



**Universiteit  
Leiden**

## **Anthropocene and contemporary art**

**To what extent does the performativity of bioart challenge the  
anthropocentric perception?**

By

Valeria Malaja  
s1945467  
v.malaja@umail.leidenuniv.nl

Master Thesis Arts and Culture  
Art of the Contemporary World and World Art Studies 2017-2018  
Leiden University  
Thesis Advisor: Prof. dr. Robert Zwijnenberg  
Second Advisor: Dr. L.M.F. Bertens

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgement .....	2
Introduction.....	3
Chapter I.....	9
Vexations of Anthropocentrism.....	9
Chapter II .....	15
Plant-Human Relationship .....	15
Chapter III.....	24
Kathy High & Becoming Animal .....	24
Chapter IV.....	32
Patricia Piccinini & Monster-like sculptures .....	32
Conclusion .....	42
Illustrations.....	45
Bibliography.....	49

# Acknowledgement

I would first like to thank my thesis supervisor Prof. dr. Robert Zwijnenberg for his guidance and patience through the road of thesis writing. His utmost knowledge and reliability has helped me throughout the entire process of my research. Without his invaluable feedback I would have found myself lost in the realms of bewilderment.

I would like to thank my second advisor for Dr L.M.F Bertens as well for her time and attention spent on the reading and assessment of my thesis.

My thanks go to my parents and my sister who are always there for me, believing in me in achieving my goals and supporting me no matter what.

Likewise, I would like to sincerely thank two of my best friends, Daniel Labbé and Marije van Maaren who helped me overcome this crucial and fruitful period of my academic life. Without their support on a daily basis it would not have been the same.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this thesis to Dropje, who passed away recently. May you rest in peace, my dear cat!

# Introduction

The era of *Anthropos* or so called Anthropocene has been prevalent in the last decades - framed in “the 1980s by ecologist Eugene F. Stoermer, and popularized at the inception of the twenty-first century by Nobel Prize-winning atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen, the Anthropocene is the proposed name for a new geological epoch defined by overwhelming human influence upon the earth”.<sup>1</sup> As humans have become the dominant force on Earth, it is evident that humanism is inherently egocentric. Highly anthropocentric perception has led humans to believe that they are in power over animals, plants and nature. Propagating the hierarchical system consequently reinforces the dualist thinking and results in both human and animal oppression. This subsequently affirms the “long held philosophical idea of humans as the masters of planet Earth.”<sup>2</sup> Therefore, the strive towards different perception is needed in epistemic (philosophical), technological and social structures as these are the main factors that have played a crucial role in shaping the anthropocentrism. However, with the rise of new materialist thinking, and especially within the domain of art, artists endeavour to be more compatible with science, creating artworks that challenge the traditional concepts of anthropocentrism. For instance, bioart is one of the few art practices that executes collaborations between scientific experiments and artistic methods. The use of organic tissues, life forms such as plant cells or use of non-human body contributes to a more inclusive idea how art can transform the boundaries in shaping our understanding towards living entities. In general, bioart has opened innovative ideas for artists to better express their intentions through new art practices in response to science. Additionally, with biotechnology being in demand as a practised medium, it has evidently opened up possibilities for a collaboration between humanities and life sciences. The artworks produced as a result are often very conceptual and unconventional, giving the public a more unorthodox (different) experience. The performativity of bioart juxtaposes and interconnects the public and the artist in a way that

---

<sup>1</sup> Grusin, 2017, 8

<sup>2</sup> Evans, Brad, and Julian Reid, 2014, 3

certainly attunes to critical reflection. One of the reasons why bio artists often utilise performative act amidst their artworks is also compatible with the idea that human and non-human body signify 'life and wonder of the living'.<sup>3</sup> As a crucial example of how bioart insinuates both reflective thinking through performativity is by L'Art Orienté Objet is a French artistic duo (Marion Laval-Jeantet and Benoit Mangin) whose performance piece entitled as *Que le cheval vive en moi*, (*May The Horse Live in Me*) (fig. 1) involves a performative act where “artist injected horse blood plasma (immunoglobulin) into her own body, subsequently experiencing the changes in her own body over the course of six months, almost as if the artist herself has become a horse.”<sup>4</sup> The artist also wore a set of stilts with hooves on the end in order to feel more connected with the horse. “She walked around with the donor horse in a “communication ritual” before having her hybrid blood extracted and freeze-dried.”<sup>5</sup>

This performance piece is particularly thought-provoking as it tackles the idea of how we humans perceive animals – merely as mammals who are both mysterious and 'other' to us. Indeed, this performance piece by Marion Laval-Jeantet her creative partner Benoit Mangin could possibly indicate an attempt to overcome the ubiquitous perspective of anthropocentrism by utilising her own body through the process of a risky experiment. Additionally, does this performance imply on “blurring the boundaries between species”?<sup>6</sup> If this is the case, then how do the contemporary artists succeed in challenging this (if they actually do aspire to do so) through their performative acts and usage of the non-human body? Furthermore, in this context, is the horse portrayed as an equal partner to the artist herself? Or has the horse become no more than a pure object which has been appropriated by an artist for her own use through biotechnological practice in order to create this performance piece? On account of this performance act, my interest lies mostly in how the contemporary artists utilise both humans and non-humans as a vehicle to challenge the anthropocentric view that has remained pervasive in

---

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, 65

<sup>4</sup> Zwijnenberg 2017, 129

<sup>5</sup> Solon, Web. Sept 3 2017, <https://www.wired.com/2011/08/horse-blood-art/>

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, 129

the domain of humanities. This subsequently leads to another paramount problematic of how we, human beings, subject animals for our own benefits, propagating anthropocentrism. Did Marion Laval-Jeantet subject the horse, in order to create her performance piece? Moreover, can we candidly claim that thanks to biotechnological advance, we can overcome the anthropocentric mindset and cease 'othering' nature which we certainly take for granted? This thesis will answer these questions and will come to the conclusion to what extent do artists genuinely challenge the anthropocentric view by integrating either their own bodies through performative act, or in a combination of both human and non-human entities.

The discussion will be followed up by examining the term 'anthropocentrism' and the reason why it should be challenged by means of art. These arguments will be tackled in this thesis through a thorough analysis of selected artists who utilise (both human and non-human entities) through performative act. Through the methodology of the artwork and philosophical analysis I strive to address the issues on how the traditional anthropocentric thinking has limited the ways we have established our relationship with animals, plants and nature in general. Why I consider art as an exceedingly needed aspect in overcoming the anthropocentric thinking will be explained in four consecutive chapters, each explaining and giving the reader an apprehensible understanding on how art is able to challenge the anthropocentric conundrum that has ubiquitously remained in the way we 'other' animals and plants.

Before my case study analysis I will be commencing with the philosophical approach towards the term 'anthropocentrism' and why it is necessary to confront the term via posthuman and new materialist theories. Critical posthumanist theory will be analysed to give reader a better understanding of what the term 'anthropocentrism' signifies not only in the context of art, but how it has been overused as a core by many Western traditional philosophers. I will be examining the interconnectedness of art and philosophy in the context of my chosen case studies. In order to do so, I will be not focussing on exegesis of the theories by Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari and Martin Heidegger, however I will be leaning upon their philosophy in order to

establish a theoretical framework needed in my case study analysis. Moreover, as posthumanist theories mostly approach some position, practice, perspective and vision concerning the future of human beings closely related to the use of contemporary technologies, then there is also a possibility for a “non-anthropocentric posthumanism which indicates how the human being a product of hybridization with the non-human (environment, animals and techniques), is built not only by his own strength but always through his partnership and his environment”.<sup>7</sup> In a nutshell, to what extent can posthumanist theory be a precursor towards a new thinking?

My further discussion will be continued by a selection of case studies by contemporary artists such as Kathy High, Špela Petrič and Patricia Piccinini whose artworks assertively adapt to the aforementioned problematics of anthropocentrism. I will be mostly examining how their usage of non-human body can be beneficial in transforming the concept of anthropocentrism via the medium of performance. The reason why I mostly focus on the performance medium of art works is due to the fact that performance artists have taken their physical selves as a core element of their art<sup>8</sup>, and as a result, the notion of the body is therefore confronted already, both by the artists themselves and the public. In this case, to what extent can bioart in the form of performance create a new attitude towards the non-human entities? How can artists foster the engagement between nature and humans, as well as non-human-subjects? The proposed issues will be tackled with a set of case studies which will be well indicated as well as supported with the theoretical framework to prove my arguments.

As a first case study that I chose to discuss in the first chapter is by Špela Petrič and her performance piece called *Strange Encounters* (2017) taken place in Ljubljana, Slovenia. This performance piece, a third from *Vegetal Otherness*, observes at plant alterity to amend subjectivation, ethics, and our attitude towards dividual multiplicity.<sup>9</sup> The paramount

---

<sup>7</sup> Marina Maestrotti, 193-4

<sup>8</sup> Steve Dixon, 2014, 23

<sup>9</sup> Špela Petrič in *Strange Encounter* live in Ljubljana, Slovenia, Web. Oct 2 2017  
<http://www.spelapetric.org/projects/strange-encounters/strange-encounters-blog/>,

subquestion is as to how can we therefore reassess our thinking about 'plants' as alien entities that do not signify any importance to us? To what extent does the artwork confront the biased and hypocrite stance on our relationship with plants and nature as whole through the usage of non-human body? As a theoretical framework I will use Michael Marder's philosophy of plants which serves as an imperative discourse in how plants have been holistically neglected metaphysically, once again reinforcing the fact that the way we perceive plants indicates anthropocentric attitude which needs to be relinquished. To what extent does Špela Petrič's artwork broaden and open up a discussion on how we position ourselves through art works that spawn the issues of anthropocentrism

As a next step in my analysis I will be focusing on the alternative case study - an artwork by Kathy High and her *Embracing Animal* (2004-2006), which mostly dwells on the interaction of humans and animals through kinship<sup>10</sup> (communicating with animals as pets) and how we observe the transformation of animals as opposed to what we are subjected to perceive by our social and cultural norms. Once again, the idea that anthropocentric values constitute a subject that needs to be relinquished crosses over from the first case study to the following two. This will be established through both analyses as the interconnectedness between the artworks in terms of the utilised subject matter is the reason for their deliberate decision for examination. As a theoretical framework for the needed analysis I will be applying Martin Heidegger's idea on art, as well as Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's sense of *becoming & proximity* which are applicable on a theoretical level.

Following the *Embracing Animal* by Kathy High, an artwork by Patricia Piccinini *Young Family* (2002) will be discussed as it generates the discussion on the complex issues which I find particularly important in this specific discourse. In a nutshell, I will be examining Piccinini's artwork mostly in terms of the aesthetics and how her particular artwork can prompt post-anthropocentric aesthetics, thus confronting the anthropocentric perception of what art can

---

<sup>10</sup> Kathy High, *Embracing Animal*, Web. June 2 2017 <http://kathyhigh.com/project-embracing-animal.html>



therefore generate. Continuously, the aforementioned problematics on how we aspire to overcome the anthropocentric attitude essentially through Piccinini's artistic discourse will be examined as it initiates the complexity of the debate. Although Piccinini's Young Family is mostly a sculpture/installation and does not explicitly constitute the aspect of performance act, it can however still be considered as one implicitly, as the process of creation the sculptures suggests the convergence of performance and action. Piccinini's creations are monstrous in their not-quite human forms that also exceed the boundaries of other species. While the stem cell lumps transgress the borders of the 'naturally occurring' human body, other creatures like the mother from analogous artwork are supposedly scientifically engineered so that they slide over physical delineations of humanity and animality. The conglomerate bodies are also slippery mutants, occupying spaces that both inhabit and go beyond the categories of human and animal.<sup>11</sup> Can Piccinini's creatures make the public more hospitable towards genetically engineered entities?

---

<sup>11</sup> Patricia Piccinini, Web. Dec 2 2017 [http://www.artium.org/en/explore/exhibitions/item/55721-\(tiernas\)-criaturas.-patricia-piccinini](http://www.artium.org/en/explore/exhibitions/item/55721-(tiernas)-criaturas.-patricia-piccinini)

# Chapter I

## Vexations of Anthropocentrism

The idea of anthropocentrism has been one of the major concepts serving not only as a “social phenomenon”<sup>12</sup> but also entailing the centrality of the ‘Man’ in regards to the notion of superiority towards the species. In a philosophical sense, anthropocentrism mostly entails the idea that humans are separate from and superior to nature, “holding that human life has inherent value while other entities (e.g. animals, plants etc) are resources that may justifiably be exploited for the benefit of humankind”.<sup>13</sup> The concept has subsequently spawned polemics in various theories such as posthumanism and posthuman feminism. Indeed, the aspiration to decenter anthropocentrism as a holistic notion in the theoretical discussions consists of the opponents who are basing its “self-centered” values that have transformed the humanist critical thinking high up on the pedestal. Undoubtedly, the debate on and against humanism, which has been “pioneered by feminist, postcolonial, and race theorists”<sup>14</sup> has often indicated the aim to relinquish the concept altogether. The aspiration to decenter the anthropocentrism remains as a challenge in itself, because it constitutes a core of the traditional ontological thinking.

Alternatively, anthropocentrism having the term *Anthropos* within it encompasses another problematic for feminist thinkers as it indicates (perhaps not explicitly) the reference to only the ‘Man’, thus implying on the male dominance over the nature, and ‘othering’ women and non-white population. Therefore, in order to reach the separate thinking, the post-anthropocentric turn has been opened up by Donna Haraway in the mid-1980s - in the “Manifesto for Cyborgs”<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> For anthropocentrism as a ‘social phenomenon’ see Dario Martinelli’s research article *Anthropocentrism as a social phenomenon: semiotic and ethical implications*, 2008

<sup>13</sup> Sarah E. Boslaugh, Anthropocentrism in Britannica Encyclopedia, Web. Sept 2 2017, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/anthropocentrism>

<sup>14</sup> Rosi Braidotti, 2014, 26

<sup>15</sup> See Donna Haraway’s *A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s*, *Socialist Review* 2 (1985):65-107

establishing the feminist body politics and adjusting the critical distance from anthropocentrism<sup>16</sup>. Braidotti suggests how “the practice of defamiliarization becomes a key methodological tool to support the anthropocentric shift”.<sup>17</sup> What the post-anthropocentrism indicates as an alternative to anthropocentrism is that “human being, has always been the product of hybridisation with the non-human (environment, animals and techniques), is built not only by his own strength but always through his partnership and his environment”.<sup>18</sup> This shifting boundary from anthropocentrism to post-anthropocentrism has also suggested that the “question is not of simple establishment which is a good use of a technology, but a redefinition in regards to ourselves and our perspectives towards technology and what it can allow and what it opens up to us”.<sup>19</sup>

From Descartes and Spinoza to Heidegger, Derrida, Deleuze & Guattari apply the notion of humanism as one of the key ideas in understanding the world around us and the universal question of human. This is where the cards change - with the rise of post-humanism since the late twentieth century, the previously taken critical thinking which mainly propagates “a new conceptualisation of the human”<sup>20</sup>, new doors are opened up. Posthumanism having its critical stamina demolishes cultural representations, power relations and discourses that have historically situated the human *above* other life forms, and in control of them.<sup>21</sup> So to speak, critical posthumanism as an ontology seeks to “address the question of the human in the age of technological modification”<sup>22</sup>, and in doing so, it investigates the existent philosophical discourses on humanism. The animal studies, monster studies, cybernetics and many more are all linked together in posthumanist thinking as a decentering approach towards traditional humanism with all its limits and flaws. The blurring boundaries between the species, deconstruction of the notions of hierarchy between human/non-human and acquiring a sense of

---

<sup>16</sup> Braidotti, p.29

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, p.30

<sup>18</sup> Maestrutti, 2011/3, 53

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, p.52

<sup>20</sup> Nayar, 2014, 3

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, 3

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, 5

inclusiveness in regards to life in its general terms constitute a powerful agenda for posthumanist thinkers. In order to clarify what exactly critical posthumanist agenda stands for, we need to establish the key notions first and why do we need to break down the boundaries between the human/animal/nature.

The main problematic of the traditional ontology lies in its very limited approach towards the 'Other'. So far it has reflected an equivalent attitude which places human at the centre of it. In fact, in many ways, philosophy in the Western tradition has been one of the chief architects in constructing the traditional philosophical and ethical dogmas we have inherited concerning animals.<sup>23</sup> From this perspective we can see that giving humans the power over other "human bodies", races, genders, ethnicities has also posed the exclusivity towards animals, plants and nature itself.

As opposed to the traditional ontological perception, the critical posthumanist thinking acts as a needed antidote to break down the hierarchisation of life forms, which has resulted in exclusionary practices directed at particular life forms, races and groups.<sup>24</sup> Critical posthumanism is a needed discourse that can amplify and critique the anthropocentric notions which have been predominant. How can we therefore apply this critical posthumanist discourse? This is where we can foremost turn to the domain of art. Subsequently, together with the revolutionary changes in artistic practices, such as application of scientific experiments as a process to create art can help us open ourselves to new possibilities. Bioart for instance, projects the "use of biotechnology, as artists can now employ both biological laboratory techniques and technologies to create their living works of art and keep these entities alive in the space of an art gallery".<sup>25</sup> As artistic discourse can be beneficial in breaking the pattern of anthropocentric limits and in this case, bioart plays an important role. Not only does it reflect the use of the new media and the new techniques, it also not intentionally dismantles the traditional forms of art.

---

<sup>23</sup> Calarco, 2015, 7

<sup>24</sup> Nayar, 2014, 31

<sup>25</sup> Mitchell, 2010, 4

From installations to the use of biological tissue - all of this may/can contribute to the critical posthumanist vision. In addition to that, new materialist approach in art also serves as a crucial factor in the aspiration to battle anthropocentrism. Connecting the current developments in sciences and technology with motives borrowed from a tradition of immanent thinking that “breaks through . . . the mind-matter and culture-nature divides of transcendental humanist thought”<sup>26</sup>, the new materialist thinkers invite us to reconsider the categories of this world.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, the artists who incorporate new materialist agendas within their artistic practice can therefore bring out a new perspective on the issues of anthropocentrism. For example, *L’Art Orienté Objet*, as was mentioned before in the introduction serves as an example that uses the new means of technology, such as the process of injecting immunoglobulin into the human body. Aforesaid aspect creates a new perspective for the artistic practice, as the focus is shifted away from the traditional form of art - the canvas. Instead, the scientific experiment processed on a human body. The subject matter is challenged here as the idea is not to depict the horse as it is, but to create a connection between the human and the horse. Additionally, the boundaries of anthropocentrism are provoked in a sense that the animal is not the subject of exploitative nature, instead, the human body is exploited for scientific purposes.

If we return to the notion of anthropocentrism then we can trace it back in the philosophical discourse of René Descartes (1596-1650) whose stance on the animals is that they lack the *mind* (meaning the rational, discursive and reflective self-consciousness) and perceives them as “complex automata”.<sup>28</sup> In a nutshell, according to Descartes, animals do not possess any knowledge on how they can express their thoughts through language, and this is one of the reasons why there is no ethical explanation for them to be slaughtered or utilised as mere objects. This also is seen in the philosophical discourse of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), who as well as Descartes, demonstrates the equivalent stance on the distinction of human and animal and

---

<sup>26</sup> Dolphijn and van der Tuin, 2012, 96

<sup>27</sup> Iovino, 2015, 21

<sup>28</sup> Calarco, 2015, 9

showcases the hegemonic thinking. Although, we are perhaps further away from such ideas, such ideas could still be prevalent in many discourses of mainstream philosophies. The question is of course, how can we break free from this dualist thinking in the first place? Matthew Calarco suggests that in order to establish that, one needs an ability to perceive the world from the perspective of the other first, rather than from our perspective.

Additionally, in order to do that, we need to explore the framework of the ethical principle that all animals are equal.<sup>29</sup> If this can be established through the posthumanist approach then we can finally be able to collapse the wall between “human” and “animal” distinction. Calarco shows that in order to achieve this if we recognise the zone in which human and animal exist together: where shared capacities bring to light new ways to inhabit perspectives that, while they recognise both human and animal, correctly belong to neither.<sup>30</sup> Thus, the idea of difference and the logistics of anthropocentrism should be examined beforehand, in order to achieve any results in the non-dualist thinking. Here it is relevant to mention Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) and his theory on the differentiation of humans and animals. His ideas are mostly based on the power relations and the violent hierarchisation of humans towards animals.<sup>31</sup> Derrida’s critical thinking towards the issues concerning the human hierarchisation in regards to animals serves as a precursor towards a critical thinking of humanism. Derrida argues against traditional accounts of human nature and their essentialising and naturalising tendencies.<sup>32</sup> He confronts forcefully the question of anthropocentrism as the Western philosophical tradition has been dominated by a notion of individual human subjectivity that obscures the complex matrix of relations and differences that makes such individuals possible, and that one of the chief tasks of thought is to attend to such differences.<sup>33</sup> So if we lean onto the Derrida’s criticism towards the human subjectivity, then this is where we can apply it to the posthumanism as well. In other words, if

---

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*, 17

<sup>30</sup> Conrad, 2016, 18

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, 35

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*, 35

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*, 36

we can refuse to perceive the human subjectivity as self-contained and independent, the posthumanism can reject the centrality of humankind in the world. How art can become a mediator in propagating revolutionary notions and changing perspectives will be shown in the next chapters with the the examples of case studies.

# Chapter II

## Plant-Human Relationship

The notions of othering is acquainted very well both in traditional animal studies and Western philosophies where we have seen that animals are a subject of an intense hierarchisation and speciesism, and it has been arduous to perceive them as our equals. We have established in the previous chapter that critical posthumanist thinking and new materialist theory are efficient in breaking the pattern of the ontological anthropocentrism. We have seen that art and biotechnological practices are successful in the way that they open up reflective thinking on the matters of animal being the ‘other’ and how we can be more embracing in our perception towards the living entities. We will have to establish the fact that nature and plants have been critically neglected in every sense, and even more than animals have been thus far.

Animals are in fact one of the privileged names for “the other” throughout our history”.<sup>34</sup> To quote Derrida here, readers of Western philosophy will immediately recognize this “limit that we have had a stomachful of, the limit between Man with a capital M and Animal with a capital A”.<sup>35</sup> Clearly we lack plants with a capital letter. In a nutshell, animals have done better than plants so far in the Western thinking. Indeed, in the Western philosophical tradition, plants have been ‘othered’ to an extent where humans often perceive them as intangible entities. Surely, “by denying to vegetal life the core values of autonomy, individualisation, self-identity, originality, and essentiality”<sup>36</sup>, we find it difficult to understand them, or even make an attempt to fathom plants.

The way we approach plants on a theoretical level has also complicated the matter as traditionally, almost the entire philosophical theory is rooted back to its anthropocentric values.

---

<sup>34</sup> Nealon, 2016, 29

<sup>35</sup> Derrida, 2008, 29

<sup>36</sup> Marder, 2011, 469



Is it actually possible to perceive plants as not uncanny aliens whose purpose is to serve humans passively? What stands for vegetal life and can we perceive plants as not that distinct from animals or even ourselves? Can we therefore apply ethics into consideration, or does this also entail that we are still bound to anthropocentric values that we cannot let go of? And finally, can art play a crucial role in breaking free from the pattern of anthropocentrism? For this purpose, I will be continuing my discourse by analysing another case study, an artwork by Špela Petrič (b.1980) and her *Strange Encounters* (2017, Ljubljana). However, before introducing the artwork and whether it serves as an imperative vehicle that can shift our perceptions, I would like to outline the general ontological perspective on how plants are perceived and have been approached so far.

The plant philosophy dates back to Aristotle (384–322 BC) and his famous passage from “On Animals” in which he portrays plants as intermediaries in a continuum of sentience, with inanimate matter at one end and “higher animals” at the other.<sup>37</sup> This leads to the Aristotelian Chain of Being where plants inhabit a liminal zone between animate and inanimate entities<sup>38</sup>, suggesting that the animals had limited intelligence and awareness of their surroundings, lacking spiritual and mental attributes such as logic and language.<sup>39</sup> This subsequently signifies the fact that plants have been overlooked, placed somewhere between living and nonliving. To oversimplify, for Aristotle, animals outmaneuvered plants as higher forms of life because former are able to possess the human condition.<sup>40</sup>

If we look at the philosophy of the twentieth century, then we are coming back to Heidegger who reflects on but elaborates on the Aristotelian ideas. Heideggerian (1889-1976) philosophical botany is the study of the essential characteristics that decide on our grasp and understanding of

---

<sup>37</sup> Laist, 2013, 12

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*, 12

<sup>39</sup> Snyder, S. The Great Chain of Being. Web. Dec 5 2017  
<http://faculty.grandview.edu/ssnyder/121/121%20great%20chain.htm>

<sup>40</sup> Nealon, 2013, 30

plants as we encounter them on a daily basis.<sup>41</sup> Yet in his actual lecture<sup>42</sup> translated as *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* he does not necessarily elaborate on plants as potential living beings. According to Tristan Moyle, “Heidegger fails to properly analyse plants in his reflection, even though he claims to offer a metaphysics of life”<sup>43</sup> and by living things, he explicitly puts humans, animals and plants under the same umbrella. Moyle suggests a thought provoking idea on how Heidegger’s attempt on implicitly referring to plants serves as a helpful hint on understanding ourselves and the state of being. I do agree with this thought as when reading Heidegger nothing seems as explicit as one would hope. Therefore, we should expect at least some metaphysical approach which would lead beyond what we actually know and perceive epistemologically. The question that arises here is whether the level of metaphysics can also be applied to plants.

According to Moyle, Heidegger’s three rules of metaphysical conditions can be applicable to all living entities, in case if these conditions are satisfied of course. The metaphysical conditions described by Heidegger are based on how plants are capable of behaving in an engaging manner with the agenda of intentional directedness. The result is a sense of transposition in which we can “transpose ourselves”.<sup>44</sup> At first glance it seems truly complicated, but if we reflect on these conditions then one might think that they can be well intelligible. I feel that this is connected to one’s subjectivity. For instance, if we say that something is intelligible to us, then it automatically becomes living. We cannot apply this to a stone, as the thought of it becomes absurd. However, in the case of plants it also therefore becomes problematic. As we do not understand them per se we cannot fully claim that we perceive them as intelligible beings. However, when we return to metaphysics, then this becomes a possibility.

Moyle once again suggests that Heidegger’s implication on transposition into the life of an

---

<sup>41</sup> Moyle, 2016, 379

<sup>42</sup> Lecture Course by Martin Heidegger, 1929-1930, *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, for more on how Heidegger explains the metaphysical concepts, check Moyle’s article which explores such notions.

<sup>43</sup> Moyle, 2016, 379

<sup>44</sup> *Ibidem*, 377

animal and in a certain manner into the life of a plant is an “unquestioned possibility” for humans because we are aware of such possibility.<sup>45</sup> I do agree with this to a certain degree because we can distinguish between what is a living entity (like a tree) or a stone. Surely, to us a stone is less of a living entity than a hedge. But can we entirely ask the ultimate question of “What it is like to be a plant”?

Moyle once again strongly suggests that one on hand it is possible because we acknowledge it and *know* it as it seems logical but on the other hand, because plants lack “conscious, experiential awareness of the surroundings”,<sup>46</sup> we still cannot truly understand them. This is where our philosophy has gone downhill. According to Michael Marder, “the pervasive metaphysical obscurity surrounding the vegetal life”<sup>47</sup> is what limits and stands for our anthropocentric perception towards plants. In order to overcome this and place plants into the equation, Marder suggests concentrating on “a more sober comparison of the plants’ and other forms of life”<sup>48</sup> which will not entail our unconscious anthropocentric metaphysical approach.

If we can execute a more sober approach towards plants which is not entirely based on metaphysics as was suggested by Michael Marder, then this is where we once again turn to art. Because philosophy and metaphysics tend to work in theory only and these two can therefore act as an obstacle in understanding the world and specifically entities that are distant to us, we are in need of something that will entangle the complexities of philosophy.

Timothy Morton explains that “art breaks open a dimension inaccessible to other experience, a dimension in which human beings, nature, and things no longer stand under the law of the established reality principle”.<sup>49</sup> Morton addresses the visible paradox on how he considers “art standing beyond all, for it is in art that the fantasies we have about nature take shape - and

---

<sup>45</sup> *Ibidem*, 390

<sup>46</sup> *Ibidem*, 391

<sup>47</sup> Marder, 2012, 263

<sup>48</sup> *Ibidem*, 263

<sup>49</sup> Morton, 2007, 2

dissolve”.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, art is capable of fostering a new dimension, intertwined with philosophy and aesthetics which can then have an influential impact on the viewer. Art acts as an important mediator between the viewer and the idea and it can surely establish ways of feeling and perceiving.

Art is also an educating and engaging instrument that can foster a more comprehensible way of understanding the world around us. For instance, contemporary artists have begun to extend ideas, leaning upon the critical posthumanist approach to art in exciting ways in order to highlight the connections between humans and nonhumans while decentering the human—especially in regards to perspective.<sup>51</sup> Here we will see that art, and in particular bioart can serve as a key to prompting a new perception and breaking the traditional boundaries. Bioart in its perhaps simplified explanation is an intersection of nature and art, it is also a beautiful collaboration of science, technology and nature. Indeed, bioart can act as a bridging device in which art, science and philosophy are all intersected together, creating an entirely revolutionary approach and shifting the limits of our narrow-minded perception.

As an example of bioart work which is ultimately my case study, is Špela Petrič and her *Strange Encounters* (2017). The artist’s intention with this piece is its crucially explicit agenda to overcome a limited approach that we have towards plants. Špela Petrič’s piece looks at plant alterity on a different level. *Strange Encounters* (fig.2 & fig.3) is the third piece of *Confronting Vegetal Otherness* series<sup>52</sup> which engages with the artist’s intentions to explore human encounters with plants. Her main agenda is to expose the human and plant relationship in vitro, at the same time questioning the human and plant co-existence. The artist utilises the genus *Chlorella*<sup>53</sup> and the human cancerous cell carcinoma<sup>54</sup> (fig. 3) for her experiment, in order to

---

<sup>50</sup> *Ibidem*, 3

<sup>51</sup> Lerberg, 2014, 151

<sup>52</sup> Špela Petrič, *Strange Encounters*, 2017, Web. Nov 1 2017 <http://www.spelapetric.org/projects/strange-encounters/strange-encounters-blog/>,

<sup>53</sup> *Chlorella* is a genus of green algae, for more information check <https://www.britannica.com/science/Chlorella>, also Spela Petrič’s website, Web. Nov 1 2017 <http://www.spelapetric.org/projects/strange-encounters/strange-encounters-blog/>,

achieve an encounter of two cells used in pharmaceutical and biomass productions.<sup>55</sup> Human and plant cells meet in vitro, under the artist's supervision. In order to deconstruct the plant-human relationship on the level of existence, Špela Petrič demonstrates how these two react towards each other. The main idea is to observe the generally incompatible entities encountering one another. The experiment had a shifting twist when the artist combined the presence of the third bacteria, which resulted in an infection:

Mateja Erdani Kreft from the Institute of Cell Biology said the presence of bacteria will skew the results, the human (and plant) cells would be reacting to this third presence. I phrased this as “a problem” to Mojca Kumerdej, who will moderate the Strange Encounters Freaktion Bar on Tuesday, when came to see our progress this afternoon. She looked at me in bewilderment, thinking my consideration was out of place: “An infection isn't a problem; the bacteria are a part of the algae culture, a part of the process.”<sup>56</sup>

This is an interesting outcome as the bacterial process results in a more prolonged meeting on a biochemical level. The artist questions the reason why she chose to involve the bacteria as a third entity in the process. The reason is to “explore the plant principles through an instigated precarious proximity of human and plants units”.<sup>57</sup> This is reminiscent with the sense of proximity, introduced by Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995) and Felix Guattari (1930-1998) in their *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980). Although, both philosophers applied this sense of proximity mostly with animals, this can be applicable in the case of Strange Encounters. As the zone of proximity involves the sense of becoming, not in a literal or imaginative sense of course, but “in a more concrete and material states of affairs that express impersonal forces in order to transform

---

<sup>54</sup> Špela Petrič, Strange Encounters, 2017, Web. Nov 1 2017 <http://www.spelapetric.org/projects/strange-encounters/strange-encounters-blog/>

<sup>55</sup> Špela Petrič, Strange Encounters, Web. Nov 1 2017 <http://www.spelapetric.org/projects/strange-encounters/strange-encounters-blog/>

<sup>56</sup> Špela Petrič, Strange Encounters, Web. Nov 1 2017 <http://www.spelapetric.org/projects/strange-encounters/strange-encounters-blog/>

<sup>57</sup> Špela Petrič, Strange Encounters, Web. Nov 1 2017 <http://www.spelapetric.org/projects/strange-encounters/strange-encounters-blog/>

sensible forces that would otherwise remain insensible”.<sup>58</sup> Applying Deleuze and Guattarian zone of proximity Špela Petrič’s art work perfectly matches this, as the encounter of the incompatibles results in a new becoming of the human cell and the plant cell. Here the new encounter is introduced as a new becoming. The incompatible encounter which was impossible previously acts as a precursor towards the sense of proximity, and this time in a literal way. As the artist observes two cells interacting with each other, in a way, the incompatible becomes compatible.

How does Špela Petrič specifically break the boundaries of anthropocentrism with her *Strange Encounters*? Firstly, I suggest that artist’s work teaches the public about the plant cells, as the subject is not based on the idea that the human is at the centre, but what becomes as a full focus is how we project plant awareness through the artwork. The meeting point of the cells and how they react to each other becomes the main aspiration. Interestingly, the artist herself becomes a viewer, and observant of the entire process who learns. In addition to the artworks educational aspect, the artwork propagates the notion of inclusiveness. Furthermore, as the human is no longer utilising the cells for her own personal or industrial purposes, but for pure observational aspects blurs the boundaries between subject and object.

Secondly, the aesthetics part is completely overshadowed, and this is why Špela Petrič’s work is of utter importance towards a completely selfless perception. As the aesthetics in general require the human judgement of what is considered beautiful or tasteful, the artwork by Špela Petrič which lacks such notions, either purposefully or not, metamorphoses into an artwork that clashes these human-centred boundaries.

The zone of proximity in the Deleuzian sense is interconnected with the sense of empathy, which indicates the parallels of how we are able to ‘feel-with and be-with’ the living entity. This idea is quite relevant in the case of *Strange Encounters*. Briefly, the notion of togetherness/proximity

---

<sup>58</sup> Beaulieu, 2011, 75

‘allows us to receive, not just lose ourselves, but to acknowledge the living entities’ embodied experience and empathise with them on their terms.<sup>59</sup> This can be explicitly seen in *Strange Encounters*. As Špela Petrič acts as an observant, she acknowledges the embodied experience of the two cells.

Additionally, she empathises with them on their terms. One would think that the sense of empathy was already showcased by the artist herself where she felt the need to apply the presence of the third bacteria and in her observation towards the potentially negative outcome of the uncanny encounter. However, the sense of empathy is yet highly problematic if we continue with the discourse of metaphysics. According to Marder “despite its intricacy, the philosophical rapprochement of the ontology disallows empathy and compassion alike”<sup>60</sup> Marder therefore suggests that because we are vigorously trying to accentuate the differences between the human and the plant we are failing at our efforts to actually conquer the anthropocentric mentality within our traditional philosophy. Instead he argues that applying the anthropocentric ontology to plants creates even more boundaries which complicate the matter. Marder therefore suggests replacing “the excesses of anthropocentric ontology with the essential superficiality of the human psyche and the crucial role of non-conscious intentionality in any embodied existence”.<sup>61</sup> In other words, Marder advocates the idea that plants should not be perceived in a complicated metaphysical matter, because this further entails the difficulties in breaking the pattern of the Other. Additionally, for him, the sense of empathy and applying it to plants is of inherently narcissistic nature which subsequently entails anthropocentric features. Marder however also adds that on an ethical note, the limits of empathy are not to entirely exclude the possibility to apply them to plants. To some degree, the ideas advocated by Marder make sense, but on the other hand is it not too precarious to completely deny the sense of empathy towards plants?

If we return to the artwork by Špela Petrič, then clearly we as viewers should not base our

---

<sup>59</sup> Sutton, 2017, 6-7

<sup>60</sup> Marder, 2012, 265

<sup>61</sup> *Ibidem*, 265

perception upon metaphysics when engaging with the artwork. In this case, the sense of empathy is possible, and the artist herself clearly distinguishes it through her artwork. The artist herself performs with care and responsibility; she observes and reacts, with feelings towards the strange encounter between the human and the plant she herself created. And if the feeling of empathy is natural to human beings, then her art serves as a vehicle to foster such feelings in humans. How our perception to animals has been shaped on anthropocentric values will be explained in the next chapter.



## Chapter III

### Kathy High & Becoming Animal

Before commencing my second case study analysis, I wish to ask a very important question: can we ever know another being? Be it animal, plant or even another human being, can we be able to understand them? It is evident that we can perceive them in our own context, which gives us at least an opportunity to fathom them on a personal level. For instance, the closest we are able to closely observe animals would be as pets. When we pet animals, we comprehend from their body language their sense of content or discontent (depending on cats or dogs for example). However, it is quite difficult to entirely grasp what it is like to *be them*. When we see them from our subjective perspective, the levels of divergence are apparent. We are different to them, and they are distinct to us. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in their philosophical approach towards animals claim that *becoming* and *being* are two utterly different words. The contrast between these is focussed on the distinct notion of *becoming*. What is becoming? Does *becoming* involve mimicry? If we start making dog sounds or meowing as cats, can it be the same as *being* them?

According to the philosophical theories on how we approach animals, Deleuze and Guattari stress on the fact that “becoming is not about resemblance and is not a form of imitation”.<sup>62</sup> In the sense, the becoming is not oriented towards imitating characteristics such as barking. Nor does it entail any form of imagination. Moreover, Deleuze and Guattari suggest ‘entering a level of proximity’ in relation to animals, meaning that instead of imitating a dog, we can explore the surroundings or parts of the animal’s world,<sup>63</sup> implying on the sense of closeness towards the animal. As explained by Alain Beaulieu ‘to become is the metaphysical experience of a process

---

<sup>62</sup> Stark, 2017, 153

<sup>63</sup> *Ibidem*, 154

through which a zone of proximity made up of affects between entities is found.<sup>64</sup> This suggests that the sense of impersonality is projected and expressed through speaking, acting or writing in the place of whichever body. Thus, the becoming can only happen on the metaphysical level, when we do not literally try to impersonate the animal as in dressing up as a bird and trying to imitate bird chirping. I agree with this idea that emulating something or someone is further away from understanding and becoming the animal. It gives us nothing as of a shallow level of comprehension as to what it is like to become an animal. In keeping in mind the Deleuzian sense of becoming, I believe that the reflection of becoming already suggests a shifting change in thinking about our attitude towards animal or natural entities.

Moreover, if we continue reflecting in the stage of *becoming*, it fosters an action ‘away from the human as the central and exalted autonomy in hierarchies of being.’<sup>65</sup> However I strongly feel that the reciprocity and interaction with animals can also promote a major shift in how we experience the world in its general sense. Additionally, the notion of togetherness ‘allows us to receive, not just lose ourselves, but to acknowledge the animal’s embodied experience and empathise with her on her terms’.<sup>66</sup> In this sense, the Deleuzian “idea of proximity” is appropriately parallel here as it encompasses the very notion of how we are able to ‘feel-with and be-with’ rather than bringing about the self-project approach.<sup>67</sup> This evidently means that a feeling of empathy can be helpful in generating a breakthrough in hierarchical relationships. Therefore, what is worth mentioning here is that art can serve as a paramount vehicle that can generate the feeling of empathy and thus be of extraordinary phenomena that can increase our awareness in how we acknowledge and feel the world around us. To mention Martin Heidegger (1887-1976) here would be of necessary nature as his *Being and Time* and his classic essay ‘The Origin of the Work of Art’ both introduce the idea on how the state of being and work of art can

---

<sup>64</sup> Beaulieu, 2010, 75

For more on the ‘becoming animal’, see Alain Beaulieu’s article *The Status of Animality in Deleuze’s Thought*, 2010

<sup>65</sup> *Ibidem*, 154

<sup>66</sup> Sutton, 2017, 6-7

<sup>67</sup> *Ibidem*, 5

accomplish such form of gathering, through the concept of “dwelling”. Elizabeth Sutton proposes that Heidegger’s concept of dwelling suggests the idea that ‘art is a place where we can open ourselves to the ways phenomena gather with us and extend to us, simultaneously appropriating them.’<sup>68</sup> This idea mostly implies on the fact that art serves as a place where humans become aware of their existence and the true self, at the same time representing a crucial place for reflection and questioning. Interestingly, Heidegger’s idea on art “departs from the traditional anthropocentric philosophical view”.<sup>69</sup> Because Heidegger proposes to ‘go to the actual work and ask the work what and how it is,’ it already suggests the fact that human existence is no longer the centre of the analysis, and can no longer serve as the conduit of meaning.<sup>70</sup> In this case, the notion of anthropocentrism is challenged through the work of art which creates a new paradigm in how we react to the world around us. Further contextual analysis of the artwork will demonstrate the workings of the idea how art can generate the shift in traditional philosophical paradigm.

The new thinking towards such human centred problematics is called “new materialism”<sup>71</sup> which has risen up in the past decades. In theory, new materialism suggests an escape from the notions of anthropocentrism by “propagating a different approach towards a non-hierarchical relationship with nature and other living beings”.<sup>72</sup> This is a crucial trend that has the potential to break down the traditional pattern of anthropocentrism in theory. However, can we solely rely on new materialism traversing the ontological ideas towards a new direction? Certainly, this is where we return to art. To simplify, art has an ability to influence and enhance the imagination, at the same time art can also offer a reflection on certain issues, depending on the context of course. Additionally, if art can help us understand the world around us then this is how artists become crucial fighters against the dualist thinking. Art opens up world - new, mysterious, and

---

<sup>68</sup> *Ibidem*, 3, For more information on Elizabeth Sutton’s suggestions on Heidegger’s theory see the article *Relational Ethics and Aesthetics in Art, Animals and Experience*, 2017 p.3

<sup>69</sup> Mansbach, 1997, 162

<sup>70</sup> *Ibidem*, 159

<sup>71</sup> On new materialism in detail, see Rick Dolphijn’s *New Materialism: Interviews and Cartographies*, 2012

<sup>72</sup> Zwijnenberg, 2014, 138

other worlds that cause us to wonder, ask questions.<sup>73</sup> As was mentioned above, if art can foster the feeling of empathy and the zone of proximity in the Deleuzian sense, we can reprogram our mindsets towards a new non-dualist human/animal, human/nature approach. Clearly, with the rise of biotechnological practices being utilised as a medium and the process of creating art projects beyond the canonical comprehension on what art can do forces us to reconsider our traditional views of human and nature relationship.<sup>74</sup> Furthermore, through these unique artistic practices we can make contact with what cannot be known, be it an animal or a plant.<sup>75</sup>

As a crucial example that advocates the human/animal relationship in addition to empathy but with the twist of Deleuzian and Heideggerian philosophy is Kathy High's (b.1954) *Embracing Animal* which is presented here as a case study. It is important to give the reader a background of the art work before commencing the overall analysis. Kathy High's *Embracing Animal* (fig.4 & fig.5) is a multi-media/installation of exchanges between people and animals which consists of three transgenic lab rats (model HLA-B27) being given special housing and made available to the public's view.<sup>76</sup> In this installation the transgenic rats are micro infused with human DNA, permitting them to share human genes. Given that transgenic rats are referred to as mere objects for the purpose of scientific experimentation, physiologically speaking these rats remain closer to humans as ever.<sup>77</sup> Additionally, High's conscious selection was mostly based on these animals having in common "her own autoimmune digestive condition"<sup>78</sup>, which here creates a connection fueled with empathy between her and the rats. Furthermore, the bonding is enacted here via the artist's deliberate choice to refer to the rats as her "siblings".<sup>79</sup> Simultaneously with such actions, Kathy High confronts her condition through the uncanny kinship with the rats. High shows them her affection by playing with them and feeding them as they were her dearest companions. Through this art experiment the artist can finally defeat her own doubts not only in

---

<sup>73</sup> Sutton, 2017, 5

<sup>74</sup> *Ibidem*, 148

<sup>75</sup> Conrad, 2016, 22

<sup>76</sup> Kathy High, Web 1 Nov 2017, <http://kathyhigh.com/project-embracing-animal.html>,

<sup>77</sup> Kathy High, Web 1 Nov 2017, <http://kathyhigh.com/project-embracing-animal.html>,

<sup>78</sup> Aristarkhova, 2010, 4

<sup>79</sup> *Ibidem*, 5

regards to her autoimmune disease but also expand her openness towards the transgenic animals. Indeed, the idea of how to relate to them opens up a new way of questioning one's perception not of the self, but also about the non-human entities.

If we go back to philosophy, then this artwork elicits the very notion of Deleuzian sense of 'becoming'. Even if this idea is not explicitly showcased by Kathy High, I find it still very omnipresent in the context of this artwork. If the rats and the human, in this case the artist, possess the same health affliction, the 'zone of proximity' is what creates a special bond between the animals and the human in this case. Indeed, the artist herself has said that this artistic experiment has given her a sense of 'a strange kinship', even though at first it was highly difficult for her to overcome her fear of rats. She adds:

Why did I decide to work with these rats? I am afraid of them. And I don't know how to relate to them. They make me nauseous and queasy. They make my skin crawl. I have never touched a rat before except accidentally when they ran over me, when they crawled over me in bed at night, when they ran by my foot in the alley or the subway. They terrify me. Plague-laden animals, low to the earth, crawlers, sneaky, creepy vermin...<sup>80</sup>

Not only can the artist therefore understand what she is experiencing with having an autoimmune disease on her own personal level, but with this peculiar sense of manifestation she is able to understand the other. This sense of reflection is indicated in her explanation on why she decided to execute her project with the rats:

I bought [transgenic rats] to conduct research and to treat them holistically with alternative medicines, environmental enrichment, good food, and play. I want to relate to them because I, too, have autoimmune problems.<sup>81</sup>

Not only does Kathy High's artwork elicit the notion of empathy towards animals which gives the viewer a possibility to reflect upon the approach in regards to their holistic exclusivity, but

---

<sup>80</sup> *Ibidem*, 6

<sup>81</sup> *Ibidem*, 7

*Embracing Animals* also propagates the idea that the work of art itself is solely about the rats. The two could both represent the subject and the object in this case which indicate that the artist is mostly focussed not on her own subjective experience as a sufferer from an autoimmune disease, but particularly on *their* struggle. As the work of art was at first conducted at the artist's own home facilities, the transgenic rats were taken care of, observed and treated with respect. Perhaps here the artist's intention was not to solely relate to them as living beings with the analogous health affliction, but to understand what is it like to be them. This leads us back to a universal philosophical question that was posed at the beginning of the chapter. Can we ever know what it is like to be an animal, in the case of the work by Kathy High, can we know what it is like to be a rat?

In the chapter of *Mortal Questions*<sup>82</sup> "What is it like to be a bat"? Thomas Nagel suggests the notion of phenomenology as being the essential factor in understanding the other. Nagel advocates the idea that there exists a sense in which phenomenological facts are totally objective<sup>83</sup> when for instance one person can apprehend or tell of another that features the other's experience. However, the sense of subjectivity nonetheless remains here, as the "objective ascription of experience is possible only for someone sufficiently similar to the object of ascription to be able to adopt his/her point of view".<sup>84</sup> This can certainly be seen in the context of the artwork by Kathy High. The fact that the rats share at least one aspect in common with the artist (in this case the same genes and the identical autoimmune condition) can be appropriated as an objective reasoning in accordance with the experience of the other. In other words, the artist understands the rats better, as she comprehends their experience with a similar one which makes it easier to transcend the boundaries of human centeredness and dominance.

---

<sup>82</sup> Thomas Nagel's *Mortal Questions* is an essential book on the philosophical matters of life. The chapters are comprised of metaphysics of consciousness.

<sup>83</sup> Nagel, 2013, 172

<sup>84</sup> *Ibidem*, 12

If we look at the title of the artwork itself, *Embracing Animals*, it explicitly showcases the vocal focus and the agenda of the artist - to embrace is to accept. The fact that rats are being used in scientific experiments as a mere tool for certain purposes are in the end neglected as living entities. The animals are utilised for our bio-technological agriculture, the cosmetics industry, drugs and pharmaceutical industries, which still entails the dualist perception.<sup>85</sup> However, to take them home as pets and provide them with love and care seems to me as a precursor towards understanding the 'unknown', in this case the transgenic rats. Indeed, to develop a friendly relationship with the 'uncanny' such as these transgenic rats is in a way what Donna Haraway suggests in her book *When Species Meet*<sup>86</sup>, that in order to break down the pattern of anthropocentrism we need not perceive animals as other and uncanny, but as them on their own turf (to enter into a pact based on mutual respect and recognition).<sup>87</sup> This she suggests will help us to learn "how to live in a post-human environment"<sup>88</sup> without the very notion of human dominance.

Not only does the artwork speak of inclusiveness per se, but to me it also explores the notions of identity. As the rats were injected with the human DNA, can the artist identify herself with the rats? Does it actually blur the identity boundaries between the species? Are rats now similar to human or not? With these questions in mind we can apply critical posthumanist thinking when approaching this work of art. If we look at the speciesism, which so far has been seen in animal studies as a form of "positioning human species as the dominant species that then controls, oppresses, exploits, guards the animal species",<sup>89</sup> then critical posthumanist discourse calls for untangling such perceptions by leading to species-crossing, hybridity, mutual dependency and co-existence.<sup>90</sup> If we compare Kathy High's *Embracing Animals* with *Art Orienté Objet* and their performance piece *May The Horse Live in Me*, then we can perceive the shift needed to

---

<sup>85</sup> Braidotti, 2006, 99

<sup>86</sup> Haraway, 2008, 27

<sup>87</sup> Conrad, 2016, 9

<sup>88</sup> *Ibidem*, 30

<sup>89</sup> K.Nayar, 2014, 96

<sup>90</sup> *Ibidem*, 96

relinquish the categories “human”, and “animal”. In a sense, both works are in the realm of such agendas - the French piece is conducted in a way where human has an opportunity to feel as a horse. The artist herself expressed a “feeling of being extra-human, and not being in her usual body”.<sup>91</sup> Perhaps the same can be said about the rats in the case of Kathy High’s artwork. If they were given the injections of human DNA which are infected with the autoimmune disease, can they be feeling more like human? If we look at the artworks from the ethical perspective of animal studies, then both can be perceived as quite problematic. Firstly, is the horse used as the subject matter in the case of *Art Orienté Objet* being subjected for the artistic purposes? Are the rats in Kathy High’s art work also utilised for the sake of the art work? The next chapter will look at aesthetics and ethics respectively in the case of Patricia Piccinini’s *Young Family* (2002).

---

<sup>91</sup> Zwijnenberg, 2014, 129



## Chapter IV

### Patricia Piccinini & Monster-like sculptures

In the previous chapters we have seen that anthropocentric attitudes have been prevalent in both animal and plant studies. The philosophical theories of the twentieth century are to certain extent bound to the anthropocentric values which exclude plants and animals from the perception as equals. However, we have seen that artists have addressed the issues of anthropocentrism in their artistic practice. The artworks discussed so far are both representatives of bioart, which thanks to their revolutionary break from traditional aesthetics, medium and concept ease the process towards new critical thinking. Bioart and its connection to the critical posthumanist thinking already presupposes a breakthrough in our relationship towards the world, as was established above. As I have demonstrated in the previous chapters, Kathy High's *Embracing Animals* and Špela Petrič's *Strange Encounters* deal with how we attune ourselves to the notion of inclusiveness in regards to animals and plants.

Kathy High's rats are transgenic and clearly this artwork creates a different experience for a viewer. Given that rats are stigmatised, seeing them as a central subject of the art work clearly expands our reflective abilities on how rats are representative of mere objects. Špela Petrič's artwork creates an analogous situation as the plant cells utilised as her subject matter also aims at breaking the narrow-minded pattern of how we perceive plants - as mere entities for our purposeful and exploitative utilisation for various industries. The notion of hospitality suggested in Kathy High's work attunes to a more inclusive notion which is clearly needed in order to battle anthropocentrism. As Donna Haraway points out, "the minimum requirement is that the dualism human-animal has to be relinquished, in favour of a more dynamic notion of relation or even relationality".<sup>92</sup> This can be clearly seen in Kathy High's *Embracing Animals*, and this

---

<sup>92</sup> Barad, 2017, 89

indeed what makes Kathy High's artwork successful in acquiring such notions of relational relationality within the companionship with animals. The transgenic rats in Kathy High's artwork can be related to Donna Haraway's '*Companion Species*' where she draws a direct line between the early figurations of the cyborg and of oncomouse on the one hand, and of companion species like dogs on the other.<sup>93</sup> If we can see transgenic rats as our companions like dogs, then the human-animal relation can therefore be lifted from this historically confined narrative.<sup>94</sup> As the idea that art in terms of its agency can alter the experience for the viewer is suggested in both artworks. The performativity in both artworks matches perfectly with an entirely different aesthetic. What if the artworks created in a rather traditional sense, say sculpture, can they be able to alter and break down the pattern of anthropocentrism?

Patricia Piccinini's (b.1965) works consist of silicon, acrylic, human hair, leather and timber. The sculptures create a mixture of interconnected entities of human, animal, material and intersect a visual representation of a human and non-human hybrid. This chapter will analyse the work of art by Patricia Piccinini in terms of aesthetics. Can we candidly claim that Piccinini's artwork challenges anthropocentrism within the domain of aesthetics and bioethics?

Firstly, it is important to establish how aesthetics and its entire notion is once again based on anthropocentric perspective. If we read Immanuel Kant and his *Critique of Judgement* (1790) then it is obvious that its intrinsic aspect of how we perceive something as aesthetically pleasing depends on our subjective matter of what we consider to be aesthetically pleasing. As he states: "All one wants to know is whether the mere representation of the object is to my liking, no matter how indifferent I may be to the existence of the object of this representation".<sup>95</sup> Kantian aesthetic theory is committed to the formal aspects, meaning that for Kant, "an aesthetic judgement that a particular work of art is considered 'beautiful' or 'ugly' does not depend upon

---

<sup>93</sup> Braidotti, 2017, 32

<sup>94</sup> For Haraway this needs to be redefined in the context of a techno-scientific world that has replaced the traditional natural order with a nature-culture compound. An epistemological question therefore generates a new ethical dimension. Accordingly, the human-animal relation needs to be lifted out of the Oedipal and infantilizing narrative within which it has historically been confined.

<sup>95</sup> Kant, I & Walker, N., 2007, 178

the particular material existence or properties of the work of art, but is instead based only on the form of the object".<sup>96</sup> Additionally, for Kant, an object itself cannot be art and it subsequently becomes disgusting. The sense of disgust is present in Kantian aesthetic theory, however, only briefly he mentions how a disgusting object cannot appear beautiful if it is depicted in a painting.<sup>97</sup> As for the object that one finds ugly in real life, it therefore cannot be made beautiful in a painting.

The reason why the artist is unable to create a beautiful representation of a disgusting object is due to the fact that it can possibly incite two contradictory responses from the gazer,<sup>98</sup> which can alter the entire experience of what art can make us feel. For Kant, the object that he considers being art is the one that is capable to create a reflective distance with the viewer.<sup>99</sup> However, some scholars critique Kant's judgments of pure ugliness.

For example, H. Guyer argues that while there might be some displeasure in the ugly it always involves an interest.<sup>100</sup> Additionally, if there exists a disinterested judgement of ugliness, it has to be always in the context where beauty is expected.<sup>101</sup> Kant and his aesthetic theory clearly purport this notion of exclusiveness towards any kind of art, which already alludes to its inherent anthropocentrism. For example, I doubt that Kant would appreciate performativity of bioart, perhaps he would claim that bioart remains in the realm of disgusting and ugly. Indeed, the critique of Kant can also be applicable to Patricia Piccinini's sculptures which clearly linger in the realm of fine art. Can her *Young Family* (2002) or *Tender Creatures* (2007) (fig. 6 & fig. 7) only be considered as disgusting and ugly? Assuredly, if we apply Kant's aesthetic judgements then clearly, the Australian artist's sculptures can clearly be put under an umbrella of discontent, as the viewer has no choice as to experience such senses of disturbance or perhaps even repulsion. Because Piccinini's sculptures appear to be a sort of hybrid between human and

---

<sup>96</sup> Mitchell, 2010, 86

<sup>97</sup> *Ibidem*, 86

<sup>98</sup> *Ibidem*, 86

<sup>99</sup> *Ibidem*, 86

<sup>100</sup> Guyer, 2005,

<sup>101</sup> Ginsborg, 2003, 175-177

animal, the creatures are automatically considered as being ‘monstrous’ and ‘other’, because we do not encounter creatures like this on a daily basis anywhere. So explicitly speaking, it is evident that most viewers would consider Piccinini’s sculptures ugly, based on its monstrous characteristics which perhaps would serve as a key theme for horror films and literature. However, there is a clear connection between these monsters and their very much cartoon-like features. As we can see, the faces of offsprings who are depicted alongside their mother resemble cartoon-like characters with their round luminous blue eyes.<sup>102</sup>

Anita Goriss-Hunter suggests that this “cartoon-like effect is also echoed in the long ears of the offsprings that bestow a slightly comical air to the little creatures that is reminiscent of animation, especially children’s cartoons”.<sup>103</sup> This evidently interesting aspect challenges Kant’s theory of aesthetics, as these creatures could certainly indicate at least some appeal to children, and perhaps even to some adults. Thus if one can have a sense of admiration towards such creatures, in the realm of art, challenges the notion of what can be considered ugly or beautiful. In the case of Piccinini’s sculptures, the paradox of the artwork combining both sense of beautiful and ugly is what makes this art object crucial in breaking down the pattern of anthropocentric aesthetics. Similarly, it is suggested that the mother-creature monster has a “cuddly, cross-species”<sup>104</sup> appeal, which permeates the viewer not only react to it in a positive way, but relate to it on a level of empathy - “in the artwork, these little creatures are rendered as entirely worthy of a traditional mother-love of liberal humanistic values”.<sup>105</sup> Indeed, at the same time, the hyperreal characteristics of the silicone sculptures make the creatures appear real, which therefore permeates the viewer react in different ways. Given the fact that the sculptures are resembling humans, it can suggest a certain degree of anthropomorphism - curves of flesh, the echoes of human physicality, the embryonic veins and size of the creatures all combine to construct an aesthetic of appeal that renders the lumps as strange but adorable, robust but

---

<sup>102</sup> Goriss-Hunter, 2004, 550

<sup>103</sup> *Ibidem*, 550

<sup>104</sup> *Ibidem*, 550

<sup>105</sup> *Ibidem*, 551

vulnerable.<sup>106</sup> Seemingly, while Piccinini's sculptures paradoxically possess the notions of cute, as suggested by Goriss-Hunter, the visual aesthetics are thus being confronted with the traditional theory of aesthetics of Kant.

If we consider Piccinini's sculptures as mere monsters, which we certainly might do, perhaps on a subconscious level, given the fact that they still remain in the realm of fiction, then we are tied up in the sphere of anthropocentric perspective. This is because the term monster is a culturally and socially constructed term, which expresses "cultural anxieties about and demonisation of forms of life as diverse as the black races, particular animals, mutant babies/animals, the impaired and the insane".<sup>107</sup> Distinct bodies, different skin colour, uncanny animals have been categorised as monsters, mainly due to them not belonging into any familiar category. Piccinini's hyperreal sculptures can possibly reveal our anthropocentric attitude towards the creatures that evidently appear different, strange or uncanny to us. However, Piccinini surprises the public with a twist as her obviously genetically engineered living creatures resemble humans. This aspect clearly contradicts the inherently anthropocentric constructs.

Piccinini's method of creating the hyperrealistic sculptures is a combination of traditional clay technique and incorporating silicone and human hair, both of which are formed from living materials. The final result are the creatures who clearly because made from silicone, are translucent, almost as if they were made of human flesh. "When creating her creatures, Patricia Piccinini resorts to hyperrealism in order to invite the spectator to observe the skin, wrinkles, sweat and hair of these sculptures".<sup>108</sup>

Piccinini states:

What interests me is the way that flesh is changing as a result of medical and scientific research. All of my works take place in a time when flesh is becoming plastic.

---

<sup>106</sup> Goriss-Hunter, 553

<sup>107</sup> Nayar, 2014, 83

<sup>108</sup> Piccinini, Web. Dec 2 2017 [http://www.artium.org/en/explore/exhibitions/item/55721-\(tiernas\)-criaturas.-patricia-piccinini](http://www.artium.org/en/explore/exhibitions/item/55721-(tiernas)-criaturas.-patricia-piccinini).

Ultimately the aim of genetic engineering, stem cell research and the like is to control flesh, make it malleable, and plastic. For many years my work has revolved around the questions of what we will do with flesh when we can control it. I think there is a nice conceptual irony in my use of silicone – basically a kind of plastic – to create flesh in works that talk about the plasticity of life.<sup>109</sup>

When confronted with the contradictory aspects, such as monstrosity, but at the same time resembling human, can one be able to relate on a level of empathy? As the sculptures invite viewers to feel unease at first, then inescapably the emotions of empathy are generated through the sculpture's visuality. The feelings of empathy, as referred by Piccinini above can therefore generate a sense of inclusiveness, which is very much needed in order to shift from anthropocentrism towards post-anthropocentrism.

As was discussed with Kathy High's *Embracing Animals*, the sense of proximity and empathy are standing very close to each other, and when acquiring both, it can purport a new direction towards new thinking. Additionally, Piccinini's sculptures are able to generate the feelings of empathy because they resemble to what we might consider rather adorable. Moreover, the sense of empathy can always play a key role in acknowledging that animals, and even genetically modified living entities can become our companions, on a level of kinship. Moreover, the sculptures can still "invoke a sense of tenderness."<sup>110</sup> To quote Eduardo Kac here would be of utter importance, as his transgenic green fluorescent bunny was a revolutionary experiment, echoing the issues of bioethics:

(It) does not attempt to moderate, undermine, or arbitrate the public discussion. It seeks to offer a new perspective that offers ambiguity and subtlety where we usually only feel affirmative ("in favour") and negative ("against") polarity. "GFB Bunny" highlights the fact that transgenic animals are regular creatures that are as much part of social life as any other life form, and thus are deserving of as much love and care as any other animal.<sup>111</sup>

---

<sup>109</sup> Thompson, 2005, 104

<sup>110</sup> Piccinini, Web. Dec 2 2017 [http://www.artium.org/en/explore/exhibitions/item/55721-\(tiernas\)-criaturas.-patricia-piccinini](http://www.artium.org/en/explore/exhibitions/item/55721-(tiernas)-criaturas.-patricia-piccinini)

<sup>111</sup> Kac, 2013, Web. Dec 4 2017, <http://www.ekca.org/transgenicindex/html>

Piccinini's sculptures not only reverse the ideas in terms of aesthetics, but they "invoke the erosion of species boundaries".<sup>112</sup> As these seemingly genetically modified creatures are manufactured and molded to better serve the human race, the artist questions the human condition.<sup>113</sup> Can the human-animal hybrid once and for all break through the pervasiveness of anthropocentrism?

Piccinini's works of art certainly initiate the issues concerning speciesism which "positions the human as the dominant species that then controls, domesticates, oppresses, exploits. It is also a discourse and a mode of cultural representation through which such exploitation is naturalised and made possible."<sup>114</sup> With these creatures seemingly resembling humans but at the same time retaining animality, does it actually result in erasing the constructed nature of the two categories - human and animal? Seemingly, Piccinini's sculptures are debatable, because the problem with the hybridisation and cross-species technique is constructed as such to be inherently anthropocentric. According to Helena Pedersen, "the importance attached to boundary dissolution between animals and humans ignores the fact that the relations between animals and humans are never symmetrical".<sup>115</sup> Additionally, "border dissolution itself suggests the human urge to 'be a part of an expanded context and community of life forms'.<sup>116</sup> Specifically, the impulse to incorporate cross-species technique can suggest to be viewed as "a traditional human colonizing impulse"<sup>117</sup>, which is constructed with anthropocentrism. This problematic can be seen in Piccinini's sculpture, even though perhaps the artist's intentions were not to propagate anthropocentrism. Even though the problematic still pertains, I find Piccinini's silicone hyperreal sculptures groundbreaking on an emotional level.

The issues concerning bioethics for example are visibly addressed as well, and even though perhaps this is not explicitly showcased, the viewer is asked to make her own narrative of certain

---

<sup>112</sup> Link, 2012, 40

<sup>113</sup> *Ibidem* 42

<sup>114</sup> Nayar, 2014, 96

<sup>115</sup> Pedersen, 2011, 65

<sup>116</sup> *Ibidem*, 66

<sup>117</sup> *Ibidem*, 66

issues. Piccinini herself has stated:

I don't think that you really can - or indeed should - try to understand the ethics of something without emotions. It can easily be argued that such a focus on empathy might distract from a true rational understanding of the issues, but in fact that is exactly what I am aiming to do. . . The empathetic nature of my work deliberately complicates the ideas. It is one thing to argue for/against cloning when it is just an intellectual issue. . . I like to think that my work understands that the point at which 'good' becomes 'bad' does not stand still, which is why it is so difficult to find. Ethics are not set like morals, they have to be constantly negotiated. Bioethics are especially flexible, which makes them especially difficult.<sup>118</sup>

Even if the idea behind the sculpted creatures goes in circles with the inherent anthropocentrism, the sculptures nevertheless convey the feeling of empathy, which produces a new relationship between the viewer and the artwork, which paradoxically appears to be real, given the artist's creative method on combining silicone and plastic. Piccinini's method of creating the hyperrealistic sculptures is a combination of traditional clay technique and incorporating silicone and human hair, both of which are formed from living materials. The final result are the creatures who clearly because made from silicone, are translucent, almost as if they were made of human flesh. "When creating her creatures, Patricia Piccinini resorts to hyperrealism in order to invite the spectator to observe the skin, wrinkles, sweat and hair of these sculptures",<sup>119</sup> as was mentioned previously.

Returning back to the notion of empathy, it is clearly generated by Patricia Piccinini within her hyperrealistic sculptures. Her artwork becomes an accurate match to "critical posthumanist thinking which suggests that species borders are not valid, that different forms of life must be seen as different but not inferior, that all forms of life are interconnected."<sup>120</sup> The sense of empathy blends with these key notions that Piccinini's sculptures, perhaps implicitly, address.

---

<sup>118</sup> Patricia Piccinini, "The Long Awaited," Patricia Piccinini Web. Dec 4 2017

[http://patriciapiccinini.net/works/05Sculptures\\_2008-2009/](http://patriciapiccinini.net/works/05Sculptures_2008-2009/)

<sup>119</sup> Piccinini, Web. Dec 4 2017, [http://www.artium.org/en/explore/exhibitions/item/55721-\(tiemas\)-criaturas.-patricia-piccinini](http://www.artium.org/en/explore/exhibitions/item/55721-(tiemas)-criaturas.-patricia-piccinini), Dec 4 2017

<sup>120</sup> Nayar, 2014, 98



Patricia Piccinini's hyperrealistic sculptures also deal with the issues of bioethics, and the ultimate questions on responsibility. In other words, as discussed by Rachel Kent, "for each of these new creations, for what ultimate reason have they been made, and who will take responsibility for them and their welfare once they are an established part of the ecosystem of the planet?"<sup>121</sup> As in our day and age, the scientific technology is available to control animal and human recreation, Piccinini's *Young Family* precisely conveys the idea on how would such genetically modified human/animal entities be treated. Would they be domesticated? Or would they be retained for exploitation for particular scientific experiments? In case of a malfunctioned genetically processed experiment which can produce unexpected results, would the new living beings be 'othered' as mere monsters, or would they be included into a society? Such questions are of utter importance, as the way the sculptures are visually positioned perhaps reveals some of the answers to ascribed questions.

Interestingly, the way the mother-creature is laying there seems vulnerable. Her gaze is oriented towards the viewer, wary of her offsprings being tucked towards her human-like body. What is the possible outcome of this cross-species experiment? Even if Piccinini does not give an explicit answer to these questions herself, she undoubtedly creates a reflective environment for the viewers to think critically, perhaps with care towards the issues of bioethics. In fact, the notion of care is conveyed in Donna Haraway's article *Speculative Fabulations For Technoculture's Generations: Taking Care of Unexpected Country*, where she states that Piccinini's "world is where nature and culture are tightly knotted in bodies, ecologies, technology and time; and tuned to reconciliation and taking care of always situated place and its denizens."<sup>122</sup> The clear interconnection between the technoculture and nature, according to Haraway, is clearly emphasized. What Piccinini conveys is that the shared responsibility of any kind of scientific technocultural experiments should be kept in mind, more importantly it has to be imbued with care and responsibility. This can be also be applicable in any case of genetical engineering, or

---

<sup>121</sup> Kent, 2005, 65

<sup>122</sup> Haraway, 2014, 250-251

transgenic and xenotransfusion processes. Patricia Piccinini's art engages contemporary viewers "in all its social and political complexity"<sup>123</sup>, from technological implication on how our world works interconnectedly with other living entities, and how it is essential to keep preserving our natural world, and being kind and open towards all life forms. Essentially, Piccinini's artworks fight the inherent anthropocentric perception, even though the artist herself does not give definite answers, instead she offers reflective thinking for the public. This is certainly essential in shaping the way the world, nature, biotechnology, animals and 'other' entities interrelate with one another and create foundation for new thinking.

---

<sup>123</sup> Frye Art Museum Educator's Guide, "Hug: Recent Works by Patricia Piccinini" Frye Art Museum, accessed Dec 4, 2017, <http://fryemuseum.org/images/docs/Piccinini2.pdf>

## Conclusion

In four consecutive chapters the need to relinquish the notion of anthropocentrism served as a key problematic in this thesis. Human dominance over Nature, and reassurance of having hierarchically higher seat on the pedestal of life indicates that anthropocentric values need to be battled. Only now however, it seems that humanity is making baby steps towards a new, non-anthropocentric perspective. In our day and age, the technological advance permits different philosophical, scientific and art practices to challenge the notion of anthropocentrism. In the domain of theory, critical posthumanist thinking serves as a milestone towards a remission of anthropocentric perspective. As we have established, critical posthumanist thinking, instead of praising humans in all its glory, offers a more inclusive, symbiotic relations with animals and plants. It therefore favours co-evolution, symbiosis, interconnectedness and friendliness, instead of autonomy, hierarchy and exclusivity. Contemporary feminist thinkers such as Donna Haraway offer an idea of kinship and partnership as a key factor in overcoming anthropocentrism. Even though postmodernist theory remains in the sphere of anthropocentrism, it nonetheless serves as a precursor towards post-anthropocentrism, as without it there would not be a need for a step further. Therefore, instead of demolishing the postmodern theories, we shall look for answers in there as well as in ourselves.

Another important domain which acts as a mediator between theory and practice, is evidently art and artistic practice. Here art and its performativity act as a vehicle that can challenge, create reflective stimulation and break down the boundaries. Artists who experiment with technology and science have become the ice breakers in tackling the issues of anthropocentrism. As we have seen in the previous chapters, the case study analysis proved to be fruitful in how we put animals and plants under the category of 'unknown', or 'below' us, and how art can tackle such narrow-minded pattern. In case of Špela Petric's *Strange Encounters*, the subject became one with performativity, and how concept of relinquishing the biased attitude towards plants became

possible thanks to technological advances. The examination of such artistic experiment is crucial in understanding our relationship towards plants and Nature in general.

How we perceive animals and the essence of animal studies have become my main priority in this thesis. As was established in the first, third and fourth chapters, the notion of speciesism has been always prevalent, since ancient times. The hierarchy that humans remain the dominant force over animals has served as a key theme in Western philosophies. However, with the contribution of Deleuze & Guattari, Martin Heidegger and Derrida, the philosophical fate of animals have become slightly better. What served as a crucial factor in relinquishing animal/human relation boundaries was once again artistic practice in accordance with biotechnology. Kathy High's *Embracing Animal* served as an essential precursor towards new perspective. Not only did Kathy High shift the focus onto animals as a main subject matter, but she also utilised biotechnology as a tool in producing a reflective artwork. The transgenic rats and aiming for the sense of proximity, which was analysed and explained by Deleuze and Guattari reinforces the idea of how human/animal relationship can start anew. One cannot forget the sense of empathy which is also considered as an essential factor in bridging the humans and animals more together and acting accordingly in relinquishing the notion of anthropocentrism.

On a cultural level, alongside with the issues of bioethics, the works by the Australian artist Patricia Piccinini serve as a contemporary answer to the notion of anthropocentrism. Not only does it challenge the theory of aesthetics of Kant, it also cultivates the viewer on many levels. The artwork itself is a hybrid of all the socially/culturally inclined terms which inherently construct anthropocentrism. Even though the artwork has a shock effect, it nonetheless clearly purports and creates a reflectively engaging atmosphere. The viewer does not have the choice not to be confronted with the issues of bioethics and responsibility, which are omnipresent in our technological society. How to behave towards genetically engineered living entities and how to create relationships/kinships with them is still far far away from our understanding. However, the artists' aspiration functions as a crucial element here. Their purpose is to make the public

reflect on the issues of anthropocentrism. The art plays a paramount role in disputing the question of anthropocentrism, and with artists developing their ideas further results in greatly influencing the public to perceive our world in a more non-anthropocentric way.

# Illustrations

Fig 1



Art Orienté Objet, *Que Le Cheval Vive En Moi (May The Horse Live in Me)*, Ljubljana, Slovenia, Performance, 2011 Photo: Miha Fras, [http://we-make-money-not-art.com/que le cheval vive en moi may/](http://we-make-money-not-art.com/que_le_cheval_vive_en_moi_may/), Dec 2017

Fig 2

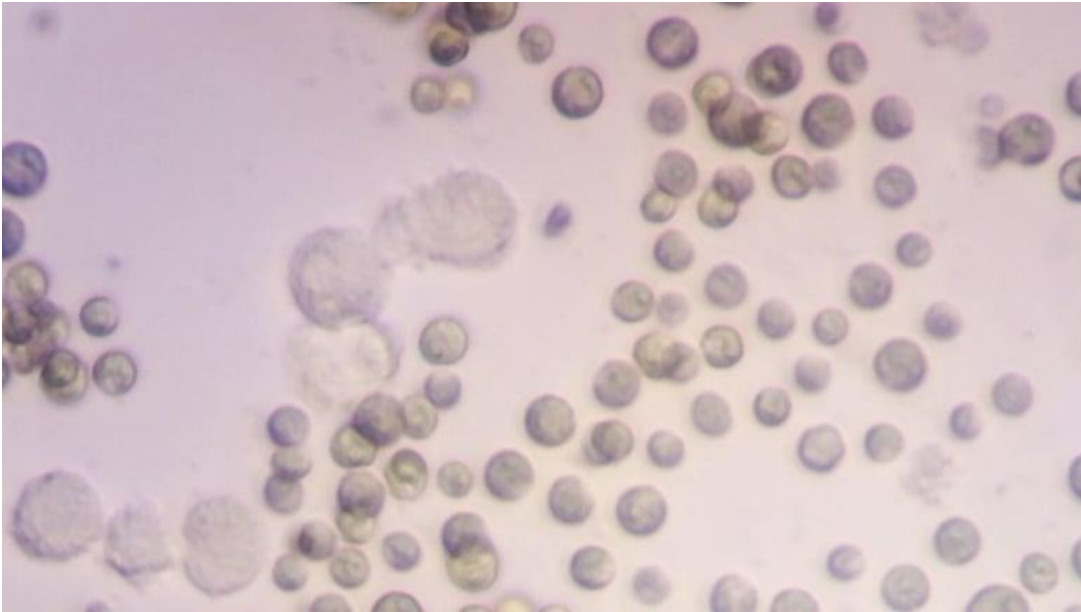


Špela Petric, *Strange Encounters*, 07/01/2017, Live at Biotehna, Ljubljana, Slovenia, Performance Experiment

<https://vimeo.com/user3412457>, Dec 2017

<http://www.spelapetric.org/projects/strange-encounters/strange-encounters-blog/>

Fig 3



Špela Petric, Strange Encounters, 07/01/2017, Live at Biotehna, Ljubljana, Slovenia, Performance experiment

<https://vimeo.com/user3412457/>

<http://www.spelapetric.org/projects/strange-encounters/strange-encounters-blog/>, Dec 2017

Fig 4



Kathy High, Embracing Animal, Site-specific, mixed media installation with glass tubes, video, sound, live transgenic laboratory rats in extended rat habitat, computer terminal with website, dimensions unknown, 2004- 2006. Exhibited at Becoming Animal. Contemporary Art in the Animal Kingdom of Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art. Photographer unknown. Web. Dec. 2017

Fig 5



Kathy High, *Embracing Animal*, Site-specific, mixed media installation with glass tubes, video, sound, live transgenic laboratory rats in extended rat habitat, computer terminal with website, dimensions unknown, 2004- 2006. Exhibited at *Becoming Animal*. Contemporary Art in the Animal Kingdom of Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art. Photographer unknown. Web. Dec 2017

Fig 6



Patricia Piccinini, *Young Family*, 2002, silicone, polyurethane, leather, human hair, dimensions variable, *We are Family*, Australia Pavilion, Venice Biennale, 2003, Web [http://www.roslynnoxley9.com.au/artists/31/Patricia\\_Piccinini/249/](http://www.roslynnoxley9.com.au/artists/31/Patricia_Piccinini/249/), Dec 2017



Fig 7



Patricia Piccinini, *Tender Creatures*, silicone, polyurethane, leather, human hair, 2004  
We are Family, Australia Pavilion, Venice Biennale, 2003, Web,  
[http://www.roslynxley9.com.au/artists/31/Patricia\\_Piccinini/249/](http://www.roslynxley9.com.au/artists/31/Patricia_Piccinini/249/), Dec 2017

# Bibliography

## *Literature*

Aristarkhova, Irina. "Hosting the Animal: The Art of Kathy High." *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture* 2 (2010): 1-12.

Beaulieu, Alain, "The Status of Animality in Deleuze's Thought", *Journal for Critical Animal Studies*, Volume IX, Issue 1/2, 2011

Braidotti, Rosi, "Four Theses on Posthuman Feminism in Anthropocene Feminism" n *Anthropocene Feminism*, 2017, Published by the University of Minnesota Press

Braidotti, Rosi, *Metamorphoses. Towards A Materialist Theory of Becoming*, published by Polity Press, 2002

Braidotti, Rosi. *The Posthuman*. Cambridge/Malden: Polity Press, 2013.

Braidotti, Rosi, *Transpositions*, published by Polity Press, 2006

Calarco, Matthew, *The Question of the Animal from Heidegger to Derrida*, New York Columbia Press, 2008

Conrad, L. Jennifer, (2016) *Becoming Nonhuman: Uncanniness, Impossibility and Human-Animal Indistinction in Recent Literature and Visual Art*, (Doctoral Dissertation) The University of Wisconsin - Madison, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 10117969.

Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Félix. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P. 2005.

Dixon, Steve, *Performance Art*, Oxford University Press, 2014

Dolphijn, Rick , and Iris van der Tuin, *New Materialism: Interviews & Cartographies*, edited by Graham Harman and Bruno Latour, *New Metaphysics*. University of Michigan Library: Open Humanities Press, MPublishing, 2012

Evans, Brad & Julian Reid, *Resilient Life: The Art of Living Dangerously*, published by Cambridge Polity, 2014

Goriss-Hunter, Anitra, "Slippery mutants perform and wink at maternal insurrections: Patricia Piccinini's monstrous cute", *Continuum*, 541-553, 2004

Grusin, Richard, *Anthropocene Feminism*, Published by the University of Minnesota Press, 2017

Ginsborg, H, *The Role of Taste in Kant's Theory of Cognition*, New York, Garland, 1990

Guyer, P, *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974

Haraway, Donna J., *When Species Meet. Posthumanities, Vol. 3.* Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2008.

Haraway, Donna J., "Speculative Fabulations For Technoculture's Generations n Multispecies Salon", *The Multispecies Salon*, edited by Eben Kirksey, Duke University Press Books, 2014

High, Kathy, "Playing with Rats." *Tactical Biopolitics. Art, Activism, and Technoscience.* Eds. Beatriz Da Costa, and Kavita Philip. Cambridge/London: The MIT Press, 2008. 465- 478.

Kant, Immanuel, Walker, Nicholas, *Critique of Judgement*, Oxford : OUP Oxford. 2007

Kent, Rachel. *Nature's Little Helpers.* New York: Robert Miller Gallery, 2005.

Laist, Randy, *Critical Plant Studies:Philosophy, Literature, Culture: Plants and Literature: Essays in Critical Plant Studies*, Amsterdam, NL:Editions 2013

Lerberg, Matthew, *Confronting the Spectacle of The Other (Than Human): Posthumanism and the Convergence of Art, Aesthetics, And Ethics (Doctoral dissertation)*, The University of Texas at Arlington, Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations Publishing (2011)

Link, Danielle, *Hyperreal Sculpture as Bio Art: An Examination of Works by Sam Jinks, Ron Mueck and Patricia Piccinini*, (Master Thesis), Sotheby's Institute of Ar, Rerieved from ProQuest Dissertations Publishing (2012)

Maestrutti, Marina, Chapitre 3. “Humain, transhumain, posthumain. représentations du corps entre incomplétude et amélioration”, *Journal International de Bioéthique* 2011/3 (Vol. 22), p. 51-66.

Mansbach, Abraham, “Overcoming Anthropocentrism: Heidegger on The Heroic Role of The Works of Art”, Blackwell Publishers Ltd. 1997

Marder, Michael, “The Life of Plants and the Limits of Empathy”, *Dialogue* 51 (2012), Canadian Philosophical Association, 259-273

Martinelli, Dario, “Anthropocentrism as a social phenomenon: semiotic and ethical implications”, *Social Semiotics*, Vol. 18, No. 1, March 2008, 79-99

Mitchell, Robert, *Bioart and the Vitality of Media*, 2010, University of Washington Press

Moyle, Tristan, “Heidegger’s Philosophical Botany”, Published online: 31 October 2016  
Springer Science+Business Media Dordrecht 2016

Morton, Timothy, *Ecology Without Nature. Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics*, Harvard University Press, 2007

Nagel, Thomas, *Mortal Questions*, Cambridge University, 2012

Nagel, Thomas. 1974. “What is it like to be a Bat?” *The Philosophical Review* 63(4): 435–450

Nealon, Jeffrey, *Plant Theory: Biopower and Vegetable Life*, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press 2016

Pederson, H., “Release the Moths: Critical Animal Studies and the Posthumanist Impulse”, *Culture, Theory and Critique*, 52. 65-81, 2011

K.Nayar, Pramod, *Posthumanism*, Polity Press, 2014

Singer, Peter, *Animal Liberation. A New Ethics for Or Treatment of Animals*, A New York

Review Book, 1975

Stark, Hannah, “Deleuze, subjectivity and nonhuman becomings in the Anthropocene”,  
Dialogues in Human Geography 2017, vol. 7(2) 151-155

Sutton, Elizabeth, Art, Animals, and Experience, Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2017

Thompson, Nato, “Patricia Piccinini,” in *Becoming Animal: Contemporary Art in the Animal Kingdom* (North Adams: MASS MoCA Publications, 2005), 104.

Zwijnenberg, Robert. “Biotechnology, Human Dignity and the Importance of Art.” *teoria rivista di filosofia XXXIV/2014/1(Terza serie IX/1) (2014): 131-148*

Zwijnenberg, Robert, “On Xenotransfusion” *Institutional Critique to Hospitality: Bio Art Practice Now. A critical anthology*, Chapter: Stranger Connections On Xenotransfusion and Art, Publisher: Grigori Publications (Athens), Editors: Assimina Kaniari, pp.129 - 138, 2017

### *Websites*

E.Boslaugh, Sarah Anthropocentrism in Britannica Encyclopedia,  
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/anthropocentrism>, Sept 2 2017

High, Kathy, Embracing Animal,  
<http://kathyhigh.com/project-embracing-animal.html>, June 2 2017

Petric, Špela in “Strange Encounters” live in Ljubljana, Slovenia,  
<http://www.spelapetric.org/projects/strange-encounters/strange-encounters-blog/>, Oct 2 2017

Piccinini Patricia, [http://www.artium.org/en/explore/exhibitions/item/55721-\(tiernas\)-criaturas.-patricia-piccinini](http://www.artium.org/en/explore/exhibitions/item/55721-(tiernas)-criaturas.-patricia-piccinini), Dec 2017

Solon, Olivia, “Artist Injects Herself With Horseblood, Wears Hoove”, Web Sept 3, 2017  
<https://www.wired.com/2011/08/horse-blood-art/>,

Snyder, S. "The Great Chain of Being", Dec 2, 2017

<http://faculty.grandview.edu/ssnyder/121/121%20great%20chain.htm>