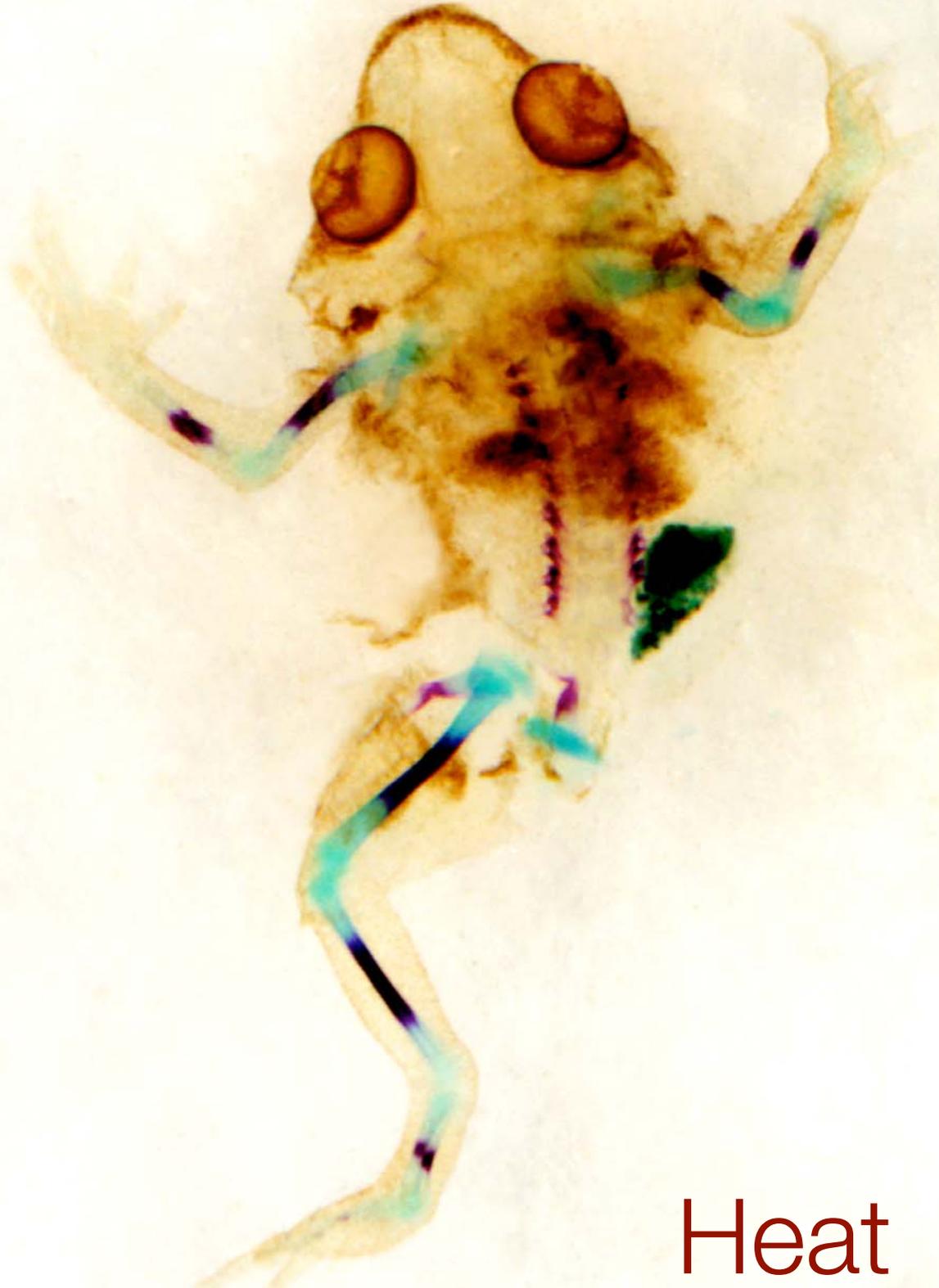


ANTENNAE

Issue 10 - Summer 2009

ISSN 1756-9575



Heat

Max Andrews The Whole Truth *Brandon Ballengée* Beyond Classic Field Biology: Batrachian Deformities
Maja and Reuben Fowkes Towards the Ecology of Freedom *Julian Montague* Stray Shopping Carts London
Fieldworks Super Kingdom *Todd Gilens* In and Out of Place *Julian Mathews* Maintaining a Green News
Agenda *David Buckland* Cape Farewell: the Ultimate Journey *John K Grande* The Uncultivated Landscape:
Patrick Huse *Max Eastley* Imagining the Arctic *Heather Ackroyd and Dan Harvey* Ackroyd and Harvey's
Grass *Linda Williams* Heat Art *Orienté* *Objet* *Kit* *Ecosysteme- Animalite* *Geralyn Pezanoski* Mine *Gregory*
Pryor Mausoleum

ANTENNAE

The Journal of Nature in Visual Culture

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EDITORIAL

ANTENNAE ISSUE 10

This issue of Antennae is fully dedicated to climate change. *Heat*, pieces together a selection of artists' responses to climate changes as experienced in different geographical, social and cultural realities. In doing so, we have tried to evenly divide our attention through a range of issues related to and departing from global warming.

The issue continues to focus on the "botanical side of things" with the work of Heather Ackroyd and Dan Harvey whose collaborative work includes installation, sculpture, landscape design, photography, performance, and film, and frequently reflects both architectural and scientific concerns. With them, we explore the use of grass as artistic medium and their long-lasting commitment to Cape Farewell, a UK based arts organisation funded by David Buckland, that has brought together leading artists, writers, scientists, educators and media for a series of expeditions into the wild and challenging High Arctic. Together they map, measure and are inspired by this unique environment and have endeavoured to bring home stories and artworks that tell how a warming planet is impacting on this wilderness.

Cape Farewell offers us here the opportunity to explore the wonders and issues currently involved with the Arctic, in this case through the work of Patrick Huse, here interviewed by John Grande, and Max Eastley an artist whose work combines kinetic sound sculpture and music to produce a unique art form. Since the late 1960s. Eastley has been fascinated by the relationship of chance to music and art, and in environmental forces such as wind and water.

In its challenging gathering of different voices and perspectives from around the world, the issue looks at the work of artist Brandon Ballengée, whose practice bridge the gap between biology and art as he combines a fascination with amphibians, fish and insects with techniques of fine art imaging. Through the study of young batrachians, Ballengée has been documenting the decline of this class through the analysis of 'bitterly beautiful' deformities. From woodlands to the heart of the city, our issue looks at Super Kingdom, the latest project by London Fieldworks; the taxonomical system invented by Julian Montague for "stray shopping carts" and the urban environmentally conscious art of Todd Gillens. A more direct focus on animals is brought back in place by an extensive interview with Art Orienté Objet, whose work has been concerned with the environment, trans-species relationships, and the questioning of scientific methods and tools, and our relationship to the environment since 1991; and an exclusive interview with Geralyn Pezanoski, director of MINE, the powerful story about the essential bond between humans and animals told against the backdrop of hurricane Katrina, one of the worst natural disasters in U.S. history. This issue ends with the work of Gregory Pryor, an artist committed to raise awareness of botanical extinction by turning a gallery at the Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts into a big, black Solander box, its walls lined with thousands of black ink sketches of extinct Western Australian flora.

Giovanni Aloï

Editor in Chief of Antennae project

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Heat - Art and climate change brought together the work of 22 Australian and international artists, and collaborators, for a sensory experience of climate change through paintings, photography, soundscapes, installations and interactive media. It is the first international exhibition on this subject in Australia and will explore issues of degradation, global warming, over consumption, extinction and man's impact on nature.
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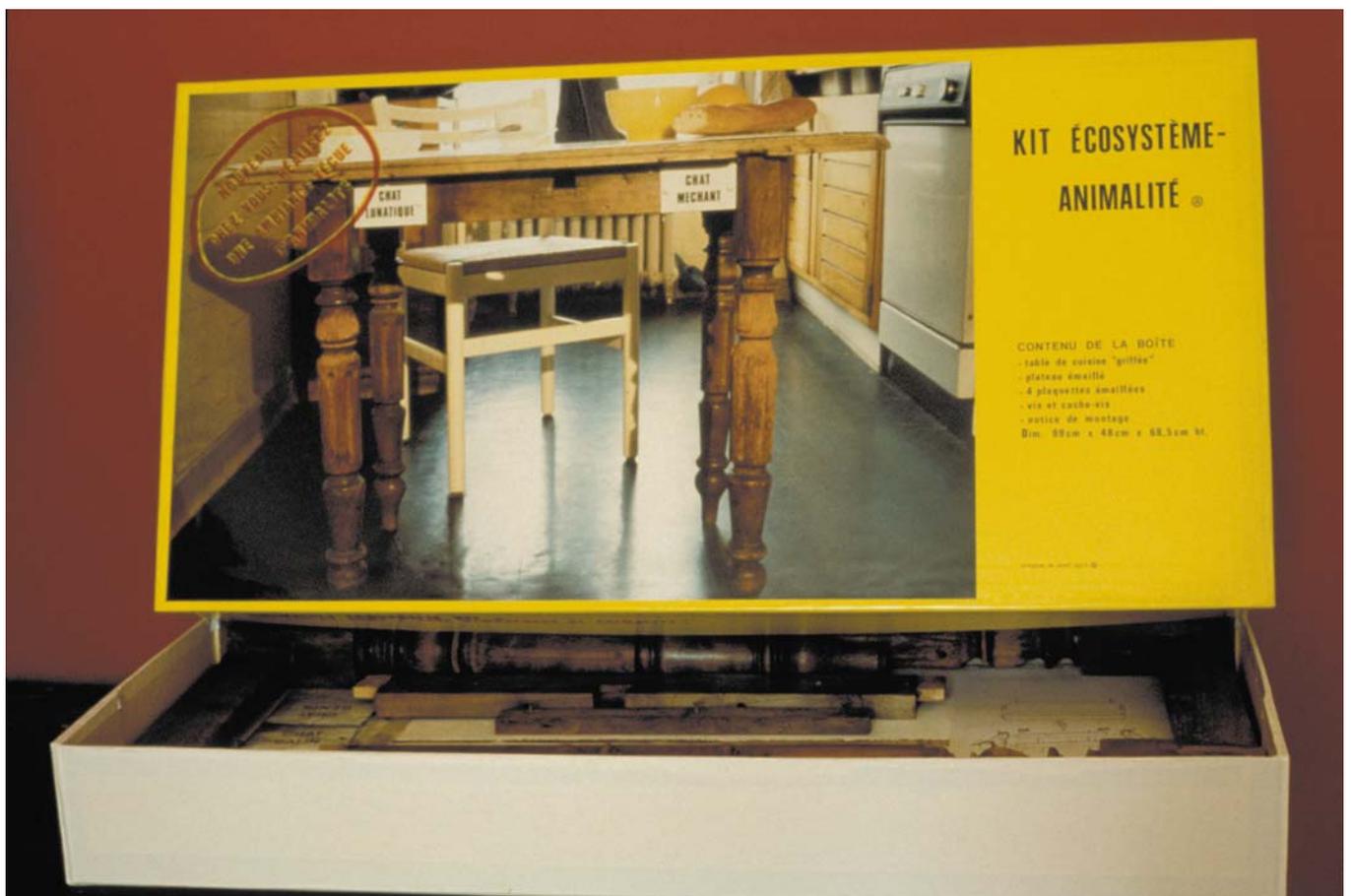
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KIT ECOSYSTEME-ANIMALITE

Art Orienté Objet have been creating work concerned with the environment, trans-species relationships, and the questioning of scientific methods and tools since 1991.

Text and Questions by Julien Salaud. Translation by Jeremie Fabre



Art Orienté Objet

Kit Ecosysteme-Animalite, 1991 © Art Orienté Objet

For the last eighteen years, Art Orienté Objet (Marion Laval-Jeantet and Benoit Mangin) have put forth several poetic and surprising projects resulting from their experimentations and which reveal our behaviors as we face our existence and the environment. Their works take on various aesthetic forms (installations, objects, videos and/or photographs) in which we find a familiar animal presence and a staging of their own existence.

Over the years, the French couple, throughout their creativity process, have managed to entangle human and animal together, in order to understand the stakes of our problematic relationship with the environment. If one examines their works, it becomes visible that from the beginning of their collaboration, Laval-Jeantet and Mangin specifically focused their attention on the concept of territory as called into question by the pet...

Brand new! Get that lived-in animality in your home now! is a "subscription to animality kit" realized in 1991. Regarding this artwork, the couple explained that:

"At the time, we shared our living space with nearly twenty cats. We were immersed in animality so that we began coating the legs of some furniture with the essential oil of valerian to encourage the cats to scratch them. As a result, these pieces of furniture endured damages which, for the cats, were merely the marking out of their territories within a human territory. In the form of a commercially available kit, these pieces of furniture questioned the space of culture and animality within us. They became an anticipatory vision of a world where animality would be banished or at least would subsist as a conditioned trace of its former self."

The Happy Hen

A few years later, the two artists were led by their research to extend their investigations from the domestic sphere to the one of the wild. *A Pioneer World* and *Pioneer Ark's* presentation sums up this part:

"In 1999, we went to Australia to prepare *Signs of Life* in Melbourne. This stay was an opportunity to get to know a farm that is called the *Pioneer Farm*. This farm is a gathering place for animal victims that have suffered from mutations due to human activity (toxic chemical and radioactive pollutants) as well as naturally occurring spontaneous factors that are more or less inexplicable. Our observation of this conscientious collection by scientists of animals that have suffered the effects of mutation and our knowledge of studies in genetics, led us to conceive of two complementary artworks that present this very real phenomenon: *A Pioneer World*, which presents a scientific diorama placed in front of a large map of what the world would look like if the polar ice cap were to melt and the sea level were to rise a few meters; and *Pioneer Ark*, a large hanging mobile representing a contemporary Noah's ark in which ecological urgencies are inscribed within an aesthetic of competition.

These artworks present porcelain transgenic animals inhabiting a microcosm where the observations of a world manipulated by humans and their science are concentrated. They hinge upon the aesthetic fascination provided by science and the beauty of animals. By presenting modified organisms, they open the way for a poetic digression and a dreamlike aesthetic that highlights the ambiguity of the metamorphoses of our time."

The Year my Voice Broke

During their eighteen years of working together, Laval-Jeantet and Mangin, departed from the pet to the domestic animal, and then to wildlife, and in the end, to environment. We can also notice that the two modes of plastic art expression Steve Baker defined as the tools of the postmodern animal definition, mark out the path of Art Orienté Objet: *The Happy Hen* is an example of "botched taxidermy", as well as the furs of *Roadkill Coat*, the knits of *The Year my Voice Broke*, etc. It seems that following the couple's tracks leads us straight into the field of the postmodern animal as Steve Baker depicted it. Which field is that? How do they mix human and animal territories? Why looking into the domestic animal, the sources of the wild animal's denaturing?

Answering this question implies "to take an interest in the animal's cultural construction."⁽¹⁾ Examining the wild and the domestic domains leads us to look into the phenomenon of domestication. Paleontologists agree about this process' origins to take place in the Neolithic era, when in the cradle of the West, humans turned from being hunters into breeders. In order to explain how the domestic era began, Jean-Denis Vigne, a paleontologist specialized in domestication, relies on Jacques Cauvin's remarks:

"inside hunters communities, man perceives himself as the equal of animals, plants and natural elements, through a horizontal perception of the universe. ⁽²⁾ ⁽³⁾ With colonizing new territories and domesticating, man establishes a vertical hierarchy and assumes the right to dominate nature, even including mammals which are his closest parents".

The paleontologist goes further adding that, from that moment, humans took the liberty to depict themselves in their art whereas, beforehand, it only represented animal shapes.

Thus domestication certainly brought about the change of paradigms, propitious to various mutations, which themselves contributed over the course of history, to pull out the individual from nature, but also to durably evade the animal issue. An example of these mutations takes part in Elisabeth de Fontenay's book, *le silence des bêtes, la philosophie à l'épreuve de l'animalité*, published in 1999.

She explains how, following the Neolithic's revolutions, the emerging humanism of Greek philosophy durably subtended the Western societies' construction and, at the same time the deconstructing of the animal,



Art Orienté Objet

Bwiti Turning, 2003 © Art Orienté Objet

throughout history: it is introduced as being the driving force of the ontological breach qualifying our relationship to animals, which key-mutation relates to sacrificial practices between ancient paganism and Christianity. First of all, according to the philosopher, the crucifixion as founding principle of Christianity was in fact an ingestion of the old sacred triad of men, beasts and ancient gods. Incorporating the Agnus Dei to the Christian sacrifice gave birth to the Holy Trinity, founder of the “canonical principle of individualization by which we became divided subjects: master of exteriority and of our own interiority.” (4)

Moreover according to Elisabeth de Fontenay, the Christian god, allowing all animal-eating with no process, opened the way to an unrestricted exploitation, of which the current food-processing industry is undoubtedly our most shameful inheritance...

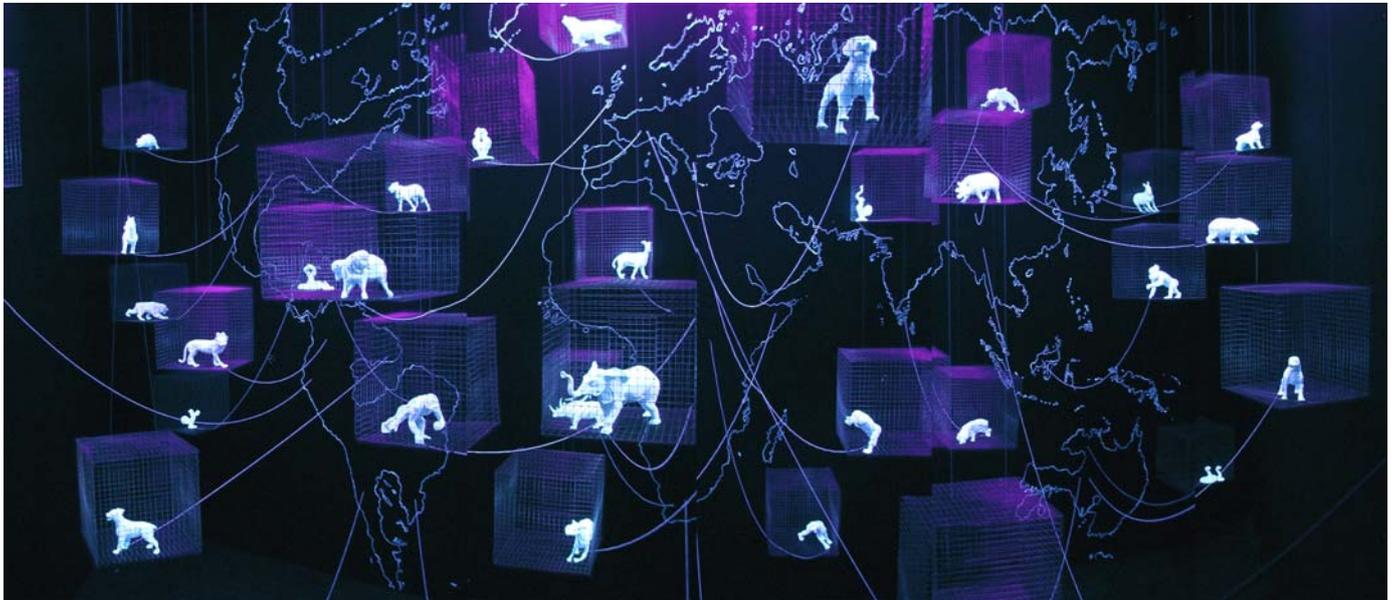
Religious ceremonies, coming with Christians all along their history, were the vectors enabling this principle to set up. These ceremonies persisted through modern age, in what Louis Althusser brought into light about psychoanalysis in 1964: “psychoanalysis [...] deals with [...] the only war with no recollection or memorials that humanity pretends having ever waged; the one she always thought winning in advance, basically because humanity exists for having ever waged; the one she always thought winning in advance, basically because

humanity exists for having survived it, for living and for keeping on giving birth to itself, as a culture within human culture: a constant war made inside each one of its offspring who, [...] everyone for himself in loneliness and against death, are forced to go all the way on the path that will turn them from mammal seeds into human infants *subjects*” (5)

If this entire course is forced, then none if its journey is irreparably constituent of the individuals who comprise it. How to reverse the process in this case? The two artists of Art Orienté Objet share the feature of coming across domains and search tools, with the present thinkers of the animal question: *Bwiti turning* refers to an “ethnopsychiatry” experiment; *Bad trip* is tinged with a strange psychological aspect... Where does their approach lead us to?

Que le panda vive en moi is a project of performance for artists planning on being injected with genetically modified panda blood, which mixes medicine genetic engineering, art and environmental concerns, but most probably, psychology and anthropology too. With this artistic act, are we not at the edge of the “Sorcerer’s” appearance haunting Steve Baker’s book? We met with the artists to discuss their work.

The Ecosystem kit (Brand new! Get that lived-in animality in your home now!) deals with the



Art Orienté Objet

Pioneer World, 2001 © Art Orienté Objet

human-to-animal relationship within the domestic sphere. Could you explain to us what your cats taught you regarding the territory question, and in particular, the interactions between nature and culture in the West?

Actually, I have always lived with cats... I have never quite understood the notion of territory other than through animals, and it started with cats.

It happens that I have been watching an old woman who was feeding about forty of them. They were all sleeping at her place more or less and when I arrived there, I saw that the furniture was absolutely wrecked. It was pretty interesting as at the time, the animal presence was being forbidden in town... When we created the *ecosystem kit*, a law was just been voted in Japan: every cat owner in Tokyo was heavily taxed. I said to myself "we come to such a regulation with taxing that even the animal presence will become rarer". I tried to understand precisely what we missed in that case... The animality's aspects expressed through the cat ("I deteriorate my environment with scratching or urinating") are elements we try to domesticate in mankind but, according to me, they are needed to experiment a certain way of life.

I therefore found it very interesting to use the image of what the animal deteriorates, in order to show the familiar presence of animality we soon wouldn't be allowed to have at home. The kit was also a way to get exposed in a gallery: I think this was our first piece of art showed in a gallery, as a space which, for me, tallied with domesticating the artist. The simultaneous issue was "What is a proper object saleable in a gallery and how can an artist domesticate his own animality in order to get exhibited?", which basically means "Do it where you are told to do it". I find it very tortuous for an artist!

On your website, you introduce the stag from The Year my Voice Broke as a forest emblem which has been muzzled. What does this muzzle symbolize? Which boundary does it refer to?

This piece was born from the beginnings of wild animals' electronic tagging. Nowadays, we can make a census of them, over a particular territory, thanks to electronic chips and there is an animals' identity record book as there is one for men. There isn't an actual notion of savagery anymore, especially among the biggest mammals. I felt this as a loss: a loss of the environment's perception, along with its numeration and its quantification which appear to me as quite strange and inhuman because...

It is very disturbing! At that time, I met Edouardo Kac for the first time: he injected himself with chips though he was not an animal. I was questioning hunters who kept the chip of a shot animal in order to write down its number on their hunting license. All of this is extremely administrative, very legislated, and I find the fact that men's wanting so much to domesticate nature is surrealist.

Empathy started the idea of *l'année du tricot animalier*: It was a way to show that, after taking animals' skins, we make them a new one instead. This empathy is in the meantime very pathetic, which often is the behaviour we have towards animals in our works: there is both empathy's motion and reaction of rebellion, in view of the state we let them in today.

In A Pioneer World and Pioneer Ark, questionings about the wild and the domestic are mixed up. The relationship between the individual

and his environment emerges from these works, by means of the animal. What do you reckon the stakes of the Western relationship to nature could be?

Those two pieces follow upon the *Pioneer Farm's* visit in Australia, the first international farm built by scientists to gather all mutant animals which appeared nationwide. A lot of them were mutants because of buried toxic or nuclear wastes. There was a time when animals were killed, but researchers decided to gather them afterwards for studies. We managed to visit it but it was not easy, and we could not take pictures. From this frustration *A Pioneer World* was born, a piece of work in which we collected as many mutations and hybridizations as possible, all taken from scientific magazines like *Nature*. We wanted to understand where mutations and hybridizations took place, knowing that hybridization is a making whereas mutation is spontaneous.

This work has been done because there was a trouble once more. Burying chemical wastes has major environmental consequences. Botanists realize it and they can show us when a leaf is in duplicate on a branch but we could not see it ourselves without a trained eye. However, if we see a creature with two tails, it will straightaway seem to us as pathological, because we have a bigger knowledge and familiarity with the animal. We found it interesting to reveal it that way: it is disconcerting for us to think there is confusion today between a mutation that can be spontaneous (one decadent case out of ten thousand animals is normality) and a mutation linked to a non-mastered environment. I'm talking about "non-mastery" because if we really were the masters of things, we would not mess up with ecology. Yet, we seek to master animals within our "non-mastery"... There is a strong ambiguity between the conception of animal populations and a complete practical inexperience of what an ecosystem can be... Benoit and I are part of an art which is looking to testify about that, but we have not openly taken sides. We force human consciousness to face its incongruities, the incoherencies of its own behaviour.

According to you, those works bring into light the "metamorphoses' ambiguity at the present time". How did you come to think about this theme? Where does its ambiguity lie in the current context?

Benoit and I worked a lot with associations for environmental preservation and we met a lot of researchers. In 1998, we went to Jouy-en-Josas to see the first French clones (bovines) to understand the works they were subjected to. My mother was a biologist so I had notions of genetic tagging, evolution, and anomalies; when I was a child, I already collected anomalies: I was fascinated by the notion of monstrosity. It is very old in the artistic culture, and, for example, I'm thinking about Boileau's poetry and this remarkable verse: "*il n'est point de serpent ni de monstre odieux qui par l'art imité ne puisse*

plaire aux yeux" ("There is no serpent or monster so hideous that art cannot make it pleasing to the eye")... At which time comes beauty? Does not beauty come from teratology? This notion of teratology is very important to me. I had a trisomic brother and I have always wondered: "When are things supposed to be normal or abnormal?" Regarding this matter, the animal is again an interesting symptom: when we see a genetic anomaly that is induced, we can wonder whether the person who created it is normal or not; besides, if it is not induced, we realize that the anomaly is natural. There is something very interesting in this looming sort of frailty: for me, the anomaly or the genetic mutation is the human frailty's symptoms. If we can see the consequence of a genetic weakness, we can as well become aware of our own weakness. There is for me, an obvious link between the individual, I would nearly say the "therapeutic individual", and the animal side.

The Happy Hen is about mechanization and homogenization of the living inside the industrial world. About this work, you paralleled the human and animal conditions: "if we were changed into one of these chickens, how would we go back to our artists' state?" Can you develop this connection and enlighten us about how you consider the artist?

I have always asked myself questions about the notion of empathy. This is one of the reasons I am a therapist: experiencing empathy is the first necessary condition for taking care of someone. Why I realize I have a pathologic side is because since childhood, I have always had empathy beyond average regarding animal suffering. Of course, human suffering hurts me but my enhanced sensitiveness tells me that the animal can only be a victim of mankind because animals can not verbally defend themselves. When I put myself in the animal's place, I always question myself: "Will this act enrich my personality in one way or another and enable me to put forward a point of view others have never seen?"

I have a wide conception of the artist. According to me, the artist starts to be like a sponge: he absorbs an amount of things more important than average people and spit it out through sensitiveness and a particular process, for in general he structured himself in a specific way, in order to bear everything he has absorbed. I think this is the most interesting point about the artist. What happens when he goes so far as to absorb an unknown dimension, like the feeling of a hen in a cage? What will he transcribe from this experience? These are broad questions ... Can one be sure to actually feel the same as the animal? I think that by dint of experiencing absorption and empathy, one ends up really strong at this little game! Artists choose to identify themselves to various things and I am certainly not as skilled as a landscape painter to reproduce a landscape, but I can be when it comes to animal feelings because I always wondered about psyche, going as far as animal psyche.



Art Orienté Objet

The Year My Voice Broke, 1992-1997 © Art Orienté Objet

Marion Laval-Jeantet, as an ethnopsychiatrist, you paid a special attention to Bwiti. Can you explain your interest in this initiatory ritual?

Nowadays, *Bwiti* is one of the rare rituals trying to transform man with the help of nature. The ritual consists in swallowing a very strong psychotropic wood which is supposed to bring you to the threshold of death. *Bwiti* being practised on the African ground and in forests generally puts you in a very particular state of perception towards the environment...

The matter is to heal yourself with truly sensing the value of the forest around you. I have always thought it to be fascinating because there are a lot of likewise practices – all rituals regarding shamanic obedience as we called them – including the one my grandmother was in (she lived in Corsica). One trouble remains: tackling the issue of man, immersing him into an ecosystem.

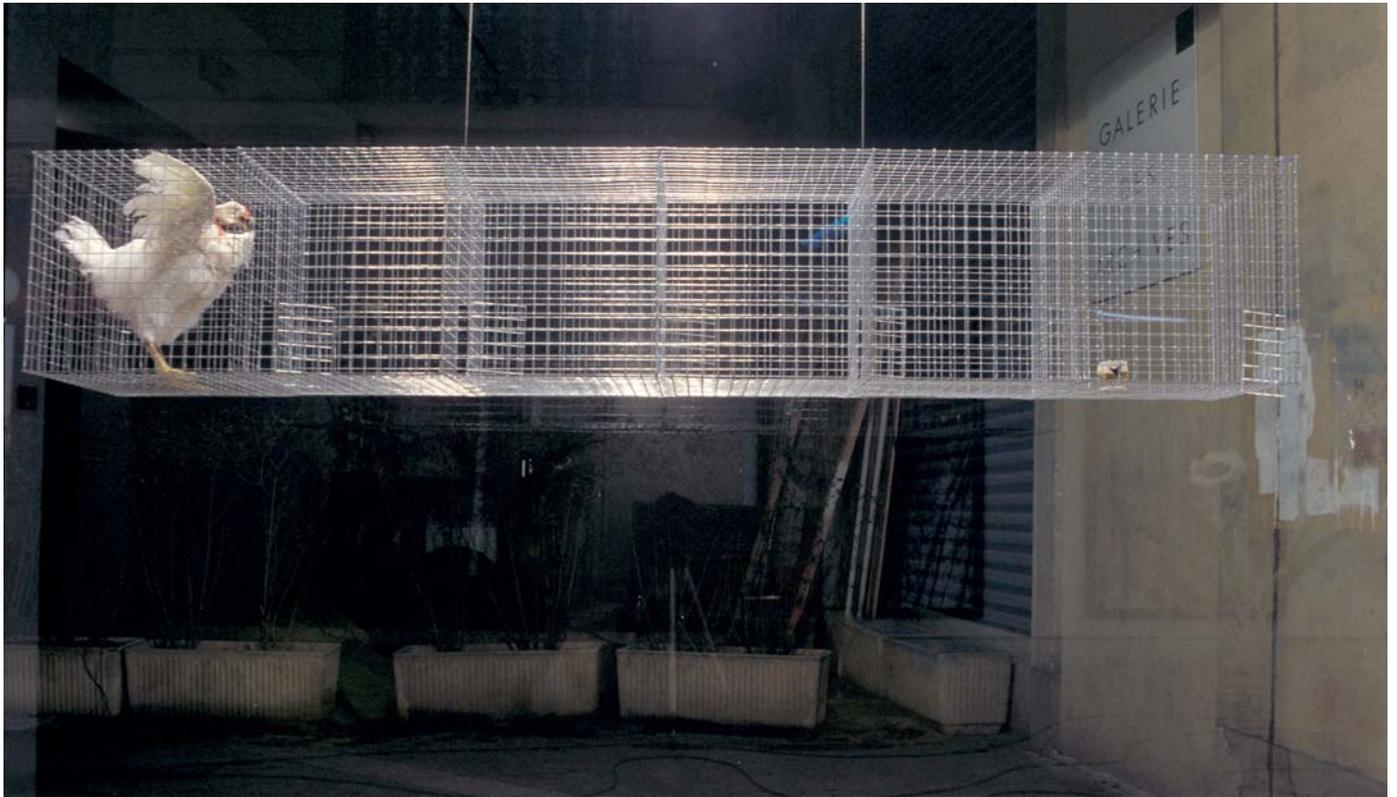
What kind of cosmogony do Bwiti's rituals generate?

It is a connection with the complex realm. Those who get through the ritual and reach the threshold of death will communicate with an invisible world, from the plant to the nearby animal up to the dead and to "God". In the *Bwiti* beliefs, there is an almighty god called *Mwanga*.

animal... Human, animal and vegetable natures are undifferentiated. The main part is the notion of soul: from the moment human incarnation is possible, there is a possible incarnation in nature, whether it is vegetable or animal. We therefore are in a system which does not create any discrimination of genre or species. There are superior beings on the other hand, but chances are they can either incarnate an animal, a vegetable, or a man.

What impact does Bwiti have over initiates regarding the link towards their human, animal and natural environment?

Unfortunately, not all people experiencing *Bwiti* reach the same level of awakening; some of them do not reach a high awareness of the environment. Those who do are outraged by the nature's pain: the first thing they hear is the carnage around forests. Personally, I would say *Bwiti* reinforced my belief in a major importance of biodiversity. I felt that this impoverishment of the animal and vegetable environment was a serious mistake, as if as humans we lacked of therapeutic abilities to survive; as if everything was linked; as if a minor crushing of this biodiversity had an impact on us: a genetic modification, a broken link in the chain... On a mystical plane, *Bwiti* to the nearby animal up to the dead and to "God". In the *Bwiti* beliefs, there is an almighty god called *Mwanga*. convinced me there is a reason for every type of human



Art Orienté Objet

The Happy Hen, 2007 © Art Orienté Objet

existence; we are not here to judge it or to try to flatten the whole towards a sort of normality. Every outrage done to one of the dimensions of biodiversity (whether it is human, biologic, of the ecosystems, etc.) seemed tragic to me from a long time ago. But this conviction increased after practicing *Bwiti!* What also seems important to me is that I was not sure until then, of the very strong link existing between the notions of art and therapy. Since then, I am certain pieces of art have a therapeutic dimension for society. The consciousness an artist can have for his environment – and at the same time can transcribe – brings people to look at it and to ask themselves more questions. And it is saving it.

Could you talk to us about Que le Panda Vive en Moi!, a performance project during which you planned on injecting yourself some genetically modified panda blood?

This project came from ecological militancy and from one of its issues: How can one use the funds? We cannot save everything in danger, so we have to make choices. This notion of choice always seemed quite unethical and very frightening. Why should we have to choose to save an animal more than another, under the pretext of a symbolic value? There is a strange paradox regarding the panda as well: it symbolizes the endangered animal, the creature to save and whose survival depends on men. Yet in China where the panda is protected, its potential habitats are savagely damaged. How can one save the panda without protecting its surroundings? This one and

habitats are savagely damaged. How can one save the panda without protecting its surroundings? This one and only animal's symbolization is very ambiguous. In view of this paradox, Benoit and I thought about a very symbolic action: to inoculate ourselves some panda blood, and to venture the hypothesis that "we do not accept to save what does not go through us". It was a way for us to strike people's minds. This project is also in relation with our respect for pygmies who manage to live without tampering with their environment... This is not the case for us.

Que le Panda Vive en Moi! thus had an ecological dimension. You could not achieve it but you are currently working on a similar artistic act. Can you tell us more about it?

We needed a lot of blood for our counting works and we did not have a sufficient amount at our disposal. We therefore got closer to labs that worked on human/animal compatibility. Their research was interesting for matters of xenotransplantations, the idea being that the human body could change under the effect of animal biological parts...

On one hand, when the fragile human/animal barrier is transgressed, dire dangers happen to mankind, like the mad cow disease... I wanted to consider transgression in a thoughtful way, to try to understand what really happens inside human consciousness: there are blood elements, hormones from endocrine glands in particular, that induce consciousness

modifications. I have tested those first elements to see how an animal existence manifests itself through the human body... As to not merely stick to empathy. From those first achieved experiences, I can assure that a horse's nervousness is different from a man's one. Going through this consciousness enables one to understand, for example, why a horse shies when he sees a destroyed woodcut on his way.

Does the species' change affect the stakes of the coming performance?

Symbolically yes because the image is not the same! But in the end not completely, for we experience a very deep and violent otherness. It is memorable enough for people to truly wonder about their time. The environmental stakes are hardly the same: in "*Que le cheval vive en moi!*", they are bound to biology. It is in fact the next experiment. Biological experiment is the next one; the one we had not deeply looked into.

Que le cheval vive en moi mixes modern and traditional medicines: Why?

There is indeed a shamanic part in the crossing of existences but also – as in all our works using the animal – a mix between the ancient and the modern. This is the same principle we find in the coat made with crushed animals, the piece which puts into question the wastefulness of society, whose ground is crossed over with roads. *Roadkill coat* deals with environment considering the animal existence, which gives it an active value. Its shamanic dimensions thus meet the condemnation of a society that ignores its natural reality. In the horse's history, we can find the same combination: on one hand, a dive into the metamorphoses' history like in antique mythology, and on the other, the high-tech dimension of contemporary medicine. One could almost wonder if in the human imagination, the same components are not always processed through myth or science, depending on the period of time. We always had within ourselves, this capacity to mingle with the other, even with the animal, nourishing a recurring myth.

What about your Horsey experiment? When and where will you be given the transfusion?

It is going to take place in October, in the Kapelika gallery in Slovenia. The date is not fixed yet. It will presumably be between the 15th and the 25th of that month.

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Many thanks to Jeremie Fabre for his translation work on this piece.

Marion Laval-Jeantet and Benoît Mangin founded Art Orienté Objet in 1991 as a collaboration intended to resemble that between a playwright and a stage director in constant dialogue. During the last fifteen years their work has been focusing on "the sciences of life" in general, from the life sciences to ethology and trans-cultural psychiatry.

For more information please visit: www.artorienteeobjet.com/

Marion Laval-Jeantet and Benoît Mangin were interviewed by Antennae in Spring 2009 © Antennae