

*stimulus* → *respond*



# *stimulus* → *respond*

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# Editor's Letter

Dear Readers,

Don't forget that Stimulus is visiting Edinburgh in a couple of weeks. Alongside an exhibition of images, we are also holding poetry readings, live music and film showings. This is due to take place over the weekend of 16-17 June, and more details can be found on the website.

More new arrivals this issue in the form of Tara Blake Wilson who has taken over as literature editor, as well as two new regulars, Amanda Truscott and Sam Beck.

I should also point you in the direction of contributions by Michael Taussig and John Hutnyk in the form of *Dead Meat* (p093) and *The Politics of Cats* (p067) respectively. Also look out for Yannis' interview with Polly Morgan on page 057, as well as Melina's profile of Christian Wijnants, recently endorsed as a designer to watch by Editor in Chief of Italian Vogue and L'Uomo Vogue, Franca Sozzani.

I am moved very much by the loss of Mary Douglas and Tim Stelfox-Griffin, both of whom have touched my life in very different ways but who will be missed equally.

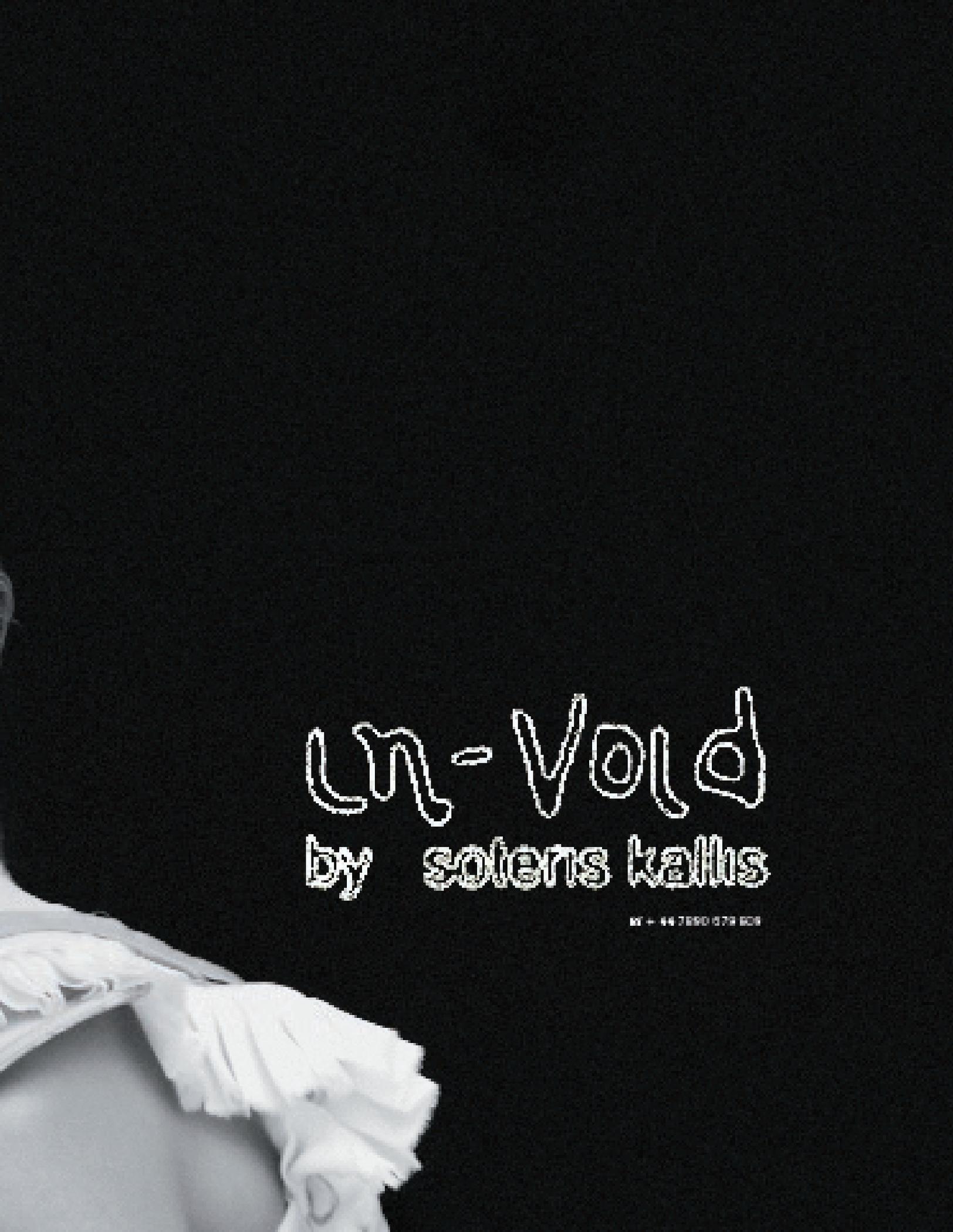
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*Editor in Chief*

*Image by Atalya Laufer*







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We welcome unsolicited material from our readers. If you would like to make a contribution to future issues then please email the editorial team at the addresses above.

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Image *Bestiglossolia* by *Samantha Sweeting*

# Kifissia

Words by *Edward Lucie-Smith*

Eyes. Hands. Husks opening. Clothing ripped at, cast  
Broadcast upon the dry floor of the wood.  
It's almost dark. Night filters through the pines.  
Glimmering beneath them, white as flour or dust,  
Our forked flesh waits the moment when it joins—  
Machine looks at machine, and need at need.

*And somewhere a dog barking, a dog barking.*

Somewhere, not far, a city. Nearer still,  
Verandas of the rich. A gramophone  
Whining. Gossip. Nearest is the other.  
A car is changing gear to climb the hill.  
We are at one in what we do together,  
Yet each feels wholly separate while it's done.

*And somewhere a dog barking, a dog barking.*

First there came lust—a hurt called to a hurt—  
And then the sweats and shivering of the sick.  
Soon it is over—comes the time for shame.  
So now we cannot look. Each turns apart,  
Groping for clothes, for buttons, for a name.  
We cast each other off, take selfhood back.

*And somewhere a dog barking, a dog barking.*

Edward Lucie-Smith is an internationally known art critic and historian, poet, anthologist and photographer.  
His website can be visited at: [www.edwardlucie-smith.co.uk](http://www.edwardlucie-smith.co.uk)

Poem reproduced by kind permission of the poet.

# The Dogs of Sri Lanka

Words by *Simon Barraclough*

On Galle Face Green they gawp at kites and sift  
the lost trade winds for a whiff of master,  
collarless. No home to guard, no hand to lick,  
they coil into earth as still as plaster.

Unfed, they wobble into roads and lay  
their grizzled heads in the path of trucks.  
No game to course or games to play,  
they air their tongues and test their luck.

And when Lord Buddha stamped his foot upon  
this templed isle, he would have kinked the tail  
of some poor loveless cur, too woebegone  
to care or stir; too far beyond the pale.

Simon Barraclough's first collection, *Los Alamos Mon Amour*, will be out in March 2008 by Salt Publishing ([www.saltpublishing.com](http://www.saltpublishing.com)). His work will also be featured in a pamphlet called *Ask For It By Name*, which will be out in September 2007.

# Payback

Words by *Debbie Ouellet*

'Tis sweet  
when the prey  
consumes the predator,  
plucks the eye  
of the huntress,  
caped black wings,  
cockcrow arrogance—  
tribal dancing.

'Tis easy  
when the claws  
lie sheathed,  
in rigid feline pose  
of hair and bone—  
carrion payback  
never tasted  
so sweet.

# *Pool of Grace*

Words by *Lana Hechtman Ayers*

Sleepy koi, orange-gold bodies  
holding the flame inside themselves,  
inside their slick skins  
until the ice loosens its blanket  
of half-light hibernation.

A holding time,  
everything in the body slowed,  
a time without surface,  
water-still contemplation.  
Patience only amplifies the wanting.

Desire for sun/flesh,  
for swimming in green light,  
for the embrace of warmed currents,  
persists in the near-black cool  
of bottom-feeding memory.

Tension of life against starvation,  
life against suffocation,  
contention for what is beyond the pond,  
is seen in flashes,  
seen in breaking bubbles.

Koi grace thrives even in these cold hours,  
mosquito-mirage, a buzzing ache in the gut,  
and the larger ache for the very light  
that removes its touch  
before it can be granted.

Lana Hechtman Ayers's first collection, *Love is a Weed*, was published in 2006 by Finishing Line Press ([www.finishinglinepress.com](http://www.finishinglinepress.com)). Her second collection, *Dance From Inside My Bones*, was published in 2007 by Snake Nation Press ([www.snakenationpress.org](http://www.snakenationpress.org)).

For more information on Lana Hechtman Ayers, please visit: [www.lanaayers.com](http://www.lanaayers.com).

# *You, Me and the Orang-utan*

Words by *Isobel Dixon*

Forgive me, it was not my plan  
to fall in love like this. You are the best of men,  
but he is something else. A king  
among the puny; gentle, nurturing.

Walking without you through the zoo, I felt his gaze,  
love at first sight, yes, but through the bars, alas.  
Believe me, though, it's not a question of his size—  
what did it for me were his supple lips, those melancholy eyes,

that noble, furrowed brow. His heart, so filled with care  
for every species. And his own, so threatened, rare  
how could I not respond, there are so few like him these days?  
Don't try to ape him or dissuade me, darling, please.

For now I think of little else, although  
it's hopeless and it can't go on, I know—  
I lie here, burning, on our bed, and think of Borneo.

Isobel Dixon's first collection, *Weather Eye*, was published in by Carapace Poets in 2001. Her second collection, *A Fold in the Map*, will be published in October 2007 by Salt Publishing ([www.saltpublishing.com](http://www.saltpublishing.com)) in the UK and Umuzi ([www.umuzi-randomhouse.co.za](http://www.umuzi-randomhouse.co.za)) in South Africa. Her work will also be featured in a pamphlet called *Ask For It By Name*, which will be out in September 2007.

# Shadow

Words by *Christina Lovin*

I want to write my poems like a dog  
lives life: muzzle deep in the rot  
of flesh and hair found in a far field:  
to wallow joyously in the stench  
of death—its hard remains worried  
until clean and white—and read the shit piles  
of life as if they were the New York Times  
or gateways to enlightenment. Stupid  
in my love—all eyes and tongue and tail—  
I would head into the path of fate ears pricked,  
uncomplaining when its wheel rolls over me.  
Just glad to have had this day, this bit of sun  
and shadow, some hint of game on the breeze,  
a momentary hand resting on my head,  
  
a name to be called.

First appeared in *The Bark* ([www.thebark.com](http://www.thebark.com)). Christina Lovin's first collection, *What We Burned For Warmth*, was published in 2006 by Finishing Line Press ([www.finishinglinepress.com](http://www.finishinglinepress.com)).

# Desert Orchid

Words by *Simon Barraclough*

So much abduction, obituary and ossuary  
that this long-jaw eye-roll flank-twitch  
resignation gives me pause;  
makes me long to roll amid the gamey straw  
of a blameless life smoked out of nostrils flared  
and into the paddock where souls strut,  
on-the-muscle, unjockeyed, colourless.

# Songbird

Words by *Colin Dardis*

They say a caged bird  
will always sing  
for want of being  
free.

Imagine if  
there was no sight  
to behold  
beyond those bars  
but brick walls  
insulating metal rails,  
no sky  
to line dreams,  
with darkness  
calling out  
to be a friend.

What song  
would the bird  
sing then?

# Only Adapt

Words by *Isobel Dixon*

Observe the sand gazelle  
who with a shrinking heart  
survives the drought—  
an admirable desert art,  
this making small, a skill  
that we who doubt  
the seasonal largesse  
must learn as well.

# DMZ

Words by *Simon Barraclough*

Your Christmas card came in July.  
You wrote it then lost it, you said.  
Turned up with divorce papers under the bed:  
“Hooded cranes readying to fly.”

A paradise of scattered mines,  
neither North nor South Korean,  
the Demilitarised Zone is “a haven  
for wildlife of various kinds.”

National Monument 228  
tugs at fuses and firing caps,  
dances around igniters, and flaps  
its alarm at the search for a mate.

*Note: ‘National monument 228’ is the South Korean classification for the Hooded Crane.*

# christian wijnants

text and interview/ *christos kyriakides*

photography/ *robert glowacki*

styling/ *melina nicolaide*

hair/ *naoki*

make up/ *kent*

model/ *topaze at premier model management*

layout/ *tina borkowski*

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After working closely with designers such as Dries Van Noten and Tarlazzi, Christian Wijnants started his own label in Paris in 2004, embracing fashion in an atmospheric, mystical, 'Belgium poetry' way ...

Twenty eight year old Wijnants grabbed our attention with his trademark hand-made knitwear











and 'marble' prints from his latest collection, projecting his admiration for symbolism among other art movements from both the beginning of the last century and our own for beautiful fashion.

[www.christianveijnants.com](http://www.christianveijnants.com)

1  
Greatest achievement?

*Difficult to say... there are a few highlights in my "career" that I remember... The greatest achievement is probably that I've been able to make my dream come true: since I was a child I dreamed of working in fashion and to have my own brand. To dress people all over the world is a very exciting thing*

*Also I was very proud and happy when I organised my first show in October 2004 - it was a very special and emotional moment and very motivating and flattering to have been chosen and to win the Swiss Textiles award in 2005 (alongside designers such as Giles Deacon, Undercover, Charles Anastase...).*

2  
Your biggest fear?

*Environmental issues like global warming...*

3  
Main influence so far ?

*Each season is extremely different. I get inspiration from a large variety of things surrounding me: exhibitions, artists, travelling, movies, new cultures...*

*The 2007 summer collection theme was about Vietnam and a novel by French writer Marguerite Duras L'amant (the lover), this winter collection was inspired by Belgian symbolist painters Fernand Khnopff and Leon Spilliaert.*

4  
How much of your work reflects yourself and how much is purely commercial - is there a balance?

*All of my work reflects my personal taste. I don't make any aesthetic compromise to be*

more commercial. ...

*A more commercial approach is only in the choices of fabrics or finishing that are more affordable.*

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. .  
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5

What drives you to continue?

.

*The reactions of my customers. It is the biggest motivation to see people wearing and enjoying my clothes, that's why I am doing it for: to make people happier and feel good in my clothes.*

.  
. .  
. .

6

This is the "animal" issue. In some years from now almost 37% of the existing animals will be extinguished due to global warming. What is your reaction to that?

.

*I am extremely preoccupied with environmental issues. I love animals and it is very choking to observe the impact of selfish activities that have a terrible effect on biodiversity and our environment.*

*. I grew up in an environmentally friendly family where I've been taught the benefits of recycling, respecting the environment, loving the Nature... My mother comes from a small village in Switzerland where people are very concerned and respectful to the nature. It is amazing to see how people have different concerns and interests depending where you live. In Belgium for example, recycling and ecology habits are changing slowly compared to countries like Switzerland or Scandinavia where those issues are very deeply influencing people's mentality.*

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Originally hailing from Norway, 29-year old London-based designer kristian Aadnevik emphasises the waist and loves long, nude legs. Sculptured layers and floating drapes embrace the mystery of “Valerie and her week of wonders”, his theme for A/W 07/08, with couture bordering silver chains, leather belted dresses and flamboyant feathers parading on his runway.

---

In his words: “This is a surreal dream of a dream: naïve beauty meets vampires and lusty priests in a strange orgy of intrigues”. As Collin Mc Dowell says, “Christian is one of the UK’s hottest and exciting young talents.” We just can’t doubt that!

---

# Kristian Aadnevik



**KRISTIAN AADNEVIK QUESTIONNAIRE:**

**1 Greatest achievement?**

To never give up, to live my dream.

**2 Your biggest fear?**

My biggest fear is to lose myself in a world of cold self-obsessed individuals.



### **3 Main influences so far?**

The darker world outside contrasted towards the beautiful world inside.

### **4 How much of your work reflects yourself and how much is purely commercial – is there a balance?**

My work is always me

at that moment in time. The art is to create something very special and which at the same time appeals to the eye. Some pieces are there to show the extremes of your concept others are there to sell. The best designers can make the pieces that sell just as personal and creative as the “show pieces”.

### **5 What drives you to continue?**

You create a world of your own, you give yourself and if people love and respect this – it will keep me going.

### **6 This is the animal issue. In some years almost 37% of existing animals will be**

### **extinguished due to global warming. What is your reaction to that?**

Global warming is a disease worse than evil. If we don't change our way and start rethinking how we live – the true beauty of nature will only be a picture and a memory.





# *Animal Astronauts*



Understanding animal space travel as material and semiotic projection, *Janet Harbord* re-imagines systems of human and animal classification, weaving together such diverse thinkers as Leach, Harraway, Deleuze and Guattari, Latour, Foucault and Freud.

A photograph, from 1957, of a dog strapped into the capsule of a Russian rocket, has the status of an iconic image. There appears to be, culturally, a tacit understanding of the significance of the dog (Laika) being sent into space in a machine. Dog here is surrogate man. Dog bears the dangers and potential disappointments of man's ambitious dreams to go forth. Dog inside a space machine is a melancholic portrait of the trusting and loyal species, even if that trust is about to be betrayed by her inclusion in a mission in which her safety is severely compromised, or less euphemistically, her survival is not a consideration. Dog, however, is only one of many animals about to be, in the following decades, dispatched into space, followed by monkeys, cats, pregnant mice, rats, spiders, bullfrogs. At a later date, a series of biological capsules carrying plants, fungi, quail eggs, newts, seeds and cell cultures were dispatched beyond the earth's atmosphere in a series of experiments that saw the materials of natural history museums re-located to outer space. As Foucault reminds us in *The Order of Things*, "Natural history is nothing more than the nomination of the visible". He continues, "Hence its apparent simplicity, and that air of naïveté it has from a distance, so simple does it appear and so obviously imposed by things themselves" (1966: 144). It is a curious, if not unimaginable imaginative leap, that the organisation of the museum and the act of witnessing, critical according to Latour to establishment of scientific fact,

*“For Freud, animals within the consulting room were standing in for something else”*

and plant forms, in the enclosure of the consultancy rooms of Vienna, animals were springing up in unexpected places. In phobias (Little Hans and the horse), neurosis (the Wolfman) and obsessive thoughts (the Rat Man), animals were on the inside. Chains of signification were apparently broken, distance eliminated, as Freud laboured to uncover the meaning of these animals out of place. Yet, as Deleuze and Guattari illustrate, animals for Freud were resemblances, hieroglyphs rather than things in themselves. The Wolfman “knew that Freud had a genius for brushing up against the truth and passing it by, then filling the void with associations”. He also knew “that Freud knew nothing about wolves, or anuses for that matter” (1987: 26). The boldly stated critique here is precisely Freud’s interpretation of what is animal, neglecting the more radical implications of cross-species relating. For Freud, animals within the consulting room were standing in for something else. For Deleuze and Guattari, on the contrary, dream animals bring to bear an otherness that cannot be incorporated or explained in terms of an economy of the same. Human-animal relating presents a potential ‘contagion’ of each species, leaving both parts marked by the encounter.

Animal astronauts present a dense sedimentation of metaphorical and material relations of being between species, but only in the detail of the voyages themselves can we begin to unpick the specific forms of relating. If we consider, for example, the choice of species category and the practice of animal astronaut naming, we can begin to draw out what Haraway calls forms of sociality that join humans and animals. In early space animal experiments, there is a clear species preference between the competing nations: the USSR choice was for canines, the USA for primates. In the topography of classification, the choice of the Russian aerospace team is an animal closest to the human in spatial terms. Dogs live with humans, yet the dogs used for the experiments were notably not former pets but stray dogs. Gathered from the streets of Moscow, these particular canines were considered choice for their lack of ‘history’. Not only stray dogs but mongrel bitches: female dogs, according to the reasoning, were physiologically better suited to the constraints of the harness as they could urinate by squatting. Their training included being placed in simulators, riding in centrifuges and living in progressively smaller cages for several weeks prior to a mission. A stray dog that has no experience of confinement might have regarded this particular set of ordeals as the ultimate exercise in survival.

These criteria are not simply practical components, but constitute a set of relations with a particular type of dog. Stray dogs have strayed from the laws of human proprietary; as ‘blank canvases’, the state may impose a claim. Similarly, mongrel dogs have no attachment to lineage, no identifiable history of breed and the associated forms of knowledge and familiarity accruing to canine typology. Thus, the particular dogs selected for the space missions reconfigure the meaning of ‘dog’; no longer taking up the proximate position of domestic pets or valuable canine stock, these dogs are relocated further along the human-wild animal spectrum. The practice of naming consolidates this manoeuvre. The dogs in many

“Space travel is  
a projection in its  
multiple sense”

are brought together in the spectacle of space travel: we watch the ‘apparent simplicity’ of sending animals into space.

Space travel is a projection in its multiple sense. A material vehicle, the semiotically rich idea of the ‘rocket’ harnessing the power of weaponry, is projected into a calibrated range of distances. Whilst dispatched within specific historical conditions, it is also the projection of a future, gathering into itself the limitless fantasies of other modes of existence that may extend the experience of ‘life’. Simultaneously it transports and extends the competitive struggle between nations to establish control over territory, a projection of empire onto unmapped space. Each of these projections takes as foundational a familiar lineage of classification, an ordering of nations, ethnicities and species. Animals, as they journey into the unknown, are fulfilling a range of psychic, topographical and historic modes of thought; the exercise in animal space travel in fact reproduces familiar paradigms of subject positioning and hierarchy. The anthropologist Edmund Leach, seven years after the first animal voyaged into outer space, wrote a paper that illustrated the structural importance of animals as categories of thought, *Anthropological aspects of language: animal categories and verbal abuse*. Leach did not ostensibly have space travel in mind in the writing of this essay, yet the system that he presents bears fruit for the thinking of the significance of animals in outer space.

The classificatory system that Leach maps out is distinctly spatial, tracing a series of distances between the human subject and finely distinguished animal species. Closest to the human subject are pets, followed by domestic animals (chickens, geese, goats), wild fowl (pheasants, pigeons, deer), and finally wild animals. This system marks a distance from the human subject (and Leach notably uses the word ‘Ego’ followed ‘self’ in brackets), as a spatial delineation. The pet resides in the home, livestock within the farm, game in the field, and wild animals in the ‘far’. This topographical model is replicated in terms of human kinship. From self we move to sibling, followed by cousin, neighbour and, at the edges, stranger. The structural nature of this model suggests that the sets of animal, topography and kinship are homologous, that is, the way in which we think about the components in each series is identical. Strangers, distance and wild animals invoke the same response. Equally significant is the oppositional nature of thought as it operates, with the first and last elements of each chain creating a stability of opposition.

The categories of the middle terms, Leach writes, are less stable, giving way to levels of ambiguity. Livestock may also be pets. Game may be wild animals. When the laws of incest and rules of ownership are muddled, spatial relations are disturbed and animals are seen to roam into stray areas of thought. Leach’s essay usefully joins two modes of nineteenth century thought regarding animals: the discourse of natural science producing a hierarchical classification of species, and the project of psychoanalysis and the slippage of such categories. Whilst in late nineteenth century Europe, national museums were fulfilling the task of ordering and making structural sense of the relations between humans, animal

instances are given names of wild animals: Bars (panther or lynx), Lisichka (little fox), Belka (squirrel), insects, Pchelka (little bee), Mushka (little fly), Kozyavka (little gnat), or earthly elements, Ugolek (little piece of coal), Verterok (little breeze). By a curious turn of imaginative thought, these dogs are translated into other animal and elemental forms, pushing the canines away from human domesticity and engendering naturalised elemental metaphors for the space dogs.

In contrast, the US space mission selected animals from the further end of the spectrum and set about translating the creatures into human terms, an anthropomorphic re-inscription. The first primates to undergo sub-orbital flights in 1948 were Albert, a rhesus monkey flown in a V2 rocket, followed three days later by Albert II and three further Alberts, many of who died in the course of the experiments. In 1952, two Philippine monkeys named Mike and Patricia were sent thirty-six miles into the atmosphere, along with two mice, Mildred and Albert. In a further twist of the animal-human interface, two of the most famous primates sent into space have names that are acronyms: Sam, a rhesus monkey (US Airforce School of Aviation Medicine) and a chimpanzee, Ham (Holloman Aero Med). Here, a specific form of human-animal relating emerges in alliance that incorporates the science culture itself, condensed in the name that layers primate, human and laboratory. The naming of the animal, in addition to its telemetric implants, configures a new cross-species of human-animal machine. In 1960 this configuration is given a generic term, the word *cyborg*, appearing for the first time, according to Haraway, in a paper written for a US Air Force aviation medicine conference.

*“The national inflection of the space projects creates bonds of different kinds”*

The national inflection of the space projects creates bonds of different kinds. The USSR model, through its selection of canine type and naming practices, situates the domestic canine within the wild, naturalising the wilderness of outer space, creating a new homology between terrestrial and outer space. Dogs, we may conjecture, are dangerously close to the human, a surrogate too familiar to subject to such risk. The US model, in contrast, takes an animal from the ‘wild’—literally, in the case of Ham, from the Cameroons in West Africa—and sets about an anthropomorphic transformation. The need to justify both the scale of economic resources and the ethical use of animals in space experimentation demands a close relation with the primates, a surrogacy that appears but one step away from the human counterpart. The use of primates and their human naming draws a continuity between species, a gradation of links in which the science culture of the space project appears as a naturalised continuity of evolutionary progress. Animals, critically, do the work, materially and semiotically.

In sending animals into space, there is a putting into circulation of ideas about species categories and a re-newed forging of animal-human relations. The context is complex, animals can appear too close or too distant, but what is less visible is the simultaneous coming-into-being of humans. In relation to the animal astronauts, scientists risk an extraction of their humanity if the project appears overwhelmingly an exercise in rational control and abstract



experimentation. In the cold-war period this anxiety was negotiated in the ways outlined here, in the management of metaphorical distances between species, in a project that was after all about ‘space’ in its multiple sense. In the follow-through of relations with these animals post-space mission, the mode of sociality is no less complex. Whether or not animals literally came back to earth, they continue to feature in symbolic systems of circulation, to guarantee a certain humanity in the form of memorial and celebrity. The chimpanzee Ham was placed, on his return to earth, in the Washington Zoo until 1980 and the Carolina Zoological Park until his death in 1983, where upon his body was preserved and loaned to the International Space Hall of Fame in Alamogordo, New Mexico. Claimed for a particular kinship system of space travel, enjoined by the story of heroism and sacrifice, the body of the animal is preserved and put to work once again.

The after-life of animal space travellers bears the hallmarks of the transcendental, the extraction of some ordinary organism from an everyday context and its transformation as an eternal entity. It is the ultimate make-over story for animals, a trade-off for their utility, although the animal labour continues. Strelka and Belka, two dogs who went into space aboard Sputnik 5 and returned as the first animals to survive orbital flight, are particularly hard working examples. Strelka was subsequently mated, delivering six puppies one of which was gifted to the daughter of President John Kennedy as an act of international solidarity in matters of space exploration. Both Strelka and Belka were preserved through taxidermy, the latter on display in a glass case at the Memorial Museum, Moscow. Strelka’s body continues to negotiate travel as part of an international touring exhibition. In a further declension of the metaphor of travel and space, the dog astronauts are commemorated by a series of stamps, diminished in stature and eternally stuck down, destined to travel but possibly never to arrive.

The most iconic animal in space travel also leaves the most curious trace. Haunted by a contestation of ‘facts’, Laika’s story is not a testament to the animal but to the complex investments in play in animal astronauts. Laika, a stray dog of approximately three years in age found on the streets of Moscow, a mongrel thought to be mostly Siberian husky and part terrier, was sent to an altitude of almost 2000 miles in Sputnik 2. Travelling in a capsule attached to a converted SS-6 intercontinental ballistic missile, Laika was secured by a harness that allowed movement to reach food and water. She was fitted with electrodes that transmitted information about her blood pressure, heartbeat and breathing. The experiment was considered a success as the dog survived the transition through the earth’s atmosphere and into space, providing information about a living creature’s experience of weightlessness. Watched attentively by an international media, the experiment was not designed for ‘recovery’. Information was broadcast that Laika was treated to a form of euthanasia as the life-support system ran down, oxygen levels depleted and possibly her food had been deliberately poisoned to secure a controlled death. It was reported that she lived for six or possibly seven days in space. In 2002, new information was released,

*“Laika’s story is not a testament to the animal but to the complex investments in play in animal astronauts”*

revealing that Laika had survived for a period between five and seven hours, and rather than a planned depletion of resources, the dog had died from stress and overheating.

The trace of Laika, rather than the monument to her, is to be found on the internet site of the Tass News Agency. It is a sound file, a recording of the dog's heartbeat, contextualised by the voice of an American scientist. The heartbeat of a dog in space fifty years ago is a strange *memento*. A sound trace, more than an image, evokes the solitude of the journey, and the heartbeat is a particularly primal sound. It places the listener, speculatively, in the place of the dog, which is symbolically in the place of the human. In the cross-registration of positions, it allows a momentary imaginary perspective from the dog's point of view. What must 'we' have looked like from there? It is a question that decentres the human perspective, a task that animals, if we let them, can usefully do.

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# Gareth Webb

*“Perhaps you would not kill a man. I would. I would kill him dead. I don’t know where I’d find the strength, but I would. And I wouldn’t stop. Does that make me an animal?”*

Thou shalt not kill.

Are you a parent? Perhaps not. Well, imagine this for me. Try to imagine the uncertainty, the nervous excitement on hearing the news. Imagine the pregnancy. Feeling the first kick. The growing realisation that this tiny thing is a new person. Imagine the tender immensity of that.

Seven months later a small, perfect, underweight girl is born. Imagine the happiness you feel, coloured with worry and fear, the sleepless nights until they let you take her home. She is everything.

You remember the first time she stands. Her gurgles. Her smile. The first time she stayed at a friend’s house and how difficult it was to not be there to tuck her in.

She is fifteen now. When you look at her you still see that exuberant four-year-old. She is fast building her own life. You have no idea what music she listens to. At her friend’s birthday party last weekend she probably drank vodka, but there’s no way of knowing.

And now... you and she have been taken hostage. You are lying cold and weak on a bare concrete floor. The earthy, metallic air chills your nostrils. Everything aches. The dim light and the moving shadows are terrible. You hear the click of his belt and the clink as the buckle meets the floor. She stopped crying some

time ago. Her sobs are silent.

Imagine the fear. The broken chair leg is not far out of reach. Perhaps you are too afraid, too weak. Or perhaps you rise and, as he goes to lay his hands on your daughter, you bring the chair leg down on him, beating, and beating, and beating. He will not touch her. Not that.

Perhaps you would not kill a man. I would. I would kill him dead. I don’t know where I’d find the strength, but I would. And I wouldn’t stop. Does that make me an animal?

If you are thinking “Yes, but that’s different”, then you are missing the point. It’s not different. If in that moment you could kill a man then killing is in you. It is a part of you. You probably find the idea of killing repulsive. Good. I’m glad. I wouldn’t want you to like the idea. Rejecting that violence is healthy and important, but denial is different from rejection. If you deny that something is in you, part of you, because it is unpleasant or uncomfortable you will never understand.

There is a boundary between what I accept and what I deny. I am a generous pacifist; I am not a murderer. I am also not a racist or a thief. Fine. These distinctions are important and valid. It is important to be able to distinguish one from the other.

Our understanding operates primarily in terms of similarity and difference. Similar to, different from. If I couldn't distinguish one car from another I'd be very confused in a car park. If I could not tell one berry from another I might eat the poisonous one. If I could not draw a line between myself and the murderers, between 'I' and 'not I', I could not write a law that punishes them and protects me.

But the other side of punishment is prevention, and if I deny my unpleasantness I can never understand how hate works, how racism works, how fundamentalism works. And if I can't understand, I can't prevent. Pushing "That is not me" over there and far away doesn't help anything.

As I write this, the television is burbling away in the background. Advertisements for hair products and skin creams and deodorants. It's not just the murderers that we deny. We deny ourselves. Obviously if someone stinks of BO then they don't wash, they are unclean and hence unhealthy. Unhealthy is bad. But really, what is gained by being at odds with yourself. Your inescapable, animal, unpalatable self is nonetheless yours.

Sweat, blood, mucus, fat and faeces. It's not pretty, is it? It is likely that you pull away from these words. Distance yourself. They all have their negative

connotations. If you came home tomorrow to find that your dog has left a turd for you on the sofa you might well say in conversation, "So I came home last night and that bloody dog..." On the other hand you would not be so quick to discuss your own diarrhoea.

We don't talk about shit and blood. Much less menstrual blood. There are huge taboos surrounding periods. And how does that make a teenage girl feel? To be physically forbidden once a month. And why? That blood is the most basic symbol of fertility and the beauty of birth and life. We are sweaty, bloody animals. We are much else besides, but without that we are nothing.

Charlotte



# Dumas



Although she has photographed dogs, wolves, bears and tigers, Charlotte Dumas is perhaps most fêted for her portraits of horses, in which she brings out their dignity and brooding vulnerability. *Yannis Tsitsovits* talks to the artist whose work is informed by a fascination with history, animal symbolism, and the pathos of French Romantic painting.

*Untitled*

2002

C-print

115x153 cm/30x40 cm



*Untitled*  
2004  
C-print  
90x120 cm/30x40cm



*Untitled*  
2004  
C-print  
90x120 cm/30x40cm

**I**f one were to draw an imaginary scale, in contemporary photography, of promiscuity toward subject matter, Wolfgang Tillmans, with his fondness for the casual and everyday, would sit at its 'loose' end (*If One Thing Matters, Everything Matters*, announced his 2003 retrospective at Tate Britain). Charlotte Dumas, meanwhile, would surely find herself somewhere on the other side. Her approach to portraiture betrays a passion for observation that recalls the doggedness of old school painters: witness the meticulous *chiaroscuro* effects of her *Day is Done* series, and her travels around the globe to pursue her chosen mammals.

But, besides the animal theme, her photography is also about time and its effects on the realm of the living. She likens her polaroids—which she says she uses as “sketches”—to relics. Yet her subjects are often relics themselves, be they tigers in captivity or the remains of the Italian cavalry. This often gives her photographs a quaint, wistful air. Her thoughts reveal an artist who is intent on evoking empathy in the viewers—not through feelings of pity for what they are looking at, but through helping them see in the animal something of themselves that would otherwise be obscured by the presence of their own kind.

*How did you start photographing animals?*

I started photographing police dogs for my graduation project. I wanted to have some pictures of instinctive aggression without the human contact, which is never without a story, so I ended up focusing on their jaws and teeth. After my graduation, I went to the Rijks Academy in Amsterdam for a postgraduate programme, where I had two years' time to develop whatever I wanted to do. I was fascinated by these police dogs, so I had them come to my studio. I presented the portraits as big posters to emphasise their symbolic values and iconography—police dogs as statues. Because I was working with the police so often, I became interested in police horses, which to me was a bigger, almost overwhelming subject. The police is the last Western place where horses are used in such a matter—not just for fun or to work in the field, but they are connected to power and the army. That led me to the army horses of Rome, the Carabinieri a Cavallo, which I photographed in 2003-2004.

*Seeing a policeman ride a horse, especially in the centre of the city, is a really bizarre sight. It's obviously less convenient than driving a car, so it's much more about status and power.*

There are still animal qualities that man likes to use, which aren't easily evoked by machinery. A horse has a natural power—it's intimidating when you're next to it, it plays on our instinct. In Amsterdam they ride by two, in contrast to New York where they can ride by themselves. It looks really strange, like a lonesome cowboy on the streets of Manhattan. But I really like that aspect that

“I presented the portraits as big posters to emphasise their symbolic values and iconography—police dogs as statues”

still exists in modern society. For me it's about the interpretation of animals, their qualities and how we take them to heart and try to identify with them. People stand in front of my portrait of a horse and they can really relate to it, because they're projecting their own feeling onto it. I think that's why animals are my main subject: they're easy for someone to reflect upon without having the human context of your own species.

*Have there been any painters that have been an inspiration for you?*

My favourite painter is Eugène Delacroix—especially with my topic now, because he painted and sketched a lot of tigers and lions. It's a very romantic theme, the way he used it to express human emotion, which was often repressed in the commissions he did. Especially with him, they turned out more human than the animal they had to represent. There are also other artists such as Antoine Barye and of course Ucello, Caravaggio and Géricault, because of the horses. They were very thorough too. They really stuck with their subject and studied and painted and sketched it over and over again. I work in that way—the classical way—so I spend a lot of time investigating and observing.

*You refer to Polaroids as nostalgic because they capture a moment in time, so they automatically are a reference to something gone, a relic. You also mention these 'old masters'. How important are the past and tradition to your art?*

I think you really hit a point there. From a philosophical point of view, photography is the evidence of a moment that has already gone, so I kind of hold on to it. If you exaggerate a little, it's almost a tragic medium, but also very romantic. So it already makes the medium so suitable for themes like that. My subjects are also very much about the past and history. I like to place myself in the tradition of classical art, where one spends a lifetime doing one thing and then at the end of it you might have captured a small surface but you did it so thoroughly that it leaves a mark anyway. Being a good observer and knowing how to frame your image—whether you're a painter or photographer—I think that's where the quality of an artist comes in.

*You say your work is almost tragic, like an elegy for the past. But there are a couple of photos that seem humorous to me: the ones of the horses' backs. At first glance, what is discerned is this strange, hirsute shape. Have you ever played that game as a child where you paint a mouth between the thumb and the index? Your photos have a similar effect, which is comical, almost anthropomorphic.*

I can certainly understand that there is some humour in it. It also becomes aesthetic too. It's really about form—how things transform. That's also one of the manipulative traits of photography or just using images: you show things that are so different for everyone to see, but you show them in a particular way. Lots of people thought that photo looks like a lying woman more than a horse. I really like that about my subjects: they're very accessible and simple in their set up, but it's not simple to make them. When you make something

“There are still animal qualities that man likes to use, which aren't easily evoked by machinery”

pure it can have so much impact, instead of doing something with multiple layers where you have to have an essay on the side.

*What you do, which most other artists who use animals aren't doing, is that you bring out the character of the animal, so your photographs are portraits in the true sense.*

A couple of years ago I would have rebelled against a statement like this—I would have said that it wasn't about animals, it's about humans. Of course it is about us, because we're the ones that are looking at it, so I don't have to emphasise it even more. But, in the end, they really are animal portraits. Working with animals or children is often seen as a lower form of art, it's not really taken very seriously in that respect. So you either have to use them, or exaggerate them, or mock them, but to just make portraits like that is considered less of a worthy subject somehow, at least in the Netherlands. Now this is kind of changing. But I had to struggle very hard to make my point. I finally feel that I'm getting somewhere—people expect animal portraits from me, but it's not National Geographic.

*So what does the horse symbolise for you?*

For me the symbol of the horse is what it stands for in history. I have a fascination with the First World War, which is the last European war which was mainly fought on horseback and also the first war in Europe to be captured so broadly on film and photograph. I don't think there is another animal as full of contradictions as the horse, because it's supposed to be free and powerful and proud, a very gracious animal. On the other hand, it's been used and abused; it has a violent past. It's also about faith and trust and cooperation. A horse is not like a dog—you can't make it do things. It's very complex, the relationship between horse and man. I don't want

to make a political statement about horses being treated badly—I'm just very interested in the whole dynamic, this love-hate relationship. And it all comes from our side of the fence. The horse itself is just an animal, a pure being. In history, it's what we have given it: using it as an icon, in everyday life and in wars. So it's a perfect metaphor to see our own history. But in my own portraits I cut down to my own experience, it's purely about the emotion. My relationship with the horse is something fragile and delicate. It's an animal that knows better, but is letting it happen regardless. It's tragic in a way, like some sort of passive resistance.

Charlotte Dumas will be on show at the Centre Ceramique, Maastricht, from 24 June until 16 September. Her work will also be presented by Galerie Paul Andriessse at Art 38 Basel, which runs from 13 June until 17 June.

For more information on the artist, please visit: [www.charlottedumas.nl](http://www.charlottedumas.nl).

All images courtesy the artist.



*Untitled*  
2002  
C-print  
100x154 cm



Polly Morgan



Polly Morgan's still lives are taxidermy with a twist: instead of mounting the animals mid-flight or on all fours, she displays them in a position of death or sleep. *Yannis Tsitovits* meets the peculiarly British artist that has elevated *rigor mortis* to an art form. Portrait by *Lisa Johansson* and *Giuseppe de Bella*.



*Untitled*  
2007  
Leather-bound prayer book,  
taxidermied robin  
25 x 27 x 27 cm



*La Petite*  
2007  
Wooden matchbox, quail chick  
7x3x1.5 cm



*Someone On The Phone* (detail)

2006

Bakelite telephone, taxidermied magpie, glass box, white wooden plinth  
153x42x42 cm

I first came across Polly Morgan's taxidermy by accident. It was August 2005, and I was celebrating my birthday at an East London venue that had commissioned some pieces from her. I was perhaps too inebriated at the time to pay them the attention they deserved. When I returned to the scene a few days later, I felt intrigued by what I saw: four bell jars, each containing animals in impossible constellations, such as a squirrel holding a miniature glass dome with a fly on a sugarcube, or a lovebird staring at his own reflection, complete with tiny white rat rug.

That was Morgan's debut as an artist. Since then, a longer line of exhibitions has followed, including the Banksy-curated *Santa's Ghetto* (where she showed alongside Chris Cunningham and David Shrigley), as well as group shows at LAZ.inc, London in 2006 and the Kirsty Stubbs gallery in Dallas, Texas in March. In these installations, instead of reanimating the animals, Morgan displayed them in a position of repose or death, thereby turning traditional taxidermy on its head.

Her decision to study taxidermy—which she describes as “part butchery, part sculpture”—was prompted by a desire to cater to her own taste—that, and a particularly badly stuffed rodent. “I wanted to buy some taxidermy online,” Morgan tells me. “The first thing I got was a rat's head mounted on a plaque. Even to my untrained eyes it looked terrible: it had beads for eyes and black cotton stitching around the mouth. I remarked to a friend as a joke, ‘God, I think I can do better than that.’” A few months later she was studying under the tutelage of taxidermist George Jamieson. “I'm quite competitive by nature,” she says. “With taxidermy, I felt I could take my time learning it and that, at the same time, my work would stand out in a way that it wouldn't have done if I was doing photography, for example.”

Morgan's “still lives”, as she calls them, have become a trademark of sorts. “I always knew that I wanted to see the animal in the posture that it died in, as opposed to its being reanimated,” the artist explains. “And I didn't want the natural habitat mimicked, because it sometimes ends up looking like a bad photograph.” Her art rests on the paradox that seems to lie at the heart of the practice: recasting the animal in action will often make it look empty, while preserving its stillness can lend it depth. It's as if a soulless vessel is presented to the viewer, who is expected to jump in to fill the void with meaning.

Much of this filling-in depends on whether one sees beauty in what has perished. For Morgan, this is a given: “It's an ornament. When an animal is just lying down and looks like it's dead it makes you look at the body and feathers as a shell, as opposed to imagining the life inside it. Because there is no life inside it.” Later, she adds: “I love living animals, of course, and don't wish death on any of them, but when it happens it's just

*“I always knew that I wanted to see the animal in the posture that it died in, as opposed to its being reanimated”*



*To Every Seed his own Body*

2006

Glass dome, silk-covered wooden base, leather-bound prayer book, taxidermied blue tit, crystal chandelier  
20x23x23 cm



*Still Life After Death (no 1)*

2005

Glass dome, wooden base, taxidermied pigeon and chick, crystal chandelier  
34x41x17 cm

as beautiful. It just becomes something different—not something less. It just changes.” Morgan facilitates this shift in aesthetic perception through the use of chandeliers, bell jars, cutlery, and other props procured from junk shops or eBay.

Take *Rest a Little on the Lap of Life*, for example, for which she placed a white rat in a champagne glass: “By putting it in the glass, it naturally formed a circle in quite a perfect way. At the same time, it’s as if the body is spilling out of the glass. It ends up looking like a scoop of furry ice cream.” The work does indeed allow the rat to shed its association with horror and disease, as a press release proclaimed, but this is due less to its being placed in a different environment than the transformation of its back into a fluffy sphere. For viewed from a different angle, the foetal heap—all pink limbs, ears and tail—very much retains this association—which adds an element of thrill to its visual appeal.

Finding the right setting for Morgan’s still lives frequently takes on a trial-and-error approach. While working on *To Every Seed his own Body*, she got a feeling of the blue tit’s weight, which prompted a U-turn: instead of perching it on a twig, she decided to place it on top of a leather prayer book that was lying around. “Something really clicked between the two things,” she muses. “It was as simple as that. I also had a dome that fitted with it perfectly. The whole thing happened organically in the studio—quite a lot of times it does.”

*The Mind Over Matter* series, whose composition is a nod to Salvador Dalí, was conceived in much the same fashion: “I was thinking about Dalí’s *Sleep*, where the head is propped up by little sticks and the flesh flops over them. It was similar to what I was trying to achieve. But they didn’t add anything to the bird—they just looked like stalks.” Morgan ended up combining her initial idea with the melting clocks in *The Persistence of Memory* and the cutlery stuck into the rock-human formation in *Autumn Cannibalism*. With that, the sticks were replaced by spoons, whose molten ends were used as a base to prop up the birds.

Other works too echo the Surrealists: *Someone on the Phone* brings to mind Dalí’s *Lobster Phone*, while *Rest a Little on the Lap of Life* recalls Meret Oppenheim’s fur-covered teacup. Although Morgan accepts these connections, she is quick to reject any deliberate reference to these Surrealist staples: “There is definitely something there. But the only time it’s been really conscious is with the spoons.” Yet what her taxidermy also shares with, say, Óscar Domínguez’s *Brouette* or Marcel Jean’s *Armoire Surréaliste*, is the espousal of craftsmanship as a core ingredient of the work. Moreover, both her art and the movement draw attention to the possibility of a parallel reality, with Morgan’s still lives strongly hinting at the afterlife—even if in her case this is not so much about the uncanny or supernatural as about art’s ability to breathe new life into the earthly. And as if that wasn’t enough, her upcoming solo show in London has been titled *Exquisite Corpse*.

This is, however, where the analogies with Surrealism end. When I ask Morgan if she ever worries that death could monopolise her work’s interpretation, she replies, “In art, a lot of things boil down to death and sex. But I don’t think the latter interests me. I can’t ever imagine myself addressing it in my work.” In a Surrealist setting, her animals would probably have been fetishised in homage to Freudian theory. And although both rely, to a certain extent, on the chance meeting of objects, Surrealism plays on their incongruity, whereas in Morgan’s taxidermy, their goal is to embellish. Morgan’s art, then, does not lay claim to altering the viewer’s perception of reality, much less to freeing mankind from the shackles of logic and reason, as the movement’s

*“In art, a lot of things boil down to death and sex. I don’t think the latter interests me. I can’t think of myself addressing it in my work”*

vanguard bellowed.

That's not to say that her art is innocuous. Taxidermy continues to stir controversy and Morgan occasionally finds herself answering to accusations of morbidity or cruelty: "When someone gives me something they found dead, I can't think of a single time I felt repulsed by it. That's a natural instinct. Children love my work and they love coming across dead things. It's a learned response to drop them or not go near them." She makes it clear that she does not aim to sensationalise. "I'm celebrating the animal—I'm not trying to be gruesome or shock people," she argues.

Some people, however, continue to misinterpret the practice, mainly due to its connotations with hunting and colonialism. Morgan maintains that she only uses animals that have died naturally or through an unpreventable death. I ask her if she sees a contradiction between using a craft with such strong links to the Victorian obsession with classifying species and placing herself within an art scene that so often rails against science and systematism. Her response is typical of her attitude—part admiration, part aloofness—towards traditional taxidermy: "I appreciate it very much, but it already exists and isn't something I wanted to be part of. I suppose I wanted to do something more innovative with it. But I think I've combined the two in a way. I'm definitely influenced by Victorian taxidermy. So the taxidermy itself harks back to that era but I've put a more contemporary spin on it."

In her still lives, Morgan has found a *modus operandi* that is fruitful and distinctive. Yet the idea behind it also preceded the fashion industry's rising interest in taxidermy, birds and all things Victorian—a buildup that peaked in the summer of 2006. And, as with all hypes, it is one that will come to an end (if it hasn't already drawn its last breath). But this doesn't seem to be something that concerns her: "Art sits outside these things. If I started working alongside designers or affiliating myself with things that are very contemporary, I would run the risk of going out of fashion." I nonetheless wonder whether this could be an impetus for her to develop her art further. "I thought of getting into casting, just for practical purposes," she reveals. "You can't really display taxidermy outside if you want it to last. And also to make multiple pieces—if I wanted a flock of birds, for example." It is an intriguing prospect—creating an effigy of a shell—and one that could take her art into a more abstract direction. It would certainly give the *haute couture* something to think about.

Polly Morgan will be featured alongside artists such as Tracey Emin and Conrad Shawcross in *All Tomorrow's Pictures*, a book to celebrate 60 years of the ICA, London. The book will be launched on 30 May at the ICA, in collaboration with Sony Ericsson ([www.ica.org.uk/atp](http://www.ica.org.uk/atp)). *Exquisite Corpse*, Morgan's first solo exhibition, will be on show in October.

For more information on the artist, please visit:  
[www.pollymorgan.co.uk](http://www.pollymorgan.co.uk).

All images of the artworks are courtesy the artist.

*"I'm celebrating the animal—I'm not trying to be gruesome or shock people."*

# Helen McKenna

*“Previous lovers have watched on in horror during visits to friends with pets, the mere hint of my presence making otherwise comatose dogs snarl and foam, and fish leap kamikaze-style out of their tanks.”*

It started before I was even born—the relationship I have with animals, that is. After my conception, but before I was born. My parents had two pet cats, Martha and Alice, who they both adored. However, when my mother became pregnant with me, the cats started to get a bit tetchy. The attention that had once been lavished on them was instead being directed towards my mother’s bump and they weren’t happy about it at all. They tried to compete but what chance has a pretty kitty got against a fat-bellied mama? As the bump swelled their behaviour became increasingly erratic, until, just a couple of days before I was due, they ran away and never came back. In effect, I drove them away. This story became a family favourite—one of those anecdotes I could never escape—whenever there was a pause, a gap, an awkward moment, someone would pipe up with “Remember how the cats were so afraid of Helen they legged it before she was even born?” Of course, I’m glad I could be of conversational service. However, this story (and it is a story—how can one ever prove that it was me who made them flee?) has taken on a certain truth in my head—to the extent that I feel it has become all-out

war. The animal kingdom seeks vengeance for the banishment of two cats from my mother’s house, and I fear being alone with them lest they claim it. Simple.

I get quite upset about the ‘pet-scarer’ tag sometimes, as if in some way it reflects badly on my femininity. Aren’t women supposed to emit gentle, maternal vibes that all creatures warm to? Previous lovers have watched on in horror during visits to friends with pets, the mere hint of my presence making otherwise comatose dogs snarl and foam, fish leap kamikaze-style out of their tanks and cats—well, as I have already said, cats just scarper. And I’m convinced that at these moments Lover makes well-advised mental note to self: do not have children with this woman. And I don’t blame him. After all, if I drive animals to run away, what effect will I have on kids?

I try to justify such outright rejection by telling myself that animals and children are superficial creatures. They can’t understand what we say, so they have to go by what they see. This makes me feel better up to a point—the point at which I am forced to conclude therefore that they don’t like what they see. Is it my hair (a bit Russell Brand at the moment

actually)? Or perhaps I ought to wear more Laura Ashley?

The whole business does concern me somewhat. Animals less so, as I don't often come across them living in a city. But what if my own children are afraid of me? What if they never stop screaming when I hold them? What if only Dad can calm them down? Furthermore, what if these primitive creatures are instinctively right about me? Perhaps they are right to judge me on the superficial. What if I really am just a bad egg and the reason other people don't sense it is because I seduce them with what I say, like a politician? Is it true? Do I deceive people into liking me?

Dearie me. This piece hasn't been about animals at all really, has it? Which might indicate the real reason why animals don't flock to me as if I were a modern day St Francis of Assisi. Because they can see that I'm far too wrapped up in myself to spend time tickling them and catching their fleas. To be frank, my life ain't about animals; it's about me. And if animals can sense that with the effect that they don't bother wasting their time on me then that's fine by me.

Babies, on the other hand, well...if I'm ever to be a mother I might have to work on that one.



# *The Politics of Cats*

*John Hutnyk* embarks on a consideration of dialectics, structural anthropology, William Burroughs, anthropomorphism and warfare in his musings on the aberrance of cats. Images by *Jan Cihak*.

**C***at, n.* Small mammal with an attitude problem.

I imagine that cats are aphorists, composing dialectical koans and licking their whiskers at the elegance of their arabesques. Though I recognise that Adorno himself noted that aphorisms were not admissible in dialectical thought, which should always abhor isolation and separateness (1951/1974:16), I concede that cats are separate and aloof. Since they are never owned by their humans, they stand apart, domesticated only by choice, self-grooming, dreaming of mice (rather than hubcaps—go figure), ignoring us in ways that transcend normal social, political and geophysical categories. We know these routines already, and recognise their outsider status with a mix of awe and disregard.

Projection. The anthropomorphic charge is more difficult to lay upon our conception of cats, yet it does apply. To think of them as yoga-masters, or as independent outsider spirits, is still to malign them as merely human. I am sometimes paranoid in thinking that my cat is mechanical. A twisted automaton designed especially to distort my brain. Uncle Bill Burroughs said that paranoia was being in possession of all of the facts. So let us consider the evidence: Cats purr—this could be very cute, or is it rather the calculated industrial production of cuteness? Cats wash themselves with their tongues—and if they were electric they would short-circuit (though consider how coiffing up a hairball might be just that). Cats growl and hiss when interrogated—clearly they could be

detained as non-combatants if only we had the will, and a strong leader. Cats have whiskers... More examples would only trap us in a dialectical game of catch and release, and so cats will have once again won. They always do, toying with us; ask the mice.

So I think we need to learn to learn from these philosophers of composure. First of all, I imagine Uncle Bill, stoned in the Bunker, communing in some feline comprehension with his cat Fletch: “Wouldn’t you?” But why is it that Lévi-Strauss exchanges a look of understanding with that cat at the very end of his book *Tristes Tropiques*? Why a look, a visual metaphor for knowledge? Well, not so much a look of knowing, but a “brief glance, heavy with patience, serenity and mutual forgiveness” (1955/1973: 544). Do cats forgive? Are they theorists of hospitality? That look bothers me some. If I were to elaborate on the metaphors of vision for knowledge I would ramble on about the way our disciplines are divided up into fields; how one strives to see the point of an argument; how instead of seeing your point, I hold a different view—so many ways in which the assertions of knowledge are visual. But with cats you do not know—the enigmatic Cheshire smile prevails.

Kurt Vonnegut died recently, having once written a great book called *Cat’s Cradle* (1963) which was later accepted by the University of Chicago anthropology department as a Masters thesis. In that book, the narrator, Jonah (referencing *Moby Dick*) investigates the life of the now deceased Felix Hoenikker, developer of the atomic

“*Felix is a quintessential cat’s name, and this Felix is appropriately enigmatic also, concerned only with higher science*”

bomb. Of course we all know Felix is a quintessential cat’s name (my first cat), and this Felix is appropriately enigmatic also, concerned only with higher science, the pursuit of knowledge as calculation, and an absentminded outsider. Though I suspect a certain identification on Vonnegut’s part, only this narrator, as Jonah, could hunt him down, tempt him with the fish perhaps. It’s not just the bomb, Felix invents a substance that threatens the planet—Ice-9, and his children take it and... To tell more would ruin the story for those who have yet to read it—as far as thesis goes, it’s anyone’s guess how Chicago Anthropology managed to assess this as a scholarly work. Credit due.

Burroughs also pursued anthropology. This at Harvard as part of the G.I. Bill where returned WW2 service personnel were offered places in university. Uncle Bill reports that he found the department grim: “I had done some graduate work in anthropology. I got a glimpse of academic life and I didn’t like it at all. It looked like there was too much faculty intrigue, faculty lies, cultivating the head of department, so on and so forth” (Burroughs 2001: 76). It makes me wonder how any of those cats ever get their act together and sit for their degrees. Concentration seems awry, consistency suspended. And a mischievous outsider’s critical countenance continues to leave them disturbingly set apart.

Burroughs in London in 1970 was strangely prophetic when he described America as vulnerable: “extremely vulnerable to chaos, to breakdown in communications, particularly to a breakdown in the food supply [a typical cat concern]. Bombs concentrated on communications, random bombs on trains, boats, planes, buses could lead to paralysis. But you must consider the available counters. We spoke about the ultimate repression that would be used. Once large-scale bombings started you could expect the most violent reactions. They’d declare a national emergency and arrest anyone. They don’t have to know who did it. They’ll just arrest everyone who might have done it” (Burroughs 2001:156).

There are suggestions that all cats be detained in

Guantanamo. We are close to such a repression. Just presenting the look of being an outsider is a dangerous thing. Cats threaten the Western way of life in this time of ‘war on terror’, and do so because we cannot ever tell if they are with us or against us. And they are not afraid of sacrifice—they believe they have nine lives! They adhere to ancient cult traditions (from Egypt no less, training camps in the desert we suspect). They are long past masters of undercover operations (consider CatWoman’s wily ways of entrapping the hero of Gotham). Just read the old Eastern book of war tactics, *I am a Cat* by Soseki Natsume (1905/2002) to see how internecine and dialectical warfare offers a tactical advantage to these furry miscreants. Danger, hiss, pttfft, grrrr.

The thing about cats, aberrant and inscrutable, is that they are the antithesis of the rat-race, and for this reason alone it is worth changing their kitty-litter. Meow!

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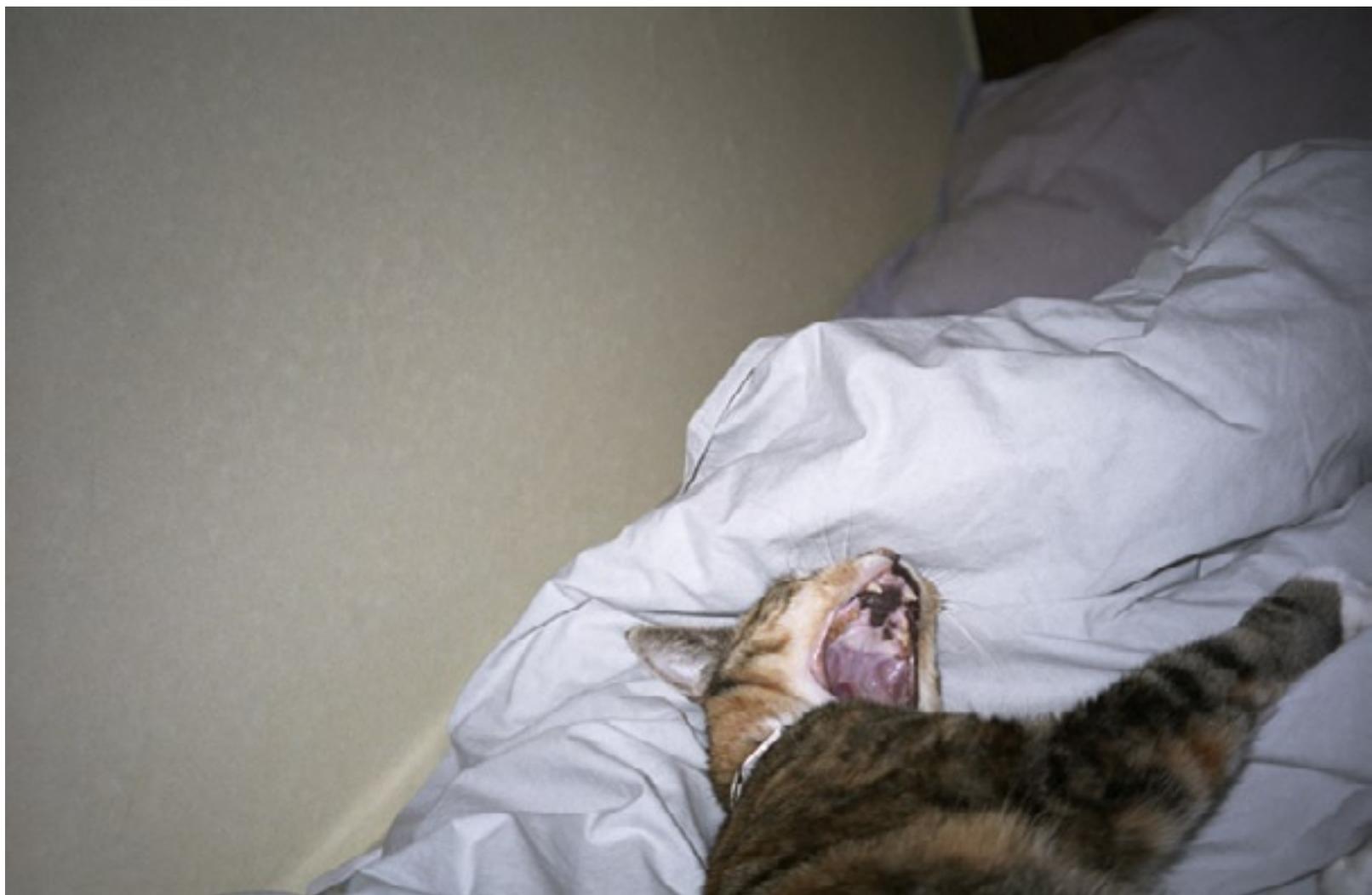
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# Trans Am

Trans Am are post-rock's worst kept secret. With a penchant for pastiche, links to the fabled Chicago scene, and a potent live show, they are the gateway drug for many a budding music-nerd. This year sees the group return to the fray with their eighth full-length record, *Sex Change* (Thrill Jockey, 2007). *Amin Samman* caught up with Sebastian Thomson (drums, programming) in London to discuss animals, robots, politics and parties.



*When did you form and what kind of music were you listening to at the time?*

We formed in the beginning of the 1990s. We had other names back then, and were in a transitional phase. When I was younger I was very into classic rock—like Led Zeppelin. But when I met the Trans Am guys, we were all beginning to get into DC hardcore. And so we were very much in between these two kinds of music, moving from one to the other: the first time we jammed, we played Jimi Hendrix; but the first show we saw together as a band was Fugazi.

*How then do you feel about being labelled a 'post-rock' band?*

Well, it seems as though the term has fallen out of favour recently: in the mid-to-late 1990s, when our albums were coming out, it was ubiquitous. I believe it was Simon Reynolds who coined the term. And when he first used it, he mentioned us, Tortoise and Ui. At the time I thought, "Oh, that's cool—I like those bands." But it began to take on a different meaning. It started out meaning bands that

are mainly instrumental, and that appreciate rock music but are looking at it in post-modern way: you take the elements that you like, and maybe you're a little bit ironic about it—that all made sense. But because of Tortoise's popularity, after two years it didn't mean that any more—it meant instrumental bands that use vibraphones and are mellow. And that kind of pissed me off, because there is nothing mellow or jazzy about Trans Am. I don't know what it means now.

*I definitely see Trans Am as a post-modern band in the way you described. You blend together so many different styles—like kraut, dub, dinosaur-rock, new wave and punk—it's almost like a 'rock genome project'. If that's the case, what kind of god-awful beast are you attempting to create?*

A mantacore. It's a mythological creature. You know, the one with the body of a lion, a human head, bat wings, and a tail that shoots spikes. I think it's from Medieval Europe—I don't think it's Greek, but it has fangs—and a human head with a beard and fangs. So it's a scary, terrifying, horrible monster.



*That's awesome—I can really see a 'man/animal' tension in your music. At least in your early work, you flick back and forth between clinical electronic loops and visceral, balls-to-the-wall rock. Is this bipolarity? Through which channel do you see Trans Am reaching out to people—the cerebral or the passionate?*

It's hard to appreciate the listener's perspective because I am so involved in the making of the music. I guess it does sound a bit schizophrenic. But the way I think of it, the two sides are actually one—it's only the instrumentation that differs. When we do the acoustic drums and electric guitar stuff, it is still pretty repetitive: it has a driving beat, a simple melody, and it doesn't have much in the way of chord changes or harmony—it's more about a riff. And that's the same thing we do when we are using drum machines and synths. You see, in a lot of ways, I think AC/DC and Kraftwerk are the same band: both are stripped-down, hooky, and make great use of straight-ahead beats. To me, Trans Am is like that. When I am playing drums during the rock stuff, I am still trying to play like a machine: a rock robot. That is the connective tissue.

*Let's focus on the man-bot stuff for a moment. Besides the stylistic statement, is there another reason for this? There seems to be an undercurrent of futurism in your music: it's quite explicit in Futureworld, but also present in a more dystopian form on Liberation.*

Well, the first album to have a dystopian view of the future was *The Surveillance*. That one was about the obsession with private property and security in the US—the whole gated communities thing. It's a very weird way to live, and it's getting more popular. And so we were sketching out a vision of abandoned inter-city zones, outside of the reach of cameras and security guards. In *Futureworld* it was a bit more playful. I actually wrote a program in Basic on my Atari computer to create the cover—that's how retro-futuristic it was. Of course, it is a result of the era in which we grew up. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, every other sci-fi movie was about the near future. With *Liberation*, that was more just a reaction to living in Washington during the beginning of the Iraq War. It was more about the present, and to me it feels like it is an album about the past. Now everybody is critical about the war. But when



we wrote that album, people in America were not critical.

*What do you think about the relationship between form and content in your music? At least until Liberation, it seemed as if they were one and the same.*

Well, I think that with instrumental music, the question of form and content is a little more complicated; you don't have lyrics and it's not obvious what the song is about. Honestly, sometimes the song is about nothing. And because we've been determined not to add to the pile of meaningless, disappointing rock lyrics, form has become our content. With *Liberation*, we did have to question what we were doing. For a long time, I was very much against politics in music. I am a very political person, but as far as politics goes, content has to be more important than form. Otherwise the Nazis were great; they had great aesthetics. If you can be convinced of a political idea because somebody wrote a good melody, then you can be convinced of any political idea! I've always thought the

strength and content of the argument to be much more important.

*What would you say then to the suggestion that Liberation had no argument; that it was a static position—an attitude?*

Well, you can't really have a debate on an album. It was an act of desperation. Nobody else was saying anything—not even our left-wing friends, only the fucking Dixie Chicks. Everybody was still pissed off about 9-11 and somebody had to point out that it had nothing to do with Iraq. The only thing that Al-Qaeda and Saddam Hussein had in common is that they both spoke Arabic. And so even though I had always been against political music, I realised that our popularity gave us a golden opportunity to say something about what was going on. I finally understood why singers in the past got political—I thought, "Well fuck, if Fox and Sky News are going cover the war in this way, then we should make our statement too". Of course, an album is not dialectical: there is no

*“On post-rock albums  
there are no names, no  
photos - nobody has fun”*

back and forth. So what we tried to with that George Bush sample on *Uninvited Guest* was make people feel weird about what they were hearing on the news. It was a debate with the media if there was any debate at all.

*Let's move on to your new album, Sex Change. Have you emasculated the defiant beast of Liberation—is that the sex change?*

The ‘sex change’ is a change in attitude. I wouldn’t say emasculated; it is more about being accepting of different possibilities. Obviously, we haven’t had sex changes, but we were trying to move away from our preoccupation with the identifiable. It’s a weird band; it’s a weird album—let’s call it a sex change.

*Is it more of a party album?*

You know what, it’s definitely more of a party album than *Liberation*, because *Liberation* is a total fucking downer. I listened to it the other day—it’s a total bummer. There were three sessions [for *Sex Change*]: one in New Zealand, where we tracked, another in New York, and the one in San Francisco, where we mixed. And in New York and San Francisco, we were definitely having a good time and I think that comes through. I remember listening back when we had sequenced the album and realising that it does keep you bouncing the whole way through. In that way it is a kind of party album. But it wasn’t an explicit attempt to make a party album, like *TA* was.

*TA really did seem like a shot out of the blue; it almost comes across as a mock boy-band album. How does it relate to the rest of your work?*

Every album we make is a kind of reaction to the previous one. *Futureworld* was concise, so with *The Red Line* we wanted to be completely experimental. It was the first time that we had our own studio up and running, and we ended up making a double-album’s worth of soundtrack music. When we finished it, we were totally into it. But a year and a half later, we were sick of it. *TA* was a direct response: we were like, “Let’s write a pop album; let’s write actual songs; let’s have vocals; let’s do verse-chorus-verse-bridge-guitar solo.” Even the artwork was a reaction to post-rock. On post-rock albums there are no names, no photos—nobody has fun. We decided to go to the other extreme and base it on the hip-hop photo-shop stereotype. You’ve seen it before: the hot girl, the car, the pit-bull—all that stupid shit. We wanted to show that we are three guys and we’re not serious all of the time. It was intended to stir up some controversy in the post-rock scene, which it definitely did. In the end, we got bored of that too. We get bored really quickly.

And that, perhaps, is what makes Trans Am as enduring as they are: rather than being held to ransom by the dead idiolects through which they speak, they remain able to place tongue firmly in cheek and move on.

[www.transband.com](http://www.transband.com)

[www.myspace.com/transbandspace](http://www.myspace.com/transbandspace)

# Amanda Truscott

*“Our ability to use language, say others. Our bipedalism. Our big, fat brains. Our capacity for self-knowledge. Our souls. As a species, we are unique, and we insist upon believing in our own specialness. Maybe that’s what separates us from the animals: our narcissism.”*

My first pet was a guinea pig that died because I neglected it. I still feel guilty. I remember leaving its cage uncleaned for so long that when I finally got around to doing it there would be tiny white maggots wriggling under the wood shavings. I remember the sight of them, the smell, the feelings of revulsion and shame. Curiously, though, I forget how I found out about its death. I don’t remember being told. I don’t remember finding it cold and stiff in its cage, which we kept outside because of the smell. All I remember are the maggots, my friend Lucie accidentally snipping a chunk out of the animal’s ear when we gave it a “haircut,” its shivering as I held it inside my jacket to take it home for the first time, and being on a road trip with my parents, looking out over the Mojave Desert, pondering my own culpability in the misery of its life and death. I was ten years old.

I use the word “it” to describe my guinea pig because I never really knew whether it was male or female. To me it was a sexless thing, which I played with like a toy and then grew tired of. If in my heart I really believed it was an object, though, then why this sense of moral responsibility? For most humans,

it seems like animals fall somewhere into the gap between person and thing, something like women used to, and in many parts of the world, still do. Obviously, this state of affairs is not without its difficulties.

Take the Menu Foods scandal, for instance. Last month, Menu Foods recalled several brands of cat and dog food that had been contaminated with a powerful rodenticide. Now, after the deaths of possibly thousands of pets, owners are seeking compensation for vet bills, emotional distress and, in the case of one woman, the purchase price of her \$850 Chihuahua puppy. Some feel as if they have lost family members and others are angry about the money, but either way, they’re probably not reacting as strongly as they would if the rat poison had been found in baby food. You probably didn’t react as strongly to my guinea pig story as you would have if I’d told you my neglect had led to the death of a child. As humans, we naturally feel an affinity for our own kind.

Maybe it’s this very affinity that leads us to ask ourselves time and again the question of what separates us from the animals. Our opposable thumbs, some of us say. Our ability to use language, say others.

Our bipedalism. Our big, fat brains. Our capacity for self-knowledge. Our souls. As a species, we are unique, and we insist upon believing in our own specialness. Maybe that's what separates us from the animals: our narcissism. But what species is not unique? What bird does not have something, a particular song, say, that separates it from all the others, and that might seem to it to be, for all we know, the only real language in all the world? We have no real proof that animals cannot think or dream or speak. Did my guinea pig have dreams of its own, of a world beyond its cage? It might seem like a stupid question, but it troubles me, because a part of me wants to believe that it did. Loneliness afflicts us not only as individuals, but also as a species—hence our keeping of pets. Our loneliness leads us to keep them; our narcissism leads us to treat them as chattel. But are we really any more different from the animals than a bird is from a bear? Are we animals?

When I was younger and worked in a barn to pay for riding lessons, I would take breaks from mucking out stalls to rest my chin on the fence and watch the horses. I couldn't get over how beautiful they were,

even the old ones, even the ones with shaggy coats, cracked hooves and bad conformation. Even under rider, bit and saddle, they never seemed to lose their pride. I couldn't shake the feeling they knew something I didn't, and so when I watched them in the fields I would try to communicate with them telepathically. I would ask things like, "What do you think of all this? How do you feel about us?"

They never answered.

# DJing for Dogs

He's split up with his girlfriend, hanging out with a dog cutter and performing telepathy with a Labrador. Is *James K. Walker* barking mad? Illustration by *Atalya Laufer*.



Whenever I split up with a girlfriend, I always stay with the dog cutter whilst I try to get my head straight. She never asks any questions when I turn up at her door, making a more viable alternative than family. I have known her ever since I was eight and she hasn't changed one bit. She still looks like she has stepped out of a Beryl Cook painting with her tree trunk legs and arms to match.

She lets me use her spare room where my decks take temporary residence upon an old dressing table and my books adorn the empty shelves. I know they are safe here because nobody ever visits, apart from the dogs and their owners and me when I split up with girlfriends.

"I prefer dogs over people," she says, as if trying to make me feel better. It is not hard to believe. There is dog paraphernalia everywhere, enough to cause unease. China figurines, pictures, door mats. Even the pelmet that sits above the curtains is in the shape of a sausage dog. If it were anybody else I would suggest such obsessive behaviour was a sign of misery but with the dog cutter the reverse is true. She is happy in herself with full control over her environment, which I think is more than anybody can hope for.

She tells me I am welcome to stay for as long as I like and doesn't have any rules other than if I make a hot drink I should make one for her as well. One advantage of living with the dog cutter is that she doesn't mind me playing my decks, and so I spend my days entertaining the canines which come in and out of her place. There is something pleasing about performing for a house of animals, perhaps because I will never know if they appreciate such things. They must get sick to death of being walked and having to piss in the park, trained to do politely what if free they would do naturally. I imagine my music offers them a reprieve.

The dogs are here to have the shag removed from their eyes so that they can see the pavements again. Then they are subjected to a bath and shampoo before being presented back to their owners. After witnessing this routine a few times I must confess slight envy at the level of pampering and wonder what it

would be like to be part of their world.

Being intolerably lazy, I enjoy the simplicity of conversing with dogs. They bark at me and I bark back. There is no fancy language or one-upmanship, just reciprocal intonations of noise. It is a welcoming change from the self analysis which the last few months with girlfriend number six evoked.

“You barkin’ at them dogs again, you daft prat?” says the dog cutter.  
“Woof.”

“Do somink useful and mek us a cup of tea”

In return for being patted and preened, all the dogs have to do is not shit on the kitchen floor. They appear to have it pretty easy and I reckon my life could benefit from this kind of arrangement. To test this theory, and with nothing better to do, I decide to take my idea a little further and climb inside the mind of ‘dog’ to see if it is as good as it looks.

My first opportunity comes at dinner time. After making my lunch I pour it straight into a bowl and place it on the floor next to her dog. Then I get down on my knees and start to eat. I ask her pet Labrador if he minds me joining him but he is too engrossed in his own Rabbit and Liver to answer. Whilst we truffle away the doorbell goes.

“Get that will ya, if it’s Mrs. Wilkins tell her I’m nearly done.”

I politely oblige and open the door.

“I’ve come to collect...”

Before she can finish, I dive on the floor and start rolling about, gesticulating through raised paws for her to scratch my stomach.

She doesn’t look impressed and whilst staring at the ceiling informs she is here to collect her dog. I bark but she does not respond. I notice her hair is magnificent and I wonder if she treats herself to a manicure and shampoo at the same time as her pet.

The dog cutter comes through with the woman’s poodle. The woman cuddles it and puts it in a coat so only the top of its head is poking out. She explains it is raining outside and that she doesn’t want Fyffe to get a cold. She leaves a one pound tip and tells the dog cutter than I am mad. The dog cutter is delighted with the tip. It is the first time the woman has given one in two years. As she ushers her out of the door, I hear her explain that I don’t get to see my parents much and that I have just split up with a girlfriend and that she shouldn’t be so quick to judge.

When the dog cutter comes back in the house, I lick at her leg to convey my appreciation of her loyalty, noticing she does not shave her legs. She tells me that it’s not called for and she would prefer it if I got up as I am blocking the hallway. Then half mockingly says if I am a good boy then maybe she will take me for a walk later, before returning to her jobs.

Having eaten and walked like a dog, the only problem I can find is a little indigestion, but I imagine that this will eventually pass once my innards have got used to their new horizontal position.

“They will.”

I look around to locate the voice but there is nobody there.

“Over here.”

I turn around and realise the Labrador is sending me a telepathic message.

“We dogs like to eat, fuck and sleep, which makes you humans a little

*“I ask her pet Labrador if he minds me joining him but he is too engrossed in his own Rabbit and Liver to answer.”*

jealous. That's why you are so eager to cut off our balls. Perhaps you would be happier if you lived our lives."

I want to tell the dog I agree but I am unsure how you perform telepathy.

"I'm proud to be a dog. You do realise that we have thoughts and feelings as well, we just choose not to let on because life is easier this way. If you humans knew we had emotions, well, it would be more than just our balls being cut off."

It is at moments like this that I realise I have perhaps done too many pills in nightclubs or read a little bit too much of Burroughs, or perhaps not enough of both. I suppose because I have never had a telepathic message from a dog before I might as well listen to what it has to say as I may never get the opportunity again.

If you don't listen, how are you ever going to learn?

The Labrador looks a little sad and so I ask him what's up. Without thinking about it I have managed to perform telepathy. My ex girlfriends' have been telling me for years that I think too much and that I should just relax and go with the flow, perhaps they were right all along.

"Humans are intrinsically nasty. They think they can make up for it by giving us the odd shampoo, bath and clip of the nails but it doesn't wash—if you excuse the pun. Having a chain around your neck all day and being shouted at is not good for the soul. Mind you, that's nothing compared to what my parents went through."

"What?"

"My ancestors had it a lot worse. Take my great, great, great, great, Grandfather. He was in what you humans call 'The Great War' although I fail to see what is great about self-induced death."

Tears begin to well in his eyes. To hide this, he bows his head and licks his paws.

"But dogs don't stay in contact with their relatives. They have no loyalty or sense of family, that's why they drift apart," I rationalise.

"What like your parents moving down to the coast and leaving you alone?"

"But that's different."

"Isn't it always?"

"But dogs sleep with their siblings," I counter-argue, hoping he hasn't heard about Nietzsche or Byron or else my argument will be flawed.

"How come you know so much about animals when you're not even a dog?" exclaimed the Labrador, giving a token bark.

"Just because we don't buy Christmas presents for one another doesn't mean we don't care. Within our culture we place no meaning on sex as it is deemed nothing more than a natural reflex. It is telepathy that binds us. This is how we stay in contact. It is pure communication and without decoration. Unlike you lot we encourage our kin to get out and explore the world for themselves rather than being stuck in the same place, sharing the same house. True love is setting someone free, not setting them in a noose and taking them for a walk."

I consider apologising for humanity but decline. This is far too big a task to ask of one person, look what happened to JC. Besides, I am sick of retrospective morality. I am interested in the here and now, not the

*“Having a chain around your neck all day and being shouted at is not good for the soul. Mind you, that’s nothing compared to what my parents went through.”*

*“Only a human could describe war in terms of liberty and freedom. War is the celebration of death”*

mistakes of my fellow man.

“We distrust humans because of what you did to us in the ‘Great War’.”

“Look, everybody suffered as we fought to defend liberty and freedom.”

“Only a human could describe war in terms of liberty and freedom. War is the celebration of death, nothing less, nothing more. If you shat, ate and fucked when you liked there would be no need for these repressed desires to manifest themselves in such grand gestures. Anyway, this is not the point. The point is, you brought us into the war and lied to us.”

“Eh?”

“We did our bit. We were messengers and guard dogs; we even went over at the front—something your biased history books omit. We even had to lay telephone wires across fields whilst being shot at just so you could communicate with each other. Why you didn’t just use telepathy we will never know. But then what would we know, we are only dogs.”

“I never realised”

“I haven’t heard that one before. Do you know how the human soldiers tested for mines?”

“No.”

“They would kick a ball into no-man’s land and ask us to fetch it. That’s how my great, great, great, great, grandfather died. How insulting to kill him under the premise of play. Ever since then our species have been wary every time you want to take us up the park. We don’t piss up lampposts because we are marking territory. We piss up lampposts because we are petrified.”

“I’m so sorry; I never realised.”

“Do you think anybody cared to make sure that dogs were fed during rations? Do you really believe that we got to eat our own dog food when the other men were starving? Give me a break. Who do you think killed the rats in the trenches so you could eat? Who do you think acted as a warm pillow and loving companion through the cold lonely nights? Why didn’t you just cuddle and stroke each other? You were the ones who were lonely and missing your partners, we weren’t because we could send telepathic messages to one another.”

I didn’t know what to say so I barked.

“So you see fobbing us off with a quick walk and blow dry is the kind of insensitivity we have come to expect from humans.”

Although I was sympathetic I felt a strange urge to defend my species. Besides, dogs weren’t so perfect.

“Well, how do you explain the prejudice you show towards postmen?”

Like most spokesman for a particular disenfranchised group he avoided the question, feebly explaining there are exceptions to every rule. To which I added was of no consolation to Postmen.

“Look, we do it to help you, you idiot. At present you communicate through emails, phones and letters. Have you any idea what that is doing to the environment? All the petrol in the delivery vans, all the trees being cut down and paper buried into the ground once the letters have been read. We bite postman because we are defending the planet and want this type of waste to stop. You need to learn telepathy. It is more

environmentally friendly. It costs nothing. It means you can stay in touch with people all the time. When anybody can read your thoughts you tend to stop having nasty ones, and the world becomes a generally better place.”

He is interrupted by the dog cutter who has finished her latest shampoo and wants to know why I am lying in the dog basket with her pet, sniffing his tail.

“We are communicating telepathically.”

She looks at me for a second and then very calmly rationalises, “Well, can you please get out. If you can perform telepathy surely ya can do it from any part of the house?”

As I went to get up the dog started to lick my face. I found the long dry lashes of its tongue strangely pleasurable.

“Show her how to do telepathy!”

“There’s no point.”

“Why?”

“Because if humans won’t listen to one another, why on earth would they listen to a dog?”

“But I did!”

“Like I say, there’s an exception to every rule”

“Please.”

“NO. Besides, you can tell her.”

“But she won’t believe me.”

“Well, you’ll have to make her believe you.”

“People have been crucified for saying less.”

I gave the dog cutter a gutsy rendition of everything I had just learnt. I told her how many dogs were killed in the war and about the minefields and rationing and warmth they offered lonely men but she seemed more interested in me making her a brew.

“You’ll get over her me lad,” she said sympathetically as if my ex was to blame for this elaborate story. Nobody ever believes you, they only hear what they want to hear.

“Please tell her what you told me,” I asked the Labrador.

He walked over, looked me with those big doe eyes, and then started to hump my knee.

The dog cutter laughed and said I was mad to think that a dog wanted anything more from life than the basics and that soon she was going to get him castrated. On hearing this the Labrador ground into my knee with a new found sense of urgency. My leg remained bellicose, as if obliging in a last request.

“Can I tell you something else?” he said whilst panting

“What?”

“You are shit at mixing, sell your decks and go on holiday and see a bit of the world.”

“Anything else?”

“Yes, don’t listen to a word cats tell you. They’re liars, the lot of them.”

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# Zoosex

Through her research into the recent history of zoosexuality, *Rebecca Cassidy* explores wider debates about the relationship between individual sexuality and public morality, engaging with such diverse areas as religion, law, fashion, taboo, homosexuality, animal rights, identity and biopolitics.

*In our culture, the decisive political conflict, which governs every other conflict, is that between the animality and the humanity of man. That is to say, in its origin, Western politics is also biopolitics.*  
(Agamben 2004: 80)

Zoosexuality<sup>(ii)</sup>, a sexual orientation towards animals, is one of a number of identities that emerged on the internet during the 1980s and 90s, alongside distinct but related groups of furrries, plushies, therians (weres) and fuzzies. The anonymity of the web created a space in which people who enjoyed sexual relationships with animals could discuss their activities unencumbered by the anxiety of discovery. By the mid-1990s, one could marry one's animal partner at the First Church of Zoophilia, receive practical instructions on how to have sex with a wide variety of species of animals, and conduct a discussion as to the pros and cons of 'coming out' as a zoo. Human-animal sex was no longer confined to the psychological literature where it had been treated as a paraphilia, practised by voiceless social inadequates. Zoos introduced themselves, tentatively at first, on blogs including alt.sex.bestiality (which has since been replaced by alt.sex.zoophile—this change in domain is highly significant) and began to create a distinctive sexual identity and to form an international community.<sup>(iii)</sup>

As zoos became an increasingly confident presence on the internet, they attracted the attention of the mainstream media. In 1999 *Hidden Love: Animal Passions*, a film about a Missouri zoo known as Mark Matthews (and also 'The Horseman' or 'Hossie'), was shown on British terrestrial television (Channel 4). It provoked a wide range of responses from viewers in the UK, but was defended by the UK television regulator (Ofcom) as "a serious documentary

exploring a rare minority sexual orientation.” Mark Matthews was one of the first zoos to ‘come out’, in his autobiography published in 1994, and had featured in an episode of Jerry Springer alongside Pixel, a strawberry roan pony who he referred to as his wife. The episode was shown in the UK in 1998, though it was thought unsuitable for audiences in the US. In 2000, an article in the Independent on Sunday described the loving relationship between Brian, 42, and Trey, his golden retriever:

“I would lay down my life for him without thinking,” says Brian. “He is always there for me. We sleep in the same bed ... and he wakes me in the morning with a kiss. The sex,” he adds, “is great.” (Bird 2000)

The article argues that “for most people, bestiality is far from being the horrifying taboo that it once was”. Soon afterwards, in 2001, Peter Singer, controversial Princeton professor of Bioethics and author of the ‘Bible’ of the animal rights movement, *Animal Liberation*, wrote a review of a book about bestiality, suggesting that because we are animals (great apes, to be precise) “sex across the species barrier” should no longer be seen as “an offence to our status and dignity as human beings” (2001a). He argues that there is no biological or philosophical basis for the barrier between humans and animals (we share genetic material and the ability to experience pain) and this barrier is therefore morally irrelevant (2001a).

During this flurry of activity on the internet and elsewhere, zoos anticipated their eventual acceptance by society, using the language of the gay rights movement in their web based discussion groups. Zoo gatherings (zoocons) were openly advertised<sup>(iii)</sup>. Individuals planned coming out parties and informed families of their sexual orientation. Today, this has all changed. Although pornography involving animals is widely available on the internet, zoo sites are now less numerous and individuals more guarded about their activities<sup>(iv)</sup>. At the same time, a great deal of energy is being invested in the creation of laws prohibiting bestiality. During the 2000s, anti-bestiality laws were introduced in Missouri, Oregon, Maine, Iowa, Illinois and Indiana. Zoophilia has been recast as “interspecies sexual assault” (Beirne 2000), a lobbying issue for animal welfare organisations including People for the Ethical treatment of Animals (PETA) and the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS). The celebratory attitude of zoos writing on the net has been replaced by a bitter sense of disappointment at an opportunity that they feel has been missed. In some ways, the debate currently taking place mirrors others surrounding sexual practices that are presented as transgressive. Zoos hide behind anonymous tags on the internet, afraid of being ‘outed’ and prosecuted under the laws created by those who consider zoosex a moral outrage or a form of abuse. At the same time, many references to sex between humans and animals are couched in a ribald tone that would be out of place in relation to other kinds of sexual transgressions. A man looking lustily at a goat when convinced he is an animal himself (The Animal 2001) is considered appropriate material for a family

*“Zoos anticipated their eventual acceptance by society, using the language of the gay rights movement in their web based discussion group”*

comedy. A man looking at a child or a dead body would presumably not be. Edward Albee's play, *The Goat, or Who is Sylvia?* which described an affair between a married man and a goat, received the Tony Award and rave reviews in London and New York in 2002. The range of responses provoked by references to sex between humans and animals creates a peculiarly productive space in which to consider the nature of human animal relationships, and more broadly, the relationship between individual sexuality and public morality.

There are several possible explanations as to why the UK television watchdog and broadsheet press might be comfortable representing zoosexuality as a minority sexual preference, rather than an aberration. Giddens has famously argued that a "transformation of intimacy" has taken place in Euroamerica. He relates "confluent love" which is "active, contingent love, and therefore jars with the 'forever', 'one-and-only' qualities of the romantic love complex" (1991: 61) to the "pure relationship", "a situation where a social relation is entered into for its own sake, for what can be derived by each person from a sustained association with another; and which is continued only in so far as it is thought by both parties to deliver enough satisfactions for each individual to stay within" (58). Alongside these new kinds of relationship that are contingent, open and negotiated, he identifies the emergence of plastic sexuality. The transformation of intimacy implies that people will actively pursue relationships that reject the connection of sex with reproduction and marriage. This argument and similar arguments by Castells (1996) and Fukuyama (1992), have been criticised by anthropologists for their exaggeration of change, technological determinism, lack of historical depth and conflation of several distinct elements. Despite this, the idea that the family, sex and intimacy have entered a radically new phase has become commonplace. According to this argument, zoosex can be understood as one amongst many newly emerging identities that are no longer restrained by a patriarchal, reproduction (both biological and social) focused system. As with all arguments that claim to identify broad historical trends, it is possible to identify countervailing tendencies. Perhaps most obvious are the rise of the conservative 'family values' associated with the Christian Right in the United States (something that was tried by the Conservative party in the UK under John Major with mixed results) and the sexual traditionalism of many institutions within the West, including the armed forces and the Church. The transformation of Times Square in New York and Soho in London have been used to epitomise the recent desexualisation that is currently taking place in the centres of many Euroamerican cities (Delany 1999).

During the seventeenth Annual Pet Week in the UK, a survey by Direct Line Pet Insurance claimed that British people are more likely to take time off work to care for their pets than for their partners or relatives (Brown 2005). Amongst those interviewed, Amanda Pitkethly argued that, "If you have pets, most people would agree that they are part of the family and therefore you should do for them what you would do for your children. Harry (a collie

*“Alongside these new kinds of relationship that are contingent, open and negotiated, the emergence of plastic sexuality is identified”*

terrier cross) is like my second child” (Brown 2005). In the same week, Zollie, the twenty two stone mastiff from Aberdeen began a “healthfood diet” (O’Hare 2005) and my local Health Authority in Lewisham initiated a scheme under which patients could apply for funding for a pet on medical grounds. Hadley Freeman, deputy fashion editor of the Guardian was dispatched to report on the launch of the latest canine fashion, dog coats from Burberry and Gucci that included a (fake) fur trimmed parka, a poncho and a mint green velour tracksuit (Freeman 2005). Pet store Pets at Home announced a 45% rise in earnings, and plans to uncover twelve new superstores (Press Association 2005).

Pets should not be seen as a solely late modern or Euroamerican idiosyncrasy. Pet keeping was widespread in classical antiquity, and is practised by many indigenous societies in the Americas. It is the recent rapid explosion of pets in Euroamerica since the 1960s that has been described as “unprecedented” and related to a loss of “ontological security”, the result of the decline of traditional social institutions including the family and the state (Franklin 1996). Pets have long been named, buried, clothed, bejewelled, and identified as beneficiaries in wills. However, the sheer scale of contemporary pet keeping is impressive, leading some to speculate about a change in demography, from the nuclear family to the single ‘parent’ of one cat or dog. These family units are an important sector of the commercial enterprise that surrounds pet keeping and the focus of much of the advertising that could equally apply to the family pet, the working dog, or the show dog. People demand equal consideration for their pets, and the idea that ‘pets are people too’ is deeply ingrained and continually reiterated. Discussions amongst committed pet keepers on animal focused weblogs revolve around the human qualities of pets, and are in this sense very similar to discussions that take place between zoosexuals.

The definitive qualities that once marked a boundary between humans and animals are now attributed to both. Pets are described as rational, reflexive, humorous and deceptive in turns. They ‘speak’ to their owners, who ‘understand’ them. Pets dream, have memories and an identity over time, they are individuals. They are ‘part of the family’, often ‘my baby’, and as such they are cared for, their rites of passage are celebrated, they are named, dressed and treated by specialists. At the end of their lives they are cared for in nursing homes, buried and remembered as humans would be (though it is also no doubt significant that many will be euthanized, presumably unlike their human kin). However, academic descriptions of pet keeping and arguments about the obsolescence of barriers between species do not lead to discussions of bestiality, and though pets may be thought of as rational individuals in need of stimulation, their sexual needs are rarely considered (except by zoosexuals, who campaign against neutering). Arguments for the acceptance of animals as kin do not support their recasting as sexual partners, but rather the existence of sometimes contradictory, but usually simply context dependent definitions of animals. Pets may be ‘just like’ kin, but, as this expression implies, in important respects they are also ‘not quite’ kin. They are not eaten, thus relative to (most)

*“Pets should not be seen as a solely late modern or Euroamerican idiosyncrasy”*

farm animals they are personlike, in that people are also not eaten. However, their reproductive destinies are controlled in a way that would presumably be unacceptable in human-human relationships, as is their mortality. The equivalence that is stressed by many pet owners is tempered by the imposition of profoundly differentiating acts on the bodies of pets, including a denial of their status as potential sexual partners.

The increasing closeness between humans and animals, in biological as well as social terms, combined with a loosening of the connection between sex and reproduction may provide support for the argument that bestiality is a potentially subversive and therefore liberating relationship between people and animals, which will gradually gain acceptance. The idea that animals are valid sexual partners may also be perceived as an implicit recognition of equality that may be appealing to those campaigning for animal rights. However, zoophilia is condemned by animal welfare organisations (HSUS, PETA) as well as by the majority of mainstream pet owners on their numerous blogs (see, for example pethub). The only organisation with a current web presence that endorses zoophilia is the North American Man/Boy Love Association (NAMBLA), presumably in order to advance its own controversial claims.

Animal welfare activists and zoosexuals do, however, use similar terms to describe their relationships with animals, emphasising autonomy and individuality:

Animals are beautiful, perfect and equal to us. They should never be coerced into behaviour that is unnatural, and they will find ways of telling you exactly what they want (Zoosexual).

PETA believes that animals have rights and deserve to have their best interests taken into consideration, regardless of whether they are useful to humans. Like you, they are capable of suffering and have an interest in leading their own lives; therefore, they are not ours to use—for food, clothing, entertainment, experimentation, or any other reason (<http://www.peta.org/> 2005).

PETA president, Ingrid Newkirk was the only high profile animal welfare worker to consider Singer's argument, while it was dismissed entirely by all of her colleagues:

“If a girl gets sexual pleasure from riding a horse, does the horse suffer? If not, who cares? If you French kiss your dog and he or she thinks it's great, is it wrong? We believe all exploitation and abuse is wrong. If it isn't exploitation and abuse, it may not be wrong” (quoted in Boxer 2001).

Newkirk was roundly criticised for this opinion, and has recently restated her views in a response to a report about the death of a man following anal intercourse with a horse in Seattle:

“Let me be clear ... PETA and I are totally opposed to any exploitation and all bestiality...Bestiality is cruelty to animals and PETA pushes for laws to outlaw it and prosecution when it occurs” (Canadafreepress.com 2005).

A recent press release by PETA official Martin Mesereau went further, making an explicit connection between bestiality and violent sexual crimes against humans:

“Offenders who commit bestiality often go on to commit sex

*“Arguments for the acceptance of animals as kin do not support their recasting as sexual partners”*

crimes against humans. The community should follow this case closely because anyone capable of this kind of cruelty poses a definitive risk, not just to animals, but to fellow human beings” (2005).

The degree of dissonance between these two groups, both of whom claim to have the animals’ best interests at heart, is striking. About one third of informants in a recent study of zoophilia describe themselves as active in animal welfare (Beetz 2002), and the major zoo site that has endured throughout my research (<http://www.zoophilia.net/>) has a disclaimer condemning animal abuse and a link to the Animal Sexual Abuse Information Resource Site (ASAIRS) website for anyone who is unclear as to what constitutes animal cruelty. Some zoosexuals consider themselves primarily animal welfare activists. People United to Restore Eden (PURE), for example, have rejected the label ‘zoo’ in order to distance themselves from people who harm animals, and prefer to be referred to as ‘zou’ (Purehumanimal.Com). Zous envisage a return to relationships between humans and animals as they were in the Garden of Eden.

The hopes of many zoosexuals, that they should be recognised and accepted by mainstream society, have been dashed by the angry responses to Singer’s review and by recent legislation against bestiality. Many have chosen to reduce their net based public activities. However, opposition to zoosex also appears to be on the wane. ASAIRS was disbanded in 2003, and Mike Rollands, for example, has removed himself from the scene, declaring that he now has “zero interest” in the issue (ASAIRS.com). The flurry of activity that took place on the web during the 1980s and 90s provoked an equally lively response from people who opposed bestiality. Since the decline in zoo presence on the net this energy has been redirected at the flourishing internet based animal pornography business. These depictions of human animal sex include cruelty as defined by HSUS and PETA, however, they do not make any accompanying claims to a particular sexual identity.

Modern pet keeping practices and the growth of the animal rights movement suggest that in certain contexts, and in particular ways, differences between humans and animals are more muted than ever before. The variety of relationships and living arrangements has also expanded, as the connection between sex, marriage and reproduction has loosened. Where kinship was once determined by convention, choice now proliferates: unmarried childless couples, same sex partnerships, recombinant families and adoption are no longer exceptional. Despite the various activities taking place on the borderlands between humans and animals, zoosex continues to provoke outrage. Biologically, humans and animals are not distinguishable in any universal sense; socially they are recognised, within certain contexts, as persons or kin like. The ‘pure’ relationship does not seem species specific. However, many of our most conventional relationships with animals demand that we continue to distance ourselves from them. Most obviously, we continue to eat animals and to exploit their labour. There are conceptual barriers to the creation of interspecies relationships. If Agamben is right, and all politics is really biopolitics, concerned

*“The hopes of many zoosexuals, that they should be accepted by mainstream society, have been dashed by recent legislation against bestiality.”*

with distinguishing humanity from animality, then zoosexuality also constitutes a threat to the very basis of Euroamerican culture. These contradictory inclinations have played themselves out on the internet in the recent history of zoosexuality.

## *Notes*

<sup>(i)</sup> The term *zoosexual*, *zoosexuality*, or *zoo*, denotes a sexual identity and is distinguished from *zoophilia*, the term used by psychologists to refer to a sexual attraction towards animals. Bestiality has been used to describe the act of having sex with animals, as has sodomy. Discussions of the definition of zoophilia are often quite revealing. Bolliger and Goetschel, for example, explicitly exclude the “petting and hugging of animals, riding and any conscious or unconscious fantasies of zoophilic acts [...] or the mere observation of intercourse between animals” (2005: 24) from their definition. To exclude these activities from any consideration of zoophilia seems a little premature to me.

<sup>(ii)</sup> These blogs and subsequent one-on-one discussions via e-mail and in person between 2002 and 2005 were the primary sources for this paper. In keeping with the wishes of the majority of my informants, no zoosexuals will be identified in the paper.

<sup>(iii)</sup> *ZooCon 94*, the first of these gatherings, took place at Mark Matthew’s trailer and yard. *ZooGathering 94* took place at the Holiday Inn in New Mexico.

<sup>(iv)</sup> As well as individual zoos going underground, many zoo sites have disappeared and are only available as cached pages.

*“Biologically, humans and animals are not distinguishable in any universal sense, socially they are recognised, within certain contexts, as persons or kin like”*

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# Dead Meat

Drawing on Frank G. Speck's studies of the Naskapi in the 1920s, *Michael Taussig* leads us on a dream-like journey through the complexities of the hunt, that is couched in the colour red, and smattered with 'spottings of the sun'. Images by *Samantha Sweeting*.

One of the most inspiring things I read about so-called primitive cultures is the respect afforded animals in the hunt once they are killed. At the same time I always wonder how sincere this is and how this respect can coexist with crass desire for meat.

This wonder is actually the first inkling as to a radically different way of relating to animals and to the kinship with nature in which we are all implicated. This came across to me recently when I was reading about dreams in Labrador.

In Naskapi dream theory, according to Frank G. Speck's studies in the 1920s, dreaming is the main channel by means of which a person keeps in communication with the unseen world and therefore dreams are of utmost importance for guiding one through everyday life. To follow the idiom, dreams allow your spirit to talk to you.

Note that several things stimulate dreaming, such as drumming, dancing, fasting, singing, rattling, the sweat bath, seclusion, meditation, drugs, alcohol . . . and gifts of clothing as when Speck gave a red necktie to a Naskapi friend who, when short of food that winter, would put it around his neck. Then he would dream a dream that led to a good hunt.

Marks of red paint were, as a general practice, painted on the underside of the skin of the animal killed in the hunt. After the skin had been tanned, red paint would be applied usually at the end of the legs where the feet had been amputated and at the neck-hole. If the head was intact, then ribbons, whose colour is not mentioned, were attached to the eye-holes, nose, and ears, and pieces of red cloth were sewn over these orifices as well.

Among Naskapi there is a device known in English as the sling or pack-strap for bringing in freshly killed game. Simple and practical, it is also sacred. Made of moose or



*“Sometimes the hunter would sing and dance around the body of the animal”*



caribou skin, it is decorated with coloured silks and beads, sometimes representing animals, among which red silk features strongly. Here are two explanatory captions from Speck's collection:

*No.7. For carrying beaver on shoulder. Six feet, one inch long. Tanned caribou skin, three ply. All red.*

*No. 7A. For carrying beaver on shoulder. Five feet ten inches long. Tanned caribou skin, three ply. All red.*

All red. The hunter would stretch the dead animal out on its back, lay the sling on it, put tobacco in the animal's mouth and sit by it, smoking, for an hour or so. The animal, so we are told, is honored in this way, its reincarnation abetted, and the spirit-master of the animals reconciled. Sometimes the hunter would sing and dance around the body of the animal.

The most poignant manifestation of red in this set of motives and motifs are the tiny constellations of five red dots forming a diamond pattern. Painted on drums, rattles, food dishes, and objects of household use, these dots are said to represent sun-rays falling onto a wide landscape as seen in real-life or, more commonly, in a dream, indicating where to hunt large game such as herds of caribou crossing a lake. Like the laying of the sling across the body of the dead animal, these red dots come after the hunt, as homage.

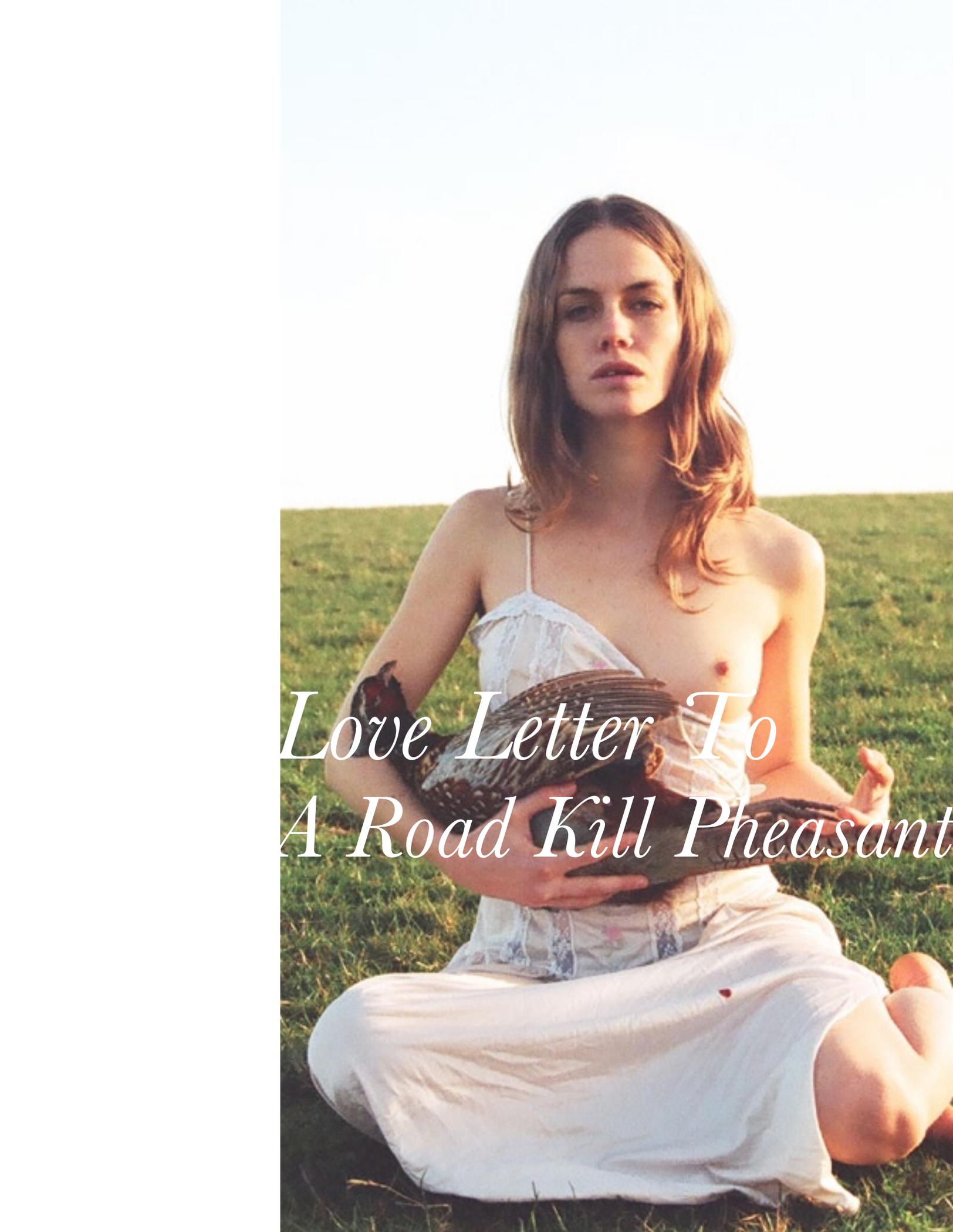
The minute size of these dots stands in inverse relation to their wonder, as does the ordinariness of many of the things onto which they are painted, whereby a kitchen

spoon becomes the repository of memory no less than of the miracle. The red dots provide testimony.

In Labrador it is not uncommon for sunbeams to fall obliquely from the sky, says Speck, "through rifts in a heavy cloud mass, illuminating certain tracts of country where the rest lies in obscurity." The Indians can hasten their occurrence in dream through singing and drumming. They call these illuminations "spottings of the sun." And they choose to paint them red.

It sounds a bit like the movies. Rays of light pierce the blackness so as to illuminate, if not make pictures. In the distance we see shapes moving, breaking the surface, those massive caribou, antlers like the branches of trees, swimming in single file across the lake to certain death at the hands of the hunter who sees them, thus revealed, in dream. More red shall follow. Red will be the edges of the holes where the feet were, red will be the edges of the holes where the eyes were, and red will be spotted on a spoon in other words red is where the animal walked and swam, where the animal saw, and as spottings of the sun with what people eat.

Michael Taussig is Professor of Anthropology at Columbia University. His extensive publication record includes a number of seminal texts in cultural anthropology, such as *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America*, *The Nervous System*, *Mimesis and Alterity*, *My Cocaine Museum* and *Walter Benjamin's Grave*.

A photograph of a young woman with long brown hair, wearing a white lace-trimmed spaghetti-strap top and a white skirt, sitting cross-legged in a grassy field. She is holding a brown pheasant in her lap. The background is a vast, flat green field under a clear sky. The lighting is soft, suggesting late afternoon or early morning. The text 'Love Letter To A Road Kill Pheasant' is overlaid in a white, cursive font across the center of the image.

*Love Letter To  
A Road Kill Pheasant*



First image by *Blaise Merino*  
Second image by *Richard Andersen*  
Concept and Direction by *Samantha Sweeting*  
Words by *Samantha Sweeting*

“I picked you up from the side of the road and took you home with me, a thin trail of blood at the corner of your mouth the only sign of violence. You were still lovely then. For two weeks you stayed by my door, with a noose wound around your neck. One evening I cradled you in my arms and you spat putrid blood across the floor making me gag. I held your still-warm body to my breast but your head drooped back, its empty eye sockets staring at the ground. I didn’t want to let you go but slowly you were falling away from me.

Then I found her, your twin; two birds of a feather. She hung by your side as the colour drained out of you. Her half-open eyes in a fixed stare, while your body was alive with writhing maggots. Your feathers fell off, exposing an almost naked skeleton. I cut off your wings and tail to save something of you. I took your legs. It made me cry to see you, a paralysed amputee. I did the same to her, plucked her feathers first and tore the yellow flesh. I cut her feet and placed her wings hand in hand with yours, laying your sad bodies in a tired embrace under the boughs of a fruit tree. I would have cooked you. I wanted to eat you to keep you inside of me, to hold your memory as an aftertaste of death. Instead I left you in the earth and walked away.”





# Sam Beck

*“Camels will do what they want to do. I found them to be even more stubborn than donkeys, even if you hit them or abused them in other ways. Calling them names did not help.”*

Anthropologists rarely write about animals in their ethnographies, nor the interaction of humans with animals, even when their studies are about pastoral nomads, humane pastoralists, or other forms of animal husbandry. I, too, have not written about events that struck me at the time and have remained with me in my memory.

The Quashguai are a pastoral nomadic tribe of Turkish speaking people in southwestern Iran who trace their origins to the Caucasus and Central Asia. While many have settled on lands along their migratory route, others resisted permanent settlement and continue to travel between the mountains north of Shiraz and the lowlands along the Persian Gulf where Iran's oil fields are located. They herd sheep and goats; the women make hand-knotted rugs and they produce all sorts of milk and wool products that they consume and sell. While only the more traditionally minded continue to use camels, mules, and donkeys as their pack animals, trucks are more common these days. In the years 1969-1971, I accompanied Lois Grant Beck on her doctoral research with one of the clans of this large tribe. The year 1970 was a tough one; there was a drought and, while the winter quarters never had a lot of grazing for the animals, this year was particularly bad. Many animals died as

a result of hunger and thirst. The pack animals were weak as we traveled from the winter lowlands to the summer mountain quarters. Midway on the Spring Migration, there was an area that was well-known for its wild artichokes; not that they were consumed by humans, but because they caused havoc among the lean animals who voraciously consumed the green stalks that pushed themselves up from the hard soil. I was warned about this and told to pay particular attention that the camels don't overfeed because they will uncontrollably eat and eat and eat.

Camels are curious creatures. While I paid little attention to them as such while carrying out research, I could not help but notice that from time to time they would just run off into the distance and the camel herder would have to be dispatched to locate them and bring them back. I asked him about this. His response was that it really was not a problem because he knew exactly where to find them. All he had to do as he raised his arm, stretched it out and pointed his long bony finger into the horizon, is look for the dust. I followed his gaze and his outstretched arm and finger, but saw nothing but the horizon, a thin line between azure blue sky and gray brown landscape. I looked harder and as I peered off into the distance, sure enough there was dust rising into the sky, cutting

the horizon, like dirt devils do during the hottest time of the year. My friend the camel herder didn't bother running after the camels, because, he told me, the camels would remain at this spot for some time. I followed him and as we got closer to the camels, the six or seven of them were in various states of rolling around in a pile of ashes that another nomadic group had abandoned before our arrival there. They were thoroughly enjoying this wallowing in the dirt as much as I would have enjoyed going for a swim in a pond or a lake.

Camels will do what they want to do. I found them to be even more stubborn than donkeys, even if you hit them or abused them in other ways. Calling them names did not help. Inevitably, one of the camels overate the artichokes and, as was foretold, inflated like a huge balloon. The camels mid-section grew inch by inch from one moment to the next. The clan's headman ordered for the camel to be laid down on its side and a pointed metal rod that was used for barbecuing meat on the open fire be heated up, disinfected. I stood close by because I did not want to miss a thing. As one of the older men—who apparently had done this sort of thing before—raised the rod to force it into the animal, who was suffering not only from being constipated but also being full

of gas, I was told to quickly move back. On the one hand, I heard this command too late and, on the other hand, I resisted because I wanted to see what would happen.

In the best of all possible worlds, according to the headman who tried to prepare me for this event, the rod would puncture the 'stomach' and relieve the ailing camel of its gas. And if the stomach was missed, it would blow up. I was curious about the blowing up part. What could that possibly mean?

The rod went in and in a blink of an eye, I heard a washing sound and I was covered with brown mucus that just moments before filled the camel's intestines. The only thought that I had at the moment was, "I guess it blew up."

For the next few days we had camel meat barbecues, a pleasant relief from chicken.

*stimulus* → *respond*



Image by *Camilo Delgado Aguilera*