasingly marginalised from industrial and post-industrial societies, Berger argues, animal symbolism has morphed into anthropomorphism, into the 'human puppets' of Disney cartoons, which have lost all connection with the real animals from which they evolved.⁷

Today, artists are unpicking the human-animal divide, and looking closer at animal experience, behaviour and consciousness. As Filipa Ramos, editor of the *Whitechapel: Documents of Contemporary Art on Animals*, puts it: contemporary artists are inviting us to 'observe how humans and non-humans can dialogue and look at each other beyond anthropomorphic attributions and projective representations.'⁸ It is not at all surprising that many artists and theorists today are rejecting modes of representation that now feel distanced from real animals, whether that be the symbolic animals that have prevailed throughout art history or the anthropomorphised human-like creatures of contemporary cartoons. But how do we represent or express what is happening inside the minds and bodies of other species from our current position? What kinds of aesthetic strategies can express our alienation from or desired re-connection to other species? Each of these artists suggest different responses to these questions.

Becoming-animal: Marcus Coates

On a sightless, grey and blustery day on the Norfolk coast a man emerges out of the sea. He pulls himself out of the water and climbs up onto the shore dressed in a mismatching shell suit. As he comes closer he starts to rant animatedly in a strange nonsensical language, until at the sight of three men approaching in the distance, he retreats back into the North Sea, disappearing under the surface. Soon, further out from the shore the small grey head of a seal appears above the water.

In a double twist of human becoming seal becoming human, this is the artist Marcus Coates becoming a selkie, the mythical seal creature that on land assumes a human form. In another recent and humorous work Coates creates a news bulletin for TV Galápagos as a Bluefooted Booby reporting on the rampant human species who have settled on the Island. In other works, he has become stoat, rabbit or slug – all improbable feats for a human being. In one early photographic work, you see Coates somehow suspended high up in a tall branchless tree. Tiny in the distance, this is the awkward long-limbed figure of a human becoming a goshawk in *Goshawk (Self-Portrait)* (1999). The image brings to mind a line in Helen MacDonald's book *H is for Hawk* about training a goshawk while grieving after her father's death. 'It seemed that the hawks couldn't see us at all,' she says, 'that they'd slipped out of our world entirely and moved into another, wilder world from which humans had been utterly erased.'⁹



Throughout his career Coates has made continued attempts to enter this wilder world, not to erase the world of humans but to connect the two. A willingness to make himself look utterly ridiculous in the process is an essential part of his artistic strategy: 'The fact that people might be laughing at me helps me disinvest in myself, or my ego even more,' he says.¹⁰ These performances are about becoming other – tuning into a bodily, trance-like state to try to feel the sensations, actions, sounds and experiences of another living creature. In *Stoat* (1999) you see him try to walk in a pair of strange wooden stilts made to emulate the feet and gait of a stoat. Appearing more like instruments of torture, we watch him stumble about and slowly find a rhythm as he starts to make ground in tiny galloping sideways steps. No matter how absurd or un-stoat like it looks from the outside these are serious and sincere attempts to feel like another living being with everything that he's got. As Coates describes it: 'either I moved like that, or I fell over. The stilts were a tool for my removal as a human.'¹¹

Despite being intensely physical and rooted in deep knowledge and research, these can't help but be projective acts. This is something Coates is more than aware of and he has always embraced the anthropomorphic dimension of what he does. For Coates, trying to remove himself in order to find understanding or empathy for another being is ultimately a way to identify that feeling within him – to acknowledge it as a shared feeling. 'I'm pouring myself into this

object or into this animal to get to me,' he says.¹² This is an anthropomorphic sentiment, but one that is a million miles away from the humanlike cartoon animals that for John Berger are a symptom of our divorce from the animal world. 'Until the 19th century,' says Berger, 'anthropomorphism was integral to the relation between man and animal and was an expression of their proximity,' however, 'in the last two centuries animals have gradually disappeared. ...and in this new solitude, anthropomorphism makes us doubly uneasy.'¹³ For Coates, anthropomorphism is essential to making connections with, to empathising with and caring for non-humans. Echoing Berger's view, he says: 'The issue is that we no longer have a framework within which these connections make sense to us anymore.'¹⁴

In works such as *Journey to the Lower World* (2004) Coates takes on the role of a shaman, channeling animal spirits to help communities dealing with problems – in this case the residents of a condemned tower block. Using a traditional Siberian Yakut ritual, he draws on practices based in deeper and closer understanding of other species to answer the residents' question, 'who will be our protector?' Wearing a full deer skin with head and antlers, Coates enters a trance-like state, emitting different animal sounds on his journey to the lower world where he encounters a number of species of bird. In the small living room of a British housing estate, this feels like an extraordinary intervention from another time or place – met with fits of giggles, intense stares and bemused looks from the small group of residents. However, people seem prepared to go on a journey with Coates. He is asking humans to take a leap of empathetic faith: a leap of faith in him, in his belief that we are connected with the rest natural world, and ultimately a leap of faith in ourselves and our capacities. It is one that we are perhaps more ready to take than we think, admittedly with a wry smile and an air of mild incredulity.

Dropped: Pierre Huyghe

In a statement that couldn't sound further away from Coates, the French artist Pierre Huyghe says, 'I don't look for empathy, but rather divided incomprehension.'¹⁵ In one of his exhibitions you might happen across *Human*, a thin white dog with one bright pink foreleg. With her handler in tow this rescued Ibiza Hound is, like the visitors, allowed to come and go as she pleases. You could encounter murky aquariums, home to crabs and other Crustaceans, or spot spiders and ants crawling across the walls. Huyghe has developed a form of exhibition making that is about creating a space and time into which things are, as the artist describes it, simply 'dropped'. While undoubtedly high-production, this is a nonchalant, undemonstrative kind of spectacle. The entities in Huyghe's exhibitions are not designed to perform to the viewer. Where their paths cross, the encounter between human visitor and animal 'exhibit' is as much about the gulf between their respective experiences as any interaction or connection between them.

That is not to say there are not interconnections or mutually beneficial relationships within Huyghe's work. In installations such as *Untilled* at dOCUMENTA 13, Huyghe creates the conditions for a whole set of evolving relations to occur. *Untilled* (2011-12) was situated in the compost site of Kassel's Baroque Karlsau Park, which Huyghe calls 'a place where things are dropped ... where things are left without culture, where they become indifferent to us, metabolizing, allowing the emergence of new forms.'¹⁶ Within this space of raw matter and biological transformation, Huyghe dropped a number of personally resonant cultural markers: a replica of a reclining nude by sculptor Max Weber and a tree from Joseph Beuys' *7,000 Oak Trees* conceived for dOCUMENTA 7 in 1982. However, the sculpture's head is subsumed in a colony of bees, like a giant swollen thumb. At the foot of Beuys' tree Huyghe had introduced another colony, this time of ants, both of whom were busy transporting seeds and pollinated an array of medicinal

plants that Huyghe had selected and introduced to the site. Bees and ants don't care much for Beuys' concept of social sculpture, even if Beuys would probably have cared a lot more about them. In a kind of reverse logic Huyghe has created a space that is not dressed up for its human visitors – without the bee-headed sculpture you would hardly even know you even in the presence of an artwork.

As Huyghe explains, 'what I'm interested in here is to have this language written within reality, meaning a mineral reality, a biological reality, a physical reality.'¹⁷

In the 2011 exhibition *Influants*, the visitors share the Esther Schipper Gallery, Berlin, with 50 spiders and around 10,000 ants in a work called *Umwelt*, alongside a gallery assistant carrying the flu virus and a doorman who announces each new visitor. With the title of this work Huyghe directly references German biologist Jacob von Uexküll's theory of *Umwelt*, often translated as 'self-centered world'. Rather than seeing different organisms as relating to the same environment in different ways, *Umwelt* is the uniquely subjective perceptual environment experienced by each living organism, brought into existence through how its sensory organs interface with its surroundings. Within the blank space of the white cube gallery, the contrasting *Umwelten* of human and ant are a much starker proposition than in the entangled ecology of *Untilled* – perhaps most potent, for the human, in the fear of treading on the artwork. The announcement of each visitor to the assembled company of 10,000 ants could read like an intentionally futile gesture, as ants are not believed able to hear the human voice. Scientist have, however, proposed that spiders can sense human voices through the hairs on their legs. Perhaps then the announcer is a suitable interlocutor after all – a warning signal – speaking to spider and human on their own terms, creating a connection, or 'semiosphere', a term coined by the semiotician Yuri Lotman to describe the communication between two *Umwelten*.

The evocative 'wilder world' that Helen MacDonald's hawks slip into is a world in plain view for Huyghe: a series of mutually distant, yet overlapping and interdependent worlds – just not necessarily on our terms. As Huyghe puts it, 'it's a matter of taking the circumstances into account and speaking through their chaotic existence. I put them in co-presence, but separated, in order to see how they act or refuse to do so.'¹⁸ Aesthetically, we can perhaps see Huyghe's works as trying to push beyond an art now very much at home in the space of the everyday, to an art that has an aesthetic dimension beyond human perception. Human culture is explicitly there – the Beuys tree, the formal announcement of visitors – but it is embedded into a non-human-centric, protean reality. Peering into one of Huyghe's *Zoodram aquariums* you can see a replica Brancusi mask, *Sleeping Muse* (1910), submerged into a silent and enigmatic subterranean world, carried on the back of a hermit crab. The crab has grafted the Brancusi onto its bare shell as it would with an anemone. One man's Brancusi sculpture is another crab's hard protective shell. The serene sleeping features of Brancusi's muse can be a metaphor for their own signifiers, which are asleep for this aquatic ecology, making them all the more poignant for the human faces pressed up to the aquarium glass.



FOXP2: Marguerite Humeau

Human culture and language – signs of which Huyghe drops into his installations to be appropriated multifariously by their diverse inhabitants – have been seen as the great divider between humans and other animals. It has been argued, most famously by René Descartes in the 17th century, that animals don't have language, so therefore don't have reason, mind, or even soul. The French artist Marguerite Humeau returns to that point 100,000 or 200,000 years ago when we supposedly severed ourselves from other species by learning to speak. In her work *FOXP2* (2016) she asks the hypothetical question: What if elephants rather than humans developed language and higher consciousness?



In the first part of the work you walk into a darkened corridor. You hear whistling. Then rasping, gurgling noises. Then what sounds like a tongue clacking, starting to form a rhythm like electronic rain. Gasping intakes of breath evolve into coughs and retches as the mouth finally starts to get itself around phonetic sounds: ... 'mmmm'... 'rumm'... 'ehhm' ... 'raah'. Another voice joins in, then another and another, slowly building in an increasingly cacophonous chorus, becoming fuller and fuller, merging together as more and more voices join this band of speaking beings. This sound piece is an accelerated birth into language sung by a simulation of the 108 billion humans that have ever lived.¹⁹

Fascinated by the theory that humans developed the capacity for speech through a mutation of the FOXP2 gene that caused our larynx to descend, Humeau put her unusual proposition to paleontologists, zoologists, linguists and other experts. What if it was elephants who experienced this FOXP2 mutation and developed language? What if instead of the Anthropocene we were entering a hypothetical era of the 'Probcocene'? Humeau often consults with scientists and other experts in the creation of her work. Her interest, however, peaks at the point where their knowledge starts to falter: where the 'science stops and speculation starts'²⁰. She is drawn to extinct beings, to lives and histories that are inaccessible to us, for example, the voices of prehistoric animals which she revives in *The Opera of Prehistoric Creatures* (2012). Kernels of fact are the jumping off point for new fictions, as Humeau explains: 'I'm interested in the possibility of creating a myth. ... Myth has always been used to understand the nature of humanity.'²¹

Emerging out of the human linguistic awakening of Homo Sapiens, you enter a brightly lit, intentionally consumerist looking 'biological show room' (*The Birth of Consciousness*, 2016). Elephantine figures are propped up on stilts and hooked up by tubes to mysterious, liquid-filled,

Becoming Species

bulbous vessels. This alternative evolutionary reality or disturbing laboratory resists definitions of future, past and present. 'I like the idea of high-definition sculpture,' says Humeau, 'I always want my sculptures to look like they have traveled through time and space, and maybe they are just apparitions and that they could fade at any time.'²²

Based on scientists' speculations, the elephants are developing 'larger brains and slimmer bodies', while their tusks 'evolve into horns, with sensory feelers at their tips.'²³ The matriarch Echo – moaning in her death throes – is programmed to die, a necessary part of the younger elephants' ascent. By whom it is not clear, but each elephant is programmed to experience one singular emotion or action. Edwina, Amelia and Antonia have experienced the FOXP2 mutation and are starting to develop a proto-language. Fed on ethanol, Félicie is becoming self-destructive, while Enid is injected with hormones that make her sad. It's almost as if Humeau is breathing life into the symbolic animals that Berger identifies as our first words and signs, that 'lent their name or character to a quality' – the symbolic animals that populate our myths, stories and art: the courageous lion or the loyal dog.²⁴

Should we speculate on what will become of these mono-emotional elephants? Their reality appears more like a monstrous dream, or as Humeau describes it, a 'luminous horror'. They stand on a pink carpet (*Body Without Soul, Liquid Human, 2016*) which has been dyed with the chemical elements that constitute the human body. The human species whose language and advanced consciousness the elephants have imbued is reduced to a symbolically soulless puddle at their feet – a reversal of Descartes' theory that animals are machines without souls. Humeau invites us to imagine an alternative reality, to think about the nature of consciousness and how it manifests in other animals. However, it is inextricably tangled up with the world we have created – our myths, our ways of seeing and representing animals, our science and consumerist culture. She has created a Frankenstein's monster.

Although in advanced capitalist and urban societies we are more alienated from other animals than ever before, perhaps from this position of separation and alienation we are starting to look closer at real animals. Through developments in fields such as ethology we are learning more about animal intelligence, emotion and behaviour – ultimately, that we are not as unique and as special as we think. For philosopher Timothy Morton, we are experiencing a 'becoming-species', a consciousness that we are humans inhabiting a planet.²⁵ This sounds like a grand statement, though when we hear scientists warn that humans are causing the 6th mass extinction on earth, or activists call for personhood rights for what we now understand are higher sentient animals, there seems to be some validity to it. A 'becoming-species' is absolutely present in Coates, Huyghe and Humeau's work, borne out of the problematic and contradictory nature of our contemporary relationship with animals.

Huyghe's interconnected ecologies seem to be trying to materialise for us – in their mysterious way – a concept of reality beyond that which the human mind can imagine. In *Humankind* Morton traces how the dominant Western philosophical tradition, from Immanuel Kant, Descartes, through to G.W.F. Hegel and Martin Heidegger, has contributed to our division from non-humans, positioning the human subject as 'the grand decider of what gets to count as real!'²⁶ From this standpoint non-human subjectivity becomes inaccessible and therefore non-existent, creating a convenient barrier to recognising animal consciousness. As Margo DeMello says, 'granting animals the ability to think, to reason, and to feel opens up a Pandora's box of issues regarding how we as a society, should treat animals.'²⁷ Huyghe acknowledges the subjective lifeworlds of the animals in his installations, in part by presenting us with their mysteriousness. This is a sentiment that Morton echoes in saying: 'Worlds are perforated and permeable, which is why we can share them'; however, 'entities don't behave exactly as their accessor wants them to behave, since no access mode will completely shrink-wrap them.'²⁸

Rooted in an attuned interest and sensitivity to the subjective feelings and experiences of other animals, Coates comes at this issue from the opposite direction, searching out the shared points of feeling between humans and other species. In *Degreecoordinates, Shared traits of the Hominini (Humans, Bonobos and Chimpanzees)* (2015), Coates, in collaboration with the primatologist Volker Sommer, poses a series of questions that have been proven true of some, but not all humans, bonobos and chimpanzees: 'Do you make representational art?' 'Can you play computer games?' 'Do cultural differences cause you to separate from others and join different social groups?' Being prepared to look at animals on their own terms has revealed more shared experience with other species than we previously thought. The idea of a 'careful anthropomorphism' is being advocated within the field of ethology. As the biologist Carl Safina simply puts it, 'attributing human thoughts and feelings to other species is the best first guess at how they are feeling because their brains are basically the same as ours, they have the same structures and the same hormones that create mood and motivation in us.'²⁹ Within the realm of contemporary artistic practice, perhaps we are so wary of the symbolic or anthropomorphic representation of animals that have pervaded through art history that we are too quick to take a stance against anthropomorphism, or to recognise it in other forms. For Coates anthropomorphism is how we empathise with other species, it is essential to care about them at all.

Returning to Coetzee's protagonist Elizabeth Costello and her provocation: can we think our way into the mind of another species? The primatologist and ethnologist Frans de Waal answers by saying: 'Even though we can't feel what they feel, we can still try to step outside our own narrow Umwelt and apply our imagination to theirs.' It is, after all, 'one of the triumphs of our species' thinking outside its perceptual box.'³⁰ This capacity for imaginative thought which for Berger has driven us apart from other animals comes full circle as the means by which we can connect with them. We are discussing artists after all, so we would expect the imagination to be at work. However, Coates, Huyghe and Humeau also all draw on science and animal studies. By engaging with knowledge and theories of

animal behaviour, experience and consciousness, the artistic imagination leaps further. In each case, they push us, the viewer, to make a leap of imagination too. This couldn't be truer of Humeau, who works closely with scientists in developing the groundwork for her improbable imaginings.

The animals and beings that come to life in Humeau's installations are a strange hybrid. They are real biological animals, the animals we are gaining a better understanding of through advanced science. They are the symbolic and mythological creatures which have been passed down to us through the ages – which also contain lost forms of knowledge and understanding. They are mysterious past and future animals that are both speculative and forever inaccessible, all brought to life in high definition, in the lurid glare of contemporary capitalist society. From where we stand right now perhaps this strange mix is just what we've got. Knowledge can be shared between cultures about their varied relations to, and understandings of, animals, and genuinely exciting attempts can be made to access and connect with the conscious lives of other species. However, we also need to characterise our own complicated position and how far from other animals we have drifted, even if at heart we share so much in common. Human society in all its difference, inequality and complexity has evolved to make our Umwelt – if we can call it that – so complex that perhaps we no longer know what the conditions of our survival are, let alone those of other creatures.

Extinction: Diana Thater

To end I want to bring things further down to earth and touch briefly upon a work by American artist Diana Thater. Her film installation *As Radical as Reality* (2017) could be seen as a sobering temporal antithesis to Humeau's elephants. Projected onto two screens, which intersect to make a cross, stands Sultan, the last male Northern white rhino. Flanking him on both sides are two armed keepers who follow Sultan wherever he goes to protect him from poachers. The artist is also circling the rhino with her camera. Sultan stands there, enormous, thick-skinned and silent as these three humans mill around him. With its deadpan filming style, the work highlights the cruel absurdity of the situation. After hunting Northern white rhinos to the brink of extinction, we are now desperately trying to keep this last one alive. In 2018 Sultan died. In Thater's film he is already the walking dead. He was known throughout the world, visited and photographed by tourists, the focus of desperate attempts to breed him. Though surely he didn't know why he was the centre of so much attention, that he was the last of his kind? Or did he? The story of Sultan is a symbolically stark example of two misaligned worlds or Umwelten overlaying each other – humans madly attempting to retract the damage we have done to another species, while the subject of our efforts can only have limited involvement in this very human circus swirling around it. Whether it is front-and-centre, or more of a philosophical question, there is an ethical dimension to all of these artworks – in that we need to profoundly reconsider our relationship to the animal and natural world because we are causing them, and therefore us, irreversible damage.

1 JM Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals* (Princeton Classics, 2016), p. 35.
 2 John Berger, *Why look at Animals* (Penguin, 2009), p. 36.
 3 Ibid, p. 18.
 4 Ibid.
 5 Ibid, p. 16.
 6 Ibid, p. 18.
 7 Ibid, p. 25.
 8 Ramos, 'Art across Species and Beings' in Filipa Ramos (ed) *Animals Documents of Contemporary Art* (London and Cambridge: Whitechapel Gallery and The MIT Press, 2015), p, 14.
 9 Helen Macdonald, *H is for Hawk* (Penguin Random House, 2014), p. 22.
 10 Marcus Coates, 'Marcus Coates in conversation with Valerie Smith' in Marcus Coates, Anthony Spira and Rosalind Horne (eds) *Marcus Coates* (Koenig Books, 2016) p. 22.
 11 Ibid.
 12 Ibid.
 13 Berger, *Why Look at Animals?*, p. 21.
 14 Marcus Coates, conversation with the artist, August 2017
 15 Pierre Huyghe in Marie-France Rafael's 'Interview' in *Pierre Huyghe On Site* (Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther Konig, Koln, 2013), p. 48.
 16 Pierre Huyghe
 17 Pierre Huyghe quoted in Christian Mooney, 'Pierre Huyghe' (Art Review, October 2015), available at http://www.artreview.com/features/october_2013_feature_pierre_huyghe.
 18 Pierre Huyghe in Marie-France Rafael's 'Interview' in *Pierre Huyghe On Site* (Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther Konig, Koln, 2013), p. 45.
 19 Humeau worked with Pierre Lanchantin from the Machine Intelligence Laboratory at the University of Cambridge to research the origins of language and the mutation to the FOXP2 gene in humans, which caused our larynx to descend and enabled us to develop speech.
 20 Marguerite Humeau quoted in Kat Herriman, 'Artist to Know: The 29-Year-Old Effortlessly Melding Science and Romance', (The New York Times Style Magazine, June 24 2016), available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/23/t-magazine/art/paris-elephant-sculptures-marguerite-humeau.html>.
 21 Marguerite Humeau quoted in Agnes Gryczkowska, 'Enter A Room Full Of Black Mamba Venom With Marguerite Humeau', (SLEEK, 4 May 2015), available at <http://www.sleek-mag.com/2015/05/04/marguerite-humeau-duve-berlin/>
 22 Marguerite Humeau quoted in Kat Herriman, 'Artist to Know: The 29-Year-Old Effortlessly Melding Science and Romance'.

23 Rebecca Lamarche-Vadel, 'Who Knows ...' in Frédéric Grossi (ed) *Marguerite Humeau* (Palais de Tokyo, Nottingham Contemporary, 2016), p. 80.
 24 Berger, *Why Look at Animals?*, p. 18.
 25 Timothy Morton, *Humankind* (Verso, 2017), p. 16.
 26 Ibid, p. 9.
 27 Margo DeMello, *Animals and Society: An Introduction to Human-Animal Studies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), p. 358.
 28 Morton, *Humankind*, p. 14.
 29 Carl Safina, 'What are animals thinking and feeling?' (TED talk for Mission Blue II, 2015), available at https://www.ted.com/talks/carl_safina_what_are_animals_thinking_and_feeling
 30 Frans De Waal, *Are We Smart Enough to Know How Smart Animals Are?* (Granta Books, 2016), p. 9 - 10.

Image Credits

Title image: Marcus Coates, *Goshawk (Self-Portrait)*, 1999. (Detail).
Produced by Grizedale Arts. **Image credit** Jet.

Image 1: Marcus Coates, *Stoat*, 1999.
Video production still. Produced by Grizedale Arts.

Image 2: *Untilled*, 2011-12
 Alive entities and inanimate things, made and not made.
 Dimensions and duration variable.
 Courtesy the artist; Marian Goodman Gallery, New York; Esther Schipper, Berlin.
 Commissioned and produced by DOCUMENTA (13) with the support of Colección CIAC AC, Mexico; Fondation Louis Vuitton pour la création, Paris; Ishikawa Collection, Okayama, Japan. © Pierre Huyghe

Image 3: Marguerite Humeau, *FOXP2, Echo*, A matriarch engineered to die, Exhibition view, Palais de Tokyo, Paris, 2016.
Image Credit: Spassky Fischer. Courtesy the artist, C L E A R I N G New York/ Brussels

Fiona Parry is Senior Curator at Turner Contemporary and curator of *Animals & Us*, Turner Contemporary.

***VISUAL RESEARCH:
CROP MARKS AND
VANISHING POINTS(.)***

KAI LOSSGOTT

No page is blank, no thing is pure. No thing is big or small. No ink or pixel is an atom or a void. These letters and the spaces between are the colour of your perspective, understood in decolonial thought as knowledge coming from a body, and bodies have histories and destinies. Mine does. So does yours. In contemplating the closeness of your stare, your fingers, these pixels, ink or pulp particles, and everything currently unsustainable about the production of the object-body you are holding that gazes back at you – everything that is not immediately visible about its carbon footprint, the long journeys of materials into your hands – I was struck by the historical role of elsewheres, nowheres and nothings in the capitalist colonial imagination.

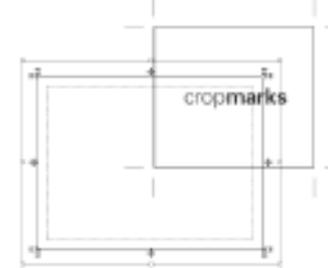
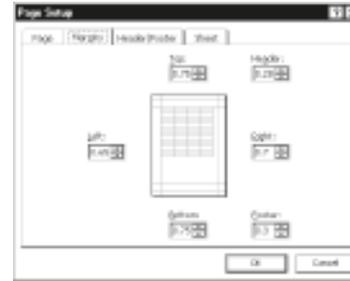
This research interrogating visual technologies and forms helped me to better approach an eye that cannot see itself, that exists through a prosthesis of imaginary outsides, deliberate blind spots and disembodiments. It led to a game with the modernist grid and linear perspective in thinking through the production of the urban environment, architects and designers drawing imaginary borders, cutting off waste and placing garbage dumps 'elsewhere'. Urban waste and climate change are a systemic organised production caused by an imagined 'outside', a place somehow off the page. In ecology there is no outside, no elsewhere. You and I are in it, it is in us, and we have nowhere else to go. A book is a very powerful imaginary somewhere. In the history of unsustainable design, the book has been somehow both form and content, a conduit in human interactions with the planetary intelligence, in which not the hand, but the cross-hair, grid and rectangle becomes the ultimate human form imposed on the landscape.

Or maybe that was what I did not want to say.

Because I think you can imagine something better.

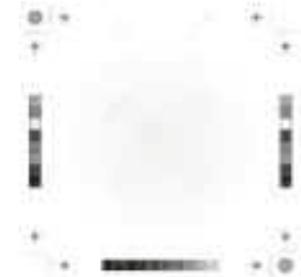
Kai Lossgott

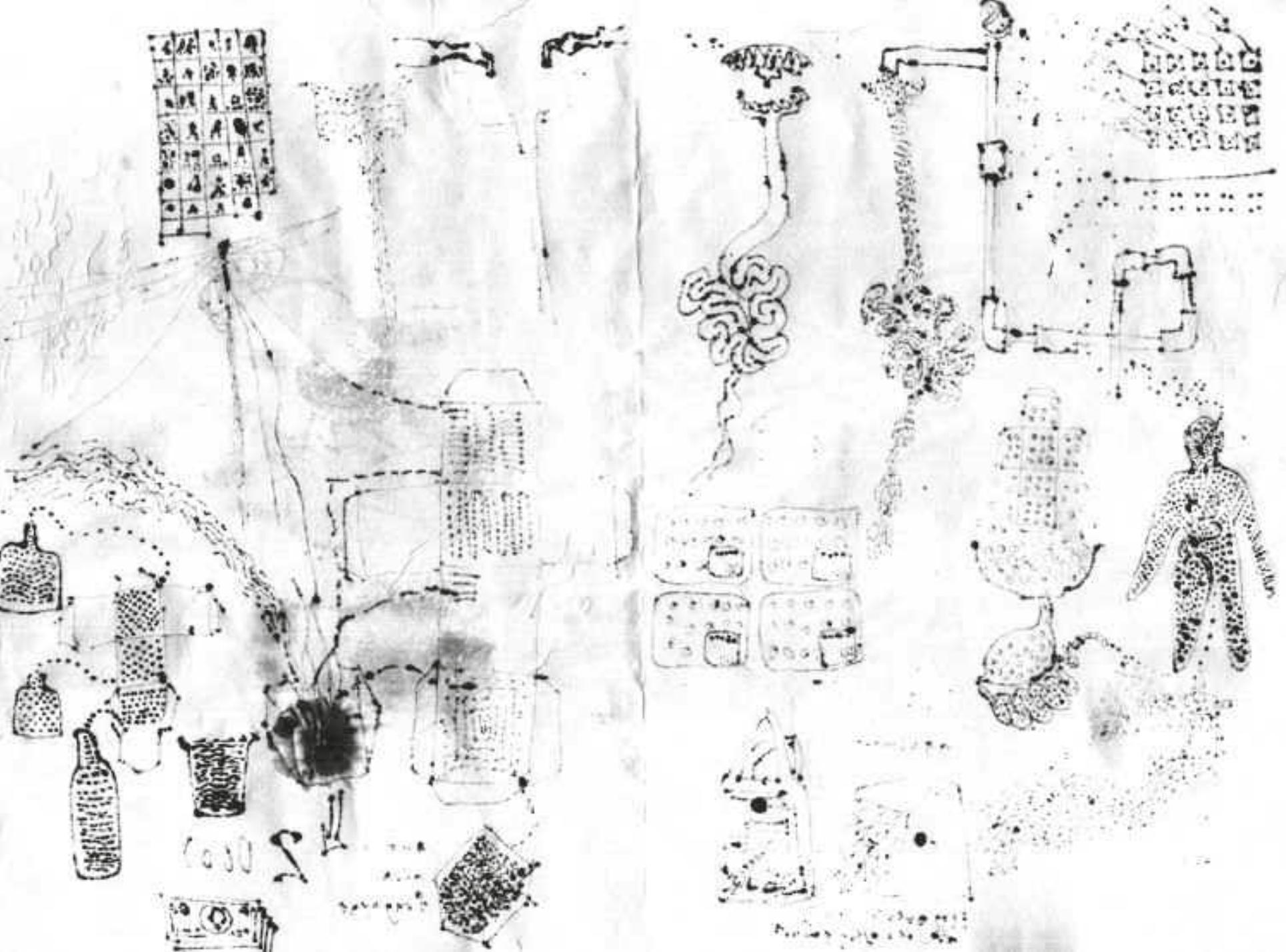
Kai Lossgott is an interdisciplinary artist, researcher and cultural careworker, born in Germany, raised in South Africa, at home in diaspora.



Crop marks and vanishing points

[a n i n t e r -
 d i s c i p l i n a r y
 v i s u a l p o e m
 p r o p o s i n g
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 s e n s o r y i m -
 p a c t o f r e -
 a l i t y]













SCALE
adapting to
interior and exterior
environments

pan vs zoom.
vs subterranean detail



*the bluntness of
abstraction.
its cruelty.
its idealism.
its ignorance.*

violence &
abstraction



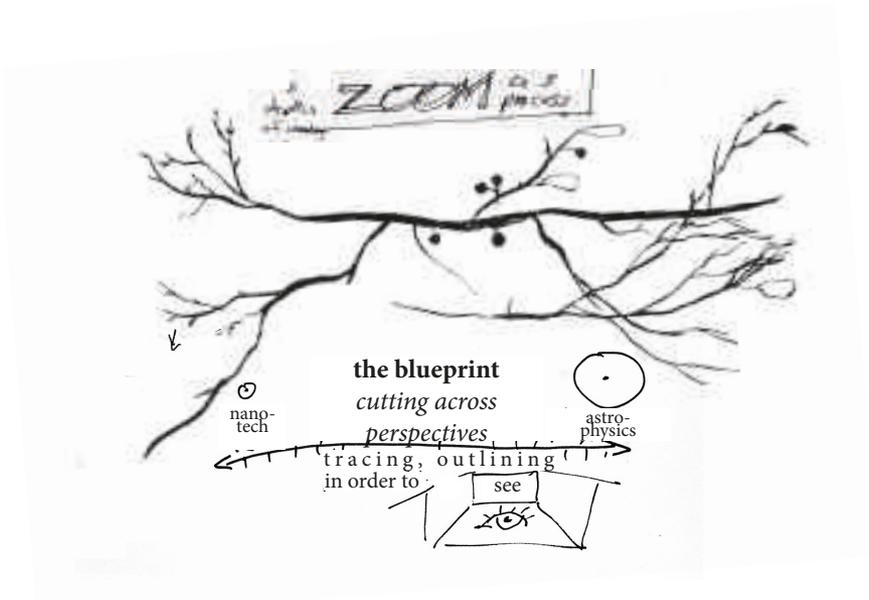
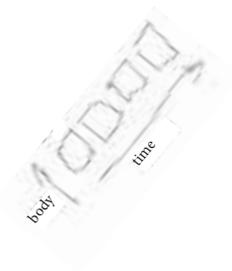
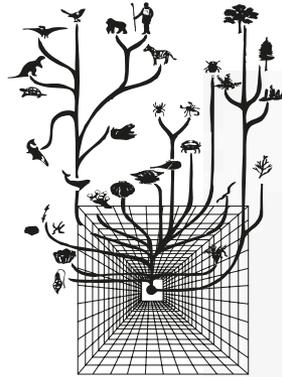
but
is **bigger**
more
abstract?

... eg built environment
... eg. structures of governance
... eg orders (genii)

is abstraction
more simple
or more complex?



1. Place hand here.



the ^{time}line as
interface
NAVIGATING
TIME-SPACE

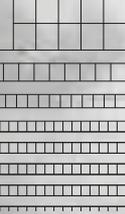


~~... the long line of faces, shooting out
to distant goals. The knot of grief, anchored at long forgotten moments that
struggles to loosen. We are pulled back here, pulled into these pieces, and out of
present moment, away from the present.~~

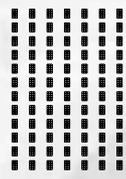
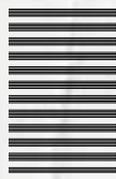
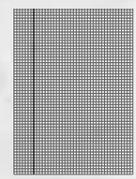
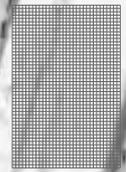
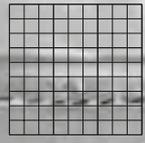
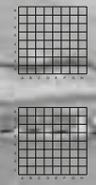
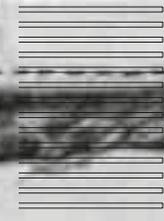
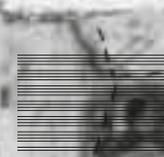
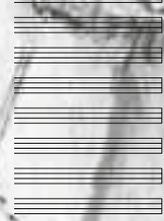
~~... a feminine, the infinity loop, looks back on itself like the mythic of women, it
is not seek solutions outside of itself. Like the meditative mind, it works with
at a loss, with what is apparent, but it does not attach itself to it. Rather, it allows
with the world, knowing that there are many ways of looking at things.
But when we are in a position, we are only return to our own, if we are on our
own, we are only to free we do not know what time.~~



5 GO ? BEYOND THE HORIZON?



4 B C D E F G H J
 r k l m n o p q
 s t u o a
 v w x y z
 a b c d e f g h i j k
 l m n o p q r s t u
 v w x y z a b c d e f



**anthropo-
 scene-
 ographies?
 arios?**

what would this mean?

horizon
 the un - known
 un - re - cognised
 un - famil - y / iar

surveillance
the gaze



centr - al
 - isation

safe / defended
territory
 the "known"?
 re - cognised
 famil - y / iar

peripher - al
 - isation

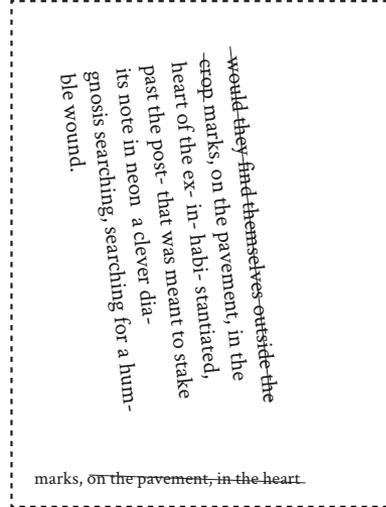
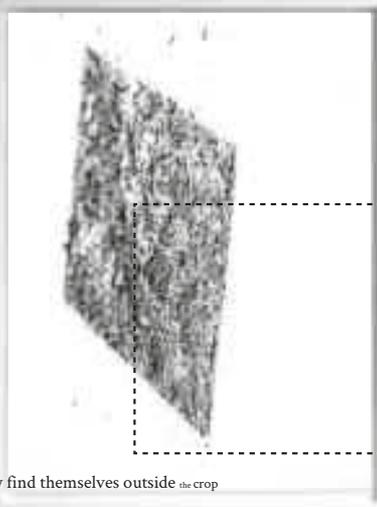
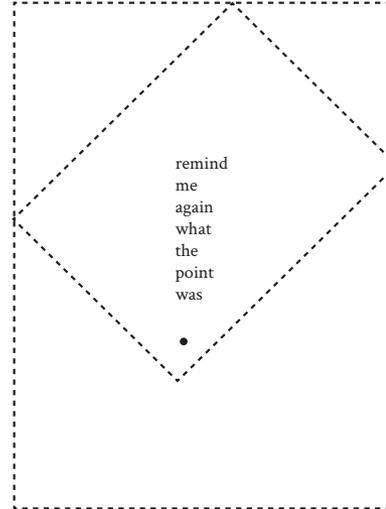
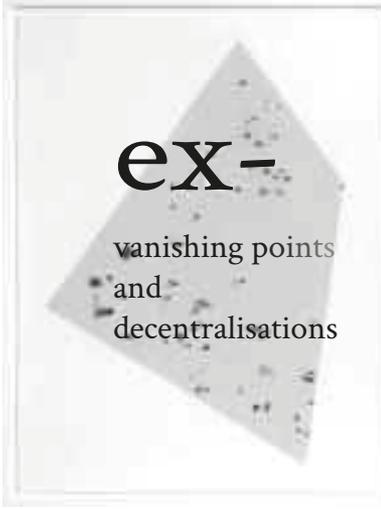
alter - ity
 - native(s)

the anthropos
 (human condition)

the anthropocentric
 as vista / stage / scape / scene

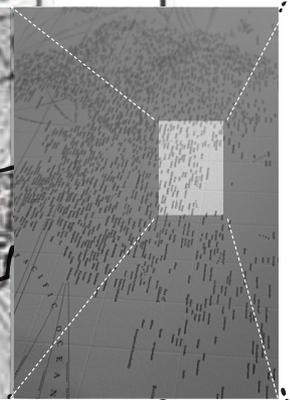
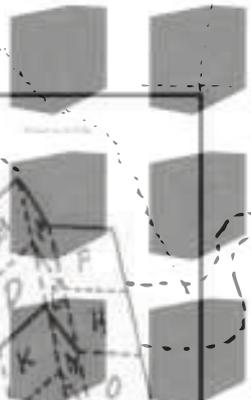
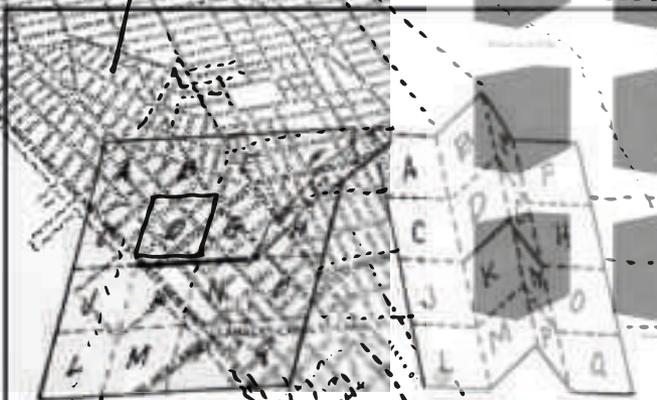
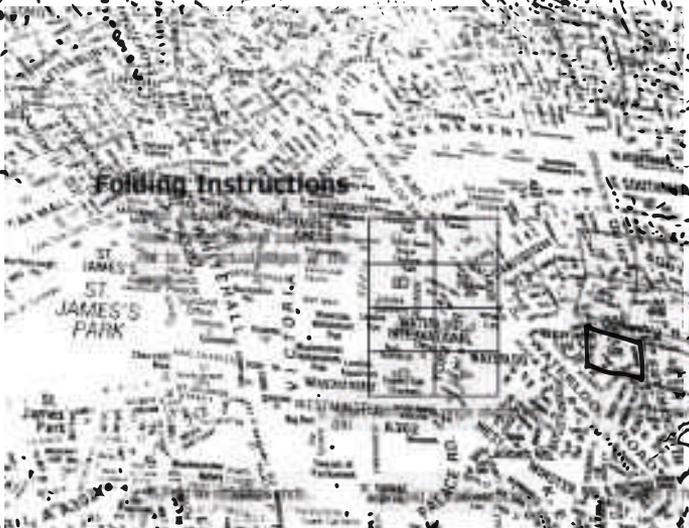


surveillance cosmology?
 the imaginary 360 degree view vs 'the fall'

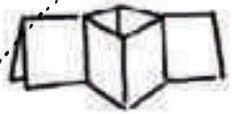
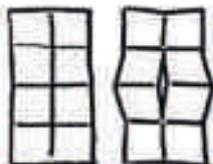


would they find themselves outside the crop

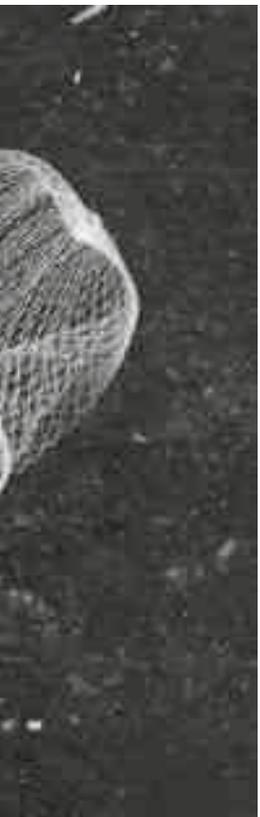
marks, on the pavement, in the heart



the grid as design element.

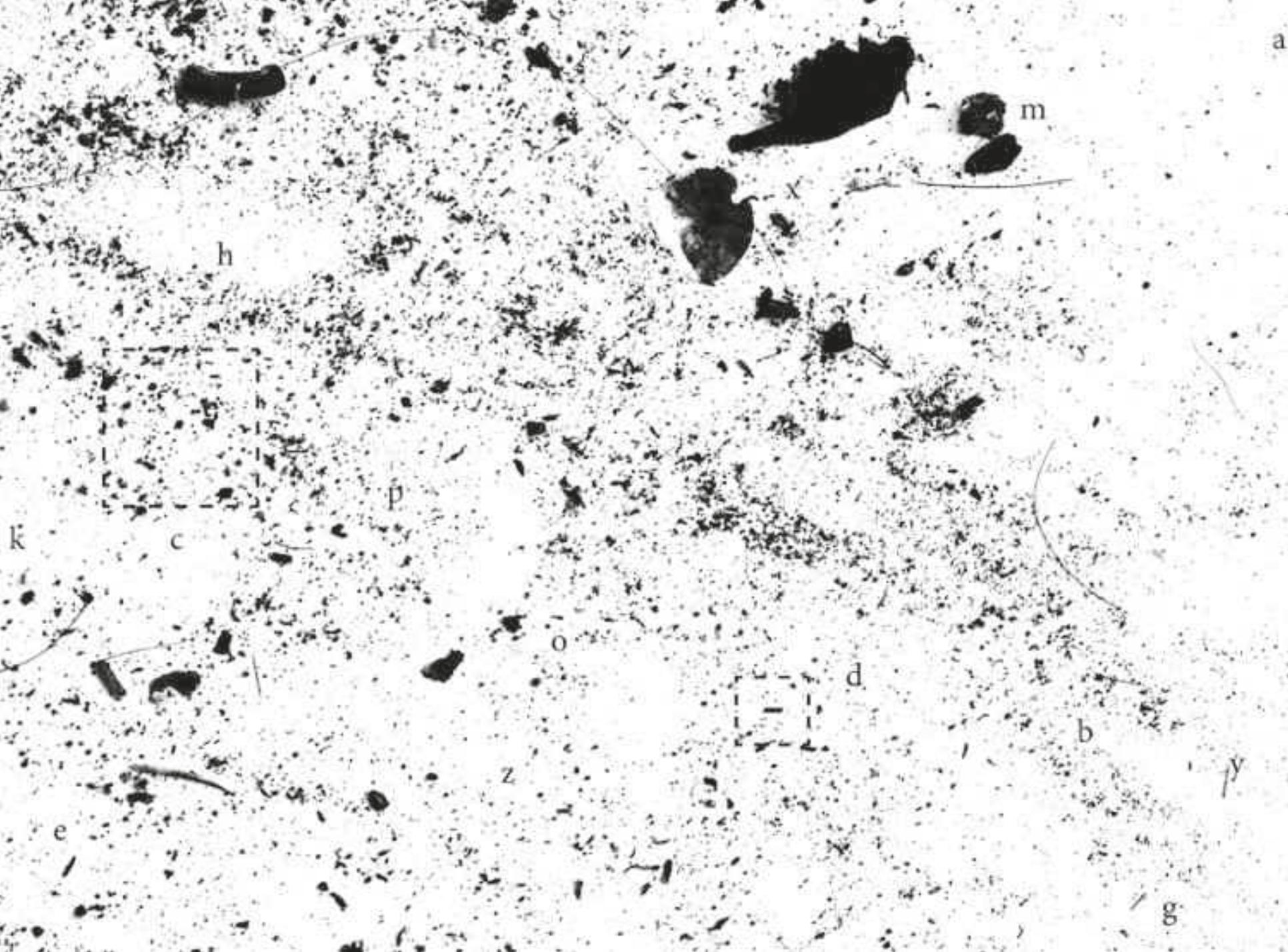
















ANGELIKA BOECK AND ULI AIGNER

Angelika Boeck is a German visual artist; she lived in Bario (Sarawak / Malaysia) between 2010 and 2016. There, she became interested in sustainability related to traditional indigenous survival practices in central Borneo, and collaborated with Wilson Bala, who shared his knowledge of the jungle. As Wilson belongs to the Kelabit, one of the smallest indigenous groups in Sarawak, Angelika had direct access to indigenous languages and knowledge. The blog *Sustainability & Subsistence*¹ resulting from the co-operation, and which documented Angelika's and Wilson's daily life in the Kelabit Highlands, gradually became a step-by-step way to make practices and knowledge related to survival in the jungle accessible to others, particularly to the younger city-dwelling generation of Kelabit.

For her contribution to ROAR Angelika drew from her experiences in Bario and collaborated with Austrian artist Uli Aigner to produce tangible works, which are reflected in conversations between the two artists as well as in the porcelain jungle objects which were the result of this artistic encounter. Uli Aigner's project *One Million*², which began in 2014, is her way of dealing with and confronting globalisation. The venture is to produce a million porcelain dishes by hand before she dies. Each item is created in collaboration with its user and tracked geographically over its lifetime. Rock hard in use, the object disappears in nature when it has served its time.

The collaborative project, *Jungle Porcelain* (2018)³, consists of durable multi-purpose items, which can be comfortably used in the jungle without a table. A cylinder that serves as a plate rest when it is clamped between the knees can later be used as a lantern. It features the design of a bush knife and several animal traps, which Angelika got to know as crucial for survival in the jungle. The set, which is easy to store in nature, was conceptualised by the artists to be placed at campsites frequented by hunters around Bario. Since 2017 Angelika no longer lives in Sarawak; she and Uli re-enacted the campsite situation in Berlin. The process was documented by filmmaker Michal Kosakowski.

Angelika's practice navigates the unstable terrains of the displaced in an era in which the gaze of an outsider directed towards an indigenous group cannot deny the double

bind of colonial past common to both. Furthermore, as this gaze is performed by a Western woman who has access to closely experience how life and death form the essence of survival, and how in turn surrounding concepts of beauty, food, body, possessions, sharing, etc. have to be revised. These questions, which started when Angelika lived in Bario, have now been addressed in a form of conversation between the two artists, Angelika and Uli, while collaborating for ROAR, back in Germany. The result is a conversation of responses to these themes in which it transpires that both artists, the one who experienced survival in the jungle and the one who did not, position themselves to consider the basic elements that constitute their practices. Starting with the concept of body, these responses allow for reflections of embodied practices whether they be artistic or survival practices, and touch upon aspects of sustainability which focus on the essence of the practices of being human, common to all.

- 1 Available at <https://csroffsarawak2015.wordpress.com/>
- 2 Available at <https://www.eine-million.com/en/>
- 3 Available at <http://www.angelika-boeck.de/en/works/all-works/single-page-all-works/jungle-porcelain/>

Image Credits

The images on the following pages are a combination of photographs from Angelika's blog *Sustainability & Subsistence*, documenting Angelika's and Wilson's daily life in the Kelabit Highlands, Bario and stills from Michal Kosakowski film, documenting Angelika and Uli's collaborative project, *Jungle Porcelain*, where they demonstrated using the multi-functional porcelain objects in a re-enacted campsite situation in Berlin.

- 1 Image Credits (Sarawak): Angelika Böck, Wilson Bala
- 2 Image Credits (Berlin): Video stills from Michal Kosakowski's video documentation *Jungle Porcelain* (2018)

Angelika Boeck is a visual artist based in Munich.

Uli Aigner is an artist, based in Berlin.

BODY

AB

Eating the animal's flesh, I feel energy flow through my body. I remember how it moved in the jungle. Although I did not kill it, I took its life.



UA

I want to grow old, very old. Through work, vital energy is flowing through my own body.



AB

The knowledge about how to survive in the jungle is getting lost because travellers want to take home an experience. What we leave behind is the feel of an easy life.

UA

I take globalisation personally. To invent new ways by investigating old paths.

POWER

AB

On my own, I am unable to survive in the jungle. Soon, I fear, everyone on planet earth will have lost the power to live a self-governed life.



UA

My art projects empower me to go anywhere. I talk with everyone to provoke self-responsible action.

GUILT

AB

It is such a basic thing to build a house. I feel both guilt and pride to settle at a place in the jungle where nobody lived before.



UA

I owe my family their existence. I am proud that my work feeds us all.



AB

I feel joy when I forget that a world outside the jungle exists. When I think of it, I start missing many things.

UA

I feel joy when I am working on the wheel. It gives me the possibility to do everything I want.

POSESSION



AB

In the jungle it matters to have no more than the really important things. They should be of the best possible quality.



UA

I need to have a body, skills, tools, material and space in time to realise an existence and improve.

RENUNCIATION

AB

I can afford the luxury to live a simple life in the jungle. I might not want to renounce the things I could buy, were it not be my choice.



UA

As an artist I can afford the luxury to be a craftswoman in a globalised world. I am desperate to renounce many many things for the few things I simply love.



SHARING



AB

The jungle represents a situation of survival. Sharing and helping each other is of utmost importance. With no acute danger, human behaviour changes dramatically. Already in Barrio life seems to be the opposite.

UA

Sharing ideas of being in the world is of utmost importance.

DURATION

AB

Everything takes as long as it takes in the jungle. Day and night time become exchangeable, time and money do not.

UA

Everything takes as long as it takes in my life. Sustainability lasts longer than a lifetime. The relationship between time and money is relative.

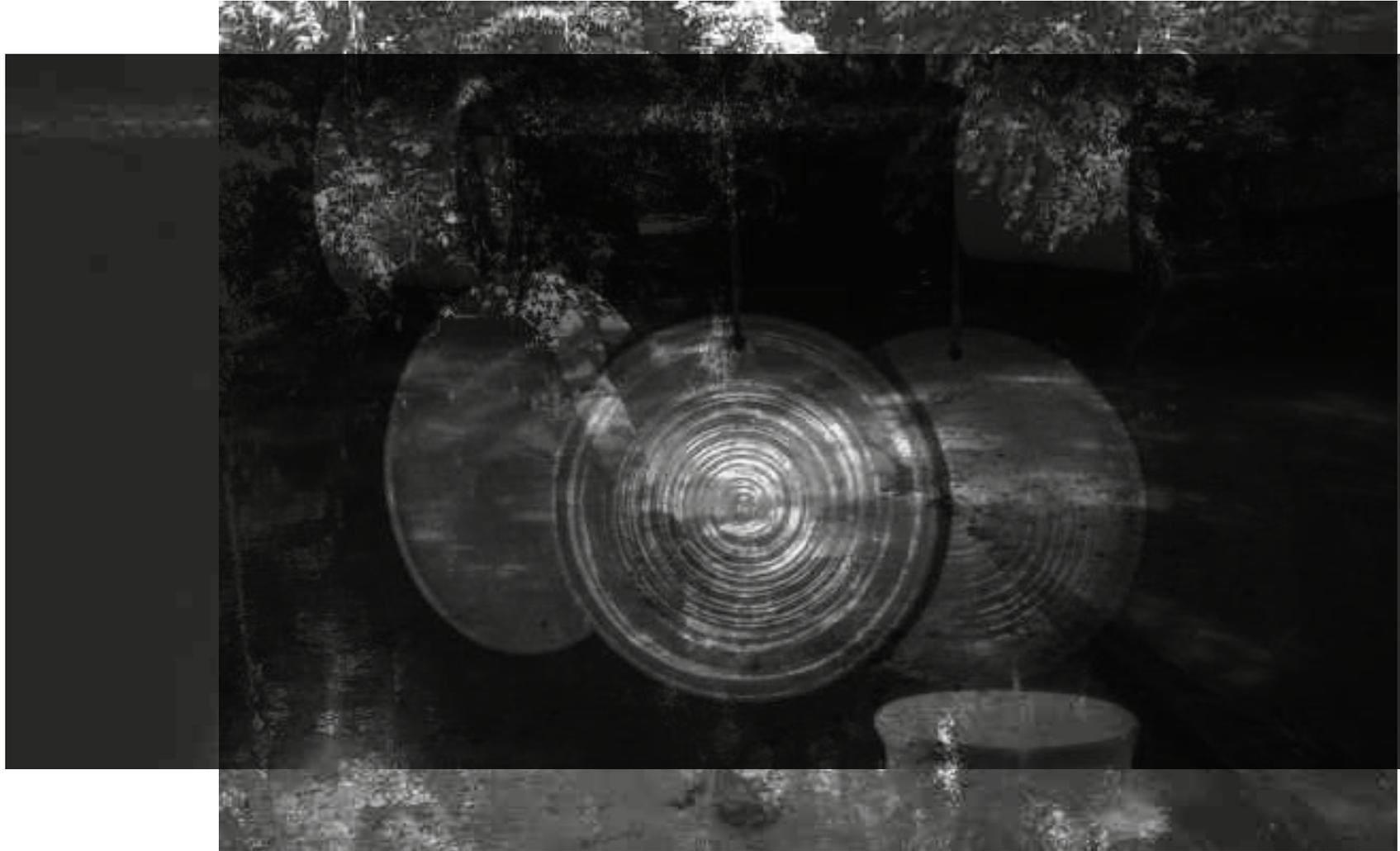


DEATH

AB

In the jungle death is a constant companion. If one cannot handle things oneself, it is extremely important to be able to trust a careful, courageous, experienced and creative leader.

116 / 117



UA

I am going to die. I will become matter like porcelain.

LEARNING

AB

A life in the jungle depends on practical learning from early childhood onwards. This knowledge resides in the body and marks me as ignorant for the rest of my life.



UA

I act beyond what I have learned. Thus new areas of action open themselves up to everyone involved in alternative actions.



AB

Unfailing actions in the jungle come with countless repetition of similar actions.

Untrained people can hardly compensate for this with equipment.

UA

Unfailing action on the wheel come with innumerable repetitions of similar actions.

Let's act intercultural, interpersonal and change yourself. We are all trained in that.

MICHAEL HREBENIAK



MICHAEL McCLURE'S
UNIVERSE OF MEAT
AND THE
CONDITION OF BETWEEN

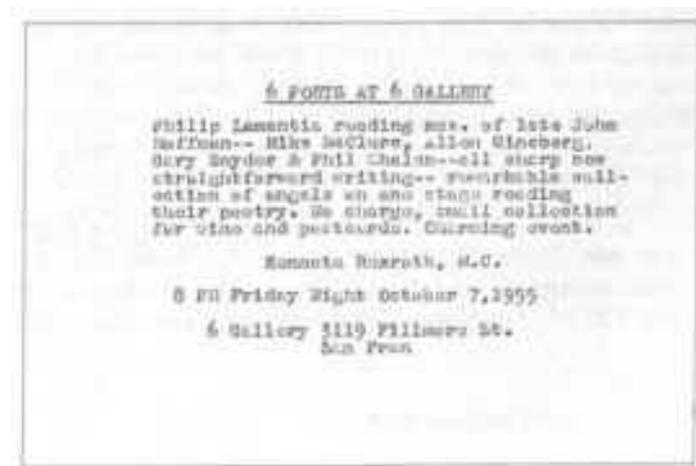
‘Poetry is a muscular principle and a revolution for the body–spirit and intellect and ear,’ proclaimed Michael McClure on the cover of his 1964 collection, *Ghost Tantras*. ‘There must be a poetry of pure beauty and energy that does not mimic but joins and exhorts reality and states the daily higher vision . . . There are no laws but living changing ones, and any system is a touch of death.’¹

Inside the book sprung forth a series of poems with no prior literary blueprint, representing McClure’s faith in the imaginative act to renew the ‘meat–spirit’ of the human and bring to form a meeting between the realms of ethnopoetics, biology and ritual. The poet’s search is for a tantric language – primal, shamanic – with senses raised ecstatically among playful echoes of Dada, Chaucerian lyric, ballads and blues. Shaped as a spinal, ribbed creature – as something *created* – with a bilateral symmetry down the centre of the page, the emerging poem suggested a free-floating eco-system with untranslatable vocables, or what McClure called ‘beast language,’ invading its semantic properties.

Such displays of raw linguistic athleticism have been endemic to McClure’s desire to relocate humans within a continuity of other lives in world: a solo navigation through a literary counter–stream over more than half a century. ‘I wanted to make poetry that didn’t have images in the sense of describing something in the real world,’ he later observed. ‘The sound of the poetry itself creates an image, a melody imprinting itself in the mind and the muscles of the body.’²

Michael McClure was born in Kansas in 1932 and attended Wichita University, where he set up an informal group with painter Bruce Connor, actor Dennis Hopper and film-maker, Stan Brakhage, America’s finest experimental practitioner of the moving image. In 1954 McClure relocated to the anarcho–pacifist orbit of San Francisco, initially to study painting with Clyfford Still and Mark Rothko at to the San Francisco Art Institute, only to discover that they had decamped the previous year.

Instead he apprenticed himself to poets Robert Duncan and Charles Olson, situating himself adjacent to the central protagonists of two U.S. stations of avant-garde community in the form of the city and Black Mountain College. Olson spoke of the poem in terms of ‘speed’, ‘kinetics’ and ‘energy transference’ from subject to poet to reader: a high-energy construct and discharge, which awakened McClure’s desire to reinstate art’s archaic and universal capacity for healing and liberation.



In October 1955 McClure participated in the *Six Poets at Six Gallery* event – ‘a great night, a historic night . . . the birth of the San Francisco Poetry Renaissance,’ according to Jack Kerouac³ – confirming durable transitions in American civilization that would resist efforts by *Time* and *Life* to emasculate its radicalism into fashionable exotica. McClure describes the atmosphere of that night:

“

We were locked in the Cold War and the Asian debacle – the Korean War . . . We hated the war and the inhumanity and the coldness. The country had the feeling of martial law. An undeclared military state had leaped out of Daddy Warbucks’ tanks and sprawled over the landscape. As artists we were oppressed and indeed the people of the nation were oppressed . . . We knew we were poets and we had to speak out as poets. We saw that the art of poetry was essentially dead – killed by war, by academies, by neglect, by lack of love, and by disinterest. We knew we could bring it back to life. We could see what Pound had done – and Whitman, and Artaud, and D.H. Lawrence in his monumental poetry and prose . . . We wanted to make it new and we wanted to invent it and the process of it as we went into it. We wanted voice and we wanted vision.’⁴

Responding to Allen Ginsberg’s premier of *Howl*, which signalled a rejuvenation of the poem as an act of voice as well as print, McClure saw that ‘everyone in the audience of 150’ knew ‘at the deepest level that a barrier had been broken, that a human voice and body had been hurled against the harsh wall of America and its supporting armies and navies and academies and institutions and ownership systems and power-support bases.’⁵

The ensuing San Francisco Renaissance, celebrated in the June 1957 issue of *Evergreen Review*, not only cemented a mutual awareness of poets’ fraternity in the city, but expanded a community of ideas onto a national, and eventually international, matrix. McClure read his poem, *For the Death of a Hundred Whales*, at the Six Gallery, which commemorated the systematic slaughter of an entire shoal by 79 bored GI’s stationed at an Icelandic NATO base as punishment for their interference with radio waves.

This disclosed his dominant concern with the animal consciousness in humans otherwise rendered dormant by industrialisation. In 1958 McClure would go on to write under the effects of the indigenous ceremonial drug, peyote, embracing the energising potential of psycho-tropics. The ensuing ‘mammalian-poetics’ engaged with the ruthless,

cannibalistic pulse of nature, as well as its co-operative strain. His totemic refrain, ‘WHEN A MAN DOES NOT ADMIT THAT HE IS AN ANIMAL, he is less than an animal,’⁶ testified to his belief that the Beat Generation comprised the literary wing of the emerging Green movement.

Over next decade McClure would in-part catalyse the Beat transition to Hippy, basing himself in the Haight-Ashbury and performing Blakean melodies on his autoharp, most notably alongside Ginsberg, Gary Snyder and Timothy Leary at the ‘Gathering of the Tribes for a Human Be-In’ at Golden Gate Park in 1967, the apex of the counter-culture prior to its shift into commerce. Throughout the era he stood consistently at the centre of the scene, pulling energies exuberantly towards him rather than slavishly following fads. McClure revelled in Dionysian conflict, pursuing the Blakean tension of the contraries in both life and art. ‘JESUS HOW I HATE THE MIDDLE COURSE!’ he declared in ‘Love Lion’ (1970).⁷ He rode with the San Francisco Chapter of the Hells Angels, fascinated by notions of charismatic allegiance and destructive power, and collaborated with its secretary, Freewheelin’ Frank on his autobiography. In 1966 he was filmed trading roars with male lions at San Francisco Zoo; the poet young, fearless and handsome, raising a form of mantra anew without ideological baggage: ‘Grahrrr! Ghrooooh!’⁸ The lions quicken and are agitated: ‘a defining moment in twentieth-century American poetry,’ according to Jerome Rothenberg.⁹

McClure also co-wrote the lyrics for Janis Joplin’s *Oh Lord, Won’t You Buy Me a Mercedes Benz*, and made an explosive contribution to American theatre with *The Beard*, a darkly comic absurdist dialogue. ‘YOU’RE A BAG OF MEAT!’ Billy ‘the Kid’ Bonney tells Jean Harlow, the play’s figures consigned to an endlessly circular seduction scene in hell: ‘a white sack of soft skin and fat held in shape by a lot of bones! . . . Nobody’s free of being divine!’¹⁰ Its first performance by the Actors Workshop in Berkeley in 1965 earned McClure the charge of ‘lewd and dissolute conduct in a public place;’ its shift to Los Angeles was met by the Police shutting it down for a record fourteen consecutive





39

MARILYN MONROE, TODAY THOU HAST PASSED
THE DARK BARRIER

diving in a swirl of golden hair.

I hope you have entered a sacred paradise for full
warm bodies, full lips, full hips, and laughing eyes!

AHH GHROOOR . ROOOHR . NOH THAT OHH!
OOOH . . .

Farewell perfect mammal.

Fare thee well from thy silken couch and dark day!

AHH GRHHROOOR! AHH ROOOOH . GARR

nah ooth eeze farewell. Moor droon fahra rahoor
rahoor, rahoor. Thee ahh-oh oh thahr
noh grooh rahhr.

(August 6, 1962)¹⁴

nights, before the theatre itself was burned to the ground.
Feral times.

A measure of the reach and significance of McClure's work was its endorsement by Francis Crick, co-discoverer of the double-helix structure of the DNA molecule, who acknowledged his shared position within McClure's 'private world of personal reactions, the biological world (animals and plants and even bacteria chase each other through the poems) . . . [T]he world of the atom and molecule, the stars and the galaxies, are all there; and in-between, above and below, stands man, the howling mammal, contrived out of 'meat' by chance and necessity.'¹¹ Crick included two lines from McClure's broadside, 'Peyote Poem,' in his book, *Of Molecules and Men*: 'THIS IS THE POWERFUL KNOWLEDGE / we smile with it.'¹²

Having previously collaborated with Jim Morrison, McClure began working with The Doors' keyboardist, Ray Manzarek, in a bid to return to Greek bardic traditions of performance and a 'common tribal dancing ground whether we were poets, or painters, or sculptors.'¹³ The swirling lyricism of Manzarek's long improvised lines would afford an unlikely foil for McClure's later preoccupation with recording Zen Buddhist states of consciousness, one sustained over three decades until the pianist's death in 2013 and which added to the many generative provocations marking the poet's work.

A reading of the exemplary *Tantra 39* from the 1964 volume does much to illustrate the radical nature of McClure's ecocritical propositions.

On an immediate level, the verse responds to the tradition of the pattern poem or *carmen figuratum*, extending back to George Herbert's *Easter Wings* (1633) and Stéphane Mallarmé's *Un Coup de Dés Jamais N'Abolira Le Hasard* (1897), wherein the work's expressive content is reinforced by its shape on the page. Marilyn Monroe's hourglass contour is literally embodied within its shadowy Yonic form that is, in turn, superimposed upon her signature pout. Indeed, the poem's extreme stylisation performs its subject's own status as an icon of total cultural styling: an act of self-fashioning in accord with the demands of the male gaze. This extends to the sexually alliterative nomination, 'Marilyn Monroe,' which erased the historically-constituted subjectivity of her given name, Norma Jean Baker; to the engineering of her sculpted figure through an elaborate system of corsetry; to the regulation of her arched leg and sashaying step by the immobilising technologies of stiletto heel and tight skirt; and to the peroxide blonde colouring of her hair. The off-centre 'OOOH,' which might spatially coincide with the site of her navel, further draws attention to the poem's self-conscious aestheticism, problematising any claim to mimesis.

McClure aims to recover Marilyn's mammalian being by rejuvenating her animal sexuality, shedding the culturally-determined skin of objectification that reduced the living woman to tragic pornographic spectacle. The binaries of human/animal, self/other and culture/nature that comprise the boundaries of daily life must be renegotiated via a biocentric stance, relocating consciousness and the sensual processes of body within the natural world, and situating the poetic impulse in a physiology that is 'wound through, woven in, bursting out from, and pouring through all nature.'¹⁵ McClure thus instigates a worldview characterised by what C.G. Jung in *Psychology and Alchemy* called a 'participation mystique' otherwise lost to western society, where 'sacred images and rituals' allow perception of natural and psychic forces in terms of an 'undifferentiated amalgam of god, man, and animal at once.' 'In no way is [man] master of this world,' contended Jung in paraphrase of Darwin, 'but rather its component.'¹⁶

McClure speaks accordingly of an interplay between 'feel' and 'field;' 'felt and 'veldt,'¹⁷ calling on William

Carlos Williams' definition of the poem as a 'field of action'¹⁸ and the sacred geometry of Leonardo Da Vinci's *Uomo Vitruviano*, which configured the body holistically as universal microcosm. This is, of course, scientifically topical. The dating of Monroe's passing at the foot of the poem coincides with the publication year of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, which catalysed popular ecology by correlating the impact of agrichemical herbicides and defoliants – foreshadowed by knowledge of their biocidal military applications – with the interior functioning of the metabolism.

McClure's verse renders this enquiry performative, locating Marilyn and reader alike between species as inner and outer ecosystems interfuse. The diction oscillates between semantic forms and the non-referentially sonic 'beast language,' emphasising a unique set of transactions between the oral and visual cultures of the text. Indeed, the tantra's conscious Anglo-Saxon and Middle English echoes indicate that the Derridean trace might apply equally to spoken as well as print transmissions. Just as every organism bears the imprint of its entire genetic history, McClure's vocables beg the question of whether a new or 'innocent' sound is conceivable without interpretative mapping against prior iterations.

The poem becomes its own self-willed subject, self-propagating in accord with its innate qualities of exuberance and courting the 'wildness' etiquette of McClure's contemporary, Gary Snyder, which signals an 'implied chaos, eros, the unknown, realms of taboo, the habitat of both the ecstatic and the demonic . . . a place of archetypal power, teaching, and challenge.'¹⁹ McClure's citation of the biophysicist, Harold Morowitz, further clarifies his intent: 'The flow of energy through a system acts to organise that system.'²⁰ Accordingly the poem's shape materialises in the process of its writing; the emerging membrane of form is an active, responsive site, determined by content alone and comprised of 'its own nature.'²¹ This is an improvised unrepeatable occasion, seeded by D.H. Lawrence's use of the term 'plasm' as a symbol of the permanent mutation characterising free verse commensurate with the force of nature itself, 'where there is no perfection, no consummation, nothing finished. The strands

are all flying, quivering, intermingling into the web, the waters are shaking the moon.’²²

McClure’s design shares this notional romanticism. Samuel Taylor Coleridge noted in 1818 that ‘The organic form [is] innate; it shapes as it develops itself from within, and the fullness of its development is one and the same with the perfection of its outward form . . . for it is even this that constitutes its genius – the power of acting creatively under laws of its own origination.’²³ Under McClure’s hand, however, the poem inhabits an earthly consciousness rather than inciting a metaphysical order. Its ‘sacred paradise for full/warm bodies, full lips, full hips, and laughing eyes!’ admits no cleansing binary of body and spirit, and refuses any retreat from the raw and scatological in the face of the Puritan–industrial denigration of the body as obscene and disposable. This is a resolutely fleshy heaven, the viscerality of McClure’s language a counter to the surrounding bloodless Cold War discourse and its laundering of the eviscerated corpse in reports of US atrocities across Vietnam via the technocratic language of surgical strikes, collateral damage and friendly fire.

McClure further deviates from romanticism in rejecting the lyrical rapture and naïve pastoralism traditionally associated with nature writing, as typified by Wordsworth’s conservative reverence for the experience of numinosity in a pre–technological arcadia, the origins of which disguise their own culturally–mediated condition. As opposed to registering a wild order that exists in and for itself, such work ‘others’ the natural world as escapist compensation from a perspective of privileged detachment. This is typified by Wordsworth’s claim to ‘see into the life of things,’²⁴ and augmented by the device of prosopopeia that nominally grants a voice to the non–human subject, but which is more properly a self–constituting act for the solipsistic poet who talks to and about himself.

Conversely the site of a McClure poem is an amalgam of multiple forms of data and visual traces: of discourses archaic and modern, erudite and vernacular; and of varying tempos and volumes, which inter–mediate within a single vibrational field but offer no overarching unity or teleology. Plants, animals and bodies pulse with sexual energy throughout *Ghost Tantras*. The scientific notion of the

food chain becomes a sensual exchange of vital energies with perception a phenomenological interchange between inner and outer worlds taking place at the surface of language itself. To McClure the poem is not only a ‘self–perpetuating, self–comprehending protoplasm,’ or ‘a tissue between itself and the environment, but simultaneously the environment itself.’²⁵ Rejecting the dissociative implications of the word, he turns instead to what Gregory Bateson named the Cybernetic–Zen ‘characteristics of immanence,’ where being and matter fold together within a dynamic and interdependent ‘ecology of mind.’²⁶

Here the textual act yields the possibility of a metamorphosis of beings that change *in* language, the word enacting rather than merely describing the process of transformation. McClure foments the gustatory body of secretions and openings through the figure of Marilyn, who is culturally inscribed through modes of linguistic hybridity and leakage. The boundaries between species and between natural and supernatural states are rendered negotiable, gesturing towards the practices of the early and late shamans that Jerome Rothenberg named ‘Technicians of the Sacred,’²⁷ who experience life at the level of poetry in a sensory, imaginative merging within an inter–subjective world. The resulting work is not a question of mimesis but of the generation of frameworks for porosity, converging upon art as a challenge to rational goal and stasis. The ensuing release from limitation renders turmoil and uncertainty productive: the experience of all mankind, according to R.D. Laing, ‘of the primal man, of Adam and perhaps even [a journey] further into the beings of animals, vegetables and minerals.’²⁸ However, as the anti–psychiatrist concluded at the end of the 1950s, no age had moved so far from ego–loss, the crucial healing quality of communal re–orientation, as this.

McClure’s tantric language can be considered as the rejuvenating instrument of discharge from such constraints of social coding, enforcing a liminal experience of dislocation, misrule and readjustment. The mammalian immersion is always *double*, fostering a consciousness not only of shared animal status across species, but also an attention to changed circumstance as exotic performance. This ‘oscillation identifies the textual event as

performative, as set apart from everyday life,' to borrow Mike Pearson's observations about Mummings' Plays.²⁹ Here is a moment of complexity; hereby arises a tension from mimetic defect, a condition of in-between. McClure gambles upon this recognition, reiterated in Wallace Berman's man-wolf collage of the author that adorns the cover, and pre-empting Deleuze and Guattari's contention regarding the condition of 'becoming-animal' as 'not content to proceed by resemblance and for which resemblance, on the contrary, would represent an obstacle or stoppage.'³⁰ The *Tantras* inhabit this implied borderline, haunting the fringes of both culture and nature: 'the result not of evolution, of descent and filiation, but of involution, contagion, infection, *between* the terms in play and their assignable relations, *between* man and animal.'³¹

The ecstatic passing beyond sensory and intellectual limits into animal and vegetative worlds is, however, not without its dangers. While protean shape-shifting can be seen as a necessary political tactic in the historical context of species genocide and wilderness depletion, the retaining of borders and boundaries might accrue advantages, too. Contact with those romantic forces of delirium risks self-annihilation; the ultimate ecstatic experience is extinction, approximated in this instance through the cultivation of non-differentiation and ultimately homogeneity. Moreover the atavistic restoration of Monroe's meat-being simultaneously reinforces the historical denial of agency to the female. What to the poet might comprise an *a priori* act of redemption simultaneously overlooks a repressive sexual politics that participates in and reinforces the patriarchal determination of a woman's identity as animal, bereft of logos. Note, too, the (perhaps ironic) valuation of 'perfect mammal': an expressly anthropocentric taxonomy redolent of the gristly spectacle of a beauty parade.

Such demarcations are inevitably reproduced even as they are resisted. To Michael Davidson, the additional recourse to end-stopped sense closure, declarative assertion, iambic metrical convention and minimal enjambment means that McClure's work trades chiefly upon sheer rhetorical intensity for its impact, shutting off those 'alternative or divergent readings,'³² which might otherwise

add nuance to a counter-industrial enquiry derived from William Blake. The prevalence of the static and unitary 'I' further frustrates the interrogation of the category of human and its hierarchies of forms constructed in opposition to nature, the textual barriers of which remain arguably as visible and rigid as the steel cage separating McClure from the lions at San Francisco Zoo: the ultimate performance site of commodified exotica.

While such representations cannot be tidily dismissed as merely bespeaking the norms of the era, McClure's work nonetheless merits serious reconsideration as an enduring experiment with balancing the mediating function of discourse against the possibility of an affective encounter with the natural world. Interruptions, mergings and elisions problematise the signifying function of language as a means of ecologically reframing the relationships between signs, sounds and texts. As such his poetry anticipates the field of Biosemiotics, which accords patterns of signification, interpretation and habit formation as intrinsic to all sentient forms: a term attributed to the psychiatrist, Friedrich S. Rothschild, and first recorded in the year of *Tantra 39*'s composition. Language under such conditions is redefined as the evolutionary response to the need for *weltanschauung*, the bringing forth of a world shared by all biological organisms, and thus more than just a self-contained system of metaphors. Under such circumstances nature becomes a vast performative text, composed of countless semiotic systems, including human, which are meaningful in the survival of any species capable of system feedback – chemical, physical or nervous.

McClure's work combines this understanding with that of nature's primary energy of metamorphosis. This is written into the process of the poem itself to initiate what Herbert Read termed a 'prodigious animism'³³ conjured *in*, not through, the creative act. Such an impulse answers the call for an artwork that enacts in its own realms the psychological and physiological forces that structure natural world. Or the performative act that, in the words of the poet, might allow us 'to move in it and step outside of the disaster that we have wreaked upon the environment and upon our phylogenetic selves.'³⁴

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 5 Ibid, p. xviii.
 6 Michael McClure, *Scratching the Beat Surface* (San Francisco: North
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 7 Michael McClure, *Of Indigo and Saffron: New and Selected Poems*
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 11 Francis Crick, 'The Poetry of Michael McClure: A Scientist's View,'
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www.thing.net/~grist/l&d/mcclure/mc-crick.htm.
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 13 Michael McClure, 'Bob Dylan: The Poet's Poet,' *Rolling Stone* magazine,
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 14 McClure, *Ghost Tantras*, p. 46.
 15 McClure, *Scratching*, p. 100.
 16 C.G. Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy*, *Collected Works*, Volume 12
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 17 McClure, *Scratching*, p. 45.
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 21 Ibid.
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 23 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lectures on Shakespeare and Other Poets and*
Dramatists (London: J.M. Dent, 1907), p. 46.
 24 William Wordsworth, 'Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey:
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 reprinted London: Penguin, 2006), p. 111.
 25 McClure, *Scratching*, pp. 43-4.
 26 Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind: Collected Essays in*
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 27 Jerome Rothenberg, *Technicians of the Sacred: A Range of Poetries from*
Africa, America, Asia, Europe and Oceania (Berkeley and Los Angeles:
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 28 R.D. Laing, *The Self and Others: Further Studies in Sanity and Madness*
 (London: Tavistock Press, 1961), p. 13.
 29 Mike Pearson, 'In Comes I: Performance, Memory and Landscape (Exeter:
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 30 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism*
and Schizophrenia, Volume Two, trans. Brian Massumi (London: Athlone
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 31 Pearson, 'In Comes I,' p. 95.
 32 Michael Davidson, *The San Francisco Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge
 University Press, 1989), p. 89.
 33 Herbert Read, *The Forms of Things Unknown: Essays Towards an Aesthetic*
Philosophy (New York: Horizon Press, 1960), p. 63.
 34 McClure, *Scratching*, p. 21.

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Cover photograph by Wallace Berman, courtesy of the Estate of Wallace Berman and Michael Kohn Gallery, Los Angeles Makeup by Robert Lavigne.

Image 1: 6 Poets at 6 Gallery Flyer for October 7, 1955

Image 2: Film Still: of Michael McClure reading to the lions at San Francisco Zoo 1966 From video of Michael McClure taken from the USA Poetry series by Richard O. Moore (1966), released to celebrate the publication of Mr. McClure's book of poetry, *Of Indigo and Saffron* (University of California Press, 2011).

Image 3: Poster for Michael McClure's *The Beard*, Actor's Workshop Theatre, 1965.

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NACHHALTIGKEIT
LISA WILKENS

The German word for sustainability is Nachhaltigkeit. It contains the syllable *halten* which translates as 'to hold'. Holding something in your hands creates a physical engagement, muscle contractions, neural connections – responsibility?

The following tableaus are a reflection on the future of work and labour, gender equality, the increase of automatisisation and the decrease of manual labour, the idea of unconditional basic income and the possibility to dramatically change outdated structures in order to create a sustainable life and future.

Lisa Wilkens

Visual artist and guest-professor at Weißensee school for art and design, Berlin.

Material sources:

Gertrude Williams, *Women and Work* (Nicholson & Watson London, 1945).
Michael Young and Theodor Prager, *There's Work for All* (Nicholson & Watson London, 1945).
Charlotte Luettkens, *Women and a New Society* (Nicholson & Watson London, 1946).

Women and Work

THE NEW DEMOCRACY

A pioneer 40 million gave their best in a decade to make the world safe for democracy. The result today is complete misery, democracy opposed everywhere to barbaric rule and anarchy everywhere. Slaves and autocrats grab women and children, rape and murder. The men whose country saved hundreds of thousands of the world's children remained below the poverty line. We're being driven to the streets of London.

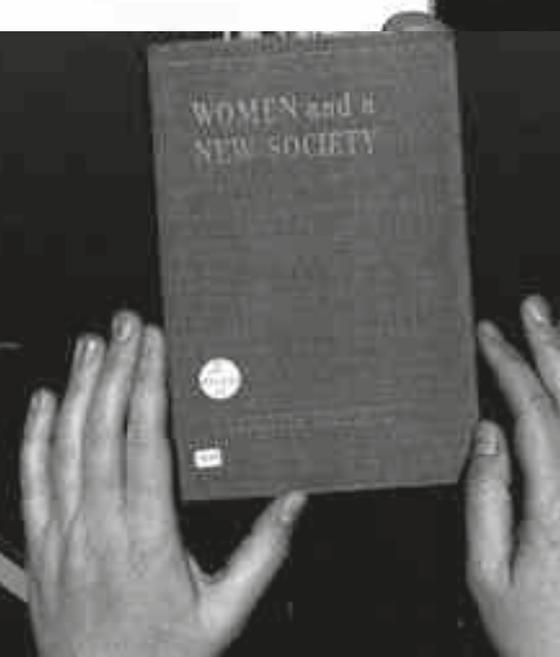
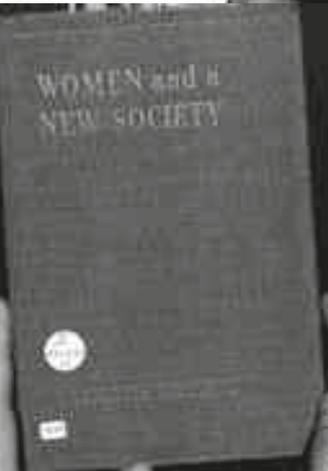
There's Work for All

Michael Young and Theodor Prager

With 14 pictorial charts in colour designed by the factory illustrators and 54 photographs



But the women are not told to make good in the economy if by a proper attitude about the economy and government they do. The conclusion is the full women are called to women who believe it to be their responsibility to support their own economic knowledge before the whole female public, using all the resources of government to give evidence on their subjects. It is a woman's duty to make a special opportunity to give leadership to working men of the new democracy. But it is also a duty to the women of their own country who believe that democracy is the only way through their own economic freedom and who mean to make it work.





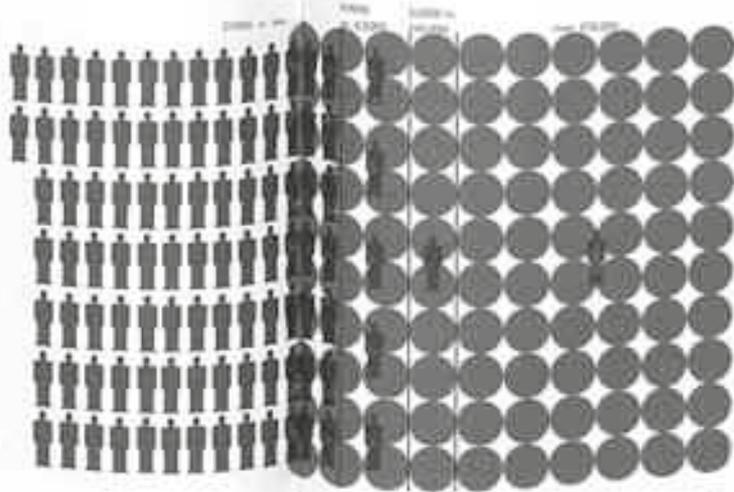
—the wife's work in the dairy is as important...



—playing with Honey

Ownership of Wealth in Great Britain

CHART II



Source: Office of Economic Affairs, 'The Wealth of Great Britain', 1968. Reproduced by permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office.



—Men have muscular strength—



—but women have the deft touch

practice—according to the type of machine and material—in order to acquire

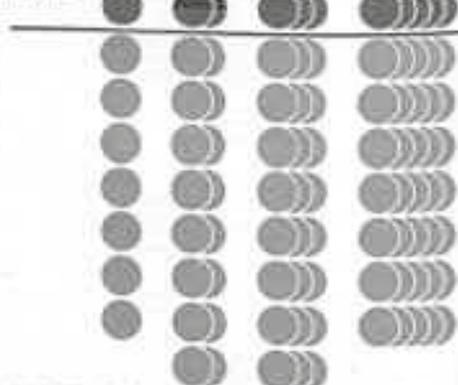
human beings and a capacity for taking decisions when necessary. Such jobs demand a new kind of skill—a skill which is rather a blend of personal qualities and experience than technical competence—a skill for which it is unusual for people to be given a specific training but for which they develop the requisite capacity while they are actually on the job.

Back with experiment 210

Men, age 20-29



Men and women, age 17-21



Other groups: 20-29, 30-39, 40-49, 50-59



—the high jump



Any kind of job



Leisure!

30

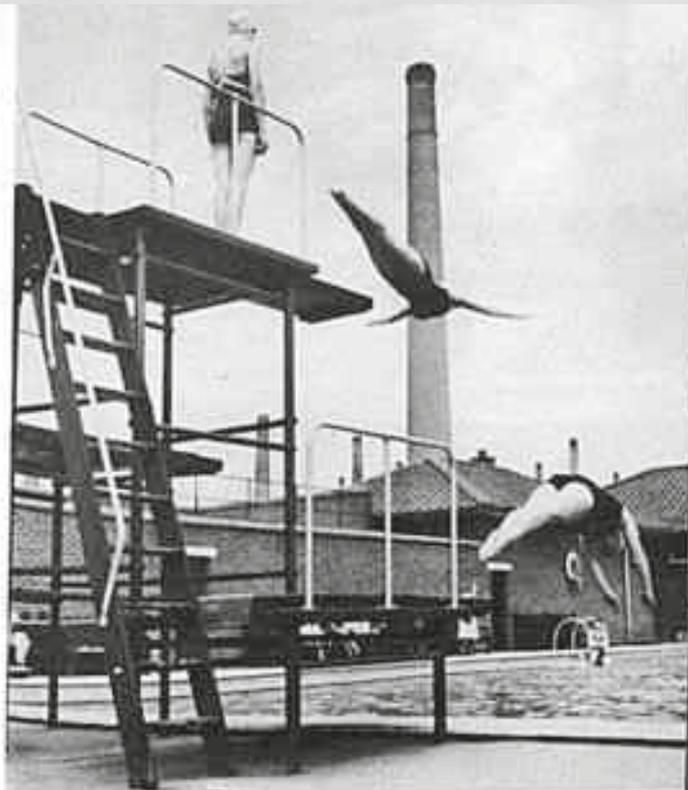
WOULD-BE
WORKERS

WANTED

they quite naturally tended to include women's rights with their claims.

Their women, on their side, having little left of the material security and human dignity of their upper-class sisters, often had a clear grasp of reality and loyally joined in the protest of their menfolk. Often their rebellion remained emotional. But when they became politically conscious, a great step was taken away from the purely personal attitude of the mother who worries solely about to-morrow's bread for her children, towards the long-term and the very detached fanaticism with which wives have urged their husbands not to give way in a strike. In the struggle for political rights, women have proved that being

51



—A modern factory swimming pool

wash can be extremely exhausting, but men have never shown any eagerness to have such work reserved for them, and the work of the daily charwoman or office cleaner involving, as it often does, the wearisome carrying of heavy pails of water up and down innumerable flights of stairs, has always been free from male competition. But if it had been usual to employ men at fairly good rates of pay in these jobs there is no doubt that the opposition

Political Rights of Women



1915



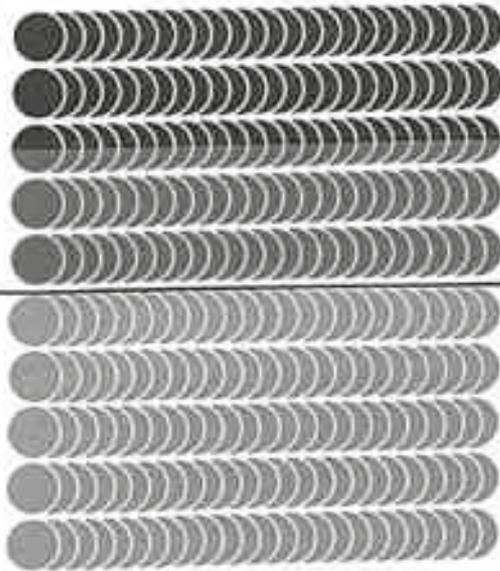
1938



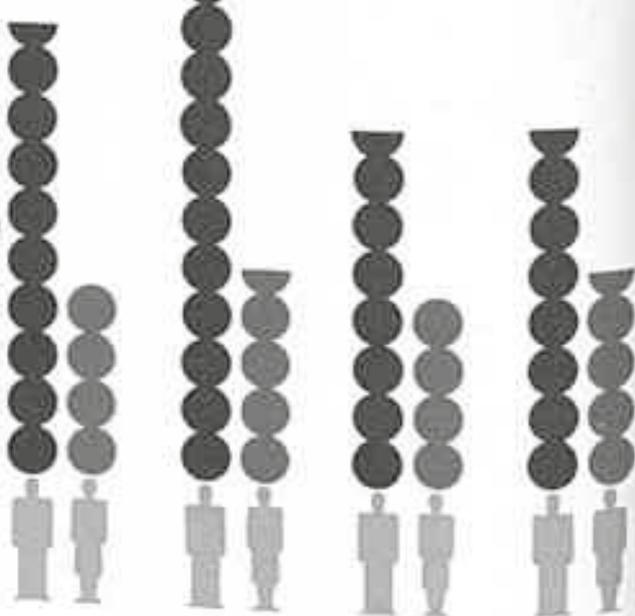
red : countries in which women had the same political rights as men in 1915
red and blue : countries in which women had the same political rights as men in 1938

Four

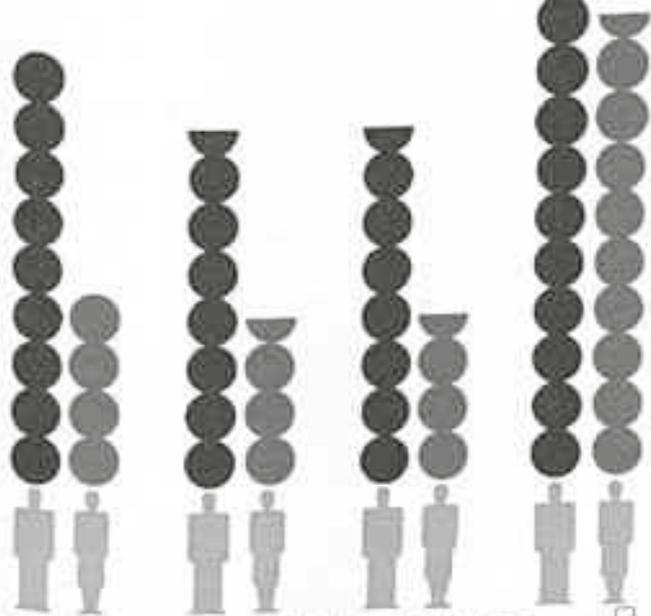
CHART X



—The first women's race in Italy in 1911



Each circle represents 10 shillings.



Men: average weekly wages or middle salaries per week of men. Women: average weekly wages or middle salaries per week of women.



Changing Dress

The illustration shows a woman in four different outfits, arranged in a descending staircase pattern from top-left to bottom-right. The outfits transition from a long, dark, high-collared dress to a shorter, lighter-colored dress, illustrating a change in fashion.

THOSE WHO CONTROL

The city's spent side of wealth

Industrial Britain

The top photograph shows three men in dark suits and hats walking on a wide sidewalk. The middle photograph shows two men standing in front of a large, dark industrial structure with thick white smoke billowing from it.



Social Life at Home

A century 189



18

Mass Production and Feminine Attitudes

Mass production and an increasing standardization of goods, a rising standard of living and much greater variety could not in the end fail to affect the ideal and the attitudes of womanhood. Luxuries previously only within the reach of the upper few became, if only through the use of imitation or substitute materials, everyday articles for mass consumption. The snob appeal of scarcity or high cost was thus abolished. Things easy to get and in large supply have less appeal, while persons who derive special distinction from the display and private possession of expensive things or services lose some of their social eminence. This must eventually react on their attitudes and the value attributed to the possession of things once rare and now mass produced. Hence rising and standardized production affects even standards and values. Many articles, and all that they meant for the shaping of the feminine type, began to lose their appeal. The attractions of rare things was bound to lessen, since more of them were available for most women, that is to say for women of all ages, and in more social strata. Silk underwear finds a powerful rival in rayon. The married middle-class woman's claim to special attention dwindles when young girls or servants take the liberty of wearing fur coats, rabbit though they may be.

It is not easy for the modern woman to seem "rare" by way of display. Precious things become demystified and the type of woman considered to be attractive to men is also subject to change. When possessions which, about the turn of the century, still made their wearers appear rare or exotic, can be bought at the 5-and-10-cent-store, a good deal of the element of mystery disappears from the exotic game. Freshness, publicity, that fresh air of directness which pervades the whole atmosphere of a democratic society here enter women's sphere by another door. If the exotic or the hidden came to be sources of erotic charm, then similarly the related appeal of the forbidden, of vice, recedes. It was the end of the puritan phase in the relation of the sexes, and it was bound to alter the ideal of femininity and of the representative type of woman.

The First World War acted as a first-rate catalyst for all these tendencies, above and underground. Women in England as in other countries had been called upon to shoulder the responsibilities of men. A belief in sex equality—if not even in the superiority of the female sex—was seen in practice in the U.S.A. where, moreover, mass production and standardization had developed to a degree unknown in Europe.

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The social centre

The library

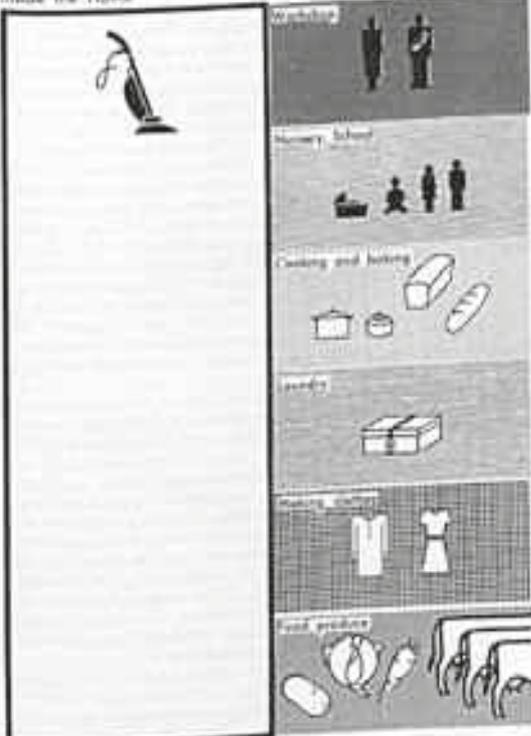
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The Future?

Inside the Home

Outside the Home

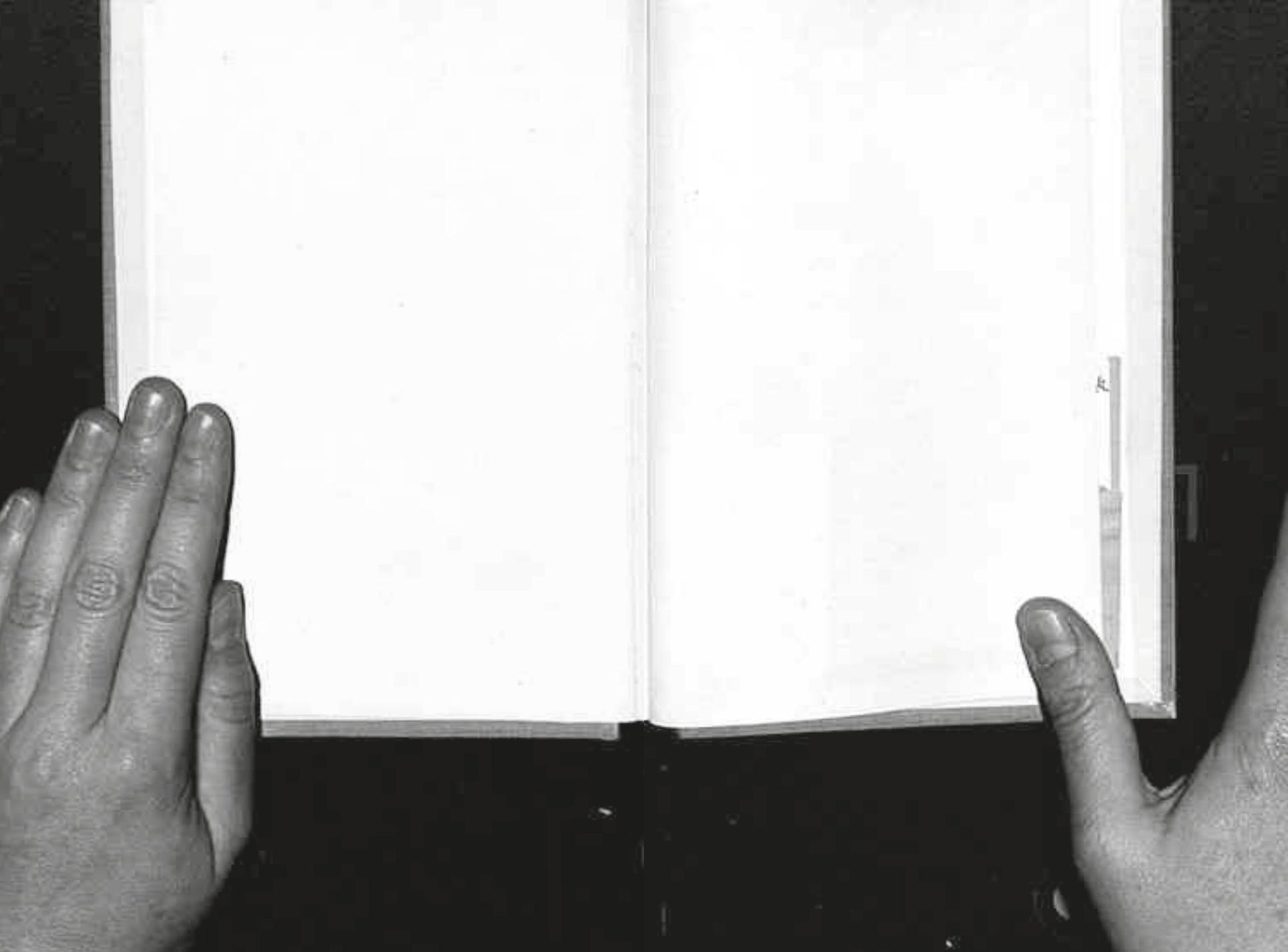


Do Women Need Less?

The view most commonly held is that men's higher pay can be accounted for by their greater needs. Probably few people would be prepared to maintain nowadays that there is much to choose between the needs of an individual man and woman in an industrially developed society; for though, on the average, a woman consumes less food than a man, conventional standards of living in a modern community require her to take greater care in selecting a lodging and to pay more attention to her clothes and personal appearance, while in other expenses—fairs to and from work, visits to the cinema, cigarettes, newspapers, etc.—sex makes no difference. But it would be fairly safe to bet that if the question of the relative rates of pay of men and women cropped up in the conversation of any chance cross-section of the community, the majority present would agree that the explanation was to be sought in the different social obligations of the sexes. A man's wage, it is argued, is not intended to meet only his individual requirements, but must cover also those of his wife and children, whereas a woman has to provide for herself alone.

How much validity is there in this popular belief? We must at the outset distinguish two separate questions, the distinction between which is not always fully appreciated. The first is, "Are there, in fact, these marked differences in the needs of men and women workers?" And the second, "If they exist, do they constitute the cause of the differences in pay?"

We are so accustomed to think in terms of the "average" or "norm" that it takes an effort of imagination to realise how little such conceptions conform to reality. For instance, Chart XII shows how greatly the size of the family varies. It is, of course, true that most men marry and are then legally and by convention responsible for their families, and it is equally true that the majority of women workers are single women. But it does not follow that every man has family obligations and that no woman has. The contrary is the truth. In most occupations a man begins to earn his full adult wage by the time that he is 20 or 21 years old, and he generally continues at work until he is 65 or 70, perhaps even longer. Suppose he has three children within six years—quite a usual spacing—his whole family has reached school-leaving age and is at least partially self-supporting at the end of 21 years from the birth of his first child. That means that for the greater part of his working life he has only himself and his wife to maintain. In fact, the claims on a man's wage are not the same throughout his life; they take the shape of a curve beginning low when he first marries, rising upwards to a peak when all his

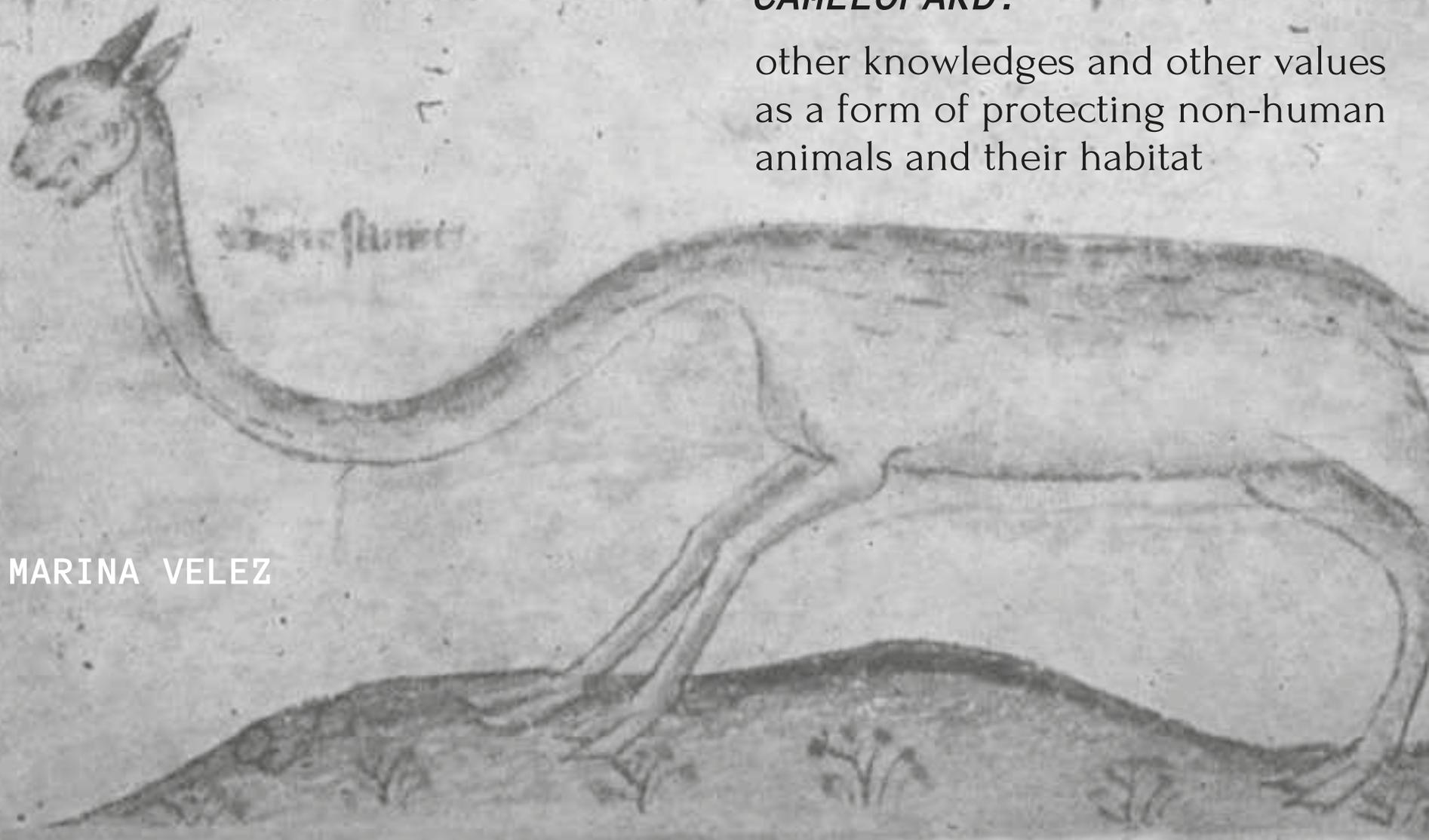


und etep hem ghyntyn
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CAMELOPARD:

other knowledges and other values
as a form of protecting non-human
animals and their habitat



MARINA VELEZ

The word camelopard, which gives title to this contribution, was originally used to describe the giraffe. It originates from Medieval Latin and it is composed by the words camel and leopard, as the giraffe was thought to have a head like a camel's and spots like a leopard's. Most naturalists had never seen a giraffe in real life and they had to rely on second hand experiences to illustrate it. Imagination mediated their scientific investigation in a way that distorted their understanding of the animals they professed to study.

Even though there is a better scientific understanding of animals today, issues of distortion and disconnection between humans and animals remain unresolved. Questioning the human relationship with animals raises questions about biodiversity and the legal aspect of those who either have no legal rights or, if they have, they are not in practice being put into effect. Animals are now faced with an anthropogenic extinction of unprecedented proportions, this will be the first mass extinction caused by one single species. As humanity approaches an age of loneliness, exploring human limitations in understanding and valuing animals has to become a priority, and questions about how humans relate to animals must be addressed:

What value do humans place on animals? Why are different values placed on animals according to their 'usefulness' to humans? Is the value of livestock higher than that of wild animals? Which animals are worthy of being allowed existence and to have their habitats protected? To what ends do humans classify animals as 'others' using socially constructed negative differences?

The work *Camelopard* addresses these questions indirectly, exploring proximity and distance between humans and animals aesthetically, suggesting that human's abilities and limitations for understanding animals' nature shape human's relationship with them. Such complexity is linked, according to Rosi Braidotti, to a dominant and structurally masculine habit of 'taking for granted free access to and consumption of the bodies of others, animals included.'¹. Human relationship with animals is tainted with the idea that animals are bodies whose sole purpose is to be consumed by humans as flesh, clothing, entertainment, prestige, pleasure, financial gain or labour. If a body of an animal

is kept in order to be consumed, the human must not allow this body to become animal; it must be viewed as a thing, a commodity. Humans must not allow emotions of attachment and compassion to come into the equation in order to maintain the values which allow for human consciousness to not question human behaviour towards animals. Changing the value humans place on these beings from bodies to be consumed to animals in their own right, with their right to exist separated from any human gain, involves altruistic behaviour and a conscious stepping out of the human habitus in order to revise received values.

Spanish philosopher and environmentalist Jorge Riechmann claims that animals are classified according to human proximity to them. He believes that wild animals do not belong to the human emotionally invested spheres and that farm animals, albeit physically close to human's spheres, are emotionally kept out of them for convenience. Riechmann states that human's emotional map of relationships creates endo grupos and exo grupos, meaning inside a group or outside a group respectively. He says that it comes naturally to treat members of the endo grupo one belongs to with empathy and compassion because one's feelings are invested in it, and one protects those that belong with one. By contrast, it does not come naturally to treat beings in exo grupos with empathy. The idea of endo and exo grupo bias is quite political and could be exploited by populists politicians for issues related to refugees, political borders, physical divisions such as walls and a hostile environment towards migrants. Endo and exo grupos demarcate emotional, psychological and geopolitical territories and they assign value to a being depending on which grupo it is placed in. Regarding animals, Riechmann thinks that humans choose to let some of them into their emotional space endo grupos, these are called pets, while choosing to leave others out, these are called livestock, wild animals or pests. The emotional value of the animal changes depending on one's deliberate decision to allow them in or leave them out of the grupo, such extreme arbitrary differentiation in value is used to hide exploitative behaviour.

If certain animals cease to be valuable to humans as means of production, would these animals be allowed to exist, reproduce and inhabit spaces? The question of usefulness is

a modernist question but it is also a political and ethical one. If only humans can act as moral agents whereas other beings are assigned the value of moral patients, the question remains as to how and by whom is this distribution of values arranged and implemented. Many are the traumas, annihilation of other forms of thinking and ethical obscenities that colonialism and capitalism impose on those oppressed by the conquering forces. The devaluing of animals and their habitats insofar as they are not quantifiable resources for profit is directly interlinked with ecocide, and critical theory and art practices alike should be testament to such suffering. In my work I try to contribute and expand this conversation by exploring the practices of difference and the web of relations of domination and power. *Camelopard* speaks of this web of relations indirectly, accessing the opaqueness of the web by activating questions related to domination and mapping out connections: Is it about human domination of nature and animals? Is it about domination of one type of knowledge, the scientific knowledge, over other knowledges? Or is it about the domination of reason over imagination?

For primatologist and ethnologist Frans de Waal the role of imagination in humans' relationship with animals is paramount: 'Even though we can't feel what they feel' he says, 'we can still try to step outside our own narrow Umwelt and apply our imagination to theirs.'² Umwelt³ is addressed in the work *Camelopard* using biologist Jakob von Uexküll's definition of the exclusive point of view of the animal and each organism sense of the environment in his/her own way. Umwelt, which is German for surrounding world, is not the same as ecological niche or conditions in the habitat that an animal needs for survival. Umwelt is, in simple terms, the organism's subjective world. The breach between subjectivities resulting from different sensory organs seem insurmountable: how are humans to perceive the world around as, for instance, a sheep perceives it? This impossible question has to be approached by letting go of one's Umwelt through imagination. In the words of John Berger: 'To suppose that animals first entered the human imagination as meat or leather or horn is to project a 19th Century attitude backwards across the millennia'⁴. Instead, he suggests the more poetic and complex idea that animals entered human imagination as messengers and promises.

The images in *Camelopard* have emerged from my field work in rural Spain, Argentina and the Middle East, personal

photographs and investigations about other knowledges and other ways of being in the world as well as research about human and non-human animals relationship. The aesthetic gesture of including images of a child interacting with a donkey, surrendering her own difference in order to get closer to the animal, both physically and emotionally, is an invitation to consider the possibility to connect with inner sources of empathy and to engage with the idea that these connections must be fostered at an early age.

While creating *Camelopard*, as the art practice unfolds its double process of extreme present connection linked to past experiences, I am transported to my childhood. My grandfather used to buy for me the Encyclopaedia of Animals, a series of weekly collectable magazines which, when put together, made for an impressive and comprehensive compendium, with photographs in full colour. Although I could already read when the collection started as I was six years old, I engaged more with the images of the animals. I wanted to know more about them, their behaviour, diet, habitat and social organisation. It was through this encyclopaedia that I learnt the meaning of the word extinct. I remember the clear emotion prompted by seeing a photograph and learning that the animal in the image was extinct. I was aware that I was a child but that I was feeling a profound emotion which belonged to the world of adults.

Have I been, all this time, making art backwards to that girl who experienced the tremendous solitude of realising that the species she belonged to was responsible for another species' extinction?

Facing ecological challenges, such as a species extinction, can be a daunting prospect, not because of a lack of information but because of not knowing how to process such information and make sense of it. The loss and suffering of animals inflicted by humans is a social form of oppression which is dealt with by mourning at an individual level, depending on the sense of responsibility and values of care that each individual nurtures. These values compete with other internalised values, such as the belief in scientific advances, the superiority of rational thinking or socially constructed agreements of order which keep together visions of culture and structures of hierarchy, power and domination.

Through my research I came across many lab animal's stories which speak of abuse and exploitation, justified by the animal's similarity to humans. On a small island in the middle of Liberia dozens of ex-lab chimps were abandoned by Vilab II centre, which used them to develop the hepatitis vaccine by experimenting on them. Chimps are the only non-human primate susceptible to hepatitis B and C. These chimps in the small island rely on humans to provide food and water in order to survive. The New York Blood Centre, which conducted the research, promised to care for these chimps when they placed them in the island back in 2005. They broke this promise on the same year. Chimps cannot swim.

Humans cannot afford any longer to impose onto a creature a shape and value which is a direct product of inabilities to perceive it. As agents of capitalism and modernity, whose legacy is a deeply damaged biosphere and a diminished community of life, humans must learn to relate to animals and to the earth as a whole in a manner that is respectful and true to their nature.

There is an urgency for spaces to be created for the continued existence of non-human living beings. Such spaces will, in their inclusivity, diversity and revised values, protect not only animals but also a multiplicity of social forms and other relations and knowledges. *Camelopard* advocates for a shift on how humans see themselves as part of a nature that is extremely fragile and which urgently requires that we develop new empathies and new understandings based on new values in order to protect it without exploiting it.

- 1 Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), p. 22.
- 2 Frans de Waal, *Are we smart enough to know how smart animals are?* (London: Granta Publications, 2016), p. 9.
- 3 Idid, p. 7.
- 4 John Berger, *About Looking* (St Ives: Bloomsbury, 2009), p. 4.

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 Johannes Jonston, *Historiae Naturalis de Quadruples* (Amsterdam: J. Amstelodami, 1657).
 John Mandeville, *Travels in Middle English* (Royal 17 C XXXVIII, 1410).
 Jorge Riechmann, *Todos Los Animales Somos Hermanos* (Madrid: Catarata, 2005).

Image credit

Title Image: Sir John Mandeville, *Travels in Middle English* (Royal 17 C XXXVIII, 1410), courtesy of the British Library, catalogue of illuminated manuscripts.

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Other source material:

Johannes Jonston and Mathias Meriani, *Historiae Naturalis de Quadruples* (Amsterdam: J. Amstelodami, 1657).
 Enciclopedia de los Animales (Barcelona: Editorial Noguer, 1970).

With thanks to:

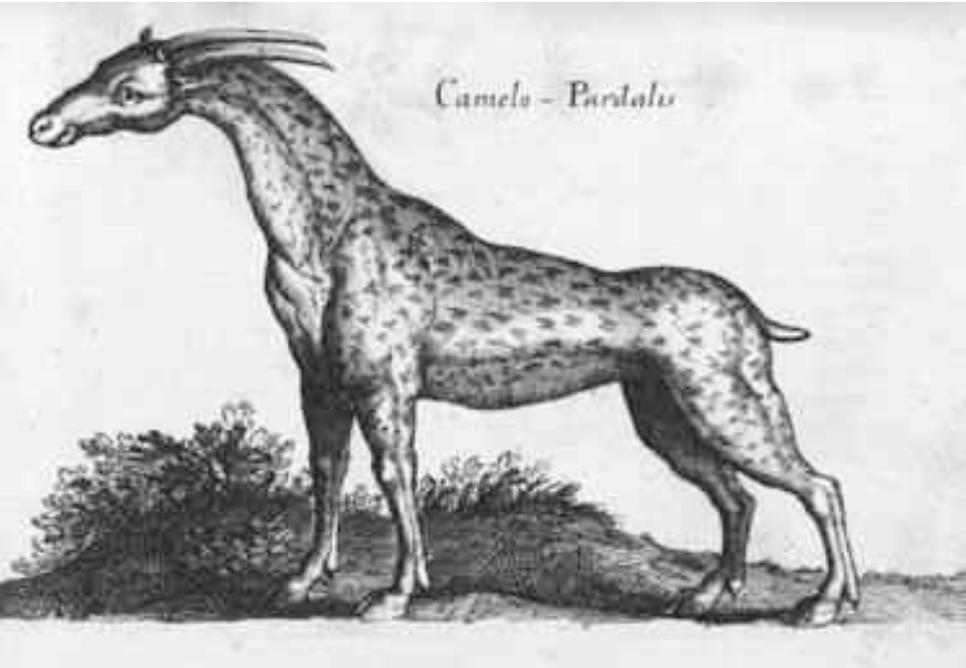
La viejita, Jaime, las mulas, ex-lab chimps abandoned on a Liberian island, orang-utans, Arabian gazelles, falcons, galgos, camels and the many animals who are not depicted in this work and with whom I share this house
 Andrés Galindo Pizarro, Sarah Humbert and Gala Tellechea Vélez
 The people of Belalcázar, Spain
 Volunteers at Galgos del Sur, Spain
 Dubai Desert Conservation Reserve, UAE
 Kuwaiti Camel Racing Club, Kuwait
 Department of Earth Science Library, University of Cambridge. UK
 Jane Goodall Institute

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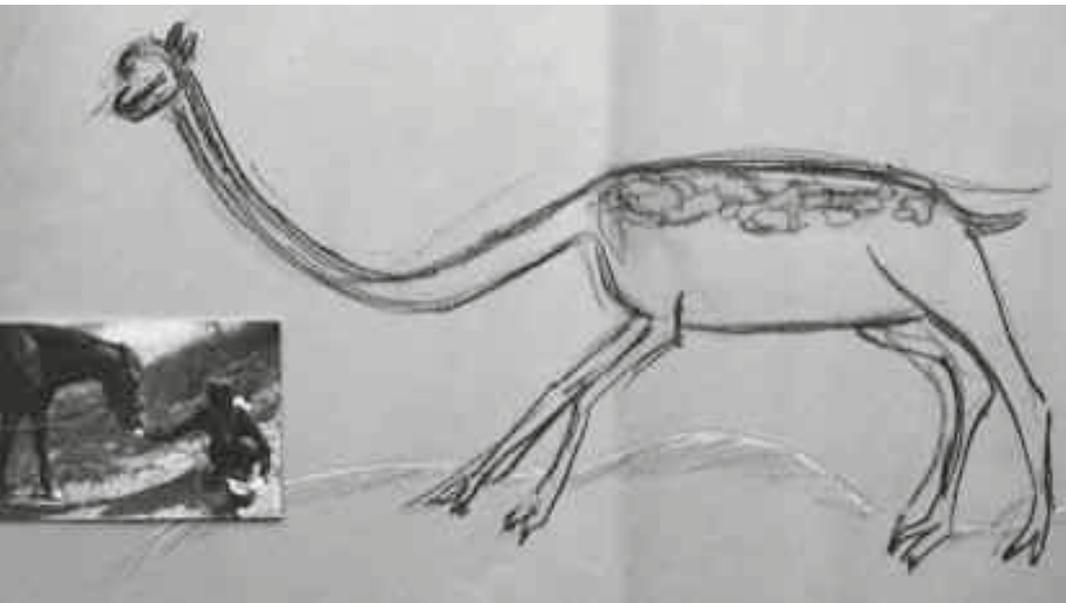


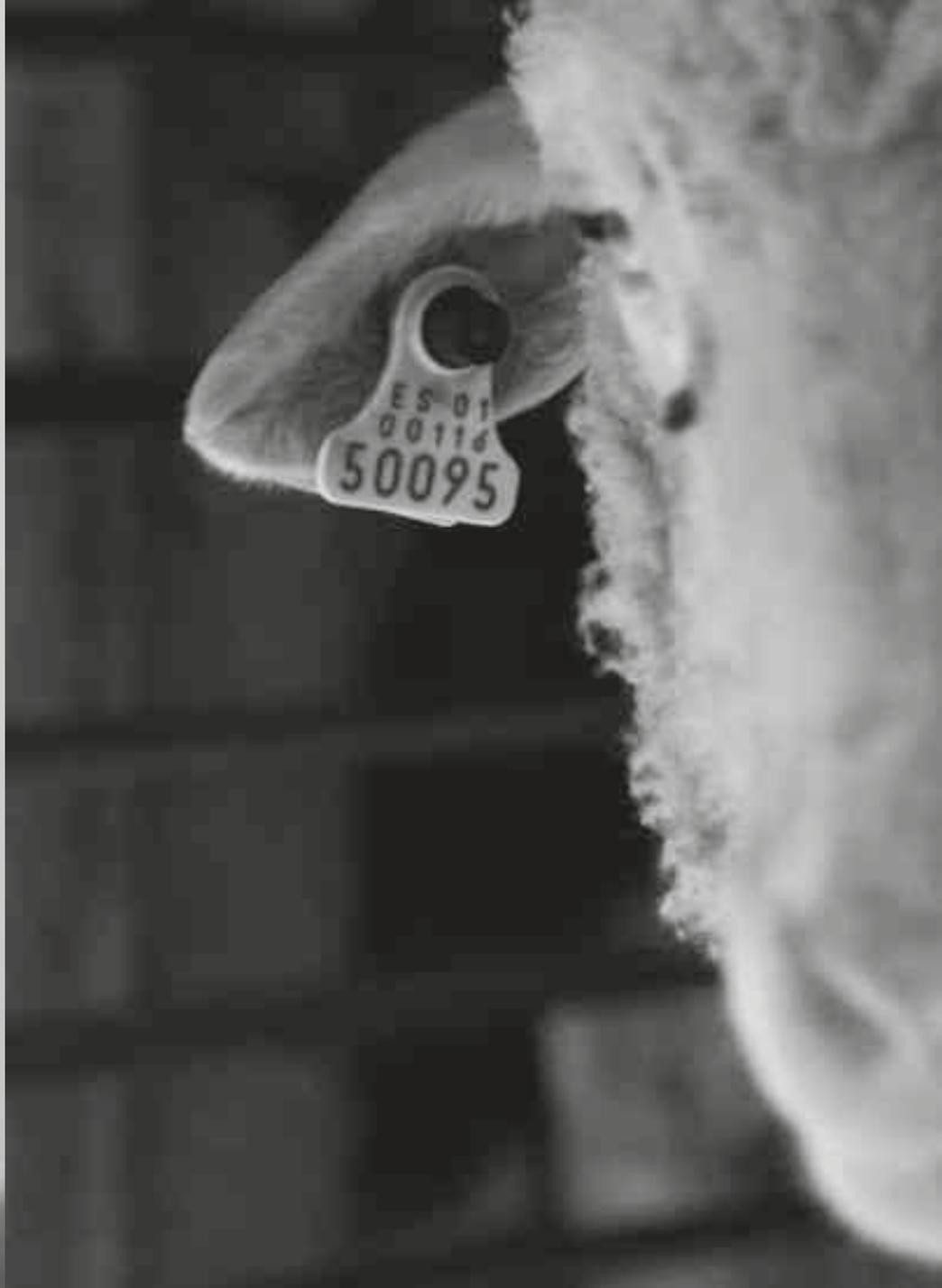
















The Cambridge Declaration on Consciousness

On this day of July 7, 2012, a prominent international group of cognitive neuroscientists, neuropharmacologists, neurophysiologists, neuroanatomists and computational neuroscientists gathered at The University of Cambridge to reassess the neurobiological substrates of conscious experience and related behaviours in human and non-human animals.

We declare the following:

'The absence of a neocortex does not appear to preclude an organism from experiencing affective states. Convergent evidence indicates that non-human animals have the neuroanatomical, neurochemical, and neurophysiological substrates of conscious states along with the capacity to exhibit intentional behaviours. Consequently, the weight of evidence indicates that humans are not unique in possessing the neurological substrates that generate consciousness. Non-human animals, including all mammals and birds, and many other creatures, including octopuses, also possess these neurological substrates.'

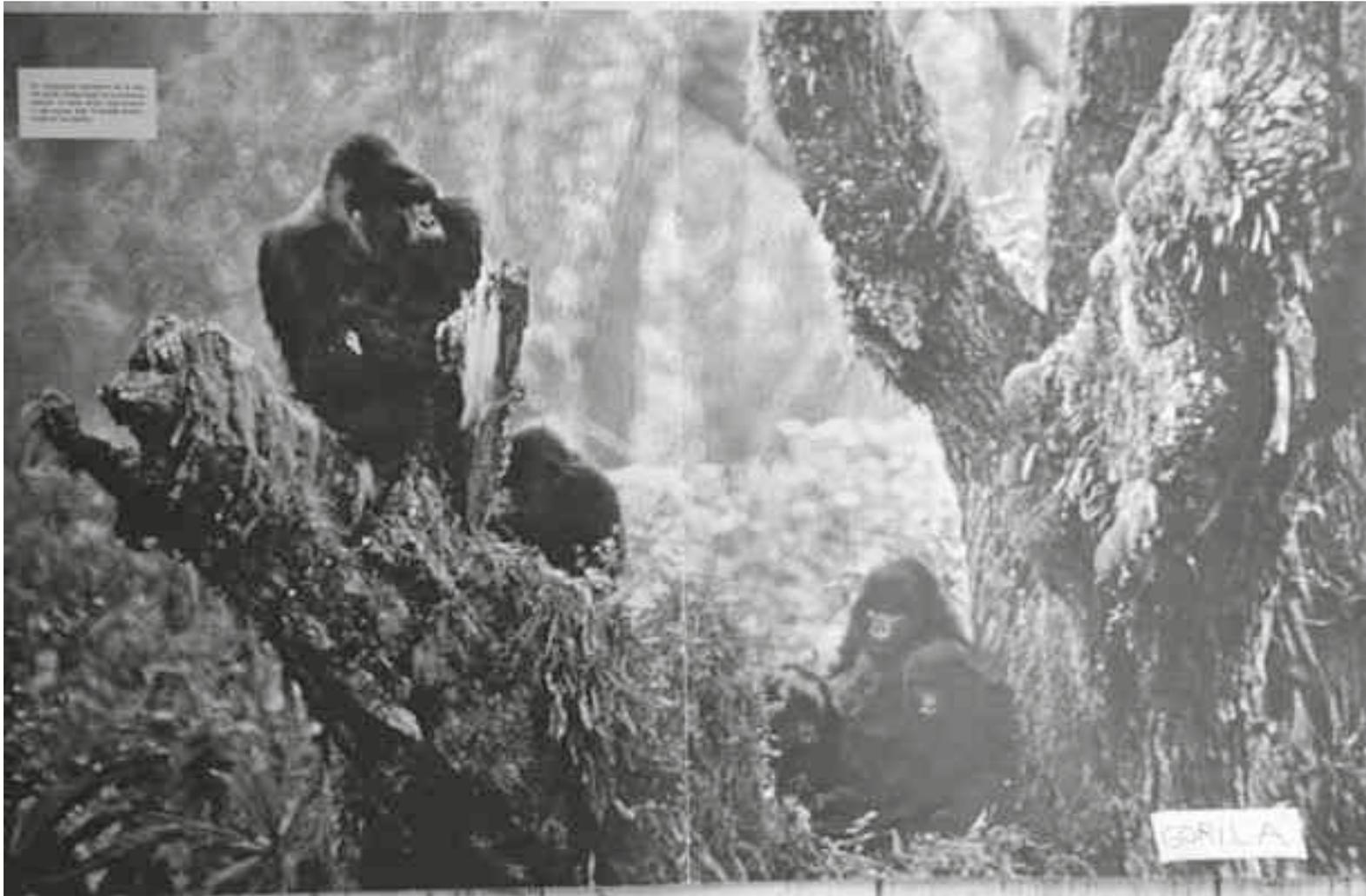
The Cambridge Declaration on Consciousness was written by Philip Low and edited by Jaak Panksepp, Diana Reiss, David Edelman, Bruno Van Swinderen, Philip Low and Christof Koch. The Declaration was publicly proclaimed in Cambridge, UK, on July 7, 2012, at the Francis Crick Memorial Conference on Consciousness in Human and non-Human Animals, at Churchill College, University of Cambridge.









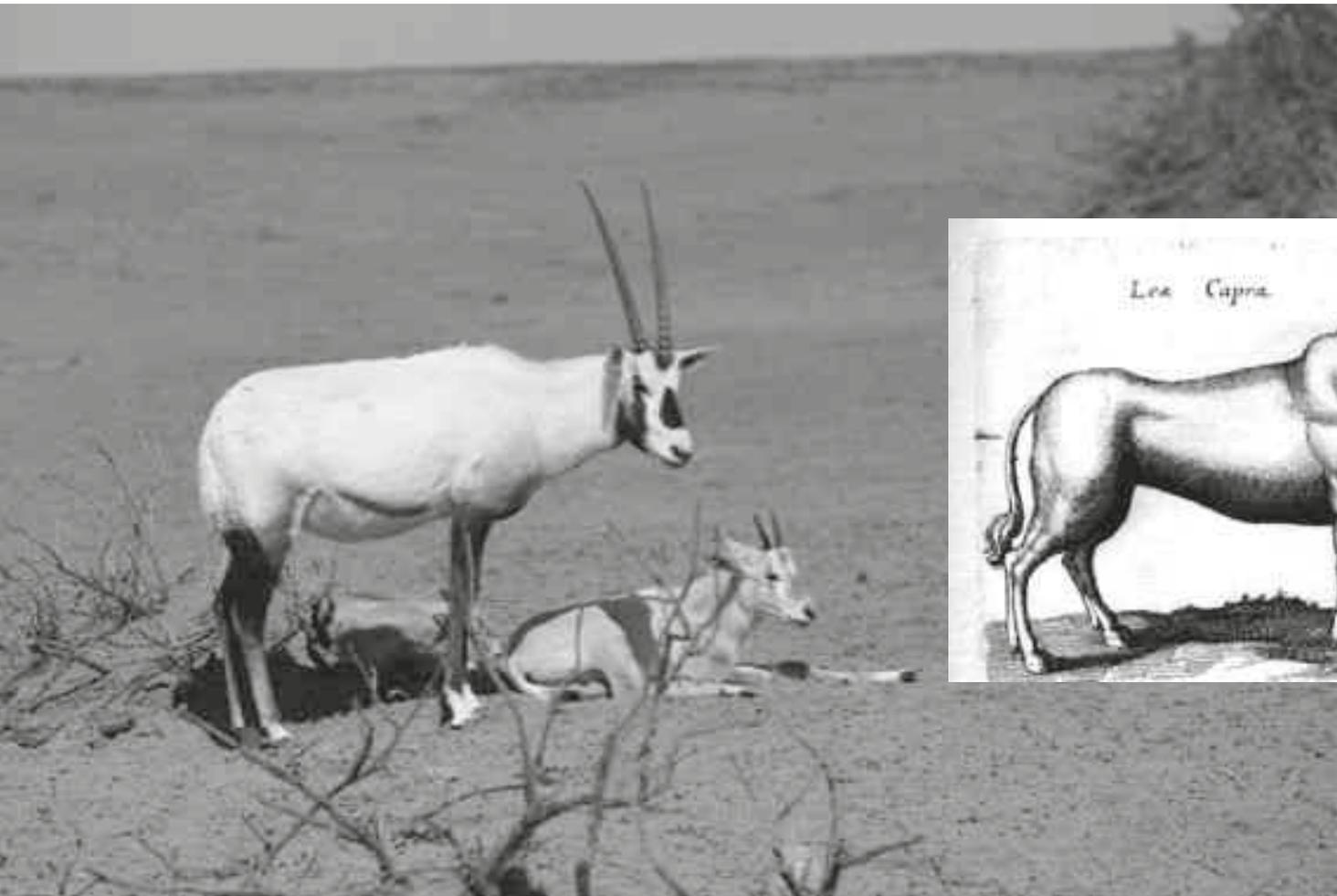


Die Gorillafamilie besteht aus 2-3 Individuen. Die Gorillafamilie ist die größte Familie der Gattung Gorilla. Die Gorillafamilie ist die größte Familie der Gattung Gorilla.

GORILA



Small text caption at the bottom of the gorilla group photograph, likely providing information about the subjects or the location.









THE FLAMING RAGE OF THE SEA

In conversation October 2018

ROSANNA GREAVES

TOM GREAVES



TG – Debating Nature’s Value Network (DNV) is an AHRC funded network jointly led by researchers at University of East Anglia and Anglia Ruskin University. It is in part a response to the rise in the rhetoric of ‘natural capital’ being used frequently in policy-making and goes hand in hand with a framework for thinking about the value of nature known as ecosystem services. The concept of ‘natural capital’ is not something that the DNV network necessarily set out to be entirely critical of, although there are a number of critical voices in the network. Our intention was to bring people together to think about the ways in which the concept affects our understanding of nature and to consider our perception of nature and its value, which is one of the reasons for including a commissioned artwork in the bid, the film *The Flaming Rage of The Sea*. This redressing of our perception seems to be a key element in what you were exploring in the work.

RG – Yes, most important for me in approaching this commission in relation to ‘natural capital’ was to pick up on notions of perception, both human perception of nature as a whole and a particular landscape, in this instance the East Anglian Fens; to consider the complexities involved in how people value nature, particularly the things that we perhaps consider invaluable or inextricable from one another, and how we perceive or enact our sense of value. The piece is primarily concerned with the other ways in which people attribute value as a counterpoint to that which is financially driven: emotional/historical/experiential/cultural/relational/spiritual or mythological etc.

This is particularly pertinent for me when considering the Fens, as this is the area where you and I grew up and spent many of our childhood holidays on our grandparent’s farm – which is where the opening sequence is of the film is shot. This led me to consider embodied experience of the land as a form of ancestral memory.

My intent in the work was to foreground complex relational value systems as an alternative to the discourse of ‘natural capital’, evoking past traditions and the 17th Century resistance to the draining of the fens, as a synecdoche of repetitions of change, migration, imported technologies and the precariousness of a landscape below sea level.



TG – It is interesting to consider this wider concept of value. Thinking about the historical rise of the notion of value itself, as very much connected to the 19th Century rise in political economy, but then it had this expansion from the economic sphere to where it's used in all sorts of different areas, including philosophy. The whole idea of morality and ethics came in the course of the 20th Century to be thought of almost exclusively in terms of value, people talk about 'value judgements' for example, but that wasn't always the case. The idiom that people would think about as ethics and morality never used to have anything to do with value, it was conducted originally in terms of virtue, and then later in terms of duty. It was only with the expansion of a term from economics that the idea of value itself came to dominate.

There has been a lot of interesting critical work in this field, particularly from Simon James, a member of the DNV network, who has suggested that research should think about the limits of this idea of value, and consider different ways in which we describe our relationship to nature, particularly in terms of attachment.¹ James argues that it's always possible to re-describe things in terms of value, which is what ecosystem services does; it adds a category of value called 'cultural values' and into that category go many of those ideas that you wouldn't necessarily think would be connected with economic or quantitative value in any straightforward way – but because there has been this huge expansion in the notion of value itself, it is always possible to re-describe attachment in those terms. As is seen in your film, personal attachment, personal histories and connections to particular landscapes and nature, one can always re-describe those in terms of value but it becomes less and less obvious why you would want to do that, unless you are already wedded to a project that is ultimately wanting to quantify all types of value.



RG – That is what is interesting and problematic in using the term value, as it suggests things can be de-compartmentalised and therefore exchangeable. I think it allows for a position whereby humans inhabit a hubristic sense of power in being the ones attributing the value, dictating what we could exchange our own notions of attachment or meaningfulness for, rather than actually thinking that the exchange is reciprocal with nature itself or indeed in-exchanges existing outside of our control.

So for me, trying to de-centralise ourselves away from being the point of perspective, or the point of attributing value, was important. Coming from a background of site-responsive installation, where the decentering of the viewer is a key concept,² in making *The Flaming Rage Of The Sea*, this notion of decentering became part of the layering of the imagery and time-structures in the film.

I wanted to visualise the points at which human activity and the natural environment become physically interwoven and inextricable from one another. Not just the effect of human activity on the land, but also the physical and psychological state of embodiment of the land, on those who work and live there.





The figures on stilts come from records of how the fens were worked pre-drainage; the fen people's livelihoods were centred on wild fowl hunting, fishing and eel catching. This also became an apparatus by which I could actualise this physical embodiment, in their movement, as a form of choreographed re-enactment.

The final song on the soundtrack to the film (sung by the Cambridge Timeline Choir) was a starting point for the whole work in its depicting of the embodied landscape.

The lyrics are from a 17th Century drainage resistance poem called 'The Powte's Complaint'. A Powte was an old word for a sea lamprey or eel. The poem is written by a fenlander who embodies the position of an eel, suggesting the ability to live and work in such a wet inhospitable environment makes him physically different, a sort of semi-aquatic being, in communication with other fish and the water, with an ability to summon the seas to rise.

Additionally, this embodiment of the eel is of interest to me, particularly with the project's connection to value systems and capital, since it is recorded that when The Abbey of Ely, now Ely Cathedral, was granted charter in 970 the ground rent was paid in eels, 10,000 eels a year. There are records from the 9th and 10th Century of rent payments and debts being settled in eels. In the film I wanted to visualise these timeframes and forms of wealth or currency in the land layered on top of one another, from the eels to the peat-rich soil.

TG – I was just thinking that within the network we are not just thinking about value we are also specifically talking about capital.

One way in which people have tried to determine how much someone values something is to say how much they are willing to pay; this then apparently becomes a question of personal choice, but of course the way we actually experience these things is multi-perspectival, because things often come with a price already attached, it becomes not just a question of what you are willing to pay but also a question of how much you can afford and how much is being asked.

RG – and who else wants it...

TG – Yes, people are presented with values all the time, this also applies to this more expanded sense of value that I see you are trying to draw out in your film. The majority of our dealings with value concern what price has already been attached. Something that is already there – I don't know if you want to describe it as 'in the land' in the same way as the more ancestral and cultural meanings are 'in the land' as you are trying to think about them.



RG – Well, particularly in regards to the arable land of the East Anglian Fens there is a sense of that being ‘in the land’, because that landscape as it stands today only exists because of how it has been produced and managed by human activity for its monetary value, because it is incredibly fertile and if it didn’t possess the ability to produce capital it wouldn’t exist as land at all, it would be flooded. So there is a sense that capital is here ‘in the land’. I started to see this as a type of un-reality, people have created this land that we are able to farm and the peat soil is very fertile and highly productive – but in a sense it doesn’t exist in the terms in which we use it; its existence is to an extent is an apparition or at least a construction – this becomes a space for mythology and the imaginary.

I was attempting to create an image where the stilt walkers are shown as apparitions of the past roaming the land’s layered history whilst simultaneously embodying its present condition. I wanted to create an image of this fen landscape that shows the layers of its history like a

palimpsest, or a crystallisation of time,³ where change in the land is constant, layering resistance, acceptance and management of cycles of change, like the turning of the soil over and over year on year. In the opening sequence of my film we see a ploughed field, over which the performers are walking on stilts, a way of moving across the waterland pre-drainage; but it also looks like a seascape, so they are traversing a land which is outside of their own time, and laying wicker eel traps on a now drained and ploughed land – the eel traps themselves are objects which transcend the time of pre to post drainage, but now in 2018 there is only one eel catcher left in the that area of the fens.



*COME BRETHEREN OF THE WATER,
AND LET US ALL ASSEMBLE,
TO TREAT UPON THIS MATTER,
WHICH MAKES US QUAKE AND TREMBLE;
FOR WE SHALL RUE IT, IF'T BE TRUE,
THAT FENS BE UNDERTAKEN,
AND WHERE WE FEED IN FEN AND REED,
THEY'LL FEED BOTH BEEF AND BACON.*



TG - It makes me wonder about that specific time of the draining of the Fens that your piece evokes so powerfully with the use of the resistance poem 'The Powte's Complaint' and also in the oral history voice-overs, which refer to that long period of enclosure, and general privatisation of the land. Clearly the draining was plugged in to that history and the very idea of enclosure, only makes sense if you've got land. It's very difficult to imagine what you could do in terms of enclosure, with the sea, and yet...

RG - we do

TG - Yes we don't actually have to imagine because just look at what people do with the sea - for a start we have fish farms, and quadrants of fishing rights, we have fenced up the sea and drawn dividing lines. In the fens there is a sense that the sea is pervasive of this land that has been drained and enclosed and made into a certain kind of capital and yet I wonder...if the sea were to come back to what extent that would change. It's not as if everyone would go back to the way of life people were living in the fens before the drainage, more likely the new techniques and technologies of capitalisation would just be applied to a marshland instead of a peat field.

RG – ...and as you mention division or borders across the sea, I think this is also about a type of perception. Countries do divide the sea across a map, in a measurement of distance but not water, I think once you think about it in terms of the actual material stuff of the world, there becomes a sense of absurdity in this partition, because the material itself is ever changing, seen very clearly with the sea, as the water itself moves so fluidly.

I think in a way that allows one to conceive of the notion of ownership differently, because this fluidity of the sea reveals the fact that it's only notional. This seems particularly pertinent in reflection on the migrant crisis at the moment, where borders at sea are actually changed and people are put into a place of limbo across disputes over responsibility. I felt it was important to draw out some of the narrative around migration, and it was a subject that kept coming up from multiple participants when I was recording the oral histories. The four women I interviewed for this part of the sound track, talk about this long-term migration and how different people have moved in through the Fen Wash, the point at which the land and sea converge, the Fens being an incoming point. I was interested in the dichotomy of a sense of place, which is very localised on the one hand, but still inclusive of others as a part of that identity over centuries.

TG – Yes I thought the way that the voiceovers in your film describe that history is very interesting. Stating that we are a migrant people. But again I was wondering about the specificity in relation to the fens, one of the ladies says *'when there was some kind of trouble, people would escape to the fens'*

RG – ...that lady was our grandmother... (laughter)



*BEHOLD THE GREAT DESIGN,
WHICH THEY DO NOW DETERMINE,
WILL MAKE OUR BODIES PINE
A PREY TO CROWS AND VERMIN:
FOR THEY DO MEAN ALL FENS TO DRAIN,
AND WATERS OVER-MASTER;
ALL WILL BE DRY, AND WE MUST DIE,
'CAUSE ESSEX CALVES WANT PASTURE.*

TG - ...but historically it wasn't just that. There is a post-Second World War paradigm which tries to maintain a division or conceptual difference between the refugee and the migrant: the economic migrant goes to a place where there are jobs to better their economic situation and the refugee flees something from which they need refuge. But of course that distinction becomes more problematic when the thing that is being fled from is an economic disaster. Yet something that seems quite specific about the Fens, all the way back to Roman times and obviously through Hereward the Wake, as a part of that whole mythology; the Fens were a refuge not because they afford great economic opportunities, there weren't those economic opportunities until the draining, but what there was instead was a sense of refuge because of seclusion, no one else could easily get into or survive in the Fens.



RG – Yes, you can see this in some of the lyrics of the Powte’s Complaint, and this idea of a landscape being particularly inhospitable was of great interest to me when researching for the film. The title ‘The Flaming Rage of the Sea’, is taken from what the fenlanders would call the flooding, or they would refer to it simply as ‘The Rage’. This sense of ferociousness and the sea’s ever-present looming threat just beneath the surface, of the water being restrained, held back but still very present in the environment can be seen in the air in the mist and fog. For this reason the mistiness is very important to the film and also because it gives an unstable horizon line. This tension in the restraint of the waters is a way in which the fen landscape is constantly revealing its own construction.

*AWAY WITH BOATS AND RUDDER,
FAREWELL BOTH BOOTS AND SKETCHES;
NO NEED OF TH’ONE OR T’OTHER,
MEN NOW MAKE BETTER MATCHES;
STILT-MAKERS ALL, AND TANNERS SHALL
COMPLAIN OF THIS DISASTER,
FOR THEY WILL MAKE EACH MUDDY LAKE
FOR ESSEX CALVES TO PASTURE.*





Considering how people have had to adapt to that over time, recognising the harm the land could do to them, with the flooding, disease, and location-specific illness such as the ague – a fever from the Fens similar to a type of malaria. This element of the research, along with listening to our grandmother's many stories about Old Granny Wiffin, led to the passage in the film about herbalists. Looking to the local knowledge of plants and particularly at how the same land that produces the disease also produces a plant that is its cure. The land grows this cycle. And of course there being great suspicion of that knowledge and particularly of the women who held that medicinal knowledge, eventually resulting in them becoming ostracised from society and ultimately condemned as witches. I found that interesting as a reflection on a value system whereby some people's knowledge for a time had great value and then there was a cultural shift where it was rejected, as it was seen to be threatening to modernity in some way.

TG – Yes, it strikes me that witchcraft persecution is fundamentally a phenomenon of early modernity. Of course it was partly a religious phenomenon, a particular type of Protestantism which encourages the sharp distinction between true religion and superstition or magic, but that was taking place in the crucible of capitalism. In that 200 year period in early modernity, leading up to the draining of the fens and enclosure.

*THE FATHER'D FOWLS HAVE WINGS
TO FLY TO OTHER NATIONS,
BUT WE HAVE NO SUCH THINGS
TO HELP OUR TRANSPORTATIONS:
WE MUST GIVE PLACE, O GRIEVOUS CASE,
TO HORNED BEAST AND CATTLE,
EXCEPT THAT WE CAN ALL AGREE
TO DRIVE THEM OUT BY BATTLE.*





RG - It's important to acknowledge that the persecution of witches was not just about rejecting a knowledge or being a herbalist, it's also about performing acts which notionally took on supernatural or spiritual affects. In rural communities this perhaps seemed necessary as a response to a land that did things to its inhabitants, that seemed unexplainable or threatening. Performing certain rituals (channelling energy or casting spells) could be seen as a

type of humility towards the potential power or destruction caused by the inhospitality of the land. As with the Whitlesey Strawbear festival seen at the end of the film, where the best ears of corn are kept from the harvest for the bear, and burnt to the ground at the end of the annual festival as a kind of offering back to the land, wishing for a good crop the next year.

RG – In visualising or reflecting on the folk traditions performed in respect of a mutable land that is constantly revealing the reality of rising sea levels and climate change. My intention was also to bring in not just a projected future but also a consideration for a dimension of time, which is, or could be, too late. Deleuze talks about a notion of *filmic time* where something arrives too late, not as a depiction of a mistake in a linear time frame but a dimension of time itself.

‘This something that comes too late is always the perceptual and sensual revelation of a unity of nature and man [...] The ‘too-late’ is not an accident that takes place in time but a dimension of time itself.’⁴

He discusses this in reference to a more direct form of narrative filmmaking, but I was thinking about this within this frame of crystallised time where you have a constant splitting of all possible presents, including the virtual.



TG – Then with a rise of capitalism wanting to deny that vulnerability because those things undermine the notion of assumed ownership and control, as you say.



The crystal-image is the most fundamental operation of time: since the past is constituted not after the present that it was but at the same time, time has to split itself in two at each moment as present and past, [...] one of which is launched towards the future while the other falls into the past... one of which makes all the present pass on, while the other preserves all the past. Time consists of this split, and it is this, it is time that we see, in the crystal.’⁵

My hope is that the film implies the question, in seeing all moments of past and present crystallised together in this representation of the land. Is there a moment or chain of contingent moments already amongst them when we already entered the ‘too late’ dimension of time in respect of turning back climate change?

TG – Yes, your film is incredibly evocative of all those things, but yet in an indirect way. In the face of climate change researchers are talking more and more about the future and constantly being encouraged to perceive of future possibilities what might happen if we cross this or that boundary and setting ourselves boundaries of 2 degrees /



3 degrees etc. But that doesn’t address people’s visceral experience of time, which is not an explicit account of ‘what ifs’, but this alternative much more diffuse feeling of what one might call possibility. It’s not like we actually experience paths forking out in front of us, or that it is even clear when we encounter a moment of choice, and I think one of the things your film draws out is this very visceral experience of uncertainty. Which is an imperative counterpoint. I’m not even sure uncertainty is the right word... how did you describe it a moment ago – a kind of catalyst that is already in the future, it shapes our experience of the present and yet never comes to be present precisely because it’s in the future.

RG – One thing I have found interesting in both visualising an apparition from the past particularly through the use of sound and the voice, is the ability to position elements from multiple time frames creating layered imagery that bores through these sheets of time⁶ in that created world, where future realities can exist to us.

TG – But your film doesn’t do that in a straightforward way like some ‘climate change’ films do, in say something like ‘The Age of Stupid’,⁷ where climate disaster has occurred and we are told the story of our time in reverse from a future position. Your film doesn’t explicitly position us in the future in that way but it gives this sense of the future.

RG – Yes I’m depicting the future not as a separate projection but as a faction that already exists within the crystallised moment of time.

TG – I felt watching your film you give us future still as future, as implied but as yet unknown.



RG – What I was hoping with that was to create a space for thinking, maybe the way we perceive of our relationship and dominance over the land and the way we are currently behaving is something that we can maybe *feel* differently about and therefore behave differently towards, with more humility and synthesis. Instead of always taking on or accepting a capitalist position where we are trying to create new solutions to enable constant extraction from the land.

TG – Yes this ‘too late’ dimension that you discuss is very interesting because it leaves open quite a few conceptual spaces that can plug into this. In terms of climate change, it clearly is too late now to stop climate change because climate change is already happening.

But there is still a debate about ‘too late for what?’ and part of the experience is of this unknown or indeterminacy of ‘too late for what?’

RG – I think something happens internally when you have a notion of too-lateness, not just being one of the cycles of time but in its own dimension of indeterminacy – this slippage into this other dimension of time could be the thing that brakes something – that could be the thing that activates the viewer beyond the notion of activation of the viewer in relationship to the artwork as we see in installation art, but activates in terms of being more activist. The work is not trying to make a single political point or call to action but what I hope there is, is a sense of depth in that layering that provokes our experience of the unknown to be so unsettling that it asks people to question their own behaviour in some way.



TG – I think that's right, but although your film is clearly not a directly activist, political film or a documentary, you are calling for a type of self-questioning, but it seems to me that your film goes beyond that, because it's not just suggesting to a viewer that they might perform some self critique in watching your film, but it allows for a space where our perception of activism itself might also change.

- 1 See, Simon P. James. *The Presence of Nature. A Study in Phenomenology and Environmental Philosophy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), Chapter 3, and Simon P. James. The Trouble with Environmental Values (*Environmental Values* 25, no. 2, April 1, 2016), p. 131-44.
- 2 Claire Bishop, *Installation Art A Critical History* (Tate Publishing, 2005).
- 3 Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2 The Time-Image* (The Athlone Press, 1989).
- 4 *Ibid*, p. 93.
- 5 *Ibid*, p.78-79.
- 6 *Ibid*, p. xii.
- 7 *The Age of Stupid*, (2009) [Film] New Zealand: Dir. Franny Armstrong.

Image credits

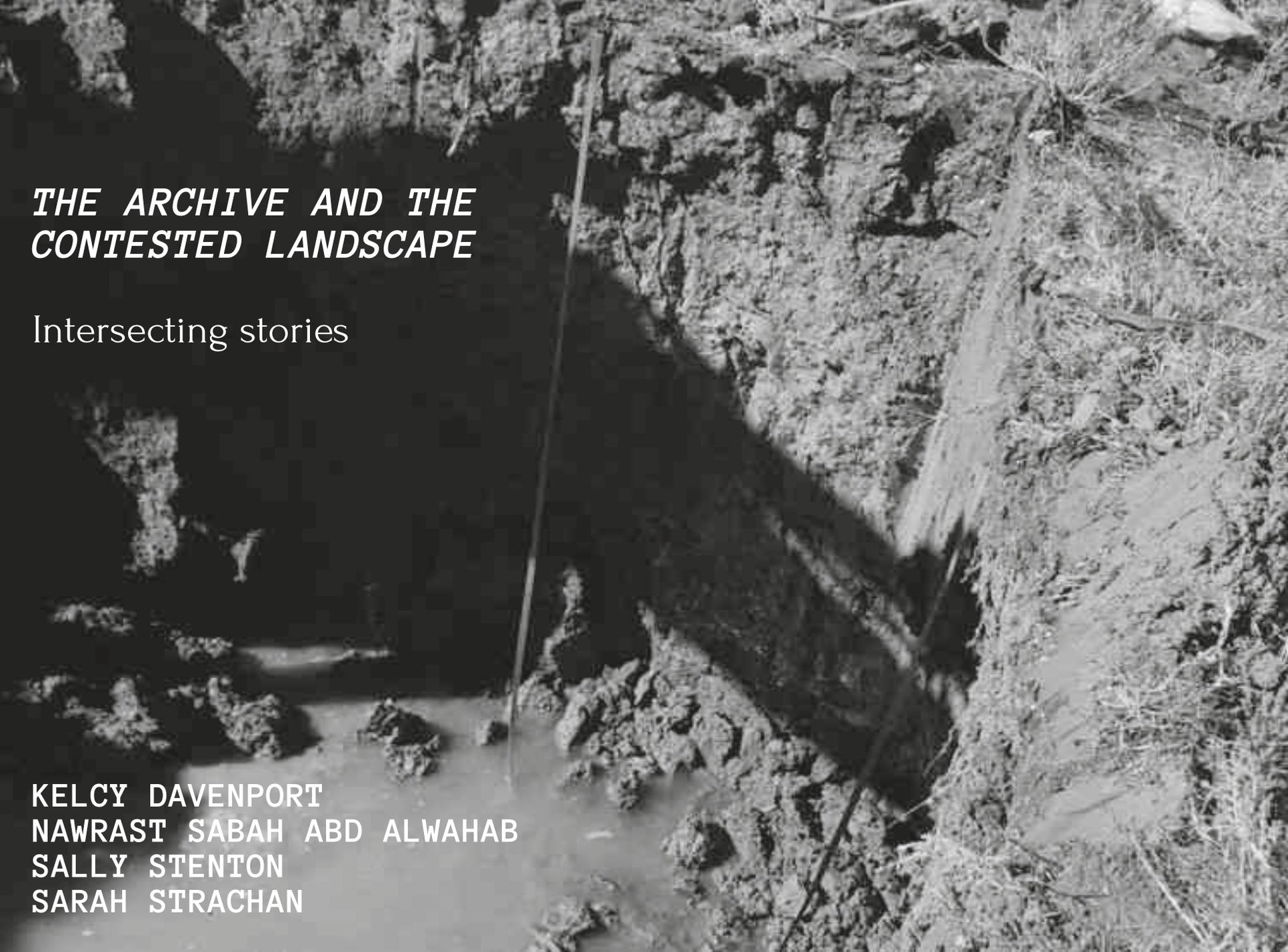
- Image 1: W.22.K78.17042 Stubble Burning at Whittlesford, 1978, showing Mr. Eric Arnold on tractor. Cambridgeshire Collection, Cambridge Central Library.
- Image 2: Family archive photograph, from Tom and Rosanna Grandparent's Farm Circa 1982.
- Image 12: WD.I90.22944 Ancient Fen House on Piles (circa 1790) from W.T. Pike 'East Anglia in the 20th Century', 1912 . Cambridgeshire Collection, Cambridge Central Library.

All Other Images: HD Video Stills from *The Flaming Rage Of The Sea*
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***THE ARCHIVE AND THE
CONTESTED LANDSCAPE***

Intersecting stories

**KELCY DAVENPORT
NAWRASABAH ABD ALWAHAB
SALLY STENTON
SARAH STRACHAN**

Our Record

by Nawrast Sabah Abd Alwahab

When I visited the UK, I brought my suitcase full of soil samples, which equated to bringing an archive of both scientific and human records. Analysing these samples through geo-archaeological methods would tell us the story of a particular ancient period of time and perhaps of unknown peoples who inhabited the land in that period; but before analysing the samples, my collaborators and I can write our own archive of thinking, drilling, challenging and communication and share it among us to create our own records.

When I first thought of the research topic: *The stratigraphy and climate change of Mesopotamian Marshland and some archaeological sites during the Quaternary*, I was thinking of finding a shared point between geology and art, as I learnt that stratigraphy is like a vessel, where we can put all our collected geological information, in order to represent, interpret and visualise the Earth's record. However, over the last three to four million years it is no longer only a record of rock, but of rock-human interaction. So, I choose the Quaternary period, and select the Mesopotamian Marshlands and its surrounding archaeological sites. I make an open choice as I do not yet know the challenges of selecting specific locations in my proposal. What if I cannot get official permission from the Antiquities and Heritage office to drill there? What if there are no roads to reach? What if there is a security issue? And what if I do not have enough time for sampling? In this early period I just ignored the issue of transporting the samples to the UK.

In Iraq, we still have bureaucratic paper processes for requiring and/or demanding anything from any office. It takes a couple of weeks to get permission from the Antiquities and Heritage office in Baghdad to visit and take samples from some archaeological sites, which I listed in my request (Ur, Babel etc.), and I wait another week to get permission from my college to do the fieldwork in both the marshes and the archaeological sites. So, I plan to begin with the nearest marshes to Basrah, Al-Hammar. But how will

I work there? An armed quarrel between some Marsh Arab tribes has started there. I make a plan with one of my professors to go there, but I cancel it. And another plan with one of my friends (Muqhdad), who is originally from one of biggest tribes near the marshes, but he asked me to postpone it. I waited for a couple of weeks to visit the marshes with him as a first reconnaissance trip. Finally, on 23rd October, 2017 we took a boat from the coast close to Basrah University at Qarmat Ali. The punt-man was also an employee of the university; his name is Falah (RIP). His family is also from one of the Marsh Arab tribes. We visited Hareer's Tells, which is a historical, unexcavated area. I found it very interesting as there are so many shards around. I hear some stories from the people there about its history; which are all 'common verbal' stories. Actually, there is only one master sedimentology study in my department's library about Hareer's Tells, and to my knowledge and research, there is no archaeological study yet.

At the end of November I return to work, on 2nd December, I visited the British excavation team, led by Dr Jane Moon in Nashwaa village, where they excavated the Charax Spasinou (Alexander the Great's lost city in Iraq). Jane has already prepared one mud sample from the Charax to be included with my collection of samples.

Finally, on 6th December 2017 I went to Hareer's Tells again with Falah. We saw the heights area of the Tells, where there is a graveyard of children from the village, covered by the broken pieces of pottery all around. We walked around to find a fresh, good open area to dig. There were some houses around, which have been built recently. It looks like a slum, distributed randomly in the area, mostly built from bricks with mortar but without varnish. Some children appeared, and then three or four men came and welcomed us. Falah introduced me to one of them; his name is Abu Haidar. I discovered that we were standing in his backyard. I asked him if I could dig there, promising to refill the hole. He agreed and gave me some more interesting information about this ground. He explained how he suffered through building his house, that wherever he was drilling he found some bricks, pieces of pottery and broken glass vessels. He thought that it may be a wall of brick extending under the channel. As my goal is to study earth-human interaction, I find this area so

important. I recorded the environment of the location and ask Falah to drive me back to the graveyard. We returned and walked around, I was not sure of the location, so we walked further and some men started to come over to us. I introduced myself to them and asked if I could dig where I was standing. They said it was okay, but that if I find anything of value, they will take it. I said that's fine as I keep in mind the 'common verbal' stories.

At this stage, it was important to start digging and preparing the Kubiena tins for the micromorphology samples. Falah managed to find a digger. On 10th December, we start digging in Abu Haidar's backyard. It was really hard and fun at the same time, as we were working surrounded by so many children and men curious of what we might find in the hole. I asked the driver to drill as deep as he can, but four metres down, the groundwater appeared. So I decided to stop drilling and enter inside the hole as quick as I could to take the samples. But as the water was faster than me, and the hole was already deep, I had to hang from the vehicle and ask the driver to lower me down. Falah came down with me for assistance. I start taking two types of samples at each horizon – bulk and Kubiena. I sketched the section and took photos of the elevations. There are so many pieces of shards, bone and plant roots.

When I finished I raised my head up to ask the driver to bring me up from the hole, I realised Abu Haidar and all his children were sitting around the hole's rim looking down inside, they were watching silently, and I had worked without noticing them. All of us were engaged in different ways.

After that, we went to the second section (the graveyard) for digging and sampling. It was afternoon already and the water has again seeped and filled the hole before I complete sampling, so I worked as quickly as I could. Meanwhile a group of men were also sitting around the rim of the hole watching me and Falah inside. Then it was time to say goodbye to all of them. I asked Falah to drive around again to see if we can find another section close to the marshes. I was navigating using maps on my iPad and I gave Falah the directions to another interesting area. It was a clean, green and open field, surrounded by some houses. Falah said that he knew the owner of this field. So we talked with him and took his permission to dig the next morning.

The next day we drilled the third and last section in Hareer's Tells. I faced the same problem, as the water seeped from underground quickly. We drilled more than six metres deep, but merely sampled four and a half metres. This section is pure; there are no artifacts, just fossils and mud.

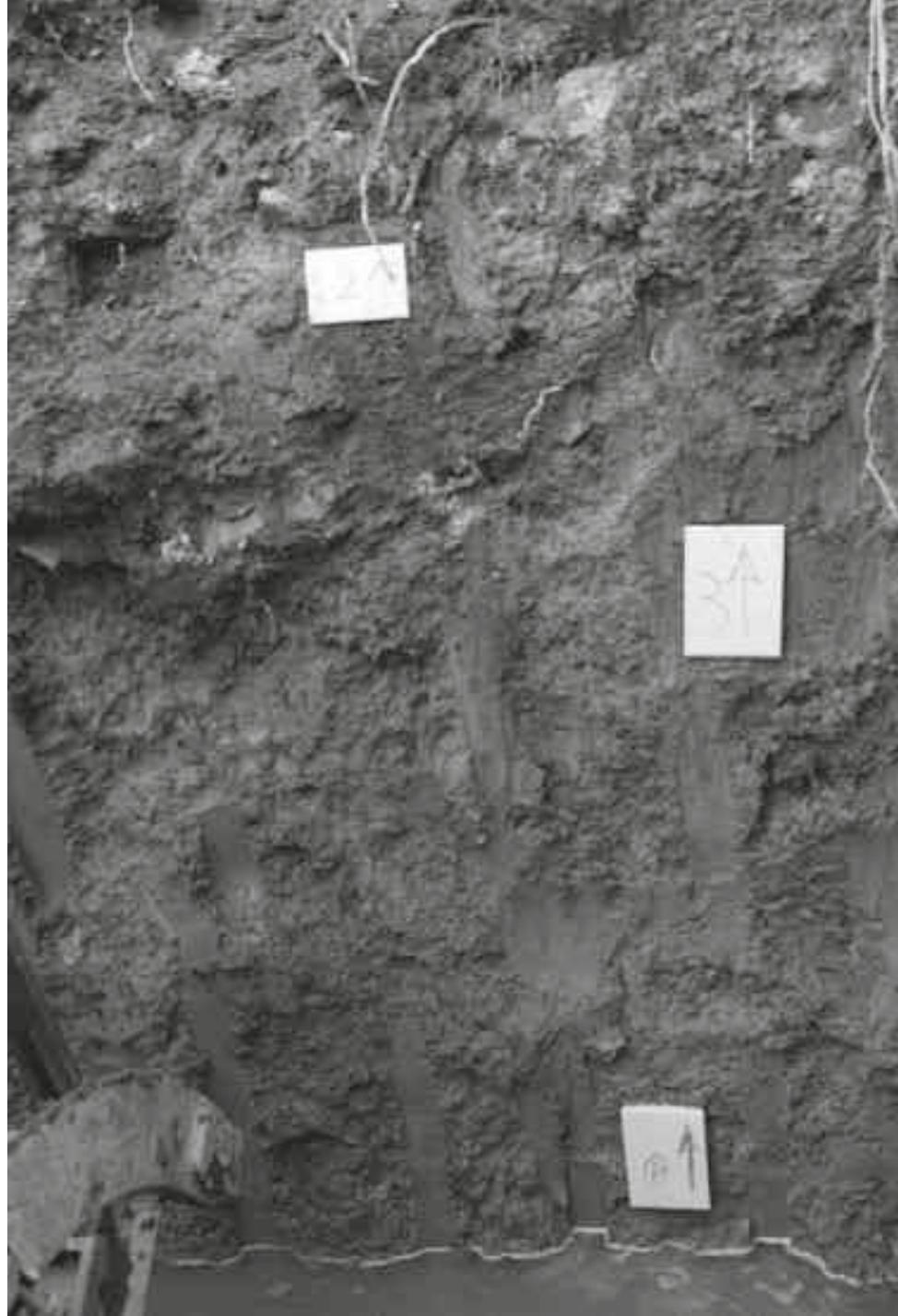
After my fieldwork, I start communicating with Professor Charles French (Charly) in Cambridge. I sent a very short report about the fieldwork and sampling process. My concern was mainly about transporting the samples to his laboratory (The Charles McBurney Laboratory for Geoarchaeology). He suggested sending only six samples for the micromorphology and any number of bulk samples. He also sent me a signed *Letter of Authority* (for the introduction and/or movement of harmful organisms, plants, plant products and other objects for trial or scientific purposes and for work on varietal selections). It was important to have this letter to be able to send my samples. He also asked for my authorising officer to sign this letter. At this point, I was thinking that The British Institute for the Study of Iraq (BISI) would support the costs of the fieldwork and the freightage of the samples to the UK. I sent a message to Dr Jennifer Griggs (coordinator of the BISI). I explained to her that I had undertaken the fieldwork and was ready to send the samples. She informed me that the BISI would only support the freightage once transportation costs are calculated and my UK visa is issued. However, I went to the DHL office in Basrah and took the samples with me. After weighing the samples, the DHL employee told me that it would cost around \$1500. I was shocked and didn't send it. The next week I went to Aramex to see if it will be cheaper. But, they thought that these samples may be not allowed to be transported outside of Iraq. The manager of Aramex suggested that I send him an email with the details of the samples so he could send it to the main office of Aramex to be sure these samples will be allowed to be transported. At this stage I took my samples back with me to think again.

During this period, I discovered that the Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research in Baghdad wrote my name incorrectly on the documents sent to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, consequently the documents were sent with this error to the UK Embassy. So, I travelled to Baghdad twice during December and January to correct this mistake.

I got my documents back in the middle of January and finally, I received my UK Visa on 12th February. By that date the coordinator of the BISI was not sure of paying the costs of the courier services, and I was also not sure if the samples would be allowed to be transported. My flight to the UK had been booked by the coordinator of the BISI, departing on 19th February. So, I took my samples to DHL again to send, but the employee weighed them and calculated the costs with additional fees, and finally he said that it costs \$2000. I only had \$1500. However, I asked him if he knew anyone in the airport and if he can ask if I can take the samples with me. He did call an officer in Basrah Airport and he confirmed that as long as I have an official document from my university, it will be allowed. It was my best moment through this entire journey.

I still had two days before my flight date, but I also had my students' final papers to amend. And above all, I was still worried if the officer in the airport would find the tiny shards in the mud samples. However, I arranged the samples in my suitcase, with a small cotton bag containing my clothes.

In the early morning of 19th February I asked my brother to drive me to the airport and to wait until I finish check-in and boarding. At the first checkpoint, outside the airport, the officer found the samples and asked me to wait until he speaks to the customs officer. He returned after ten minutes and told me that the Customs Director will check the samples himself inside the airport. So I passed this first checkpoint. Inside the airport the main police officer and Customs Director together came to see the samples, they took one sample and ask me to wait. After a while one of them comes back and says that it's okay and I can take the samples with me. Finally, at the boarding section the officer said my suitcase is overweight, he asks if I can take something out. It is the small cotton bag of my clothes that I remove from the suitcase.



The Archive and the Contested Landscape

by Kelcy Davenport

NAWRAST ARRIVES IN CAMBRIDGE – JANUARY 2018

Imagine you are a geologist, a sedimentology lecturer to be precise, coming from Basrah to Cambridge to take up a visiting scholarship to the University of Cambridge. You can only bring one suitcase with you for your two-month stay. You have looked into shipping the earth samples you would like to examine in the laboratory during your visit but the cost proves financially prohibitive. So, you are faced with a dilemma. Do you fill your suitcase with the mud or your personal belongings?

When I meet Dr Nawrast Sabah Abd Alwahab in person for the first time she asks me where she can shop for a few essential items. She tells me of how she filled her suitcase full of (very heavy) mud from Al-Hammar Marshes,¹ bringing only a toothbrush and a change of clothes in her handbag. This may be the practical decision of a scientist, but frankly, I found it rather heroic.

Nawrast's research is focused on *'The stratigraphy and climate change record of the Mesopotamian marshland and certain archaeological sites, during the Quaternary period, with a special interest in moving beyond scientific paradigms to philosophical enquiry.'* Her current plan was to process and analyse the earth samples in the geoarchaeology laboratory via sieve analysis, thin section microscopy, and the investigation of isotopes. I mean, by separating out the variously sized particles of earth in order to find out its mineral composition, by viewing slices of it under a microscope to find out how it was formed, and by identifying the flow of energy through it chemically. The purpose of this was twofold:

- To gain a clearer record of climate changes during the last 8,000 years of human habitation in Iraq and the environmental response.

- To find evidence of the impact of anthropogenic activity on the depositional environments of Al-Hammar Marshes.

I wondered if her scientific research would bring new insights on these fronts and how this knowledge may prove useful to us today or in the future. I asked if I could visit her in the laboratory to document her at work and find out more about the process.

One thing I had come to appreciate since working with Nawrast was the concept of geological time, of moving beyond competing human histories to reading the earth's archive, which held the stories of all life on earth. This helped me to think of everyone and everything as interconnected, rather than as opposed to one another in some way. And I noticed this newfound appreciation of 'deep time' appeared to coincide with my being able to articulate why I personally felt art was the means through which I could be most productive, in terms of political action. Rather than simply responding to the oppressive activities of governments and corporations in a media-driven punch/counterpunch type of way, art seemed to offer opportunities (moments, spaces, approaches) to explore different ways of interacting and co-producing. In this way, time appeared to slow down, to take its own time (as long as it needed to take). In doing so it facilitates our transdisciplinary, cross-cultural, collaboration to unfold through a constant and gentle negotiation of our various perspectives, ideas, interests and contributions.

The suitcase of mud made its way into the laboratory in Cambridge. It was a seemingly low-tech, mechanical set-up: stacks of sieves, a low temperature oven, vices, blades, a sink, various chemicals in tubs with hand-written notes on them, and a grinding machine that needed to be constantly minded. Grubby, hands-on labour is what is required to uncover the contents of the muddy samples of earth. The work is minute and laborious, requiring patience and real tenacity. Waiting weeks for the samples to dry out, sieving the earth through finer and finer meshes, compressing the earth, cutting the glass to precisely 0.4 millimetres then attempting to grind the delicate thin sections, and when they crumble in the lapping machine... starting all over again!

A two-month opportunity to be in the flow, processing the material carefully through the hands, the tools, and the machinery, not knowing what will turn out – or what new insights this collaboration may bring. In this way it was similar to being an artist, I thought – a sensitive handling of the materials through a creative research practice, watching carefully for what they may be about to divulge – a close collaboration between the creative intelligence of the practitioner and the internal logic of the material.²

As it happened, a few things got in the way of the scientific research. Most of the samples could not be dried out and processed within Nawrast's two-month visit. The laboratory and its oven were small and there was quite a queue of materials in front of the mud from the marshes. Much of what could be handled crumbled in the lapping machine day after day. Preparing thin sections is a skill only perfected through practice and Nawrast had no access to such equipment back home. The chemical laboratory is owned by a different department and would require a large and unforeseen funding donation to proceed, which would not be forthcoming. I recall Nawrast somewhat frustratedly reflecting on her expectations for the trip. Why was she here? What could really be achieved during this limited time with limited resources?

THE ARCHIVE AND THE CONTESTED LANDSCAPE SYMPOSIUM – MARCH 2018

Meanwhile, Nawrast and I committed to using our opportunity to be in the same place at the same time to put on a public engagement event together: a symposium to introduce our collaborative research and the emerging theme – *The Archive and the Contested Landscape*. We would focus, at this event, on the archive and contested landscape of the Mesopotamian Plains. The symposium would serve to announce an 'Open Call' for creative responses to the theme, with the intention of producing a multidisciplinary, group exhibition of the same name, in Cambridge and Basrah.³

With some hard work, goodwill, and a bit of luck, we managed to organise the event within a fortnight, a few days before Nawrast's flight home. The British Institute for the Study of Iraq (BISI) provided money through their outreach grant to pay for speakers and refreshments. The Department of Archaeology provided the venue and the Sedgwick Museum of Earth Sciences offered a tour and object-handling session. Happily, we managed to secure the speakers we thought were most appropriate to the theme: artist, Jananne Al Ani, and Sarah Nankivell of Forensic Architecture. On the day, we were delighted to be joined by practitioners from across the disciplines of geology, archaeology, art, English literature, heritage and museum studies, and photography, as well as students, local artists, and members of the wider public.

- Object-handling session – Sedgwick Museum of Earth Sciences

The evening began with a tour of the museum by collections assistant of palaeontology, Matt Riley, and a discussion around two drawers of fossils from Al-Hammar Marshes, which had come to reside at the museum in Cambridge in 1966. These tiny samples, thought to be up to 12,000 years old (Holocene Epoch), had been obtained via borings put down by the then British-owned Iraq Petroleum Company and donated by the geologist William A. Macfadyen. I had made several research visits to the museum to study the fossils back in 2016, writing in my journal:

'I am here as an artist to research the Museum's collection from the Hammar Formation. Working my way through a second drawer of samples I stumble across a series of twelve small packages, made up of heavy folded plain paper, and held together with a rubber band which crumbles apart as soon as I touch it. The packages are scrawled with various notes. I recognise the handwriting as that of geologist, William A. Macfadyen, whose diaries are on display at the museum. The packages, dated 50 years ago, are all intricately folded the same way, in such a manner as to prevent the contents from falling out, [...] On opening this package [...] they look to be

mostly grains of sand and some slightly larger fragments of shells – whilst gently moving them about under the microscope.

Sometime later I create a short film by interspersing footage of the investigation of Macfadyen's twelve packages with static shots of the other specimens shot through the microscope lens. The interplay of still and moving image, the material static and in motion, suggests a dialogue between the present and the past, as the moving target of the artefact is chased around the screen by the black vortex, both seeking it out and threatening to engulf it.

I wonder who MacFadyen imagined he was writing to all those years ago.'

I remember feeling disappointed, at first, on behalf of Macfadyen that it had been me (an artist) who had picked up his research where he had left off. That is, until Nawrast responded by telling me:

'Accordingly, the fact these delicate fossils were found largely undamaged in this location and at these depths, provided evidence that the ancient Tigris-Euphrates-Karun River delta previously extended north-west as far as Amara and Nasiriya, 250 kilometres from the shoreline of the Arabian Gulf today. Subsequently, numerous regional geological surveys, carried out between 1971 and 1981, provide data for different types of geological studies of the Hammar Formation and the stratigraphy of the Mesopotamian Plain.'

Nawrast proceeded to table these studies (including some which were only available in Arabic) by way of updating Macfadyen's research. We heard later from a colleague of his that he had had to stop working at that point due to being almost completely blind. For the first time, I experienced a sense of how research could work, collaborating across generations, disciplines, languages and geographies – working together (with the archives of the earth, human memory, and museum) to discover things, create meaning from

the discoveries, and pass this knowledge on. Nawrast's research, accompanied by the introduction taken from my journal, went on to be published by BISI and was accepted to the museum archives to reside with earlier essays about the fossils by Macfadyen *et al.* Matt told us that until this project began these fossils had not been researched since arriving at the Sedgwick more than half a century ago.

- Jananne Al Ani

Jananne presented her film, *Shadow Sites II* (2011), which is created by images generated by archaeological sites which are thrown into relief by shadows created when the sun reaches its lowest point, making them visible from above. When making the work she had been thinking about Paulo Virilio's writing in *The Aesthetics of Disappearance* (1991), of the strategies of film technology to make bodies disappear and the relationship between this and the television of 'operation desert storm' in the Gulf War. The representation of aerial bombing campaigns that the area was an uninhabited desert, in Jananne's view as someone who had grown up in Iraq, deliberately denied the viewer knowledge of the impact of these assaults on the people who lived there and the reality of the places they lived. She discussed how the notion of the desert as an empty, uninhabited place is an orientalist idea and connects to the narrative of Jewish peoples being invited/sent to live in Palestine, 'a land without a people and a people without a land'.

Shadow Sites II, which explores archaeology using the two technologies of flight and photography, is encountered as an immersive environment at exhibition. This is achieved through an 'overbearing' soundscape, and by building the walls, floor and ceiling to the edge of a large screen so the film fills the entire wall facing the audience. The screen displays images (black and white) of the desert landscape of Iraq marked as it is by the activities of man – fascinating lines, shapes, and patterns suggesting farming, irrigation, warfare, dwellings and more – all explored by a hypnotic swirling movement, circular from right to left, in the manner of a military aircraft surveying the area. The idea is to place the viewer in the position of the pilot. Jananne asked, 'What agency do we have as consumers of these images and how might we look through this material differently?'

- Sarah Nankivell

Sarah discussed how the work of Forensic Architecture considered architecture in the broadest sense, thinking about the importance of space. The spaces where violence has occurred can be digitally reconstructed and synthesised, in order to make use of the data, for justice purposes, holding perpetrators of violence and human rights abuses – often governments – to account. It is thought about as a ‘counter-forensics’ which turns the gaze back onto the state. This is achieved via a ‘forensic aesthetics’⁴ and by using the art exhibition as a means of presenting the findings in a public forum.

Sarah detailed several projects by Forensic Architecture and included a discussion about the way in which the deliberate destruction of heritage sites in Syria and Iraq, by extremist groups, was portrayed in the media. Sarah suggested this was through use of an ingrained and hegemonic discourse based on Western neo-colonial values, that worked to reinforce the authority of experts and states, and to silence alternative or local engagements with heritage. In contrast, Forensic Architecture, recognise that crucial evidence (videos, images, location data, testimony etc.) is generated on an unprecedented scale, by both civilians and participants in conflict, and shared widely across social media platforms. Human rights analysis needs to more fully engage with the challenges of new media and participatory, citizen generated, open-source evidence, Sarah suggested. She concluded her presentation by saying, the way we remember is important not only because of what we might learn from the past, but because it affects how we fight for human rights for the future.

- Kelcy Davenport & Nawrast Sabah Abd Alwahab

Nawrast and I explained how we had embarked on our research collaboration at the intersection of geology and art out of a mutual curiosity for what we might learn from one another in this shared pursuit. Looking for connections and concrete points of departure, we began by seeking out artefacts originating from Iraq which are currently residing

in the University of Cambridge museums. We found many and wondered what an exploration of these objects; connected as they are through shared properties, originary location, and current context, might reveal about the dynamic forces at work in the earth’s landforms and surfaces and how they continue to shape our lives today.

In time, we hoped to weave our research enquiry through artefacts across the museums. For the purposes of this event, however, we wished to leave the museum (inextricably linked, as it is, to the historic and ongoing political entanglement between Iraq and the UK) to one side. Instead, we wanted to contemplate certain terms relating to geology and art by way of looking for common ground. To this end, we put forward three points of departure: Time & Matter, Process & Change, and Archive & Contested Landscape and described what they meant to us in our individual practices. During our discussion two slideshows played on-screen simultaneously: one showing Nawrast on a field trip to Al-Hammar Marshes, one showing the fossils being researched in the museum through the lens of the microscope. And then, one showing Nawrast at work in the geoarchaeology laboratory in Cambridge, one showing the original sites of the borings put down in the 1930’s (when the fossils were extracted) via satellite images taken in 2016.⁵

Throughout the evening a strong overall theme emerged – cooperation between us and the earth, interpreted using our technologies and aesthetic sensibilities, to produce persuasive evidence in pursuit of adjoined concerns – social justice and environmental sustainability. As Nawrast put it to me on the night, *‘we are all on the same side’*.

THE ARCHIVE AND THE CONTESTED LANDSCAPE EXHIBITION – OCTOBER 2018

Our idea was to invite anyone and everyone to get involved by submitting work in relation to the theme. All who applied would be accepted. Attempting to overcome any institutional boundaries which may hinder a working together in the production of knowledge, we did not concern ourselves with notions of 'quality' or 'qualification'. We, the curatorial team, would work to curate the content in whatever way it arrived to produce the intended 'democratic, creative, interdisciplinary research through group exhibition'.

What archives? Which contested landscapes? And, how might they interact?

We provided examples of sub-themes which might include (but not be limited to) issues around:

- Subjectivities, sedimentations, and place
- Histories, reinvestments and multiple readings
- The colonial present and the post-post colonial register
- Crossings, transformations, and utopian drives

The exhibition and accompanying programme of events took place as part of the 11th Cambridge Festival of Ideas across Anglia Ruskin University Cambridge campus, Zion Baptist Church Crypt, and Gallery 9, from 22nd to 28th October 2018. It included the work of more than 50 practitioners, across archaeology, architecture, documentary and experimental film, fine art, geology, illustration, literature, music, performance, philosophy, and photography – brought together to explore (individually and collectively) the dynamic material interplay between archives and contested landscapes.⁶

In putting on this large-scale and multidisciplinary exhibition, what had we achieved together? Some of this is best articulated in the written review by Hannah Cox. *'This exhibition not only explored contested landscapes, but through them brought out the importance of human connections. Through these works we are linked to cultures, war zones and people who we are led to believe are 'them' or 'other'. In exploring our connections, we experience the humanity of people we often dehumanise and challenge the ideas which can lead to contested landscapes.'*⁷

In terms of the research collaboration between Nawrast and myself, I realised, through the exhibition our 'team' had grown. Cambridge-based artists Sally Stenton and Sarah Strachan had collaborated with Nawrast to produce their contributions⁸, combining her practice with theirs and reflecting on a different relationship with Iraq, beyond media-driven narratives. As Hannah Cox said, whilst in the audience during our exhibition symposium – and talking in particular about Sally and Sarah's respective works, *'...through your practice you are connecting the psyche of people in Iraq and the UK.'* I liked this way of thinking about our collective efforts. Making connections and perceiving that interconnectedness, facilitating more democratic and sustainable ways of living together.



Shared water, contested water

by Sarah Strachan

Shared water, contested water was inspired by issues of climate change and contested water in the Middle East's 'Garden of Eden'. Earth as recorder, kiln as creator, clay provides a historical link between human and nature – between the paleoclimate archive and the future demand for water. My first sculptural object was a response to the geographical location of the Al-Hammar Marshes in southern Iraq, the lands between two rivers – the Euphrates and the Tigris.

Shared water refers to integrated river basin management as the best approach to conserving the world's freshwater resources through managing river basins sustainably; contested water to the geo-political issues preventing this in the region. I'm always wary of the dangers of framing a situation with my own perspective (an outsider, looking in, so to speak), so the opportunity to work directly with the clay samples, collected by Dr Nawrast Sabah Abd Alwahab, helped to negate this by providing a deeper connection to the material, its custodians and its origin.

FROM SUITCASE OF MUD TO FREEZER BAG OF DUST

'I was telling Nawrast (curator of our exhibition in Basrah) about your project and she said if you want to use the clay she brought over from southern Iraq to Cambridge earlier this year you can' writes Kelcy Davenport in her email. *'It would seem to draw out a stronger connection between the clay and the contested landscape in your work'* she continues. *'Absolutely'*, I replied. *'That would be amazing'*.

Communications with Nawrast were hampered by connectivity and social media security concerns – providing just a glimpse into the everyday challenges of living and working in Basrah. So whilst the exhibition loomed closer,

with no confirmation that the samples would still be at the geoarchaeology laboratory, my anxiety about letting the curators down was tempered by a sense of situational perspective.

I imagined the clay samples would be large, cylindrical core sections that would require intensive processing, after all Kelcy had talked about Nawrast filling her suitcase full of mud instead of clothes. Would I have time to process the raw clay deposits and experiment with construction? I picked my technicians' brains and watched endless YouTube videos on reclaiming and processing clay. Then, at last contact from Professor Charles French (Charly), the UK custodian of the precious clay samples. He suggested I should meet him in his academic office for the handover. Having tracked down Charly's office in the imposing McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, to my surprise, he handed me a grip seal freezer bag containing 13 mini bags of fine dust. While he was asking me about what I had planned for the samples, I began weighing up the situation. On the downside – a lot less clay than I'd imagined, on the upside – beautifully pulverised and sieved, I thought. I described my plans to use the samples to make a clay vessel, at which point he enquired: *'Did Nawrast tell you where the samples came from... they're alluvial deposits'* he continued. *'Probably mainly limestone'* he suggested. *'Have you done any chemical analysis?'* I asked. *'No, not yet but I doubt it'll be any good for making pots, you might be able to add it to a glaze'* he replied. Just as I was leaving he added *'If you have any left can I have it back because of its scientific value'*. *'Sure, no problem'* I responded. Even more precious dust than I'd thought.

As I bundled the samples in my rucksack, I was engulfed by waves of doubt and so many questions: Was this even clay? Where did the suitcase full of mud go? Why hadn't they analysed the samples? How was I going to make a pot out of this dust? And return any of the valuable dust for scientific research? What if it didn't go to plan? What if I failed? What was my back up plan? Maybe I should play it safe and blend it with some commercial clay? Or make it into a glaze, as Charly suggested?

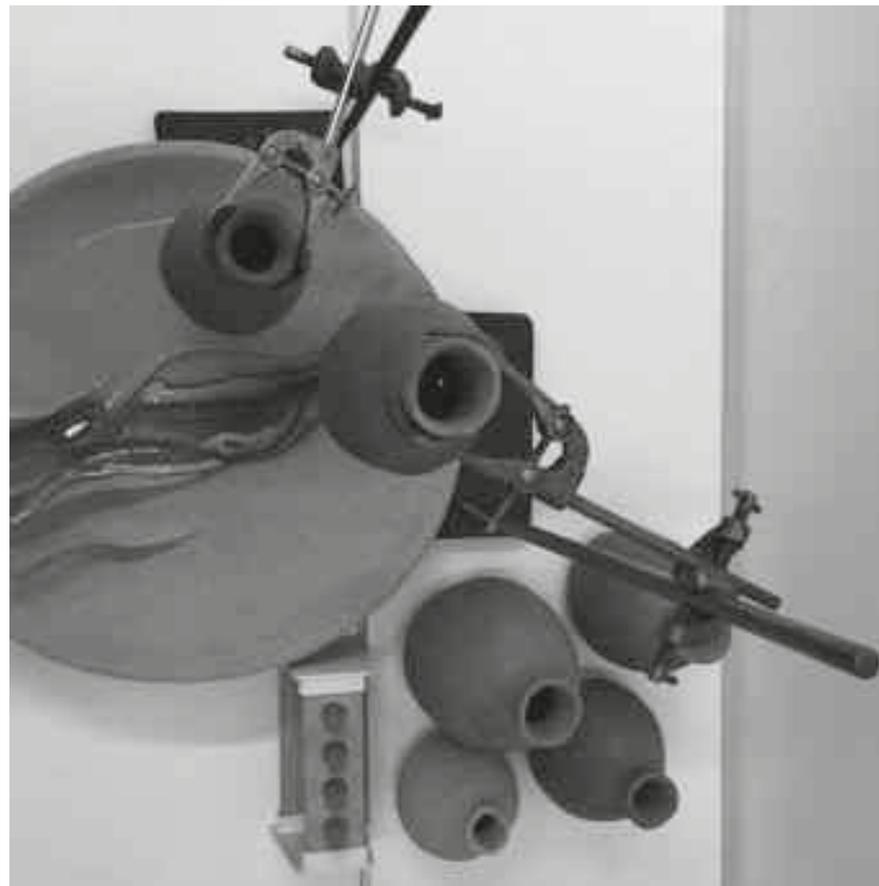
FROM DUST TO VESSEL

As an artist I think through making, so as the dust to vessel process began, I started making pots from terracotta clay, fashioning a kind of prototype using primitive methods sympathetic to the Marsh Arab's baked pottery of Mesopotamia. A *hib* is a large terracotta vessel used for filtering polluted water and I started experimenting with different additions to the clay body to increase its porosity. As I researched further, I began to develop an uncanny affinity with the village potters (*fakhkhar* in Arabic), women usually of middle age, who are acknowledged to have special talent in making pottery.

Mixing the carefully separated samples together in a glaze bowl felt like I was committing some kind of crime against geological science, but I kept just a thimble full of each sample back in the name of research. Once immersed in water, the particles swell, disintegrate and 'slake down'. The slurry poured out onto a plaster bat to dry and then wedged into a workable material. To my amazement it passed the coil test for clay content and I quickly fired off an email update with photographic evidence, a kind of message of hope, to Nawrast and Charly. Next came the pinching and coiling, a whole day compressing and smoothing the particles into alignment and another fighting the cracks as it dried out. Then on one Thursday morning, it went into the kiln for firing and we waited. Friday came and went and the kiln still hadn't cooled down enough to be opened. It was a long, nail-biting weekend but I spent the time wisely on my exhibition back up plan – a photo book, documenting the process from dust to vessel, in case the precious cargo exploded or vaporised in the kiln. To my relief, on Monday morning a light-weight, peach-hued vessel graciously emerged from the kiln – perfectly intact.

Responding to the unrest in southern Iraq over poor government services, corruption and a shortage of potable water, I focused on the clay vessels as a basic method of water filtration and incorporated them into an assemblage of objects – *Shared water, contested water*.

Working with such a precious and challenging material acknowledged my confidence as a potter. The work, I hope serving as a tribute to the material, its custodians and its origin.



If the cloud allows

by Sally Stenton

...and If the cloud allows

On 16th October 2018 we walked in a circle in two places at the same time, treading on the earth and gazing at the same moon. We traced and repeated our circular motion on the surface of the earth, in Basrah and in Cambridge.

I have been asked to tell the story of *If the cloud allows*. There are many converging influences and our human part appears insignificant in relation to the broader ecological context that the project touches. The title of the work alludes to natural and digital processes beyond our control and it has made me conscious that in talking about the work I place myself at the centre, although the experience of it tells me that I am just one of many connectors in many connected stories.

The walks would not have been conceived without the 'Open Call' for *The Archive and Contested Landscape* that prompted the proposal, and through this the connection with Dr Nawrast Sabah Abd Alwahab in Basrah, who enabled it to happen. For Nawrast her fascination with cyclicity in geology gave her a powerful sense of resonance with the idea.

A previous project *Stone Paper Cloud*⁹ gave birth in my mind to *If the cloud allows*. This collaboration with archaeologist Dr Augusta McMahon and computer scientist Professor Ann Copestake explored the digital presence and physical absence (from the Aleppo National Museum) of a Bronze Age clay tablet.

Amongst the many unanticipated outcomes of *Stone Paper Cloud* was a walk in Cambridge between Archaeology and Computing. When I examined a map of Aleppo I found an uncanny overlay. I began to trace the Aleppo route onto the Cambridge walk and identified a number of portals or intersections between the two places where people might step from one place to the other. I was fascinated by the possibilities of transporting our sensory selves to a different place with the thinking body in a way that is not possible via the computer screen. On the reverse of the

overlaid maps that I created as postcards were the words: '*One day I will walk in Aleppo and think of Cambridge*'. Unable to contemplate being able to do the walk in Aleppo at that time, I had become conscious of the moon as a common element in the experience of being in both places. This thought stayed with me.

The opportunity to do a project connecting Cambridge and Basrah sparked the idea of a simultaneous walk in both places with a view of the moon. I made no particular connection between Aleppo and Basrah apart from being conscious of how images of conflict have dominated UK media coverage of both places and obscured the lived experience. *If the clouds allows* served as an antidote to these partial and distorted impressions.

It had occurred to me that walking in a circle would be like drawing the shape of the moon with our steps. My conversations with Nawrast explored the deeper significance of what I was proposing; how the circular movement might be a metaphor for cycles of time, rhythms of the earth, the cyclical nature of evolution and the phases of the moon and its gravitational pull. The embodiment of these ideas by people walking in two places with a view of the same moon places our relationship to one another in the context of ecological union; it humbles us and endows a value on our connection that is hard for us to express in words.

Dr Matthew Bothwell (Matt) from The Institute of Astronomy in Cambridge joined our discussion and talked about the origin of the moon as part of the earth. We were trying to extrapolate from scientific theory to enable something to be felt, to go beyond the transfer of knowledge and cognitive understanding, taking a complex interdisciplinarity and resolving it into a simple act of participation.

Nawrast wondered how walking might be considered to be art and we settled on a shared understanding of it as a 'philosophical experience'. The prospect of an unfamiliar

activity such as this making complete sense to people from very different cultures, was in hindsight unlikely, but art provokes, at times, a naïve courage. Nawrast was excited that people were connecting with the idea. On the day she found the place to walk, she bought some flowers from a nearby shop and the lady she spoke to said she would join us for the walk. Her name was Hanan and she brought a bouquet with her that was placed in the centre of the circle.

When I submitted the proposal, I realised that it might not be possible to make it happen. It was precarious in so many ways; the internet and electricity cuts, the weather and political unrest all threatened, but also facilitated the process. There was a necessity to let go of fixed objectives, to be patient and embrace uncertainty and all this fed into the work in challenging, but constructive ways.

The date and time were prescribed by the position of the moon and it was only two days beforehand that Nawrast was overjoyed to have finally found a place to do the walk. For Cambridge, Matt had suggested a location a couple of miles from the city centre where the view would not be obscured by buildings. The two circles were traced out with sand beforehand and at 7:00pm in Basrah and 5:00pm in Grantchester, Cambridge we began walking simultaneously.

Nawrast and I, in our introductions, invited people to focus on the sensation of treading on the earth and gazing upwards towards the moon. We walked for 20 minutes; a total of 26 people, a similar number in each place. We were very fortunate to have filmmaker, Mohammedali Albatat, documenting the walk in Basrah.

Afterwards we wrote postcards. The first two examples have been translated by Nawrast from Arabic:

'Welcome my friend. I share my experience with you and I am so excited and I love this way of communication between peoples. It's a telepathy.'

'The moon circle was gathering us, and this beautiful chance. But the humanity and this experience are what connect us.'

'Earth beneath my feet, beneath your feet. The moon above, for you, for me. An enduring connection.'

'Almost a religious experience. Moving to think of those in Basrah gazing at the same moon.'

And Nawrast said:

'On my own card I have written that I feel as if I got victory against all the clouds in my life. And whatever our dreams, could be simple or great, the most important thing is to contest and work to make it come true.'

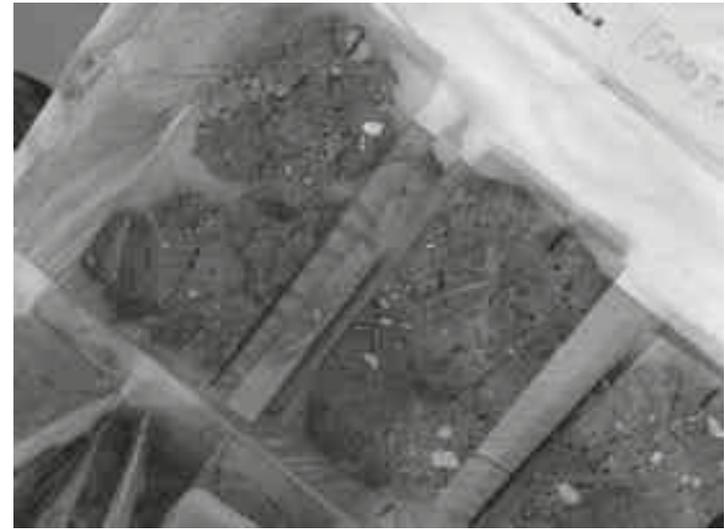
It was not only ideas of cyclicity that connected Nawrast's ideas with mine. The underlying questions about the ways in which digital spaces impact on our humanity were salient for both of us and Nawrast conveyed it most poetically when she talked about the walks embodying a 'coming to be too human in the ages of the cloud'.



Geology of Al-Hammar Marshes (a Virtual Museum)

by *Kelcy Davenport*

Our aim for 2019 and beyond is to try to redress the balance of our research collaboration, by attracting more contributors – geologists, archaeologist and artists from Basrah hopefully – through continuing to develop our research enquiry at the intersection of geology and art. Our intention is to create a virtual museum of the geology of Al-Hammar Marshes in southern Iraq. In bringing a deeper knowledge from this globally significant natural archive to interact with competing narratives of contemporary events, potentially, this research could be a source of education and inspiration for a diverse audience – particularly in thinking around problems of fossil fuel and water scarcity, climate change, and the many resulting social and environmental issues. This information, animated by a virtual museum, may facilitate a more immediate and accessible sharing of this knowledge than a large-scale earth sciences museum with an average 100-year cataloguing backlog is able to do. This stage of the research will be opened up to include a number of creative partnerships between practitioners, from a variety of disciplines, in Basrah and Cambridge.



Our approach to this continuing interdisciplinary research project embodies a ‘no-borders’ attitude. Collaboration with people, institutions, land, the raw materials we experience – past, present and future – as an acknowledgement of ‘shared resources’, attempting to impact the ways in which we may feel, think and act.

Over time, our working relationship¹⁰ has developed along lines of mutual trust, and a sense of neighbourliness, springing from an open generosity to learn and to teach. We continue to make way for one another’s contributions and ideas, and support them by bringing our particular knowledge and abilities into play. Sometimes this casts me in the role of editor (as the native English speaker), sometimes this casts Nawrast in the role of senior researcher, advising me on how I might try to synthesise my ideas. At times our research has produced more scientific outputs, at others, more artistic. Mostly it serves to foster among us greater understanding of different ways of looking at things, via the inclusion of different points of view. Through geological perspectives I have broadened my own thoughts about sustainability to think beyond a human-centric world to one in which the earth and planetary forces are protagonists, stressing a reciprocal relationship of care.

1 Since 2016, The Mesopotamian Marshlands, with their unique
environmental and cultural components, are listed as a UNESCO World
Heritage Site. Through our research collaboration we aim to build on
this opportunity to discover and conserve the marshes.

2 Barbara Bolt discusses Heidegger's notion of 'handlability' in *The
Magic is in the Handling*, Chapter 2, *Practice as Research: Approaches
to Creative Arts Enquiry*, I.B.Tauris, New York, 2009.

3 For various reasons, the Basrah exhibition had to be put on hold,
however, Sally Stenton's *If the cloud allows* took place in both cities
simultaneously in October 2018.

4 As illuminated in Mengele's *Skull: The Advent of a Forensic Aesthetics*
(Thomas Keenan and Eyal Weizman, Sternberg Press, Frankfurt, 2012).

5 Images courtesy of Artists Activists.

6 <https://thearchiveandthecontestedlandscape.wordpress.com>

7 [https://ruskinjournal.com/2018/11/09/cambridge-film-festival-the-
archive-and-the-contested-landscape-review/](https://ruskinjournal.com/2018/11/09/cambridge-film-festival-the-archive-and-the-contested-landscape-review/)

8 *If the cloud allows* (Sally Stenton, 2018) and *Shared Water, Contested
Water* (Sarah Strachan, 2018).

9 *Stone paper Cloud* took place in 2015 as part of *Art Language Location*
and also received an award from *Cambridge Festival of Ideas*. It began
when I inputted the search criteria 'Bronze Age tablet' on a digital
tablet and found an image of a clay tablet that resembled its digital
namesake. The project included the treading of clay by myself and
Professor of Computing, Ann Copestake in the courtyard of Cambridge
University Computer Laboratory to create clay tablets to be inscribed
by laser with a computational analysis of the cuneiform language
on the Bronze Age tablet. Ann was one of the participants in *If the
cloud allows*. For more info: <https://stonepapercloud.tumblr.com>
<https://www.sallystenton.com/projects/stone-paper-cloud>

10 In the first instance between Nawrast and myself, and now, between all
of us engaged in this creative research collaboration.



Image Credits

Title Image: Nawrast Sabah Abd Alwahab, research image. Location: Southern extend of Hammar
Marshes, Basrah, Iraq. (30.66889°N 47.64436°E), December 11, 2017.

Image 1: Nawrast Sabah Abd Alwahab, research image. Location: Hareer Tells, Basrah, Iraq.
(30.60867°N 47.69442°E), December 10, 2017.

Image 2: Kelcy Davenport, research image. Location: The Charles McBurney Laboratory for
Geoarchaeology, Archaeology Department, McDonald Institute, Cambridge University, March 9, 2018.

Image 3: Sarah Strachan, *Shared Water, Contested Water*, (2018) installation view.

Image 4: Sally Stenton, *If the cloud allows* (October 16, 2018)

Location: Cambridge, UK. Documentation image courtesy of Chis Stenton

Image 5: Sally Stenton, *If the cloud allows* (October 16, 2018)

Location: Basrah, Iraq. Documentation image courtesy of Mohammedali Albatat

Image 6: Kelcy Davenport, research image. Location: The Charles McBurney Laboratory for
Geoarchaeology, Archaeology Department, McDonald Institute, Cambridge University, March 9, 2018.

Image 7: Sarah Strachan, *Shared Water, Contested Water*, (2018)

Kelcy Davenport is an artist, researcher and associate lecturer, Cambridge School of Art.

Nawrast Sabah Abdalwahab is a geologist and lecturer at University of Basrah, Iraq.

Sally Stenton is an artist, studying MRes at Royal College of Art, London.

Sarah Strachan is an artist and fine art student at Cambridge School of Art.

THE END OF THE BORDER

(OF THE MIND)

STEFANO CAGOL

WITH M.I FRANKLIN,
LUBA KUZOVNIKOVA,
ALESSANDRO CASTIGLIONI
AND IARA BOUBNOVA

may **B**e necessary but what is
 n **O**T necessary is the
 inc**R**easing violence
 perpetrated **D**aily in visceral ways
 through the brut**E** strength
 of the world's remilitarizing fo**R**ces of order and their
 newfangled cyber(in)securitie**S**

borders can ha**V**e value
 without v**I**olence to
 human**S**
 the env**I**ronment or other species
 for any **B**order is an
 historica**L** and political endeavour
 less an aesthetic proj**E**ct

but we need art**I**sts to work with/out
 borders to push back agai**N**st injustice to
 make **V**isible the secret powers of
 v**I**olence to
 human**S**
 the env**I**ronment and other species a
Barrier is a
 wal**L** not a
 bord**E**r

history shows that w**A**lls can fall
 while borde**R**s will fail over
 time, the only constan**T**

Upon reflection of the social dimension of sustainability it becomes important to talk about borders. Sustainability can be described as the ability to maintain equilibrium within a system and in the relationships between systems, such as between the natural system and the anthropic system when concerning ecology, but a relationship is between one side and the other of a border.

BORDERS PLAYGROUND

In 2013 I accepted an invitation from the collective Pikene på Broen to the Barents Art Triennale to make a project in response to the title 'public space as a playground'. The resulting work was *THE END OF THE BORDER* (of the mind)¹. In the piece I wanted to test the relation between the two sides of border, using only a beam of light. In the past five years the notions I was exploring in the work have become even more pertinent and urgent. If sustainability and borders are a matter of relationships and equilibrium, dialogue is a central factor and therefore I have decided to base this paper in dialogue, with the curators and critics with whom I shared the process of research around borders during the development of the project *THE END OF THE BORDER*.

Luba Kuzovnikova², the artistic director of Pikene på Broen who invited me to the Barents Art Triennale, describes the project as follows: 'In his van, that housed a power generator and a beacon that was able to emit 15 kilometre long beams of light, Cagol explored borders and their fate by the ephemeral medium of light – until he reached *THE END OF THE BORDER* (of the mind) in Kirkenes'. Kirkenes is in the Arctic, 'in the northernmost county Finnmark, where Norway meets Russia and Finland'. She continues with an overview of the trip³ which I completed with the mobile station described above, performing the ray of light in different meaningful locations from the Alps to Kirkenes: 'Stefano Cagol's next journey stretched from the Italian Dolomites up to the Barents borderland, from the South to the High North of Europe – in March 2013 when the Polar Night was about to give up allowing the Polar Day to grow'. First of all, I projected the light over the Vajont dam in the

Italian Alps in Casso, a high, empty dam that caused a huge tragedy as a landmark of the Italian 20th century. The other official stops were in Oslo, where the Italian ambassador held a reception to welcome my project, and marked the final destination. Along the way I switched on the beacon many times un-authorised – over the fields, crossing frozen lakes and fjords. 'From Casso the expedition moved further up to Oslo where Cagol was beaming his light across the downtown over the Royal Palace, from Voksenkollen and Ekebergåsen', Luba writes and then recalls the interventions of *THE END OF THE BORDER* in the Arctic: 'In Kirkenes Cagol went with the light all over the town and the area: in the harbor, across the town from the highest points, in the open-pit mines of Bjørnevatn, over the fjords, by the Norwegian-Russian border checkpoint Storskog-Borisoglebsk and from the dam crossing the border river Pasvik'.

Luba's story about my project arrives to the apex concerning what happened when I decided to cross the border with Russia:

'Cagol's idea was to cast the light beams over to the nowadays friendly Russian side of the river from within Norway [...] We informed the Norwegian border authorities about our symbolic artistic gesture, and they were happy to facilitate it, but decided to inform their Russian counterpart about the planned action. And got a definite rejection.'

I anticipated such reactions and rejections: here is the most absurd one. The Russian authorities declared that the ephemeral beam of light cannot cross the border.

Not this untouchable light.

This was the clearest evidence that borders still exist and, that invisible lines can be as strong as high walls.

Luba concluded with some reflections following this fact:

'Reaching the end of the border can be read as physically coming to the end of the border between Norway and Russia before it enters the Barents Sea and dissolves into the Polar Ocean

– the conventional border signifying geographic boundaries, political divisions, disputed lines between West and East, Schengen and non-Schengen, NATO and non-NATO.

Enlightening the end also means declaring the death of borders. But exactly such interventions into public space become a kind of a reality-check that makes you forget about utopias about no-border worlds. [...] For Stefano Cagol, the journey in his van outweighed with the beacon became also a physical exercise and psychological process bordering on existential limits – the more northwards he moved crossing bridges and mountains and changing winter tires to studded tires, the stronger and deeper the snow storms and winds he would face – and all that allowed him to create the whole series of light energy cutting through various shades of darkness either in the shape of crispy clean lines, or diffused streams due to heavy snow. Always ending abruptly out in the distance leaving us with room for our own trajectories.’

ARRIVING TO THE BORDER

I have explored the topic of the border and methods of travelling as art practice in several of my projects. Alessandro Castiglioni⁴ discusses *THE END OF THE BORDER* in the context of my research following this common thread:

‘Starting from the ‘icon’ of the flag in 2006, Cagol began to focus on the practice of the journey as an instrument of knowledge. The journey itself, understood as ‘moving’ but also as ‘crossing’, prompted the artist to develop a precise practice of dissemination of his work to introduce him to a direct knowledge of locations, people, experiences. This fluid mobility corresponds to a series of research projects that stress the relationship – already clarified – between communication – politics – ecology. Examples of this are the *Bird*

Flu Vogelgrippe project from 2006, devoted to the panic generated by avian influenza, *The End of The Border (of the Mind)*, which prompted Cagol to trace impalpable light rays between natural landmarks and geopolitical boundaries, from the Alps to beyond the Arctic Circle, and the more recent *The Body of Energy (of the Mind)*, in which the artist crossed Europe, from Norway to Gibraltar, from Berlin to Naples, seeking to take up, through the use of an infrared camera, the electrical, social, cultural energies used or dispersed in the various locations and contexts that the artist, in his nomadic travelling, encounters and discovers.

It is therefore clear that the issue of the border, like that of ecology, is constant in Cagol’s most recent research.’

THE END OF THE BORDER has taken the cue from my previous installation *Light dissolution (of the borders)*⁵ A project I realised at the opening of Manifesta 7 in 2008. On that occasion the installation was conceived as ray of light not travelling, but moving horizontally to –metaphorically– ‘cancel the borders’. Iara Boubnova⁶ wrote about this previous project:

‘During the most ambitious event of contemporary art in the history of the region of Trentino South Tyrol, Manifesta 7 in 2008, Cagol created a majestic light installation over the city. *Light Dissolution (of the borders)* is meant to underscore the artificiality of man-made separation: ‘The light draws lines impossible to be held in the hands, as the borders between nations and cultures are.’ (Stefano Cagol on *Light Dissolution (of the borders)*) A 7000 Watt beacon is at the same time outlining and transgressing the border between the provinces of Trentino and South Tyrol, between the Italian and Germanic cultures, languages, and traditions whose separation persists in spite of the clever political management of diversity. The artist uses the light ray to surmount the stubborn persistence of mental differences.’

Talking about artificial barriers makes me think about another project of mine, because I never consider the course charted, but more the progression and opening out of new paths. I recall *Termo. Terminus. Grenzstein* (2015), a fake rock as boundary stone. In the almost an Eden-like Alpine valley of the Dolomites where the artwork was installed, there is a legend of the imaginary world of King Laurin, where boundaries exist, but they are as thin and soft as silk threads.

While writing, I'm working on a new project titled *The Walls Book* (2018) for the Off Biennale Cairo. The wall is taken as the extreme symbol of the border. Both the impassable barriers and the invisible borders on maps are drawn by the most powerful one, built up against the poorest one, try to force the balance, to write a preferred history, to underline the prominence. I selected a series of images of border barriers around the world – for example in Cyprus, Belfast, Tijuana, Israel – I modified these images through an extreme black and white making the specific walls not more recognisable, but abstract symbols of division. The walls are printed on posters and hung on walls in public spaces in different areas of Cairo, reaching a very wide and diverse audience.













- 1 Available at <http://www.endofborder.com>
- 2 Luba Kuzovnikova, 'Cagol the Barents Explorer' in *Stefano Cagol. Works 1995 / 2015*, (Mart, 2016).
- 3 Map available at https://www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?mid=1Hu6WuUTk2_RXI5e0YfZ82oE1PAs&hl=it&usp=sharing
- 4 Alessandro Castiglioni, 'Causes, Effects and Complex Systems' in *Stefano Cagol. Works 1995 / 2015*, (Mart, 2016).
- 5 This project later won the 2nd Terna Prize for Contemporary Art #2.
- 6 Iara Boubnova, 'To communicate means to get through' in *Stefano Cagol. Public Opinion*, (Charta, 2011).

Image credits

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