

## The Spaces We Make

“The animal, what a word! The animal is a word, it is an appellation that men have instituted, a name they have given themselves the right and the authority to give to the living other.”<sup>1</sup> Jacques Derrida stated this concerning our relationships with animals, a relationship that has been strained due to conceptual, physical, and psychological mediations and interventions humans have placed on animals. If humans have directed, albeit, not always consciously, the treatment of animals for our benefit, then we have created spaces in which animals will perform desired functions. It is my thought that humans have controlled animals since our recognition of difference, or the recognition of animals as other. As Derrida states, this origin stems from viewing, and self-awareness, but evolves throughout our development of language and visual representations. Surveying the current climate concerning our interactions with the animal other, it appears we are at a critical impasse regarding animals and our daily interactions.

It was ten years ago when I began to question my place within this world, a space constructed to exclude others from the rights and choices I and other humans enjoy. I questioned my role within this system, as I felt the acceptance of such beliefs was not only shaping my thoughts, but all human thought and action, severely affecting the daily lives of the animals around us. Some of these spaces we have created in the world, whether physical or merely a construct of thought, are absurd, dispiriting, amusing, and often violent. From clothing and food, to entertainment and education, we have used animals to our benefit, to help live a more complete and fruitful life, no matter the cost to their concerns. We can see how this system operates, specifically from our domineering anthropocentric stance by looking at a

scene from Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*. The scene where Jack Torrance looks down on the Overlook Hotel's hedge maze (Fig 1), which contains his wife and son, exemplifies what Mary Louise Pratt defined as "the-monarch-of-all-I-survey"<sup>2</sup>. This quote, originally from *Robinson Crusoe*, written by Daniel Defoe, shows how travel writing has shaped thought when concerning others, animals included. This is an important statement, as it suggests that when we look out towards others, we are looking with desire and fear. Both are highly prevalent within our thoughts and actions regarding animals. By applying the same standard Pratt applies towards our gaze at other humans towards animals we begin to see how our gaze dictates the lives of others. Again, if we look at this statement as something that can be applied towards the way we view and control animals, we find ourselves deeper in the chasm of human thought, one of power and ability to alter or fabricate new identities for those we look upon.

In the exhibit I have created a sculpture that includes a Cervidae taxidermy form emerging from an open chest freezer. Draped behind this assemblage are photographs printed on fabric, depicting truncated views of mountains, trees, and sky. The chest freezer has been set up on blocks of salt preventing the freezer from touching the floor, allowing for feelings of attraction, disconnection, and preservation to come forward. The pairing of salt and refrigeration points towards our methods of preservation, while also directing us to our desires to view nature, through processes that attract wildlife for numerous reasons. This amalgamation of pieces is to create a space of uncertainty, forcing viewers to confront held positions, both physically and conceptually.

Since the 16th century, humans have done exhaustive research on the animal, inside and out. Christopher Cox notes that, "Early taxonomies, such as Edward Topsell's *Historie of*

*Four-footed Beasts* (1607), were blatantly anthropocentric, classifying animals according to such distinctions as edible/inedible, wild/tame, useful/useless.”<sup>3</sup> While this taxonomy is no longer accepted as scientifically sound, it does leave its trace within the taxonomies that follow. Cox furthers this point by stating, “Despite their detachment and precision, however, the great early modern taxonomists continued to accept the anthropocentric and essentialist view that nature was a graded hierarchy, each step of which marked out an essential type that was radically discontinuous with its neighbors.”<sup>4</sup>

It is through these taxonomies and hierarchies that our place for animals has been constructed, and while more objective and scientifically rigorous methods have been implemented into the research of animals, the stain of being animal remains. This persistence of thought is evident in the research of Descartes who stated, “it is nature that acts in them, according to the disposition of their organs.”<sup>5</sup> He continues by stating, “just as we see that a clock composed exclusively of wheels and springs can count the hours and measure time more accurately than we can with all our carefulness.”<sup>6</sup> This comparison to machines, or to a clock as Descartes states, dictates that animals, although nearly identical physiologically, differ in the realms of the soul, and corporeal sensation, allowing for a psychological distancing from those non-human animals. This firmly held view still has remnants today, but Charles Darwin was able to minimize and counter viewpoints that humans were a special type of being. Cox delves into the matter by addressing Darwin’s contributions to this thought by stating, “Darwin’s theory of natural selection insists that there is a basic continuity in nature, not just among species, but among all living things, who ultimately share a common ancestor.”<sup>7</sup> This is an important thought, and is one still debated today by those who will not let go of earlier taxonomies and

religious doctrine that benefited humankind, especially above animal others. This is surmised by Cox when he states, “ Not only did Darwin eliminate the boundaries between species; he also flattened the ancient hierarchy that placed human beings at the top, and he denied that evolution is in any way progressive, that human beings are in any way better than their forebears of any other species.”<sup>8</sup> This flattening of hierarchies has allowed for a critical reevaluation of what it is to be animal, as well as what it is to be human.

Looking at how these thoughts have directed our dialogue concerning animals, we must look at how we have shaped the animal, their life, image, and environment for the betterment of humankind. This might best be seen in my work titled *Do Geese Dream of a Down Filled Heaven* (Fig 2), a sculpture that encapsulates the contemporary struggles of the goose, only if one is able to empathize with a goose and agree that there is a struggle. The sculpture utilizes a constructed environmental plane, consisting of an artificial hedge concealing the under structure, which supports an upside-down goose decoy. Supporting the artificial hedge is a framed construction that utilizes pillows for its barrier. Pillows have an ability to convey comfort and sleep, but whose sleep, and whose comfort is important? This question of comfort is important, as our comfort often leads to the extreme suffering of others. Projecting from the undercarriage of the goose and hedge is an egg-shaped video that endlessly loops a sky with passing clouds. This video alludes to the inner dialogue of animals, questions whether animals dream, and more importantly points to our desire to project our methods of thought onto animals and their daily lives. This assemblage plays on ideas of our participation in industries that hide, often in plain sight, the atrocities we carry out in the name of comfort.

Animal representation has been around since the beginning of human development and has evolved through our ever-connected cultural web, allowing for vast and often corrupting imagery that places animals firmly within the context of the other. My work specifically focuses on current conditions of animal representation, but also looks toward western culture's history as its source. Representation alone doesn't account for all current animal conditions, but it does alter our natural world. Deleuze and Guattari discuss this at length in their work *What is Philosophy*. They address the subject of the animal within the world of art by stating, "Perhaps art begins with the animal, at least with the animal that carves out a territory and constructs a house (both are correlative, or even one and the same, in what is called a habitat)."<sup>9</sup> This statement is interesting as it implicates humans as a type of animal, again flattening the plane between human and animal. It also shows the way in which territory, or space dictates and "transforms a number of organic functions-sexuality, procreation, aggression, feeding."<sup>10</sup> Reflecting on this thought, we should see that certain spaces and representations can create new representations and spaces for which animals will exist. If we continue to represent animals through limitless iterations, and continue to create spaces for them to inhabit, then we will continue reinforcing actions and thoughts which are suggested from these images.

This thought might best be expressed through two sculptures, both titled *I Like What You Like*. Both sculptures consist of rat heads cast in plaster. Some are left as cast, while others are painted black. This separation of color is noteworthy as it addresses our need to categorize by type and maintains a distinction between species. The species used here is the *Rattus norvegicus*. Separated by location, the lab rat captively bred, the sewer rat fornicating at will.

Both however, have a place within our society. They are often unnoticed and regarded as disposable. While their function and occupied spaces are quite different, they share some similarities. The biggest is that their name evokes the place they occupy and will continue to occupy. Both the lab rat and sewer rat serve as agents, occupying spaces that oppose one another. The sewer rat is an animal that, as Deleuze and Guattari state, “carves out a territory and constructs a house.”<sup>11</sup> This is true, but the sewer rat carved out a territory within one previously carved out by humans. We created the sewer rat with the conditions we provided. Similarly, the lab rat was introduced to a space created to benefit humankind (Fig 3). The title, *I Like What You Like* points to the issue at hand. We create and maintain animal forms by mediating and sustaining shared spaces. While Foucault never addressed animals specifically when discussing bio-power, Matthew Chrulew and Dinesh Joseph Wadiwel have put forward a thought on the matter by stating:

Ultimately, nonhuman animals were drawn into the laboratory to promote human health. In this sense, the meaning of biopower is consistent with that articulated by Foucault, being “what brought life and its mechanisms into the realm of explicit calculations and made knowledge-power an agent of the transformation of human life.”<sup>12</sup>

While Chrulew and Wadiwel don’t stray from the laboratory animal regarding biopower, my work extends to include all animals. Determining which animals have made an impact on human knowledge-power is dizzying. My contention is that all animals have contributed to the transformation of human life, no matter how rudimentary or exacting the experiments, or how effective such undertakings have been.

In addition to creating work that addresses the physical spaces we create, I have also included sculptures that address our need to control emotion using animal imagery. In my work

*The Shark Rots from the Head Down*, I invite viewers to control a helium filled great white shark through the gallery space. Covering its head are artificial maggots, representing another animal often forgotten and often used to benefit humankind. Maggots too teach us a great deal about the human body, as they have provided, with their remains, the ability to determine time of death, detect toxins post mortem, and the ability to heal. Maggots, like the great white shark, evoke a sense of fear and disgust, but also conjure feelings of life and death. When thinking of maggots, Damien Hirst comes to mind, specifically his work *A Thousand Years* (Fig 4). This sculpture, and others by Hirst provided a strategy to display the animals within my work. I created structures that not only hold the animal forms but point toward the structure's failure and cruelty. My work, *A Shark Rots from the Head Down*, which differs from Hirst's hunted, rotting shark, allows viewers to control a great white shark *Air Swimmers*<sup>™</sup> (Fig 5). With this children's toy, they are engaging in controlling fear, disgust, and death through a representation that is laughable and absurd. Bridging this gap, between death and humor, is essential to understanding an animal's place within this world, and by examining cultural works, such as *Jaws* and *Baby Shark* we begin to see how dominant culture uses animal representations to control our emotions and actions.

Philippe Parreno plays on similar ideas with his installation *My Room Is Another Fish Bowl* (Fig 6) by using animal imagery via fish shaped, helium filled mylar balloons. Differing is the intention behind Parreno's animal representation, as he states, "first what I always do is look at the architecture and decide how I came to this place and how I am going to use the architecture."<sup>13</sup> He continues with,

I do not want to use any algorithms, but instead want the show to be curated and created by people, so I need operators, puppeteers, dancers

to operate the events. That is the next stage for me. First, the architecture, then to see what kind of physical objects...I want to put in it.<sup>14</sup>

In this interview, Parreno likens the animal representations to objects and viewers to puppeteers, creating a participatory installation that he feels, "... plays with time and space."<sup>15</sup> Thinking of animals and representations in this way, Parreno doesn't address the concerns of such representations, or why there are animal representations at all. Parreno's installation is focused on dealing with the interactions between viewers, objects, and the space they occupy, not necessarily the implications the representations might produce.

My work, *The Shark Rots from the Head Down*, deals with similar formal issues, but is concerned with how we control certain representations even though we know they are harmful. This idea, within the context of my work, is to let viewer control a damaged, decaying shark to point to our failure as understanding beings. By adding artificial maggots to the head of the shark, its equilibrium and flight maneuverability have been compromised. This slight increase in artificial rot weight all but ruins its chance to perform ideally. Implementing failure into this piece is purposeful, and might be better understood by reading Joel Fisher's *The Success of Failure*, when he states:

We may fall short of our goals but, even in our failures, those things for which we strive somehow endure – precisely because we are striving for them, they have an *intentional existence*. We intend (that is, lean toward) a more perfect state, and the goal of that dream or striving locates itself mysteriously within the work. I'd like to suggest that some great works of art might themselves be failures and, moreover, that their failure contributes to their greatness. I also think it is possible that there is more genuine content in failure than in success. Sometimes the failures of big ideas are more impressive than the successes of little ones. [...] <sup>16</sup>

In addition to participation and failure, my work utilizes a variety of materials, some found, some made. Most are animal representations one would find on Amazon, or local dollar stores,



or the street. Some are more focused on product selection, such as Lucky Duck™. The company proclaims, “Lucky Duck™ is more than a brand, it is a lifestyle built around the subtle art of critter deception. While you are focused on the business end of a shotgun or rifle, know that we are completely focused on what matters most: you.”<sup>17</sup> This slogan implies that *you* are the most important being in this situation, and that you should not be distracted from your task, that of killing. While killing is not the intention of all who participate in animal deception, it does point again to our desire to intercede in the daily lives of others.

My variety of materials and forms is best understood when looking towards everyday life, and the overwhelming amount of material goods available to consumers. These materials are available through multiple outlets, thrift stores, online vendors, and the dumpster to name a few. I task myself with finding relevant materials that expand the discourse surrounding my work. This focus on the everyday is important, as vast amounts of visual data bombard us constantly. When thinking of visual culture, whether digital, physical, or virtual we find ourselves receiving information through immersive processes that are constantly upgrading, changing, and altering our existence. According to Michael Sheringham, “...everydayness is not a property or aggregate of these things; it inheres rather in the way they are part of a manifold lived experience.”<sup>18</sup> This belief that the everyday is something indeterminate, difficult to discern, especially when considering its many facets and forms, is crucial to the functioning of my work; everyday found objects act as a glue, adhering, strengthening through a rational absurdity.

In addition to the sculptural forms, I have included multiple video works in which animal forms are handled, examined, and cleaned. Through repetitive imagery of three distinct

animal representations, I focus the viewer on indiscernible variations and erase the certainty of time passed by adhering to strict guidelines when handling these forms. This creates repetitions within a repetition and produces a sense of induction through predictable patterns. Although ambiguous in meaning, these time-based images lead viewers to predictable, albeit never materialized outcomes.

Multi-disciplined artist Maurizio Cattelan has stated that humor is employed as a strategy within his work. In addition to addressing difficult subject matter, Cattelan likes to implicate the viewer in acts of mutual transgression (Fig 7). His thoughts on this are evident when he states, "I think humor and irony include tragedy in itself, as if they were two sides of the same coin."<sup>19</sup> He continues this thought by also maintaining, "To me it's like when you are telling a joke, but no one would laugh: most of the times, provocation lies in the eye of the beholder."<sup>20</sup> This idea of allowing sentiments of pathos and humor to come forward, is also crucial to my work, as it complicates feelings and perception. In addition to humor's ability to complicate feelings, it can complicate the readability of a forms "...readability to their unreadability"<sup>21</sup> by inducing responses of laughter and guilt.

I reflect on this world we have created, filled with innumerable words, images, and forms of the animal other. It is critical that I find my role and responsibilities within this reality, and fold it into my everyday practice of looking, acquiring, and making. In my work I want to present the failings of contemporary culture when concerning animals, not solutions to present and future problems. This is well stated by Margo DeMello in her book *Animals and Society*, when she states:

The ways in which we paint, worship, and tell stories about animals also shape how we treat them in turn. In addition, for many people, the

real relationship that humans once had with animals have been largely supplanted by symbolic representations, with important implications for people and animals.<sup>22</sup>

It is possible that we have jumped the shark when thinking of our relationship with our environment and our animal counterparts, but we must continue to reorient ourselves towards the concerns of animals despite rooted beliefs that favor an anthropocentric stance.

- 
- 1 Derrida, Jacques, Marie-Louise Mallet, and David Wills. 2008. *The Animal that Therefore*  
2 *I Am*, 23.
- 3 Pratt, Mary Louise. 1992. *Imperial eyes: travel writing and transculturation*. London:  
4 Routledge.
- 5 Ramos, Filipa. 2016. *Animals*, 117.
- 6 Ibid, 117.
- 7 Descartes, René. 1999. *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*.  
8 Cambridge, MA: Hackett Publishing Company, Incorporated. Accessed February 8, 2019.  
9 ProQuest Ebook Central, 33.
- 10 Ibid, 33.
- 11 Ramos, Filipa. 2016. *Animals*, 118.
- 12 Ibid, 118.
- 13 Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. 1994. *What is Philosophy?* New York: Columbia  
14 University Press, 183
- 15 Ibid, 183.
- 16 Ibid, 183.
- 17 Chrulew, Matthew. 2016. *Foucault and Animals*. Chrulew, Matthew, and Dinesh Joseph  
18 Wadiwel, eds. *Foucault and Animals*, (Leiden, The Netherlands: BRILL, 2016) doi:  
19 <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004332232>, 195
- 20 Parreno, Philippe “Two Automatons for One Duet // Art institute of Chicago”.  
21 Interview by Natalie Hegert. [http://theseenjournal.org/art-seen-chicago/philippe-](http://theseenjournal.org/art-seen-chicago/philippe-parreno/)  
22 [parreno/](http://theseenjournal.org/art-seen-chicago/philippe-parreno/)
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 Parreno, Philippe “Floating fish take over at Philippe Parreno's Tate Modern Show”  
25 Interview by Tim Masters. <https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-37539148>
- 26 Le Feuvre, Lisa. 2010. *Failure*. London: Whitechapel Gallery, 121.
- 27 Lucky Duck™ Premium Decoys, Masters of Deception. [http://www.luckyduck.com/our-](http://www.luckyduck.com/our-history/)  
28 [history/](http://www.luckyduck.com/our-history/)
- 29 Johnstone, Stephen. 2008. *The Everyday*. London: Whitechapel, 141.
- 30 Cattelan, Maurizio “A Conversation with Maurizio Cattelan” Interviewed by Elena Cué  
31 [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/elena-cue/post\\_8959\\_b\\_6561968.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/elena-cue/post_8959_b_6561968.html)
- 32 Ibid.
- 33 Bishop, Claire. 2006. *Participation*. London: Whitechapel, 84.
- 34 DeMello, Margo. 2012. *Animals and Society: An Introduction to Human-Animal Studies*.  
35 New York: Columbia University Press, 283.

## Appendix



Figure 1. Kubrick, Stanley, Diane Johnson, Jack Nicholson, Shelley Duvall, Danny Lloyd, Scat Man Crothers, Barry Nelson, et al. 2007. *Stanley Kubrick's The Shining*. Burbank, CA: Distributed by Warner Home Video.



Figure 2. Banholzer, Jacob. *Do Geese Dream of a Down Filled Heaven?* Image courtesy of the artist.



Figure 3. Scientist watching mice in laboratory. "Scientist Watching Mice in Laboratory." Digital image. Getty Images. Accessed April 07, 2019. <https://www.gettyimages.com/detail/photo/scientist-watching-mice-in-laboratory-royalty-free-image/95011864>.



Figure 4. Hirst, Damien, *A Thousand Years*. 1990. Glass, steel, silicone rubber, painted MDF, Insect-O-Cutor, cow's head, blood, flies, maggots, metal dishes, cotton wool, sugar and water  
2075 x 4000 x 2150 mm | 81.7 x 157.5 x 84.7 in

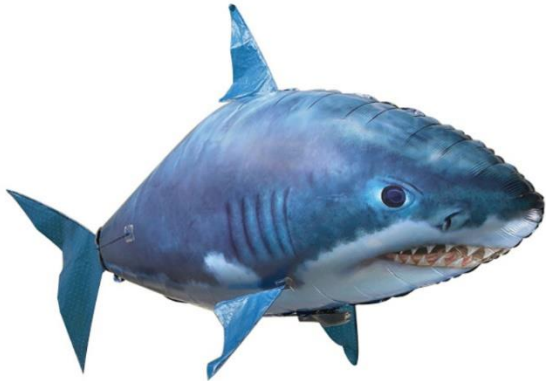


Figure 5. AirSwimmer™ product photo, <https://www.aliexpress.com/item/Remote-Control-Flying-Shark-Fish-RC-Radio-Air-Swimmer-Inflatable-Blimp-Xmas-Gift-Rc-Helicopter/32956685649.html>.



Figure 6. Parreno, Philippe, Mylar Balloons, Installation view of *My Room Is Another Fish Bowl*. Art Institute of Chicago, February 3–April 15, 2018. Chicago Institute of Art. Accessed April 2, 2019. <https://www.artic.edu/exhibitions/8919/philippe-parreno-two-automatons-for-one-duet-my-room-is-another-fish-bowl-19962016-and-with-a-rhythmic-instinct-to-be-able-to-travel-beyond-existing-forces-of-life-2014>.



Figure 7. Cattelan, Maurizio, *IF A TREE FALLS IN THE FOREST AND THERE IS NO ONE AROUND IT, DOES IT MAKE A SOUND?* 1998. Taxidermized donkey, television, rope, blanket. 150 x 154 x 46 cm | 59 1/16 x 60 5/8 x 18 1/8 inch, Unique. Perrotin Gallery. Accessed April 2, 2019. [https://www.perrotin.com/artists/Maurizio\\_Cattelan/2/if-a-tree-falls-in-the-forest-and-there-is-no-one-around-it-does-it-make-a-sound/5450](https://www.perrotin.com/artists/Maurizio_Cattelan/2/if-a-tree-falls-in-the-forest-and-there-is-no-one-around-it-does-it-make-a-sound/5450).