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# Antennae

Issue 2 / Summer 2007



## The Old Bag Issue

Supermarket carrier bag: a real eco-issue?  
Exclusive interview with 'We Are What We Do'

Ken Rinaldo Augmented Fish Reality Donna Papanolla & Jessica DeCoux The Victorian Animal KesselsKramer Do a Plastic Bag Claudia Borgna And They All Lived Happily Ever After Russ Spencer Where You Find It Greg Christensen It's Not Like We Can Make New Ones Nina Katchadourian Mended Spiderwebs Erica Fudge The British Animal Network Mo Dodson Culture in the Wild: Utopian Fantasy or Practical Necessity

# EDITORIAL

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## ANTENNAE ISSUE 2

Since its launch in March, Antennae has consistently grown on the feedback received by its readers and in response to the input of its collaborators. The second issue sees a bigger Antennae in a number of ways. The journal is bigger in size — now 46 pages — which forced us to shrink our font size to make it fit into a manageable format. It contains more articles, and has been re-named ‘Antennae – The Journal of Nature in Visual Culture’.

Why the changes? During the busy months that followed the release of the first issue, Antennae met a number of interesting people that inspired us to broaden the scope of the journal. Among others, the cultural-environmental interest of Mo Dodson and the activism of ‘We Are What We Do’ have pointed the direction for the evolution of Antennae into a journal looking at animals in art and media that is, at the same time, concerned with the representation of the environment in art and media. The recent developments involving global warming suggest that a revision of the relationship we have with nature is mandatory fostering our belief that Animal and Environmental Studies will intersect more and more in the future.

This does not mean that animals will no longer be at the very core of Antennae’s interest. The current issue opens with an introduction to one of the most fascinating tropical fish, the Siamese fighting fish, exploring its cultural relevance and the work on interspecies communication by Ken Rinaldo. We continue to focus on animals with a captivating review of the Victorian Animal Conference (Friday, May 4, 2007, -The City University of New York’s Graduate Center) as we try to understand how we related to animals in a not so remote past.

The new environmentalist turn becomes apparent over a series of articles that together investigate the impact of supermarket carrier bags on the environment, examine the way the media represent eco-friendly initiatives, and explore a range of alternative/artistic/creative views on plastic bags.

Whilst maintaining a loose thread through its articles, the main concern of Antennae’s latest issue is whether we can constructively interact with nature, and perhaps save it, even when we are the ones who have compromised it in the first place. The work of Greg Christensen in the field of advertising brings to the surface an original notion about the uniqueness of natural heritage whilst the legendary Mended Spiderwebs by Nina Katchadourian function as a reminder that not every good-willed interaction/intervention with nature may be a welcome one.

Finally, Antennae is proud to wrap up its second issue by presenting two original and challenging series of meetings comprising the areas of Animal Studies and Environmental Studies: the British Animal Studies Network by Erica Fudge and Culture in the Wild by Mo Dodson.

Upon its second release, Antennae wishes to thank all its contributors for their hard work. Let Antennae know what you think of its new scope.

Giovanni Aloï  
Editor of Antennae Project

# CONTENTS

## ANTENNAE ISSUE 2

### **4 Introducing Siamese Fighting Fish**

*Fighting their way from the rings of Bangkok to the laboratories of genetics, Siamese Fighting Fish have been for over a century the subject of intense behaviourist speculation and have simultaneously developed a solid reputation as one of the most loved tropical aquarium fish of all times.*

*Text by Giovanni Aloï*

### **7 Augmented Fish Reality**

*Ken Rinaldo's interdisciplinary media artworks look at the intersection between natural and technological systems.*

*His fascination with human kind's struggle to evolve technological systems that move toward intelligence and autonomy modelled from our current conceptions of the natural has brought to life a number of challenging installations.*

*Text by Ken Rinaldo*

### **12 The Victorian Animal: A Bird's Eye View**

*Our understanding of animals greatly evolved in Victorian times; from anthropomorphism to the intrinsic difficulties involved in the understanding of the animal's 'otherness', the Victorian Animal conference explored past problematics of contemporary relevance.*

*Text by Donna Paparella and Jessica DeCoux*

### **21 I'm Not a Plastic Bag**

*Can a mass produced object be ethical and eco-friendly at the same time? Antennae investigated the facts behind the controversy generated by the coolest carrier bag designed to spark eco-awareness.*

*Text by Giovanni Aloï*

### **26 We Are What We Do – Our Excusive Interview**

*Antennae interviewed Eugenie Harvey, co-founder of 'We Are What We Do' to understand if carrier bags could be a good place to start saving the world...*

*Interview's Concept and Questions by Eric Frank and Giovanni Aloï*

### **28 Do a Plastic Bag**

*DO is a brand that depends on the actions, ideas and initiatives of you and you and you and... DO works with many people around the world to create products, services and ideas within the mentality of DO. DO mentality: without your active involvement, DO, as a brand, does not function or exist. DO is an initiative of KesselsKramer.*

### **30 And They All Lived Happily Ever After**

*Claudia Borgna's work is informed by nature, modern life-styles and consumerism. Her installations are the materialization of an ongoing observation and questioning of how the plastic and the natural realms interact with one another and thereby come to create new ephemeral orders.*

*Text by Claudia Borgna*

### **34 Where You Find It**

*In a culture of detritus, "American Beauty" screenwriter Alan Ball discovers heartbreaking beauty in garbage.*

*Text by Russ Spencer*

### **36 It's Not Like We Can Make New Ones**

*An ad campaign to save America's National Parks has its roots in the urban jungle of Chicago.*

*Interview's Concept and Questions by Chris Hunter*

### **40 Still Mending Spiderwebs?**

*Is nature reparable? Mended Spiderwebs by Nina Katchadourian suggests that nature may not necessarily welcome our help, even when our intentions are really good.*

*Text by Eric Frank*

### **42 The British Animal Studies Network**

*Animal studies is a relatively new field of academic work, and one that is of increasing interest to academics from a wide variety of backgrounds. The British Animal Studies Network under the direction of Dr. Erica Fudge could represent a great opportunity for its future development.*

*Text by Erica Fudge*

### **45 Culture in the Wild: Utopian Fantasy or Practical Necessity?**

*Mo Dodson would like to start a continuing discussion focused on the question: "What kind of 'culture' do we need to support a sustainable global society?"*

*Text by Mo Dodson*

# INTRODUCING SIAMESE FIGHTING FISH

*Fighting their way from the rings of Bangkok to the laboratories of genetics, Siamese Fighting Fish have been for over a century the subject of intense behaviourist speculation and have simultaneously developed a solid reputation as one of the most loved tropical aquarium fish of all times.*

*Text by Giovanni Aloï*



Siamese Fighting Fish - adult male

**F**ew tropical freshwater fish possess the iconic status that Siamese Fighting Fish have acquired over the centuries. Undoubtedly one of the most beautiful tropical fish, its reputation is predominantly built on well-defined behavioural traits. The male, in captivity as in the wild, is a territorial fish incapable of tolerating the presence of another male. Intrusion into another male's territory quickly escalates into fierce confrontation, ending only with the defeat of one rival. This particular trait strongly fascinated

Siam's farmers who first discovered the distinctive fish in the shallow waters of rice fields. Once in captivity, the fish would be kept in an earthenware jar and occasionally made to fight with another male within a 'fighting ring'. According to a number of sources this may have first happened 600 years ago giving birth to a complex human-animal interaction-system that led to a selective cross-breeding in the search for the most beautiful and the most aggressive. The formation of social groups

revolving around relatively poor agricultural realities also constitutes one of the main reasons behind the affirmation of the Siamese Fighting Fish as a cultural icon. Whilst fighting events at one time took place daily, matches occur today only infrequently on the outskirts of Bangkok due to restrictions applied by new laws that have made this blood-sport illegal.

Players and betters pay to enter a shed where the fighting ring is laid out along with a range of refreshments. Traditionally, players bring their fish to the ring in a transparent water bottle. These are placed next to each other on a large table in order to excite each fighter and allow the public to choose the best contestant on which to place their bets.



Siamese Fighting fish in water bottles

Once a fight is agreed between two players, the fish are brought together into a tall bottle. Here the fight starts and does not end until one of the two males is dead or incapable of fighting back. In the ring, the fight can last up to three hours depending on the level of aggressiveness displayed by the contestants and by the effectiveness of their fighting techniques. The selective breeding engineered by the Siam's farmers developed fish that were larger than their wild ancestors and conspicuously more aggressive. Attributes such as tough scales and strong mouths would also be highly regarded in the selection of the best fighters. It also seems evident that breeders could have control over the fighting styles of the fish, fixing a range of distinctive stylistic fighting talents. For instance, a fight between two male Siamese Fighting Fish could start with an elegant dance choreographed to test the opponent. During this stage the fighter becomes visibly tense, its blood coloured gills extend, the fins flaring up as the body shimmers in a spasmodic dance. Cross breeding developed fish that skipped this display stage altogether and would assault the opponent immediately after entering the ring. Other fish were selected for their distinctive defensive fighting style or for their effective bighting techniques.

The winner would usually undergo a five-day recovery period after which it could fight again. Breeders carefully select 'winners' to cross-breed with other 'winners' in order to develop a further sophisticated fighting outcome. The losers are usually treated for bruises and

then kept in community tanks as ornamental tropical fish. The aggressive behavioural trait of Siamese Fighting Fish has also been the focus of a number of scientific studies aiming at further understanding the dynamics involved in the innate aggressive nature of the fish. It has been argued that the 'temper' of the species is intrinsically bound to the role males play in the reproductive stages. In opposition to the norm that sees female providing parental care, the male of Siamese Fighting Fish are solely responsible for the care and safety of the fry. Both in its wild habitat and in captivity, the male builds a nest made of air bubbles that like a raft floats on the water's surface.

The Fighting Fish belongs to the Anabantids family, classified as labyrinth fish because they rise to the surface to take gulps of air that pass through the Labyrinth organ where the oxygen is absorbed by the tissues. It is this specific morphism that allows the fish to build the bubble-nest that provides shelter to the fry and supplements the oxygen-poor waters in which the fish originally evolved.

Once the nest is ready and the female bears mature eggs, the male will start a chase that will eventually end with the locking of the female in a strong embrace. By encircling his body around that of the female, the male applies pressure so that eggs are expelled and simultaneously fertilized as they float toward the bottom. At this stage, the male abandons the exhausted female to recover the eggs that he will place in the nest before returning to the female for another 'passionate hug'. This cycle can be repeated up to ten times, at the end of which the female ceases to play any role in parental care and is chased away from the male's territory. He alone will continue to oxygenate the eggs and take care of the fry until the young are ready to depart.

A study carried out in 2004 by the Department of Biology of Indiana University carefully investigates the variations of levels of aggressiveness in Siamese Fighting Fish in relation to the presence of bystanders, like for example other males or females fighters.

'This study investigated the influence of two contexts, exposure to audiences of different sexes and presence or absence of a nest, on the aggressive behaviour of interacting male Siamese Fighting fish. Males interacted in the presence (male, female) or absence of an audience in three different nest conditions (0, 1, or 2 nests). Audience sex and territorial status influenced aggressive behaviour in the interacting males, but a strong audience - nest interaction also was uncovered. Males were more aggressive when neither male had a nest

and a male audience was present than when a female or no audience was present. Males also were more aggressive when only one male had a nest and a male audience was present than when a female or no audience was present. When both males had nests and a male audience was present, however, males were less aggressive than when only one male or neither male had a nest.

In sum, aggressive behaviour was influenced by the interaction between audience and nest; neither nest nor audience alone was sufficient to explain the results. Male Siamese fighting fish alter their behaviour based on both external cues, the sex of the audience, and internal cues, reproductive state and resource possession. Our results emphasize the importance of considering aspects of an animal's environment when examining audience effects and communication networks in general'. 1



Siamese Fighting Fish stamps from Malaysia and Thailand

***1Audience effect is context dependent in Siamese Fighting Fish, Betta Splendens***

Teresa L. Dzieweczynski, Ryan L. Earley, Tracie M. Green and William J. Rowland, *Behavioral Ecology* 2005 16(6): 1025-1030; doi:10.1093/beheco/ari088

***The Fighting Fish of Siam***

Hugh M Smith, *Copeia*, No 159 (Jan.11,1927), pp. 169-172

***Bubble Nest Habitat Characteristics of Wild Siamese Fighting Fish***

M. Jaroensutasinee and K. Jaroensutasinee, *Journal of Fish Biology*, Volume 58 Issue 5, p1311-1319, May 2001

***Operant and Classically-Conditioned Aggressive Behavior in Siamese Fighting Fish***

Travis Thompson, *American Zoologist*, Thompson, 1966; 6:629-641

***The Guide to Owning Bettas***

Gene Wolfsheimer, *TFH Publications*; Rev Ed edition (September 1996)

Please note that the fish selected for fighting purposes are much different from the colourful long-veiled finned variety currently available around the world. It is fair to say that the 'fighting variety' resembles its wild ancestor whilst the ornamental variety popular in contemporary fish keeping is the result of a series of cross-breeding of which we have lost track. The origin of the long finned variety is in fact a mystery of Siamese Fighting fish, although its departure from the fighting short-finned variety may only date to 1840 when the King of Siam, Rama III presented a number of his elegant fighting fish to Theodor Cantor, a Danish physician, zoologist and botanist whom working on the British East India Company made considerable contributions to Natural History Collections. In 1849 Theodor Cantor published an article about a Fighting Fish that he called *Macropodus Pugnax*. In 1909 C. Tate Regan realized that Cantor made a mistake and that *Pugnax* was an existing related species. Regan gave Cantor's Fighting Fish the now familiar name *Betta Splendens*. The fish then reached Germany in 1896, still in a relatively short-fin form and subsequently arrived in the USA in 1910. According to Wolfsheimer, the first brightly coloured veil-fin Siamese Fighting Fish arrived in the USA in 1927. Dr Hugh M. Smith, expert in fresh water fish from Siam succeeded in tracing back the development of the veil-finned to French Indocina at around 1900.

# AUGMENTED FISH REALITY

*Ken Rinaldo's interdisciplinary media artworks look at the intersection between natural and technological systems. His fascination with human kind's struggle to evolve technological systems that move toward intelligence and autonomy modelled from our current conceptions of the natural, has brought to life a number of challenging installations.*

Text by **Ken Rinaldo**

**A**ugmented Fish Reality, a recent work by Ken Rinaldo is an interactive installation of five rolling robotic fish-bowl sculptures designed to explore interspecies communication. These robotic sculptures allow Siamese Fighting Fish to use intelligent hardware and software to move their robotic bowls under their control. Fighting Fish have excellent eyes that allow them to see outside the water; they have colour vision and seem to like yellow. Small lipstick video cameras mounted under two of the bowls capture images of the interior of the fish bowls as well as humans in this environment; these images are intercepted by video transceivers and projected onto the walls of the gallery space to give human participants a sense of both, looking at the interior of the tanks and feeling as if they are immersed in them.

The half-fish half-machine robots included in the installation are constructed with laser cut aluminium and tig-welded together. The microprocessors and motor control sit in a waterproof box and the sealed lead-acid-battery provides the power necessary to operate the mechanical parts.

These are robots under fish control; the fish may choose to approach and/or move away from the human participants and each other. The bowls and robots are designed to allow the fish to get to within 1/4 inch of each other for communication between one another.

The most recent research by Culum Brown at the University of Edinburgh, argues that fish intelligence is much greater than originally believed. Fish are now regarded as steeped in social intelligence whilst also displaying cultural traditions and cooperating to view predators and obtain food. Some fish have demonstrated impressive long-term memory and the ability to mentally map their environments in finding food, creating relationships with each other and avoiding predators.

Augmented Fish Reality suggests that the

development of micro-machines, biotechnology and computer systems will further collapse the gap between the organic and inorganic world as these machines expand the spectrum of senses available to humans and other animals. Intelligent systems, coupled with sense extension lenses, are getting progressively more transparent and embedded in deeper levels of our sensorium. Thus the perceptual alterations that may occur with these lenses are less and less overt.

Mass Media could certainly be considered a form of extended sense, which is all too often dominated by the commercial system and relies on incessant repetition for commercial success.



Ken Rinaldo  
Rolling Robotic Fish-Bowl Sculpture 2004

Antennae interviewed Ken Rinaldo to discuss interspecies communication and why it could be a very relevant topic in the near future.





Ken Rinaldo

Augmented Fish Reality Installation presented at Ars Electronica 2004 where the work received an Award of Distinction in the interactive category of the Prix. Photo by Otto Saxinger

**Where does your interest in interspecies communication come from?**

Rinaldo: As a child in Brentwood Long Island NY, we were the house on the block that local families would leave their unwanted dogs and cats on our doorstep. We didn't have a sign or anything saying we were the "safe home" for unwanted kittens and puppies, though I think we just had the reputation of loving all living things. We could and would not turn an animal away. At one time we had 13 cats and 7 dogs. I began being very interested in communications with cats and dogs and the subtle body languages that animals use to communicate. We had a cat named Que tu bu who loved to lick the earwax out of our ears, which was a strange scratchy affair, though clearly a cat showing affection and love toward a human. Later, as a teenager I became interested in Marine Biology with Dr Ernest at the Ward Melville High School in Stony Brook Long Island. Later while studying communications at UCSB I focused on human communications and living systems. After years of boring business experiences I spontaneously started making art and then applied to San Francisco State's Conceptual and information Arts Program.

I began with early experiments with living Siamese fighting fish in a tight rope walking fish tank called *Delicate Balance* that gave the fish control of the tank.

**Could you further explain the role played by technology in expanding the spectrum of senses available to humans and other animals?**

Rinaldo: Well, technology can be a very empowering tool. It serves as an amplifier of sorts in that one can communicate to many from a single location as with the WWW or it collapses time by allowing us to intercommunicate at great distances, though it is also creeping into our bodies and under our skin. Douglas McCreery of the Huntington Medical Research Institute's Neural Engineering Laboratories has been heading a group working on restoring hearing to profoundly deaf individuals, with cochlear implants that electronically stimulate the auditory nerve and allow formerly deaf individuals to hear. Researchers have been successful in bypassing damaged auditory nerves and directly attaching the electrodes to the brain stem. They have discovered that by varying the shape and length of the electrodes,



Ken Rinaldo  
Mediated Encounters, 1998, detail

they neither puncture nor crush the neural cells as the probe penetrates the brain stem near the ventral cochlear nucleus. This team has been successful in allowing formerly deaf individuals to distinguish pitch much better than with past implants.

The next question is what kind of implants are possible that will allow us to augment and extend normal ranges of hearing? Perhaps to the subsonic or ultrasonic levels so we can hear the ultrasonic chirps of bats or sub audible rumblings of killer whales, without cumbersome electronics. This will certainly increase the possibilities for interspecies communication. What new knowledge and ways of seeing might we have access to with new extended senses? What other senses, like vision, touch, or smell could be augmented? Might we create a sixth sense that would allow us to directly sense pheromones? What more can we understand about animals signalling, if we could really use computers, sensors and statistical analysis of body languages in relation to certain situational and environmental cues, that would allow us to really understand how animals intercommunicate?

**Siamese Fighting Fish have featured in more than one of your works. Why these fish?**

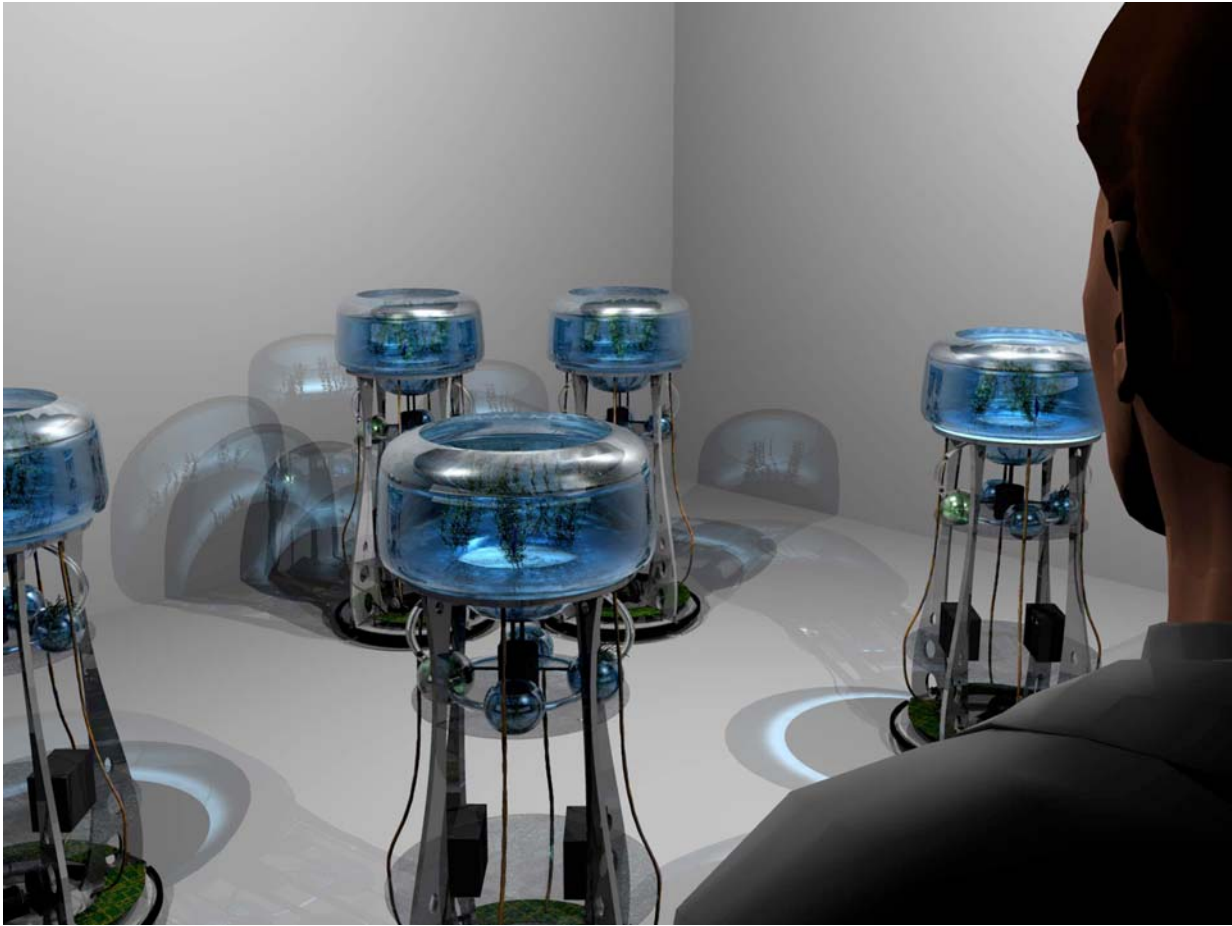
Rinaldo: These fish in particular fascinate me as they have a rich social interaction with each other. They build bubble nests to attract females and challenge each other flaring their gills presumably to appear larger and more menacing. They are top breathers, meaning they come up for air and this also allows them to be in smaller bowls where the oxygen content of the water is lower. Mostly though because of their aggressive behaviours I was interested in allowing them to control robots that would be cognizant of their existing social relations and their desires to compete. Also because they are real aggressors, unlike goldfish they are not afraid of humans.

**How does the fish control the bowl?**

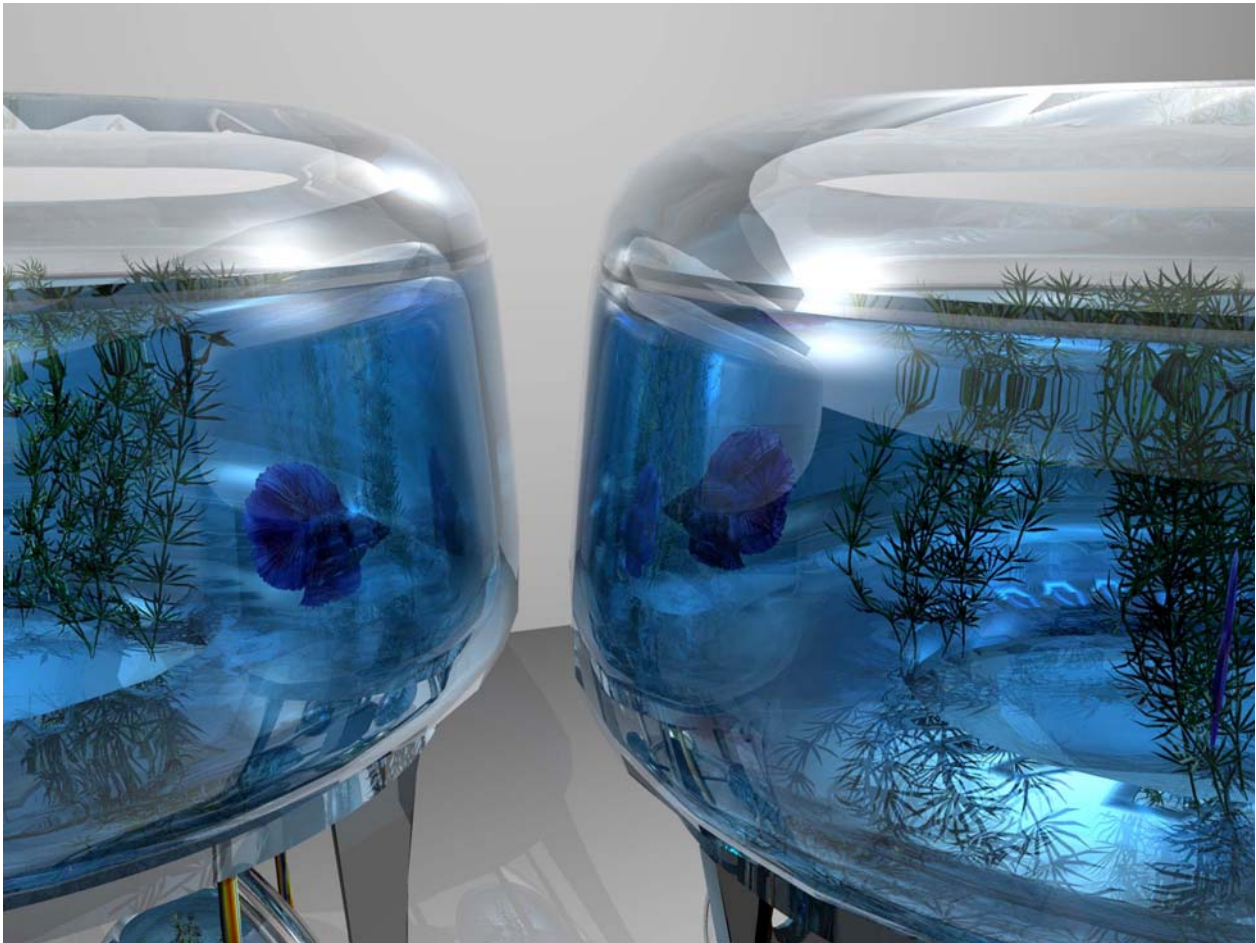
Rinaldo: There are active infrared sensors hooked up to a microcontroller which, when the sensor registers the location of the fish allows the fish to drive the tank in either direction and also allows the fish to turn the bowls in either direction.

**The work involves small lipstick video cameras, video transceivers, intelligent software and hardware. Do you devise the technical elements of your projects?**

Rinaldo: In the case of the Augmented Fish Reality I did the design with Cinema 4D software, transferred this into Adobe Illustrator to make drawings for the laser cutting of the aluminium structure. I designed the microcontroller subsystem, motor controller and sensor systems and programmed this to work in the environment. My specialty is teaching Robotics and Component Level Electronics at The Ohio State University in our Art & Technology program, so I feel very comfortable with these processes of designing, testing and constructing custom circuits to make things work. I also teach 3D modelling and rapid prototyping so high end visualization and engineering design of mechanical systems is also something I really enjoy. With the latest piece The Autotelematic Spider Bots I did invite a former robotics student of mine Matt Howard to join the project, as he was very excited with the ideas I was exploring and he also brought significant programming skills to the table. This is a chimerical robotic series where the work looked like spiders, sought food (recharge station) like ants and twittered like birds. In some cases I work with Amy Young, my wife, as we share much in common will feed our herb garden with their nitrogen based waste and these will become cooking herbs for our kitchen.



Ken Rinaldo  
3D Visualisations of Augmented Fish Reality Installation 2004



Ken Rinaldo  
3D Visualisation of Augmented Fish Reality Installation 2004

We are excited with the possibilities and issue of creating sustainable agricultural systems. At some point we would like a homemade aquaponics tank to grow edible tilapia fish, though in our first smaller work, we will use Goldfish or Siamese Fighting fish. At some point we would like a homemade aquaponics tank to grow edible tilapia fish, though in our first smaller work, we will use Goldfish or Siamese Fighting fish. The Siamese Fighting Fish featured in Augmented Fish Reality live in self-sufficient microcosms regulated by the filtering function of Peace Lilies. The peace lilies create a complex and comfortable environment for the fish and help to soften the glass and robotic elements. The plants also provide the fish oxygen and grow well with the nitrogen fish waste.

**Is the installation difficult to keep in a gallery environment?**

Rinaldo: In some environments yes and in others no. Siamese Fighting fish are subtropical fish so in Manizales Columbia at the Museo De Arte Caldas they moved quite a bit, as the fish were young and the water was just the right

temperature. They prefer water in the 76-82 degrees Fahrenheit range. At Ars Electronica in 2004 the fish did not move as much because the room was cold and the fish were not as active. They are not difficult to care for, though one does have to feed the fish every 3 days and change the water every week.

**How do people react to the work?**

Rinaldo: The public are fascinated with the concept and beauty of the fish and robotic works and it does set a stage, where people seem to want to communicate with the fish. Seeing them on a large projected screen also shows the subtleties of their eye movements and body languages and creates a new strange equivalency of scale where the fish are now at the same scale as the humans in the space and this forces humans to now contend with a “larger” fish. The scale of the creatures we communicate with is perhaps one of the more important interspecies communication issues, as animals, which are now bigger than we are, they are the masters of this new augmented fish universe.

*Please visit: [www.kenrinaldo.com](http://www.kenrinaldo.com)*

# THE VICTORIAN ANIMAL: A BIRD'S EYE VIEW

*Our understanding of animals greatly developed in Victorian times. From anthropomorphism to the intrinsic difficulties involved in the understanding of the animal's 'otherness'; the Victorian Animal conference explored past problematics of contemporary relevance.*

*Text by Donna Paparella and Jessica DeCoux*



'Am I a Man and a Brother?'  
Punch Magazine, 25<sup>th</sup> May 1861

**T**he prevailing theme at *The Victorian Animal* conference, held on May 4<sup>th</sup> of this year by the Victorian Committee of the English Department at the CUNY Graduate Center in New York City was a self-conscious insistence on confusing the boundaries between human and animal, representation and reality, biological and

political and past and present, in order to make clear the ambiguities between these terms. The "Victorian animal" is a complicated – even contradictory – site, suggesting the advancement of scientific knowledge as well as the limits of human understanding. Questions that were posed were ontological: how did the nineteenth

century bring about the “birth” of animals into cultural consciousness?; epistemological: (what) can we know about the interior life of animals?; methodological: what are the problems with and/or possibilities opened through anthropomorphism?; ethico-political: how did Victorians, how do we, realize animal rights and human responsibility?; aesthetic: how do symbol and science come together in the representation of animals?; emotional: what do human observers feel when confronted with representative and real animals, and what might this say about human interiority?; and psycho-social: how does this translate into collective consciousness and collective representation?

The participants were concerned not just with the animal as trope, but also with the “real” animal as such (as well as with “the real” in general). In the same vein, they all, in part, charted a cultural history of human relations with animals, demonstrating the moral and ethical relevance of nineteenth-century thinking to our contemporary cultural attitudes. One can say that Victorian scholars have always been interested in animals in Victorian culture insofar as they have been interested in Darwin and nineteenth-century science: *The Origin of Species* fundamentally changed the perception of human-animal relations. It seems, however, that the twenty-first-century re-emergence of concerns about animal rights have provided the impetus for a fresh look at the animals (and the treatment of them) that populate Victorian fiction and non-fiction, popular and scientific images, and private and public spaces.

The day’s first lecture, “Feeling Animal in the Nineteenth Century,” was given by Teresa Mangum, University of Iowa. It began with a look at 1861, the year that *Punch Magazine* hailed as “The Year of the Gorilla,” owing not only to the increasing awareness of Darwin’s *The Origin of Species*, published in 1859, and the proliferation of live gorillas in zoos and dead ones in museum taxidermy exhibits, but also due to the release in that year of Paul du Chaillu’s popular travelogue, *Explorations and Adventures in Equatorial Africa*.



The Lion of the Season, *Punch Magazine*  
25<sup>th</sup> May 1861

Mangum used this work as a jumping-off point to examine the way the Victorians adopted gorillas as symbols through which they could “surface thoughts coded as emotions.”

Mangum examined the ways that du Chaillu’s popular book relied on two paradigmatic Victorian literary styles in its description of gorillas: that of horror and sensation fiction and that of the sentimental novel. In his book (later revealed to be mostly fabrication), du Chaillu casts himself as the great white hunter and his gorilla prey either as bloodthirsty monsters or conversely as creatures whose recognizably “near human” gestures, facial expressions and manifestations of emotion inspire both pity and disgust. Mangum examined the way the gorilla became a convenient cipher for the most racist Victorian assumptions about Africa and Africans and a symbol of both familiarity and foreignness. By making an example not only of du Chaillu’s book and the various reactions to it, but also of a range of other Victorian works, including Emmanuel Frémiet’s much decried (and later destroyed) 1859 sculpture “Gorilla Dragging Away a Dead Negress” and various cartoons and articles from *Punch*, Mangum made the point that the gorilla in



Emmanuel Frémiet, Gorilla Carrying a Woman, Bronze, 1887  
A re-make of the original "Gorilla Dragging Away a Dead Negress" which was destroyed in 1861. This version was very well received by critics and public alike.

Victorian England functioned as a sign not only of itself as animal and as synecdochical representative of its home continent, but also as a metaphor for the moral difficulties of empire and as a way to covertly examine the hazy lines between colonizer and colonized, hunter and prey, master and slave, and self and other. Following Mangum was Jonathan Smith, University of Michigan, whose talk "Good Breeding: Darwin and the Victorian (Domesticated) Animal," examined the way Darwin's knowledge of animal breeding influenced his understanding of human breeding and genetics. Smith noted that the majority of Darwin's work was focused on the fertility and breeding of domesticated animals, and he theorized that much of this work corresponded with considerable changes taking place in the public's relationship with domesticated animals as England moved from a primarily agrarian population into a more urban and industrialized mode of living. This cultural change manifested itself, among other ways, in the increasing pervasiveness of the "animal fancier," the animal lover who bred not for purposes of replication, but to cultivate particular traits or achieve exotic results.



A Pony and Her Hybrid Zebra Foal, 1900

Smith asserted that Darwin was concerned that these fanciers, who bred without patience or a sense of the far-reaching results of their actions, might detrimentally affect domesticated species. He posited that this concern influenced Darwin's work, ultimately causing him to turn a critical eye back onto himself. Darwin had married his first cousin, a rather common practice at the time, and he became worried that his own ill health and the ill health and deaths of several of his children resulted from this interbreeding. Although Darwin ultimately put his own mind at rest by concluding that the dangers of consanguinity lay not merely in inbreeding but in breeding between "related organisms with similar constitutions and having been exposed to similar conditions," Smith encouraged his listeners not to ignore the cultural resonance of Darwin's work among novelists and others of the time, especially given the scientist's great popularity and prominence.

Through a stylistically bold and lyrical description of his own experience of a moment of "Darwinian sublimity," George Levine, Professor Emeritus from Rutgers University, conferred the same sublime experience upon the audience, metaphorically placing them ear to breast with the common sparrow whose heart beats 460 times per minute. What he/we experienced is the bird's "utter difference" from us, its "extraordinary and intense private life," which, rather than rendering it abstract, makes it all the more real. Its otherness provides both "an opening and a mystery."

The title of Levine's talk, "The Squirrel's Heartbeat," comes from the narrator in George Eliot's *Middlemarch*: "If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be

like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence."<sup>1</sup> He posited this as a central ethical question of the Victorian novelists: can we imagine another being empathically and at the same time endure its absolute otherness? Levine asserted that a primary function of Victorian realism was its project of illuminating the other, of rendering understandable the lives and ways of people different from ourselves. In confronting the ultimate impossibility of such a project, Levine argued, the great Victorian fiction, rather than perpetuating a model of solipsism, attempted to make its readers confront the "reality of difference," for each reader to face the "not-me." Animals, in their otherness, insist on a life beyond the boundaries of the book. Thus, through a series of examples not only from *Middlemarch* but also from works by D.H. Lawrence, Thomas Hardy and Herman Melville, among others, Levine persuaded us that Victorian realism's greatest moments come from its attempts to know the unknowable (that is, to both know the thing and know that you can't know the thing), and yet to maintain absolute respect for that unknowable object. Levine, while acknowledging the difficulty of this project, suggested its fulfillment in moments, and, in implicitly comparing us to the Victorians, offered us both a critique of our own failures of imagination and an ethical model to pursue. Ivan Kreilkamp of Indiana University, somewhat in tension with George Levine, offered the Victorian project of realism not

as an explanatory mode but rather as one that could potentially co-opt its readers. Entitled "George Eliot's Brute Life," Kreilkamp's talk used George Lewes's *Seaside Studies*, which asks "What happens when one animal incorporates the life of another?" to frame George Eliot's *Middlemarch*. *Middlemarch*, Kreilkamp argued, is a representation of the "biological concept of life," thematically employing a structure of relational domination and submission among its characters while enacting this same structure between author and reader. Using *Middlemarch*, Kreilkamp produced three models of organic life: parasitic, autonomous, and creaturely. He used the marriage between the characters Dorothea and Casaubon to illustrate the parasitic model, in which one partner can be symbolically devoured and violently incorporated into another. The second, autonomous model Kreilkamp offered as a possibility suggested by the presence of its opposite, as shown by the sacrificial animals that populate *Middlemarch* (for example, the helpless puppy whom Dorothea is "pained" to see treated like a "pet"). Rather than being static, these positions can be occupied by various characters at various points in time. In the third model, Kreilkamp argued for the indeterminate boundary between life and death using (*Middlemarch's*) Raffles's



Consult the Chimpanzee, 1890's



William Brody Greyfriars Bobby, Bronze, Edinburgh, 1873

<sup>1</sup> George Eliot, *Middlemarch* (London: Penguin, 1994) 194.



“undead” body as well as (the real) Terry Schiavo’s comatose one.

Although Kreilkamp, like Levine, did suggest *Middlemarch* as a potentially ethical vehicle, one that asks its readers to consider what responsibility the stronger creature bears toward the weaker, parasitic one, he provocatively depicted *Middlemarch* as a dominating presence, one that consumes its readers’ “own tiny lives.” The reader may willingly (or unwillingly) submit or resist; however, through the awareness of domination, submission, and (possible) resistance, the reader can come to a broader ethical understanding.

Kicking off the afternoon session of the day-long conference was Hilda Kean, Ruskin College, Oxford. In “The Moment of Greyfriars Bobby: The Changing Cultural Position of Domestic Animals in Nineteenth-Century Britain” Kean examined the conflation of the symbolic animal and the real one. Greyfriars Bobby was a Scottish terrier who, as legend tells, took up residence on his dead master’s grave, not leaving except to eat, until his own death fourteen years later. One year after Bobby died a monument depicting the dog was erected on the edge of Greyfriars Cemetery. Kean argued that the great popularity of the story of Greyfriars Bobby, as well as the statue itself, marked a new model for the anthropomorphizing of the animal. She asserted that the “central feature of modernity” is “the act of seeing,” which is the “key in understanding the modern animal.” This is to say that, in the modern paradigm, the act of observing and being observed creates us individually and collectively as human subjects. Kean posited that “seeing” also means seeing certain animals, particularly certain dogs, as fellow human beings.

To argue this point, Kean cited many changes in the way animals were treated in the nineteenth century: the rise of the antivivisection movement, the founding of the RSPCA, the proliferation of dogs as pets, and the public commemoration of animal deaths. She evaluated these developments alongside examples of new modes of animal representation that arose contemporaneously: the publication of animal “autobiographies” such as *Black*

*Beauty*, the “celebrity” status achieved by particular companion animals of prominent figures, and the creation of animal cemeteries that took the visual form of human cemeteries. Kean argued that these changes in animal representation and treatment depended upon a new public understanding of animals as individual personalities, as opposed to members of a species, as well as the perception of animals’ feelings as distinct and complicated, much like human beings’. Though the Victorian recognition of animal interiority and individuality led to social changes that could be considered beneficial, Kean questioned the potential dangers of this kind of anthropomorphic projection. Similarly, she noted the paradox of visual representation: that it is both an elevation of an animal, allowing it to be seen and remembered, and a subjugation of it in its symbolic “caging.” The monument to Greyfriars Bobby, a public sculpture depicting a singular animal, free of any reference to its master, yet participating in a form of representation traditionally reserved for human beings, is an example of this paradox.



Alice with the Lion and the Unicorn, and a Plum Cake, John Tenniel, 1866 in *Through the Looking Glass*, Chapter VII, Lewis Carroll

Kathleen Kete, Trinity College, in “Childhood and Pet Keeping in the Victorian Imagination,” suggested the twinning of animals and children in Victorian culture in terms of both physicality and interiority. Examples she used were Alice’s exchange with the unicorn in *Through the Looking Glass*, the “man’s cub” Mowgli in the *Jungle Book* stories, as well as the pet-keeping culture represented in painting



Mowgli, John Lockwood Kipling, in the *Second Jungle Book*, 1895, Rudyard Kipling

such as Renoir's inclusion of pet dogs in his representations of bourgeois family life and Mary Cassatt's portraits of children such as *Little Girl in a Blue Armchair*. Kete pointed out one Victorian view of pets as replacement, imitation and/or more loyal children. Though various strands of Victorian culture were imagining children as analogous to animals, and teaching children that animal families were analogous to their own, Kete noted children's own tendency to mistreat animals.

Invoking William Hogarth's polyptych, *The Four Stages of Cruelty*, which depicts the evil protagonist Tom Nero at various stages of his life progressing from torturing a dog, to beating a horse, raping and murdering a woman, then finally having his own body dissected by surgeons, Kete framed the Victorian linking of children and animals for purposes of social justice: the Victorians understood kindness to animals as a learned trait and held campaigns to impart this to children, believing that if they were kind to animals, they would grow to be kind adults. Through an analogy of British Victorians to eighteenth century French revolutionists, Kete noted the pivotal role that butchers played in

performing public dismemberments during the Reign of Terror, and the fine line between the propensity to kill animals and that to kill humans. Regarding that point, Kete posed the surprising question, "Would the French Revolution have occurred if the French were vegetarians?"

Focusing on an October 2006 article in *The New York Times Magazine* which asserted that the worldwide elephant community is experiencing a kind of "collective post-traumatic stress disorder,"<sup>2</sup> Nigel Rothfels, University of Wisconsin, sought to destabilize the current scientific conversation about elephant behavior by revealing its roots in various Victorian constructions. In "Rogue: Understanding Violent Elephants in the Nineteenth Century," he described conflicting accounts among Victorian authors that characterized elephants as either noble creatures possessing an array of recognizably human traits (courage, prudence, etc.) or as bloodthirsty villains who not only thwart but bloodthirsty villains who not only thwart but attack human hunters using brute strength and diabolical cleverness.



Mary Cassatt, *Little Girl in a Blue Armchair*, 1878

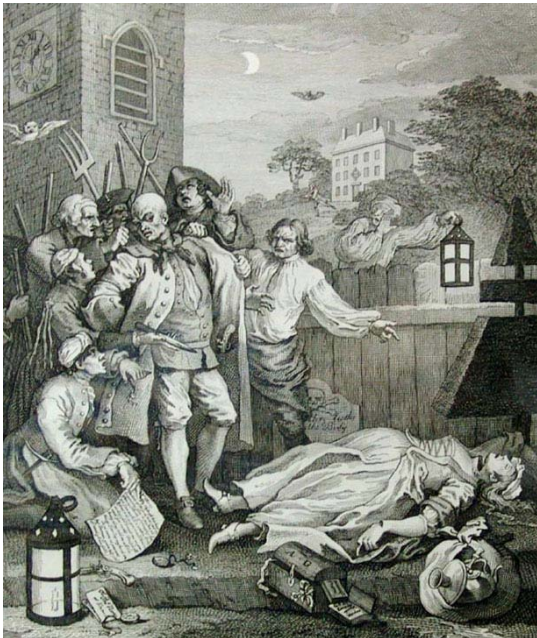
<sup>2</sup> Although the Siebert article does make reference to "chronic stress" and "species-wide trauma" among elephants, the phrase above is Rothfels's own. Siebert, Charles. "An Elephant Crackup?" *The New York Times Online*. October 8, 2006. <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/08/magazine/08elephant.html?pagewanted=2&ei=5070&en=2f736592e092799a&ex=1180756800>



William Hogart, The Four Stages of Cruelty, First Stage of Cruelty Plate 1, 1822



William Hogart, The Four Stages of Cruelty, Second Stage of Cruelty, Plate 2, 1822



William Hogart, The Four Stages of Cruelty, Cruelty in Perfection, Plate 3, 1822



William Hogart, The Four Stages of Cruelty, The Reward of Cruelty, Plate 4, 1822

Rothfels pointed out the way these colorful characterizations have been carried into our present-day understanding of elephant behavior, and highlighted what he considered to be some of the more absurdly anthropomorphic descriptions of elephant behavior in Siebert’s article (for example, the assertion that “gangs” of young male elephants have been roaming the African

countryside “raping rhinos”).<sup>3</sup> Rothfels not only criticized the scientific community’s assertions about elephant behavior, but he also called into question the entire field of “trans-species psychology,” theorizing the uselessness of human psychological tropes in explicating animal behavior.

<sup>3</sup> Again, this is Rothfels’s own paraphrase of the original article. Siebert does not use the word “gangs,” although he does refer to the “perversity” of the “young male elephants” that have been “raping and killing rhinoceroses.” <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/08/magazine/08elephant.html?ex=11180756800&en=2f736592e092799a&ei=5070>



Hamlin's Wizard Oil, Print Advertisement from the 1890's

Rothfels's talk served as a friendly warning to scientists to avoid the "shallow reading of history" that can render new research as susceptible to critique as the Victorian science that preceded it.

The final presentation of the day, "The Case of the Insane Pigeon: Comparative Psychology and the Emotional Lives of Victorian Birds," was presented by Sarah Winter, University of Connecticut, who focused on the popular nineteenth-century practice of pigeon breeding as a means to examine the formation of the fields of comparative psychology and ethology. Using studies by Charles Darwin, George John Romanes, Charles Otis Whitman and others, Winter noted the sometimes contradictory conclusions these scientists drew about pigeons, and used those conclusions to highlight the "blurred boundaries between professional observation and fancy" in scientific practice both then and now. Winter used a case study by Romanes, an early animal psychologist, who, after observing a captive male pigeon that began exhibiting courtship behavior towards a bottle introduced into its environment asserted that the pigeon was "insane." However, upon reading Romanes's account in the context of his own observations, proto-ethologist

Charles Whitman concluded that the pigeon was not insane but mistaken in its perception of the bottle as female of its species.

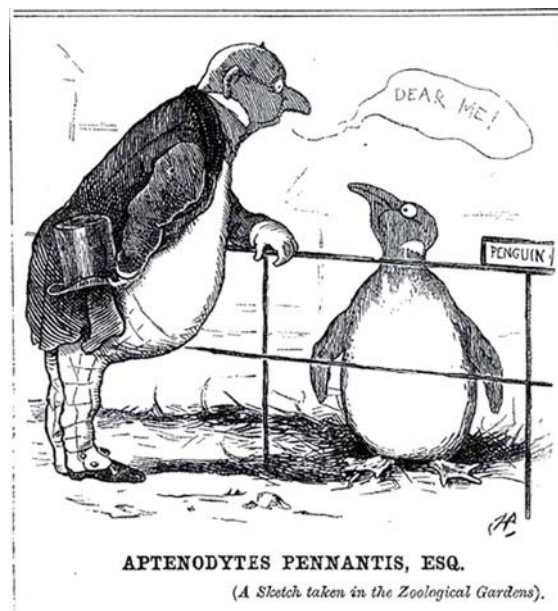
Winter asserted that both comparative psychology and ethology embraced an anthropomorphizing and highly aestheticized approach to the scientific observation of animals, and argued that the primary difference between the two scientists was their respective reliance on anecdotal versus exhaustive evidence gathering. Winter concluded that this difference is what separates the amateur fancier and the committed scientist: not their approaches, but the relative levels of systematic organization in their processes. By illuminating the historically embedded formation of these two branches of science, Winter pointed out the potentially positive effects of their anthropomorphizing scientific practice, as well as the blurry line between science and the arts, both in the nineteenth century and today.

The cumulative effect of this day-long conference was to raise numerous questions about the nature of anthropomorphization and the knowability of the animal. Each of the lecturers pointed out the ways in which the animal serves as a

blank screen upon which we project our own conceptions of ourselves and our culture, and which we use in a solipsistic manner to understand and justify our own behavior. If George Levine and Nigel Rothfels are correct, then any conceptualization of the animal must be founded on our understanding of the animal's utter difference from ourselves and its imperviousness to human models of experience. If our understanding of the animal has consistently been founded on our own culturally and historically predicated preconceptions, then how well do we trust our own understanding? Do artists and scientists bear a responsibility to unravel these tendencies to anthropomorphize before undertaking to represent animals? Can it be, as Sarah Winter, Hilda Kean and Kathy Kete all assert, that anthropomorphic projections can sometimes serve a positive role in our understanding of the animal, or is it possible that any visual or verbal representation of the animal, no matter how well considered, only serves to render the animal more inscrutable and invisible?

Another result of this line of questioning is the necessity for reconsidering our real-world treatment of animals. If it is true that the animal is wholly unknowable, how can we posit a model of responsibility towards animals based on our sympathy for their presumed suffering? Several speakers, notably Teresa Mangum, brought to light the apparent disconnect in nineteenth-century reasoning between sympathy with the "humanity" of an animal species and any disinclination to kill that species for food or sport. Does this disconnect continue today? Have we really embraced Kean's model of animal welfare through individuation, or Kete's model of human/animal empathy as a single impulse? Perhaps any discussion of the humane treatment of animals must be founded only on respect for the animal's distinct otherness and autonomy. Of course, perhaps Levine was correct when he stated that "there is no way for us to confront the absolute other without using it," and we may only be left with Ivan Kreilkamp's explication of George Eliot, which posits that we have a responsibility to

be merciful to those animals weaker than ourselves. It is a testament to all these speakers that the troubling questions they raised resonate not only within our understanding of the nineteenth century but in our understanding of our own roles as utilizers, colonizers and portrayals of the animal.



Aptenodites Pennanties, Esq., Punch Magazine, 1865

*Donna Paparella is a doctoral student in Victorian literature at The Graduate Center, CUNY. Her dissertation examines the figure of the child in relation to visual culture and representations of interiority. She recently lectured on this subject at the Brooklyn Museum in New York City, in conjunction with a John Singer Sargent exhibit.*

*Jessica DeCoux is a doctoral student at the CUNY Graduate Center in New York City, where her areas of specialization are Victorian and Modernist Literature. She is currently working on a dissertation on Decadent women authors.*

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#### Images:

A Pony and Her Hybrid Zebra Foal  
 From Guide to the Zebra Hybrids. 1900.  
 reprinted in Harriet Ritvo, "Our Animal Cousins." differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies – Vol. 15, # 1, Spring 2004

Consult the Chimpanzee  
 From an ephemeral broadside published in the 1890's  
 reprinted in Harriet Ritvo, "Our Animal Cousins." differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies – Vol. 15, # 1, Spring 2004

Aptenodytes Pennantis Esq.  
 Reprinted in Harriet Ritvo, 1865 "Our Animal Cousins."  
 differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies – Vol. 15, # 1, Spring 2004

# I'M NOT A PLASTIC BAG

*Can a mass produced object be ethical and eco-friendly at the same time? Antennae investigated the facts behind the controversy generated by the coolest carrier bag designed to spark eco-awareness.  
Text by Giovanni Aloï*



It is very early morning in London on the 25<sup>th</sup> of April. Still dark, at around 3.30 am people crawl out of their homes to wander the streets of the big city. For once, they are not exhausted revellers looking for a 24 hours Kebab Shop nor vicious muggers in search of fresh prey, but housewives with kids, office-girls and students. Where are they going

so early?

To the nearest Sainsbury's store! Why so early? Because they are determined to get their hands on the 'sensation of the season': a limited edition shopping bag designed by super-cool bag-guru Anya Hindmarch. It didn't hurt that the bag is priced at an incredible £5.

A queue of 250, snaked 75 meters (250ft) outside Sainsbury's in South-West London's chic Kensington neighborhood. All 500 carriers available at this store were sold within an hour as 19,500 more were sold over Sainsbury's 450 stores around the UK. By the end of the day it was impossible to get your hands on the hottest carrier bag in town except for one place: Ebay, where the original price of the bag rocketed to a staggering £295.

### **The Bag**

'I'm Not a Plastic Bag' is a reusable cream-colour cotton carrier bearing the statement 'I'm Not a Plastic Bag' in brown lettering over one side. The bag is completed with cotton rope handles and metal-work with the Hindmarch trademark.

### **The Designer**

Anya Hindmarch opened her first store at the age of 18 under the Own Business Initiative launched by Margaret Thatcher. She quickly became a leading designer of accessories in the UK and developed international fame thanks to an innovative approach to high design (see her personalised bags collection) and a reputation for high quality standards.

Frequently, her creations are priced at £1,200.

non-profit campaign group, is set out to change the world by taking small steps. They have published the best selling book 'Change the World for a Fiver' and the follow up 'Change the World 9 to 5'.

Whilst the 'We Are What We Do' is rapidly becoming powerful, its creators insist that the organisation is not a charity, nor an institution but a movement.

### **Sainsbury's Supermarket**

For much of the twentieth century Sainsbury's was the market leader in the UK supermarket sector. However in 1995 it lost its place as the UK's largest grocer to Tesco and in 2003 was pushed into third by ASDA.

Despite predictions that Sainsbury's would regain second position and a narrowing of ASDA's lead in recent months, the latest figures released by Taylor Nelson Sofres in October 2006 showed Sainsbury's losing share slightly, from 15.9% to 15.7% compared to ASDA's 16.6%. Tesco's share was 31.4% and Morrisons' 11.1%. "Asda widens lead as UK's second biggest supermarket.

(TNS", AFX News Limited, 18-10-2006)



Anya Hindmarch being photographed for the press outside Sainsbury's

### **We Are What We Do**

'We Are What We Do' is the brain trust behind the 'I'm Not a Plastic Bag' phenomenon. Founded in 2004 by a community worker, David Robinson, and a financial PR, Eugenie Harvey, the British

### **What's inside the bag?**

"When I was first approached with this ['I'm Not a Plastic Bag'] idea, it gave me the chills. It seemed so important," said Anya. "The thing that struck me was that when I started

working at 18 years old in the late Eighties, I remember drinking double espressos and smoking Marlboro "When I was first approached with this ['I'm Not a Plastic Bag'] idea, it gave me the chills. It seemed so important," said Anya. "The thing that struck me was that when I started working at 18 years old in the late Eighties, I remember drinking double espressos and smoking Marlboro lights Lights and working all day and night. I remember the cool young girls I started employing arriving with their yoga mats and pomegranate seeds and their plants on their desk for oxygen and me thinking it was all a bit 'knit your own yoghurt'. But of course the reality is that now we all realise the importance of looking after your health, what you eat and what you do. It was these cool, fashionable influences that helped it become trendy."

was determined to bring home more than it could possibly eat.

We simply did not care, society was obsessed with appearance and fashion, money and success; everything became disposable, Planet Earth included. Today, at least it seems things have changed. Surely global warming has captured the attention of the media to such an extent that a greater section of society is at least informed on the subject. Times have changed too, as Eugenie Harvey from 'We Are What We Do' explains: "When we started in 2004," Harvey says, "these issues were the domain solely of the liberal broadsheets. Now, we're seeing The Sun, the Mirror, The Daily Telegraph getting involved... Five years ago, people would have approached plastic bags as an entirely green issue. Now, it's part of a range of behaviour that is not



Eco-friendly messages on plastic carrier bags from Sainsbury's (above) and Tesco (right)

Back in the Eighties, our collective understanding of what was healthy and what could irreparably damage the environment was particularly abstract. Then, the supermarket plastic bag established its supremacy as the quintessential, functional throwaway item: tougher than paper bags, water resistant, colourful, indestructible, surely not biodegradable, the supermarket plastic bag cunningly became the symbol of a society that

left-of-centre, weird behaviour, but as mainstream, normal behaviour. If you like, it's the difference between campaigning naked against fur down Oxford Street, and making more discreet changes about not wearing fur at all." (*The Independent* 6<sup>th</sup> of March 2007)

The 'I'm Not a Plastic Bag' phenomenon is the latest manifestation of the designer-hype/celebrity-



obsessed society we live in. Whilst masterminded to create awareness of the environmental impact of plastic bags -- 'We Are What We Do' has estimated that the average UK person uses 167 plastic bags a year -- the marketing strategy employed to launch this eco-fashion accessory cleverly exploits the star-system as advertising-vehicle to create the ultimate must-have-item.

In February celebrities attending the Vanity Fair Oscar Night Party received 'I'm Not a Plastic Bag' as the official goody bag for the event. Instantly photographs of celebrities carrying the eco-aware bag circulated around the world, adding to the hype.

The 'democratic-price' of the accessory, a mere £5, combined with the name of one of the most internationally acclaimed designers, spell hysteria. For most buyers the appeal of designer/high-street collaboration lies in the idea that the items are only available to those who can prove their dedication by queuing for hours in the middle of a cold night; the limited-edition factor clearly plays a defining role in the appeal of the bag.

Ultimately the question is: is it ethical for a product that is meant to have a positive environmental impact to retain the elitist aura of high-fashion items? Isn't helping the environment something that we all should take part in?

If Hindmarch and 'We Are What We Do' are effectively concerned with the environmental impact of plastic bags, why would they make the 'I'm Not a Plastic Bag' so hard to purchase?

Surely, the more these reusable bags are made available, the fewer plastic bags would be used. It seems as the limited edition nature of the carrier stands in opposition to the eco-friendly principle behind it. In our time, capturing the media's attention seems to be the most effective way to advertise products or ideas and, in a number of ways, the Hindmarch's carrier has generated a high level of publicity at the lowest possible cost and in the shortest time.

Anya's Hindmarch's name bounced at the top of the world's coolest designers list with her name splashed across the front pages of respectable newspapers and tabloids reaching audiences that were unaware of her more expensive products. "What's really exciting is the reaction from the people." Sid Hindmarch on the bag's release. "I've had letters from models, film stars, politicians and even Prince Charles, all saying fantastic, well done, we all support it and we are right behind it". 'We Are What We Do', drastically increased its website traffic and sold more of its books over the past week. Sainsbury perhaps managed to re-

fresh its image as the most eco-aware supermarket in the country. Yet, everything was to take a completely different direction a few days later.

### **Ripping the Bag Apart**

The first event to dent the spotless eco-friendly reputation of the Hindmarch bag was the conspicuous appearance of 'I'm Not a Plastic Bag' on eBay with auctions fetching as much as £300 per bag. The controversy started; the Anya Hindmarch press office released a statement in regard to the exploitation of the initiative clarifying that "We have no control over bags appearing on eBay. Please note that this bag is not a charity project".

*(www.Hanya Hindmarch.com, 29<sup>th</sup> April, 2007)*

A more energetic response came from 'We Are What We Do':

"We contacted some of the sellers by email saying, 'would you buy Comic Relief red noses, sell them and keep the profit?'"

We did manage to get a couple of people to remove listings, but some said, 'Well we're just meeting demand.'

*(Kenny Jordan, consultant to We Are What We Do on www.wearewhatwedo.org)*

With hundreds of carriers on eBay, one is left to wonder on the questionable ethical consideration people are giving to the project and what impact the bag may actually have on the environment. Consider the carbon footprint generated by the making and transportation of the bags, added to that produced by the re-shipping caused by re-selling on eBay, and the cream coloured bag may turn a shade darker.

On Bagsnob, an internet blog-website for bag-lovers around the world, Lin Stanly commented: "I have to say, that the initial idea of the 'I'm Not a Plastic Bag' is great but the side effect of it is not so eco-friendly because it is so sought after now, more phones are being used, more computers sat on, more car journeys to find the bag made and so on. If a large amount had been made in the beginning maybe this would have not been so popular."

Yet, the eBay re-sell and the realisation that the fashionable eco-bag may not be very eco turned into minor preoccupations once the media delivered the news that 'I'm Not a Plastic Bag' was produced in China exploiting poor labour operating outside Fair Trade regulation. The fact that the bags travelled from China, also raised concern that the carbon footprint could be so large to even offset the potential environmental benefits. "This is bordering on the

hypocritical” said Martin Hearson of pressure group ‘Let’s Clean Up Fashion’. “There is an incompatibility in claiming the product is ethical and then manufacturing it in China”. Mr Hearson claimed workers in the Chinese garment industry are paid between 20p to 30p an hour. (*Evening Standard 27-04-2007*).

To complicate the situation further Petra Kjell, campaigner with the Environmental Justice Foundation claims that the bag is made of non-organic cotton, a material as environmentally damaging as plastic. “Cotton accounts for 16% of global insecticide releases-more than any other single crop,” she said. “Of the \$2bn of chemical pesticide used on cotton crops each year, at least \$819m are considered toxic enough to be classified as hazardous by the World Health Organisation. Aldicarb is one of the most toxic pesticides applied to cotton, yet it is also the second most used pesticide in global cotton production. One teaspoonful of Aldicarb on the skin would be enough to kill an adult.”

( *Independent Extra 03/05/2007* )

Following these claims, a spokeswoman for Anya Hindmarch said that the company made no secret about the origin of the bag.

“We never claimed this bag is perfect. We have just tried to use our influence as a maker of luxury goods to make it fashionable not to use plastic bags”.

Regardless of the controversy surrounding it ‘I’m Not a Plastic Bag’ is set to hit the rest of the world over the next few months. According to the official Hindmarch website, a cream bag with navy blue writing (different from the brown writing launched in the UK) will be released in the US and Canada in June, in July a green lettering version will be launched in Japan, China and Italy.

Please visit [www.wearewhatwedo.org](http://www.wearewhatwedo.org)

### **Common Myths on Plastic Carrier Bags**

#### **Plastic carrier bags are wasteful**

They are not. They are lightweight, strong and can be readily re-used or recycled. They are often re-used as substitutes for much thicker plastic containers such as bin-liners, which use more resources and generate more waste. 80% of plastic carrier bags are re-used by UK households, according to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs used for carrying packed lunches to collecting dog mess.

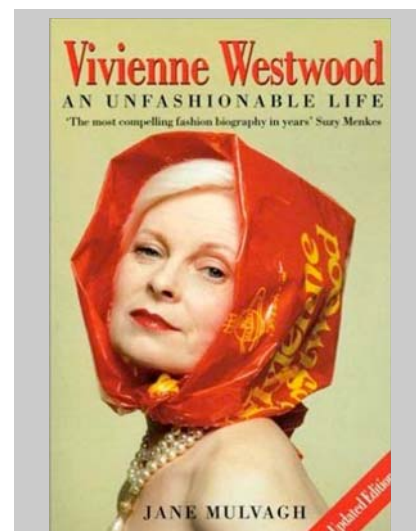
#### **Plastic carrier bags are a problem in litter or landfill**

Carrier bags represent just 0.06% of litter and 0.3% of household waste that goes to landfill. As plastic is relatively inert and stable, it does not degrade in landfill. Biodegradable waste such as spud peelings and newspapers, are unstable an landfill and break down to produce the greenhouse gas methane, which is why the European Landfill Directive requires biodegradable waste to be kept out of our landfill.

#### **Plastic use up scarce oil supplies**

All plastic packaging uses up less than 3% of world oil supply and it prevents far more waste than it generates. Over 90% of oil is used only once as transport fuel, to generate electricity or to heat homes directly. Oil used to make plastics is actually used twice, once as plastic and then as a source of energy if it is sent to an energy-from-waste-plant.

Statistic Data from ENCAMS/INCPEN Litter Composition report, 2005  
Extract reprinted with permission. Original text available at [www.incpen.org/pages/userdata/incp/PCBFS.pdf](http://www.incpen.org/pages/userdata/incp/PCBFS.pdf)



Britain’s most outrageous designer Vivienne Westwood, sports in this photograph a red carrier bag bearing her trademark. This image, featured on the front cover of her biography certainly captures one of Westwood’s most ironic fashion statements.

The pun clearly revolves around the weight of the word ‘unfashionable’ matched with the re-contextualised shopping bag as a surprisingly elegant fashion item. More than just an original fashion statement; apparently Westwood, loyal to hew working class roots, rides her bicycle through the streets of London in the rain, wearing this red plastic bag on her head so to protect her bright orange hair from the elements.

# 'WE ARE WHAT WE DO'- OUR EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

*Antennae interviewed Eugenie Harvey, co-founder of 'We Are What We Do' to understand if plastic carrier bags could be a good place to begin saving the world...*

*Interview's Concept and Questions by Eric Frank and Giovanni Aloï*

## **What responses have appeared on the blog of 'We Are What We Do' after the launch of 'I'm Not a Plastic Bag'?**

Eugenie Harvey: We had a vast variety of responses and the majority have been saying "well done, congratulation this is great!" But there have certainly been a number of people saying "I wasn't able to get one because the site crashed or because we ran out of stock, why had Sainsbury only 20.000 bags, why wasn't it made of fair trade cotton, etc...". I think that in a way the responses we received were fuelled by the press. There is a tendency of focussing on the negative responses and forgetting of how much support we received like people saying : I'm changing my behaviour about plastic bags and so on. We have been, on the whole, very pleased.

***The Anya Hindmarch press office said in regard to the bag: "We are trying to use our influence in a positive way to make it fashionable not to use plastic bags and to encourage people to make small changes in their behaviour".***

***Do you think people are buying the bag because of its claimed eco- friendly value or mainly because of the high-fashion quality?***

Eugenie Harvey: I think people bought the bag for a variety of reasons: there are those who bought it because it was a very desirable fashion item that was attractively priced, and it was a way of earning something designed by Anya Hindmarch who is a very desirable accessories designer. Ok, some people did mainly buy it because of that reason but that does not represent a problem, that is a great thing. We wanted to use fashion as a way of engaging people. I also believe that lots of people bought it because it's a 'We Are What We Do' product and it also allowed them to make a statement. The aim of the project was to create more awareness about the issue of plastic bags. We didn't set out to create the one and only solution to plastic bag usage. There are many different ways to achieving the same end. We just wanted to create aware of the issue, and that is what the bag is about, and I think we absolutely achieve that.

***'I'm Not a Plastic Bag' was initially praised by the media and then accused to be non-organic and non-Fair Trade friendly the following day. What do you think of the way the Media have portrayed the bag? Has it had any repercussion on you?***

Eugenie Harvey: The only claim that 'We Are What We Do', Anya Hindmarch and Sainsbury's made, was that it was an alternative to a plastic bag. The media whipped it all up into a frenzy. It suddenly was questioned over ethical grounds. If using a reusable bag instead of a plastic one can be considered ethical, I suppose that on this ground it is. We did not set out to make a fair Trade organic cotton bag. It would be fantastic to achieve the level of awareness that we have managed to achieve with a product that fulfilled all the criteria for organic and eco-friendly but the price would have gone up so dramatically, making the bag a very exclusive item for wealthy buyers and this would have seen us being accused of a whole different range of issues. Ultimately we never made false advertising and believe that the media was so excited about this project and built it so big that at some point it also had to bring it down. Sainsbury had a whole day without plastic bags, Tesco placed a full page advertisement, Waitrose has now introduced Green Check out tills without plastic bags. A whole range of new things that may be connected to our project has taken place after the release of the bag.

**Considering the difficulties encountered by Anya's bag in making everyone happy about its eco-friendly nature; do you think it is possible to create mass produced objects that fulfil all criteria of eco-friendliness?**

Eugenie Harvey: I think it's incredibly difficult at this point in time. Somebody who was writing about this project said 'perfect can be the enemy of good'. We had to be realistic. A bag manufactured in the UK would have seen the production cost of a unit rising to £15 to £20 would have resulted in a very expensive bag. I hope that the criticism we received may actually make people more aware of Fair Trade and the more people buying Fair Trade the lower the prices will become. It is definitely very difficult to create a product that is eco-perfect but I think that you can create products that are eco-good.

**You said: "Five years ago people would have approached plastic bags as an entirely green issue. Now it's part of a range of behaviour that is not seen as left-of-centre, weird behaviour, but as mainstream, normal behaviour". From your point of view, what has changed over the span of five years?**

Eugenie Harvey: I think the issue is moving up more and more the public agenda as we gather more evidence of climate change. More and more organisations have become involved in the battle to climate change. I think initiatives like 'We Are What We Do' help to bring this issue to the centre and make it more popular. It is really important to convey information and create public knowledge combined with initiative that seek to convert the public debate into popular means of engaging people.

**You describe 'We Are What We Do' as a movement rather than a charity or an institution. Could you explain why you identify with the idea of movement more than others?**

Eugenie Harvey: 'We Are What We Do' is not one thing. It is a thousand individuals, many companies, schools, the government, community groups etc. 'We Are What We Do' is all of this coming together. For these reasons we do not identify with a charity or a formal institution.

**Your movement could potentially set the example for eco-battle 21<sup>st</sup> century style. Do you believe it's time to change strategy in the field of environment awareness?**

Eugenie Harvey: I agree. I do not mean for a second to diminish the role played but WWF and Greenpeace, they are brilliant. They actually placed these issues on the agenda. Equally, there are different ways of engaging larger numbers of people and I think that our methods are appropriate to where we are in time. I hope that in doing what we do we can also inspire others to come up with different and new ways of creating awareness.

**After the exposure received through the eco-bag phenomenon, what will your next step be?**

Eugenie Harvey: We Are What We Do is still a very young movement, we are only two years old and we are very proud of what we have achieved in this short time. The next project is a big education project that will be launched in the UK in the middle of the year and will involve young people. This will allow us to involve a whole new audience which is really exciting.

We are also working on a Christmas project of which I cannot reveal details of now.

**Have you kept an 'I'm Not a Plastic Bag' for yourselves?**

Eugenie Harvey: Oh yes, I have kept one, but at the moment I don't want to carry it out with me just in case people may think that I queued outside a supermarket at 2am for a bag. For as much as I am proud of what we have done, I would have not got out of bed to get one.

# do<sup>®</sup> A PLASTIC BAG

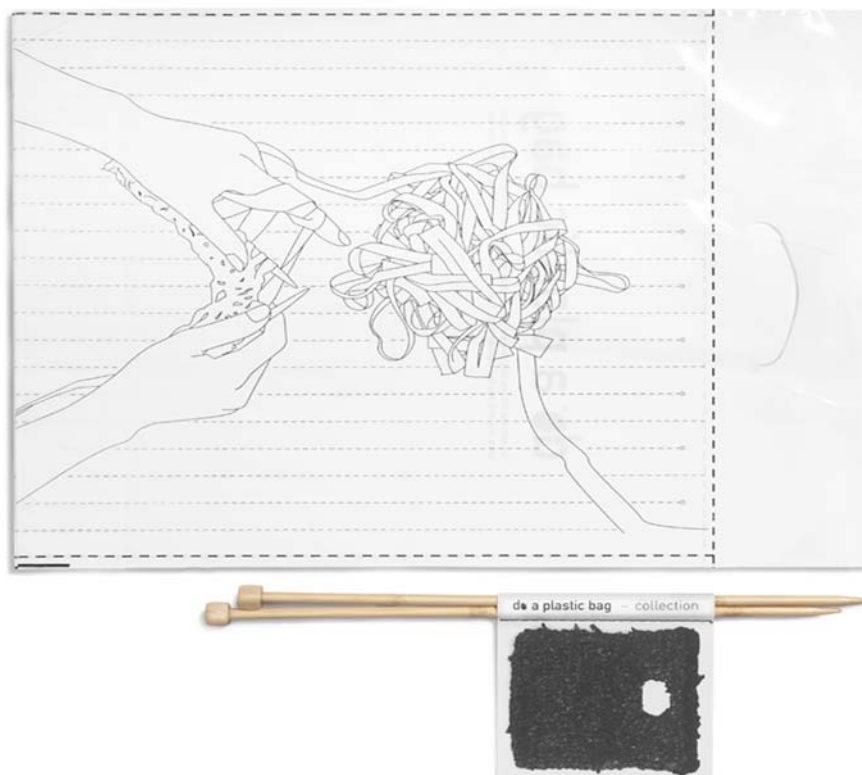
*DO is a brand that depends on the actions, ideas and initiatives of you and you and you and... DO works with many people around the world to create products, services and ideas within the mentality of DO. DO mentality: without your active involvement, DO, as a brand, does not function or exist. DO is an initiative of KesselsKramer. Text and Images, courtesy of Eric Kessels.*

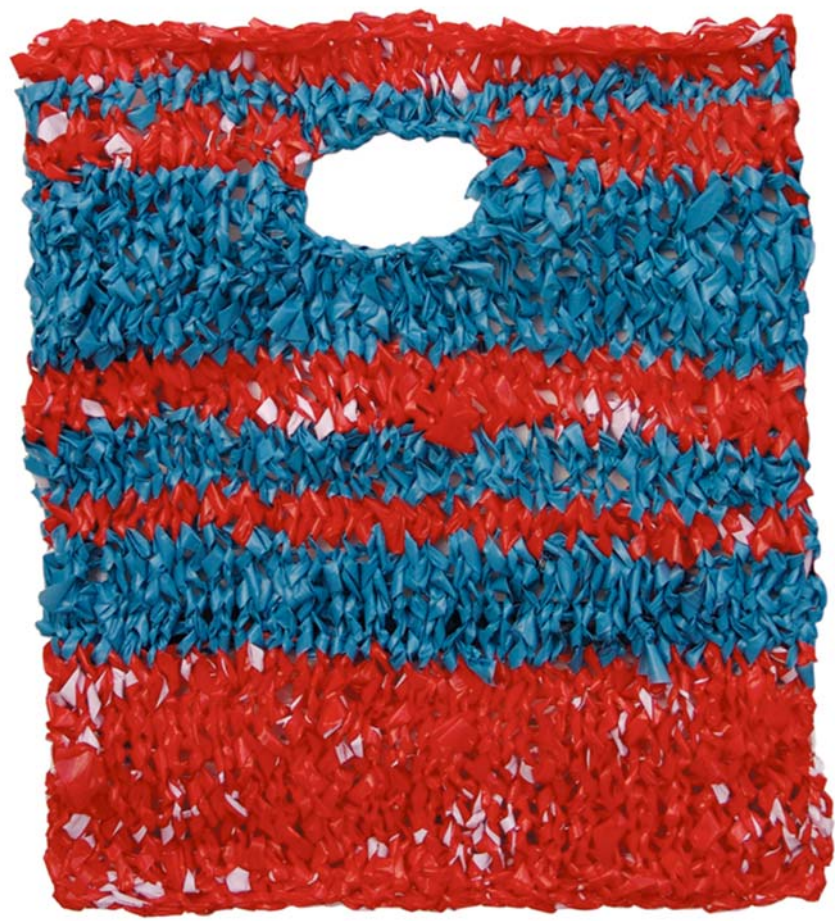
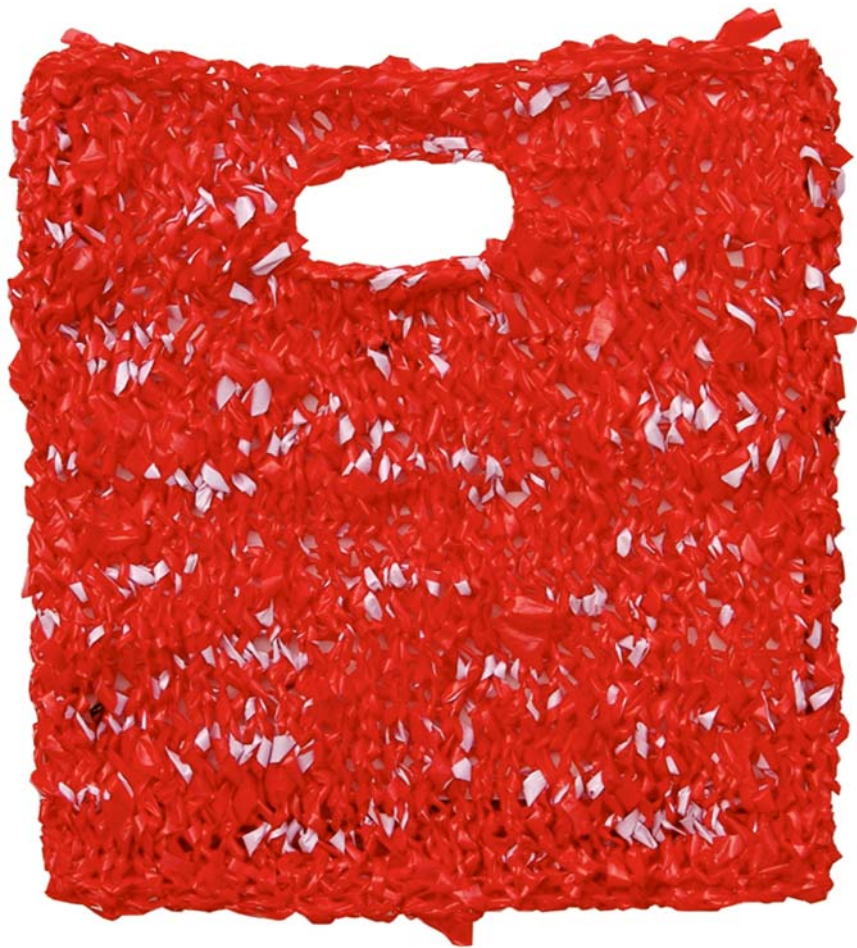
**D**O a plastic bag is a small and personal way to address the abundance of discarded bags. DO a plastic bag offers a way for people to take part in saving some plastic from ending up in a hole somewhere and slowly becoming part of the ecosphere. Did you know that plastic fibres have been found existing in some species of sea life? DO likes to invite you to take part in the DO brand, to design and create your own, custom-design plastic bag and keep some plastic in use a little longer than usual.

Plastic carrier bag, knitting needles, instruction booklet.

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# AND THEY ALL LIVED HAPPILY EVER AFTER

*Claudia Borgna's work is informed by nature, modern life-styles and consumerism. Her installations are the materialization of an ongoing observation and questioning of how the plastic and the natural realms interact with one another and thereby come to create new ephemeral orders.*

*Text by Claudia Borgna*





Claudia Borgna, *And They Lived Happily Ever After*  
2006, Connecticut





Claudia Borgna, *And They Lived Happily Ever After*  
2006, Connecticut, night view

**T**ravelling around the world I have come to realise that we are living in a world that overflows with waste. This was the starting point that led me to investigate the relationship between discarded materials, such as plastic bags, and the environment. In the past three years I have been looking at how rubbish and man-made objects are very much transforming and creating new landscapes and becoming more and more integrated into nature. After working for years with all sorts of discarded materials, waste and rubbish, I decided that I would focus on working exclusively with plastic bags.

I think that plastic bags epitomize the perfect and quintessential discarded object. It is the symbolic embryo that contains our lifestyle and is the vessel that carries it out in its journey. I find plastic bags interesting because of their remarkable contradictory qualities. They are both worthless and useful, disposable and recyclable, flimsy and strong, ephemeral and eternal, but above all they are universal. By bringing the plastic bag in an artistic context I elevate it to another dimension that removes it from the idea of the banal and obvious and transforms it into a poetic object: a mass-produced muse with forms, lines

and colour, that can't help but interact with the surrounding environment. Like in my performances the plastic bags are a natural appendix of man. One could argue that whatever is man made is natural and that ultimately nature is an unstable and unreliable human construction ruled by social and cultural needs.

I have chosen to work with installations because in this way I can better express the concept of environment, space, time and duration. I like my installations to be large and give a sense of multitude and mass as in mass-production, to be invasive by taking over space to the point of suffocation, and to be in constant evolution and therefore changeable.

I want my work to become a virtual lyrical extension of modern life that substitutes the old idealized concept of nature with a modern/romanticised one.

Despite the fact that my work wants to underline the relationship, or the conflict, between culture and nature, and how they both influence and reflect each other; my work also aims to create awareness and comment on the way we live and how this effects the environment.

## **Installing 'And They Lived Happily Ever After'**

The moment I arrived in Connecticut I immediately realised that the project proposal I had submitted beforehand was not going to be at all feasible. I found myself tucked away surrounded by 450 acres of stunning private grounds. Collecting recycled plastic bags from the local community to construct a collective installation where the inhabitants of the area were going to be active participants to my project (by contributing with interviews of what is valuable or precious in their life and what is disposable) was an impossible task.

After spending almost a week observing the natural background that consisted mainly of woods and water, I had at last the vision of my new work. I had done some outdoor pieces before but this was a great opportunity for me to get more ambitious. This vision was the child of my ongoing investigation on the relationship between the plastic and the natural. And was a new evolution of the main concept of my previous work that reflects my concerns about our consuming lifestyle, but above all it was sparked by my intuition and one could say by subconscious knowledge.

Once I had decided the location where to set the installation, I had four weeks to collect 800 wooden tree branches of all sizes that were lying on the grounds and cover them with white paint. This was a very tedious job, boring and repetitive; only the vision of the final piece gave me motivation and kept me going. I had chosen a large pond on the grounds that had to be less than 1,6meter deep and be sort of protected by strong winds.

The next stage was to fold the white plastic carrier bags and attach them with white duck tape to the painted wooden sticks. It took two days to transport the work into the woods and to the pond that was situated in a small valley where the chariot couldn't get all the way down, so I had to carry the quite fragile branches individually for the last bit of the journey. Another very important factor was the weather. By then it was December and any weather's whim could have stop me from setting my installation up. Just before I started we had a Tornado alarm! Checking the forecast every hour became a priority! I was at the weather's mercy! I wanted the installation to have a very ephemeral feel and anything could have destroyed it before I could actually finish to install everything up properly and document it by photograph (which also took few days).

Fixing those delicate artificial creatures in the pond was another weary and almost

impossible mission. I spent almost a week wearing waders in the ice freezing waters. Most of the time the branches would collapse sideways into the water or break. Two days of storm and strong wind and rain almost jeopardised the whole project. Only passion and strong will sent me back into the pond's water to straightened everything up and finish it all off. At times I was wondering what on earth I was doing all that for, somehow it did not make any sense anymore. I must admit I did lots of swearing throughout the whole time! Only when I finally managed to complete the piece I realised how much it had enriched me as a person, challenging my intellect with new question, sometimes coming up with timid answers, and deepening the concept of my work. Throughout, both intuitive and physical process, my mind had in fact never ceased working, developing new ideas, thoughts and future developments. Both the water and the plastic bags are opposite symbolic means reflecting upon each other. A narcissistic society fecundated and nurtured by natural purity and beauty. I was really pleased to observe that I had constructed a new ephemeral artificial man made order that look deceivingly natural and beautiful and was in fact completely interacting with the surrounding creating an order within an order that as I like to argue could both be natural, and dangerous because strictly intrinsic of its surrounding and inevitably effected by it. In the end they are probably part of the same order. The pond froze, the wind eventually moulded my installation according to his likes, I could only control my creation so far, and the rest was out of my powers. The full moon shone on it reflecting its whiteness and mirroring on the water magic ghostly creatures, almost as a colony of wandering aliens had landed on unknown mysterious waters. The twilight instead transformed them into some delicate organic vegetation growth. The wind gave it life adding some rustling sound effects. At times I wished I could have turned in one of the dears that lived in the woods to be able to view it all for just an instant from their prospective.

The installation lived a short season and I wonder if the wild life of the forest had learned to love it and coexist with it. And is it now looking forward for the next plastic blooming season? It took 2 days to take the installation down with the so needed help of a very kind technician. Now the white branches lie in a large pile on a spot of the grounds and have been turned into a new art piece to reflect on the never ending cycle of life.

# WHERE YOU FIND IT

*In 2000 American Beauty won 5 Oscars at the 72<sup>nd</sup> Academy Awards. This article written at the time reflects on how, in a culture of detritus, "American Beauty" screenwriter Alan Ball discovered heartbreaking beauty in garbage.*

*Text by Russ Spencer*



Still from the famous plastic bag sequence – American Beauty, Dreamworks, 1999

**A** crummy old plastic bag floating in the wind above a dirty sidewalk. It's not an image that one might immediately think of as beautiful, or moving, or important. But it is perhaps the most beautiful moment in this year's most beautiful film -- "American Beauty" -- a moment that sums up the lyrical grace of the film, and embodies the idea that fate does what it wants with us, and even if we are going around in circles on a dirty street, ultimately, if seen from the outside, there is a beauty in our little dance.

I went to a script-writing seminar a few weeks back that was attended by six of the year's best screenwriters, three of them Oscar contenders -- Charlie Kaufman, who wrote "Being John Malkovich," Eric Roth, who co-wrote "The Insider" and Alan Ball, who wrote "American Beauty." Much of the attention in the seminar, both from the audience and from the other members of the panel, focused on Ball, for obvious reasons. Not only is he the front-runner for the Oscar, and not only will "American

Beauty" most likely win best picture, but there is a kind of newness to the tone of "American Beauty" that makes it almost seem like a landmark film, a kind of paradigm shift in the portrayal of the pain and despair of everyday life in ways that recognize both its comedic and tragic aspects and make it seem, ultimately, all worth it. Ball was asked about the plastic bag scene, but not by one of the audience members. It was illuminating, actually that the question came from another writer, David O. Russell, who wrote another of 1999's most innovative films, "Three Kings." Russell leaned forward into the mike, looked Ball right in the eye, and asked, as if he were asking a telepath how he had managed to bend a spoon, "How did you come up with the plastic bag scene?" For those who have not seen the film, the scene is simple -- a white plastic bag is caught in the wind in front of the kind of graffitied metal doors that come down at night in front of liquor stores in tough neighborhoods. The scene is shot in slow

motion. The bag goes up and down and left and right and around and around. It could be a bird, or a butterfly, or a cloud. But it's not. It's a piece of litter on a dirty street. And as such it's a metaphor that even in the toughest place, and perhaps most often in tough places, beauty happens.

Ball answered the question directly, with no emotion. He said that he wanted a scene of grace to balance out the heaviness of the other scenes, to provide a quiet moment. "I tried to think of the most beautiful thing I had ever seen," he said. For him, it wasn't some schmaltzy sunset in Hawaii. He remembered walking past the World Trade Center at a time in his life when he was working as the art director at a magazine, and writing plays at night for a theatre company that was disintegrating. Most of the people in the theatre company were hitting their mid-30s and moving on. He felt a little stuck. A plastic bag was caught on the wind and it seemed to float around him, as if it were a spectre, as if it were alive and talking to him. There was something so profound in the simple beauty of the moment, he said, that it brought him to tears.

I called Ball after the script seminar to talk to him in more detail about the plastic bag moment. "It was in the early '90s, towards the end of winter, the beginning of spring," he said. "It was kind of cold and overcast but it wasn't raining. It was a Sunday. So the whole financial district was deserted. But it was kind of one of those days that after months of it being freezing, it was warm enough to walk. And so I just decided to walk from midtown down to the World Trade Center to catch the train back to Brooklyn. I was in front of the World Trade Center, and I noticed this plastic bag in the wind, this white plastic bag. And it circled me, and it literally circled me, like, 10 or 15 times. And after about the third or fourth time I felt very, um, I started to feel weird. And then, I don't know, there was something striking about the experience, and I really did feel like I was in the presence of something."

Ball used to be a television writer, a job he loathed. Just like Lester, the "American Beauty" character played by Kevin Spacey, he yearned to change his life, to escape from the trap he had found himself in. And the way he changed his life was by writing "American Beauty." "That script was fuelled by anger," he said -- anger at having to write television characters over and over who did nothing more than "trade insults." Just as Lester was essentially freed, in a way, in the movie, Ball freed himself by writing it. In what could be considered a minor miracle in today's bloated Hollywood script development world, his

script sold eight days after he put it on the market, and it was in the theatres 18 months after that. Along the way, director Sam Mendes allowed him to be on the set every day, and to help shepherd his script through the filming process, which is another impossible dream for a writer. Although Ball is still fulfilling some television contracts, when that is completed, he will most likely never again have to write dialogue about people trading insults. When you watch "American Beauty," the plastic bag scene comes when Lester's daughter asks to see her boyfriend's video footage. The boyfriend lives in an emotionally dangerous world inhabited by his psychologically incapacitated mother and his violent, repressed father. The boyfriend shows the girl his footage of the plastic bag going round and round. Mendes lets the audience watch it for a long time. The longer you watch, the more mesmerized you become until the bag begins to speak to you the same way it did to Ball. A friend of mine in New York, a hardened entertainment journalist, cried at this scene, and so did I.

"As children we come into the world with eyes that are wide open and we can see beauty in the most surprising places and the miraculous in the mundane, and that gets sort of conditioned out of us as we are socialized," Ball said. "But there was something about the poetry of that bag in the wind. The lyricalness of it was incredibly overwhelming to me on that particular day. I think there is a part of us that longs for that way of seeing the world. I think that's what people talk about really when they talk about the loss of innocence. So just to be reminded of that, and that it still exists within all of us is very moving to people. Because it's so easy to be so cynical." And so, on Sunday, when Ball walks up to receive his best screenplay Oscar, you can know he will be doing so in part because he told the truth about the most beautiful moment in his life. The plastic bag scene works, as does the entire movie, because Ball was so pushed to the edge by the circumstances of his life that he found the courage to make a little pearl and to share it with the world. And in a world of contrived scripts and cobbled together Hollywood schlock, it is refreshing and encouraging that Ball's "American Beauty" will be the big winner. It's real. It's about time.

*About the writer Russ Spencer is a Southern California freelance writer whose work has appeared in the New York Times Magazine, Entertainment Weekly, Outside, Book, Icon, the Los Angeles Times and online magazines New Media, Shift and IFILM.*

*About the film American Beauty went on to win five Oscars at the 72<sup>nd</sup> Academy Awards - including best picture, best director for Sam Mendes and best actor for Kevin Spacey. This article first appeared at [www.salon.com](http://www.salon.com). The original remains in its archives. Reprinted with permission*

# IT'S NOT LIKE WE CAN MAKE NEW ONES

An ad campaign to save America's National Parks has its roots in the urban jungle of Chicago. Interview's Concept and Questions by **Chris Hunter**

<p>NATIONAL PARK CONSTRUCTION PLANS GIANT SEQUOIA SEQUOIA NATIONAL PARK, CA</p>	<p>NOTES: 1. Mass production for "forest effect" pending budget approval.</p>
<p>SHEET: 01</p>	<p>REV. A</p>
	<p>SHIPPING WEIGHT: 2,000,000 lbs.</p>

300 FEET

6 FEET

IT'S NOT LIKE WE CAN MAKE NEW ONES.

Help protect America's national parks for future generations.  
Visit [www.npca.org](http://www.npca.org) to learn more.  
And for a free map, call 800-NAT-PARK.

**T**hat snort you heard comes from a bison weighing more than your Smart Car. That bumpy log you see? It's an alligator in the muddy reeds. What looks to be a small airplane is actually a lone condor wheeling overhead. And that trout you're trying but failing to catch will soon be helping a grizzly upstream lay on some winter fat.

Where on earth are you? For most of us, the city zoo would be the only possible answer. But for an estimated 270 million drop-jawed visitors this year the answer will be America's sprawling National Parks.

Born when Yellowstone became the world's first national park in 1872 and officially established in 1916, this network of designated parklands, seashores, recreation areas and wildlife refuges engulfs habitats as diverse as Alaska's coastlines, Florida's everglades, Montana's snow-capped peaks and the great Smoky Mountains while playing host to dolphins, manatees, moose, panthers and hundreds of other species. Even the Statue of Liberty is an official resident, part of the Statue of Liberty National Monument of New York and New Jersey.

Taken together, the National Park System, National Forests, and National Wildlife Refuge system total more than 363 million acres. In other words, they're big enough to swallow England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland six times over. Nevertheless, scale of this sort has also contributed to an outsize perception: that the parks are impervious to change and large enough to absorb any harm caused by the changing world around them.

It seems size, so important to the American identity, is ironically the very thing that puts the nation's beloved parks at risk. Taking for granted the mighty sweep of their natural assets, average citizens find it hard to comprehend something so seemingly permanent is in fact fragile. The result is a kind of apathy born of blindness to ever-persistent encroachment, fragmentation and overcrowding. Meanwhile biodiversity is threatened by a diversity of culprits. Buffalo diluting their DNA by breeding with domestic cattle and animals accidentally struck by automobiles are just some of things taking the life out of wildlife.

Well, you might think, at least America's parklands are under the full protection of the US government, right? Not exactly. Logging companies, mining interests, and developers see the parks as resource-rich prizes. Congress must constantly defend them from plunder. Right now a proposed \$200 million road project near Alaska's Denali National Preserve threatens

caribou herds and wolves. If land being sold to timber interests bordering Big Thicket Preserve in Texas were clear-cut, the affects would be devastating. And Virgin Islands National Park is battling to preserve its coral reefs and mangrove shores from sediment runoff triggered by private development.

Originally created by an act of Congress it now seems only an act of God can adequately protect nature's last stand in America. Instead, in its quest to preserve the parks for future generations, the National Parks Conservation Association has turned to an advertising agency.

Last year the NPCA launched a new awareness campaign created by Greg Christensen of Y&R Chicago, an award-winning creative boutique. Housed in a Mies Van der Rohe skyscraper smack in Chicago's super urbanized Loop district, Christensen's work environment is a far cry from the one he's trying to protect. And his strategy is equally surprising — to remind the public that once their parks are gone, all the American ingenuity in the world will not bring them back.

*Antennae* recently met with the ad man to discuss his magazine and poster campaign.

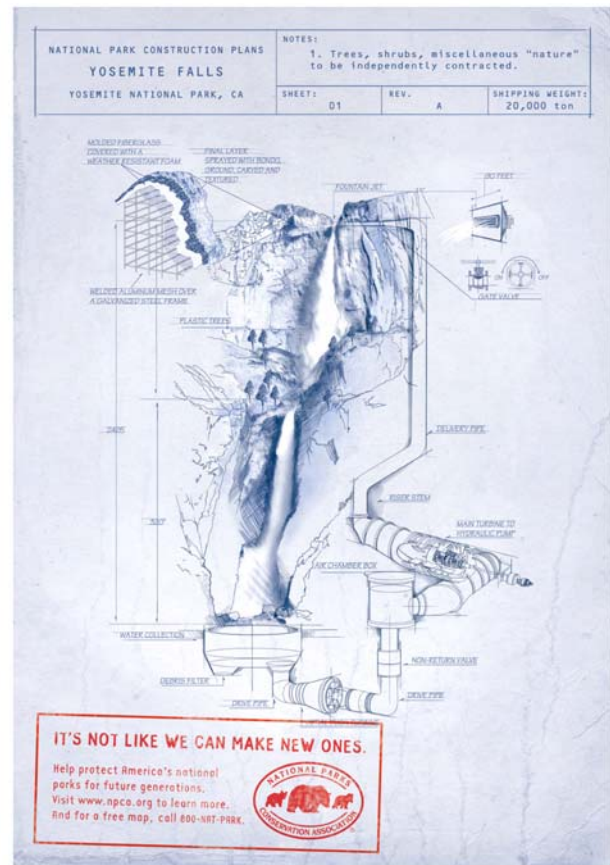
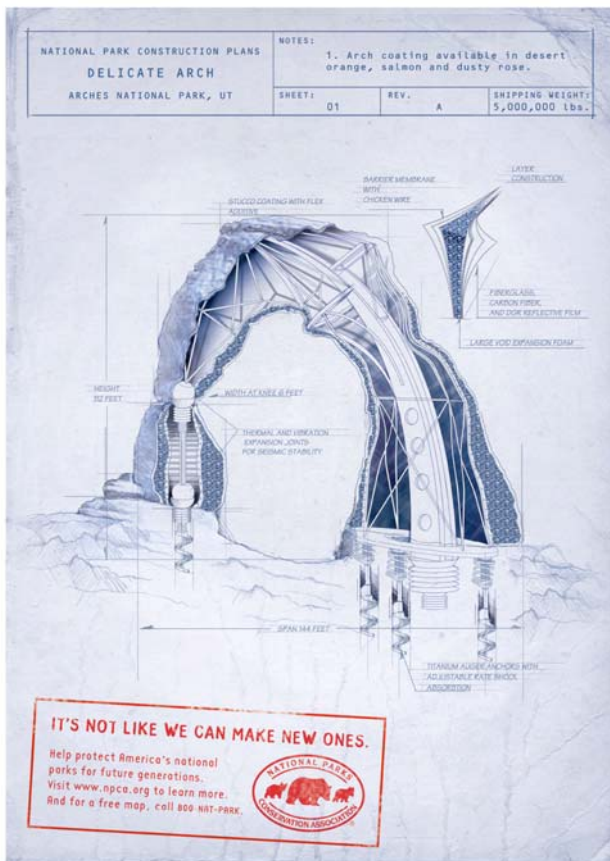
***So here you are in one of the USA's most densely populated cities trying to save the wilderness. Ironic, isn't it?***

Christensen: Well, I live in Chicago, but I'm originally from Utah. I think most people from the West tend to be more environmentally aware because it's so very accessible.

I grew up wedged in between mountains and canyons to the east and an enormous desert to the west. You skied in the winter and hiked in the summer. Living in a city is great, but it's important for me to know that those wild spaces are there.

***So how did you come to work on a campaign to preserve America's National Parks?***

Christensen: I grew up in Utah, which has more than its fair share of national parks. In college, places like Zion, Arches or Bryce Canyon were an easy weekend trip. I also spent a summer working at the Grand Canyon selling film and making chocolate shakes. I'd been a member of the National Parks Conservation Association, and



kind of on a whim – cold called them to see if they'd be interested in some pro bono advertising. It's been a mutually beneficial relationship.

**What was the brief for the National Parks poster campaign?**

Christensen: The single most compelling argument we had was that the national parks are a non-renewable resource. We wanted to remind people that there's a symbiosis between appreciating the parks and preserving them.

**What thought process is behind the concept you arrived at?**

Christensen: We had one idea where we'd have supermarket shelves lined with packaged parks – rows of Yosemite-in-a-box, or shrink-wrapped Arches. It got to the disposability idea, but it wasn't as quick.

We liked the idea of coldly designed blueprints because they seem like a government-initiated contingency plan. As if that were really an option. They seemed to show the absurdity of having any strategy outside of vigilantly preserving what we already have.

**Is there a feeling that Americans take their National Parks for granted?**

Christensen: Unfortunately, yes. Our culture values disposability. Razors, clothing, cars. Look at Gladware. It's disposable Tupperware. The stuff that was supposed to last forever has been improved because it's been made disposable. When we see a monolith like El Capitan in Yosemite or an eons-old cavern like Carlsbad, we assume they're permanent and unchangeable.

The problem comes from more and more people visiting parks that aren't receiving the funding they need to keep up with the maintenance and preservation those visits require. Most people probably believe the park entrance fees are enough to cover operational costs. But a lot of our parks aren't able to tell their own history. In some instances, historical and natural artifacts have to be kept offsite because there isn't enough funding to properly display them in visitors-centers.

**How many people visit the National Parks each year?**

Christensen: I had to look this up on their website (nps.gov). They claim that in 2006, the

national parks had 272,623,980 visitors.

**Who did the illustrations?**

Christensen: His name is Alan Daniels. We liked some of the work we'd seen from him at [www.beaudaniels.com](http://www.beaudaniels.com) and felt he'd be perfect. He did a great job.

**How is the Park Service using the posters?**

Christensen: They've run them as PSAs in magazines, but they also sent copies to each member of the U.S. Senate and House of representatives, and distributed them throughout their organization at a rally in DC.

**When was the campaign launched and what's the response been like?**

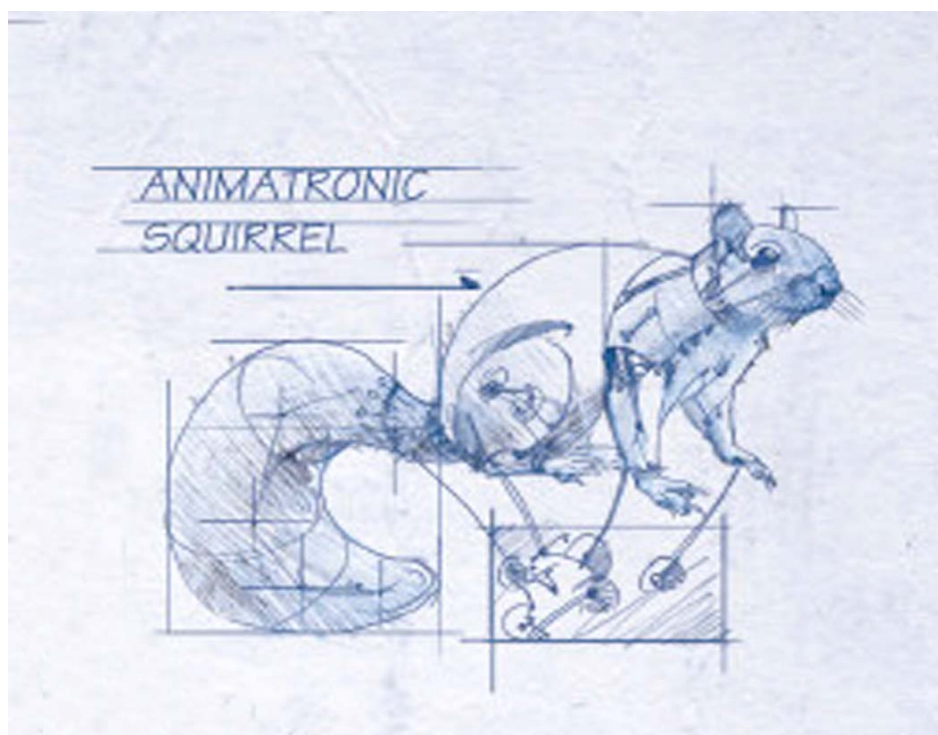
Christensen: They first began appearing in magazines a little more than a year ago, and they continue to appear. They were sent to the members of Congress in the Spring of 2006. The response has been very good, from what I hear. I understand some of the rangers at Yosemite weren't too thrilled with the idea of

Yosemite Falls being depicted as an enormous pump. But after the launch, they've contacted the NPCA to request additional copies.

**When was the last time you visited one of the National Parks?**

Christensen: It's tough living in Illinois. I think we're one of the few states that has absolutely zero national parks. But each year, our extended family tries to plan a trip together. Last Labor Day my wife and kids and I flew to Zion and met up with my mom and sisters. I've been to both canyons more times than I can count, but taking a couple of kids there (both under 4) for the first time was really special.

I used to visit Shenandoah National Park when I lived in Virginia. I think it's on record as being the most polluted in the NPS system, because the whole park is basically a road that runs right through the Appalachians. It's a beautiful area, but it would be so much nicer if access were a little more restricted. Preservation requires some sacrifice.



NPCA poster campaign. Copywriter: Greg Christensen Art Direction: Denison Kusano



# STILL MENDING SPIDERWEBS?

*Is nature reparable? Mended Spiderwebs by Nina Katchadourian suggests that nature may not necessarily welcome our help, even when our intentions are truly good.*

*Text by Eric Frank*



Nina Katchadourian, Mended Spiderweb #19 (Laundry Line)  
Cibachrome, 30 x 20 inches, 1998

In 1998 during a six-week period spent in Pörtö, Nina Katchadourian produced Mended Spiderwebs, a surprising and fascinating artwork with naïve breadth and metaphorical depth.

Nina explains: “All of the patches were made by inserting segments one at a time directly into the web. Sometimes the thread was starched, which made it stiffer and easier to work with. The short threads were held in place by the stickiness of the spider web itself; longer threads were reinforced by dipping the tips into white glue.

I fixed the holes in the web until it was fully repaired, or until it could no longer bear the weight of the threads. In the process, I often caused further damage when the tweezers got tangled in the web or when my hands brushed up against it by accident.

The morning after the first patch job, I discovered a pile of red threads lying on the ground below the web. At first I assumed the wind had blown them out; on closer inspection it became clear that the spider had repaired the web to perfect condition using its own methods, throwing the threads out in the process.

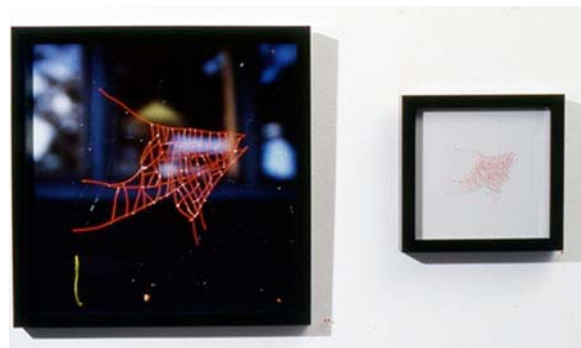
My repairs were always rejected by the spider and discarded, usually during the course of the night, even in webs which looked abandoned. The larger, more complicated patches where the threads were held together with glue often retained their form after being thrown out, although in a somewhat "wilted" condition without the rest of the web to suspend and stretch them."

Mended Spiderwebs was amongst the works exhibited at The Greenhouse Effect exhibition which took place in London in 2000 (see Antennae's first issue). The exhibition explored at length problematics of natural and artificial and the correlations between the two.

Mended Spiderwebs could be seen as an ironic gesture revolving around the naïve child-like quality behind the intervention; yet, beyond its visual appeal and its mischief attitude, the work metaphorically reminds us that however good our intentions are, 'repairing nature' may be something we are not effectively capable of.

More than casting a negative light on what we could do or could not do to 'repair nature', Mended Spiderwebs invites us to carefully consider the nature of our 'positive' intervention, its modality and furthermore its wider impact on the environment. Is nature repairable?

The tactless invasions of the spider's domain suggest that we may be too far removed from the 'ways of nature' to successfully repair it or to allow nature to repair itself.



Nina Katchadourian, Mended Spiderweb #8 (Fish Patch)  
Cibachrome, 20 x 20 inches, 1998



Nina Katchadourian, Do-it-Yourself Spiderweb RepairKit  
Plastic box with foam and thread, tweezers, scissors  
and glue, 1998

# THE BRITISH ANIMAL STUDIES NETWORK

*Animal studies is a relatively new field of academic work, and one that is of increasing interest to academics from a wide variety of backgrounds. The British Animal Studies Network under the direction of Dr. Erica Fudge could represent a great opportunity for its future development.*

*Text by Erica Fudge*

**A**nimal Studies, as the recent exchange of emails on the internet discussion site h-animal revealed, is not perceived to be a discipline by those involved in it. Rather it might better be termed a 'field of study' - an appropriate designation for a herd of ruminating mammals. If this is the case, and I think it is, then contact must be made beyond the limits of each of our individual disciplines if we are to develop our own work, and continue to develop the field itself, for such interdisciplinary exchanges are vital when studying the perception, representation and use of animals by humans, as perceptions, representations and uses are often themselves constituted by various systems of meaning - religious, cultural, rhetorical, ethical, spatial and so on. Animal Studies is a field where the best work is often produced by scholars who focus on their own disciplinary materials - we all have our own expertise - but read those materials from the stance of a broad awareness of other contexts. For example, a literary critic working on dogs in Victorian fiction could produce an utterly formalist study: a thematic analysis of a group of novels that did not look beyond those novels in its argument. However, a literary critic coming at the same topic with a knowledge of debates in Animal Studies might offer something very different: not only a contextual analysis including, for example, the history of science or of animal welfare movements in the period, but also a reading that includes an engagement with some broader, theoretical issues - like those concerning agency, space, the ethics of representation - that might not be considered by more orthodox (that is to say, human-centred) analyses. This is what makes Animal Studies so innovative. We know this when we read beyond our own disciplines, when we apply paradigms established in the study of art to the study of

place where productive interactions between scholars from different disciplines might take place. Organised around ten meetings held between May 2007 and February 2009, BASN will invite scholars from different disciplines and with different perspectives to speak on particular themes central to the work we all do in Animal Studies: these themes include post-humanism, anthropomorphism, the representation of animals, children and animals, companion animals, and animal futures. Speakers come from (in no particular order) literary studies, history, geography, childhood studies, film studies, art history, anthropology, science studies, cultural studies, philosophy, environmental studies, sociology, media studies, ecocriticism. I hope that what will emerge from such interactions will further our understanding not only of the place of animals in our world, but of the status and role of humans too.

BASN is also offering us a chance to formalise some of the informal, unfunded, conversations that we have already begun, whether these take place in the ether that is h-animal, at academic conferences, in email contact, or face-to-face. Why is such formalisation important? I ask this question because in many ways it might seem more sensible to resist the prescribed structures of organisations like universities or funding bodies which might tend to delimit as well as facilitate development. On the one hand, I can be flippant: it is nice to have the funding from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and Middlesex University available to invite speakers, hire a room and equipment, pay for refreshments, and make no charge to those who attend. On the other hand there is a more serious issue at stake here: the formalisation is important as it is one way of establishing Animal Studies as a field of

inquiry beyond that field itself. It is, to use an animal metaphor, marking out our territory in the more official space of the funded network. And we should note that the AHRC seems open to the kinds of work we are engaged in: it does not designate culture as human, for example, in its Mission Statement which presents one of its aims as being to 'Promote awareness of the importance of arts and humanities research and its role in understanding ourselves, our society, our past and our future, and the world in which we live.' Perhaps someone should contact them to ask if they might add the phrase 'with animals' to the end of this sentence?

But marking out our territory is only one aspect of what BASN might achieve. There is also, as Jonathan Burt noted in his paper at the first meeting, a disruptive possibility in Animal Studies that we probably all enjoy and that will, I hope, be something we engage with at the meetings. Animal Studies upsets some of the assumptions of the Humanities disciplines we work within. But it is not only that the disciplinary boundaries that we all live within are challenged and what we might call the internal architecture of castle Humanities pulled apart when one invites animals in to be contemplated. It is also that the assumptions that underpin the Humanities shift to reveal something more than they might allow for in their current form. The blurring of fact and fiction, for example, was a central aspect of Nigel Rothfels' paper, something that reminds us not only of the textuality of the Humanities, but of the textuality of the sciences too.

But how do we negotiate these shifts in the disciplinary assumptions, these challenges to the frameworks that we all operate within (whether we are historians, literary critics, geographers, sociologists, artists, whatever) without disrupting the ecosystem that is our own field, Animal Studies? One of the key subjects of debate at the first meeting was the danger of an attempt to establish a 'party line' in Animal Studies as the field becomes more established, and more self-aware. One way of thinking about this emerged out of geographer David Matless's paper which traced the different ways in which animals have been studied in England over the past hundred years. Matless noted the competing voices at work in Cley Marshes Nature Reserve in Norfolk in the mid-twentieth century. On that reserve, he argued, could be heard voices of conservationists and bird-watchers competing and co-existing with those of wild-fowlers. There are, he noted, different *moral* landscapes in play here; different ways of being human meeting in one place. Perhaps we can take his moral mapping of Cley

Marshes as a model for the work that Animal Studies might be attempting. We are not going to be able to create coherence, unity or consistency in Animal Studies, and nor should we want to: diversity is, as we all know, both inevitable and vital. But perhaps BASN might offer a place where we can discuss our diversity and find a way, to adapt Matless's phrase, to allow for different ways of being Humanities scholars in our shared environment.



The British Animal Studies Network held on Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> of May 2007. From the left, Erica Fudge, Jonathan Burt, David Matless and Nigel Rothfels.  
Photographs by G.Aloi



*Erica Fudge* is a senior lecturer in English literary studies in the School of Humanities and Cultural Studies at Middlesex University in London. She is the co-editor, with Ruth Gilbert and Susan Wiseman, of *At the Borders of the Human: Beasts, Bodies, and Natural Philosophy in the Early Modern Period*.

## The Meetings

Organised with financial support from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and Middlesex University, and under the direction of Erica Fudge The British Animal Studies Network is a meeting point for scholars from different disciplinary backgrounds working in the field of Animal Studies in the UK and beyond.

All meetings are on Saturdays from 1.30-5.30, and will be held in room G.01 in the Clore Management Centre, Torrington Square, London WC1 unless otherwise advised.

There will be no charge for attendance at any meeting, but prior registration is required. Please register for each meeting *at least 1 week in advance* by emailing Sally Borrell at [sb1211@mdx.ac.uk](mailto:sb1211@mdx.ac.uk) stating which meeting you are registering for. Any changes to the location of the meeting will be sent out by email at least 48 hours in advance.

## Dates for your Diary

1. Saturday 26 May 2007: 'The History of Animal Studies'  
Speakers: Jonathan Burt, David Matless, Nigel Rothfels  
Discussant: Erica Fudge
2. Saturday 28 July 2007: 'Humans, Animals and Posthumanism'  
Speakers: Neil Badmington, Lynda Birke, Ron Broglio  
Discussant: Martha Fleming
3. Saturday 29 September 2007: 'Anthropomorphism'  
Speakers: Hilda Kean, Richard Kerridge, Anat Pick  
Discussant: Wendy Wheeler
4. Saturday 17 November 2007: 'Anthropology and Animals'\*  
Speakers: Rebecca Cassidy, Garry Marvin, Piers Vitebsky  
Discussant: Roy Ellen
5. Saturday 9 February 2008: 'Representing Animals'  
Speakers: Philip Armstrong, Gail Davies, Diana Donald  
Discussant: John Simons
6. Saturday 26 April 2008: 'Children and Animals'  
Speakers: Susan Pearson, Victoria de Rijke, Paul Wells  
Discussant: Sue Walsh
7. Saturday 28 June 2008: 'Companion Animals'\*  
Speakers: Emily Brady, Clare Palmer, Julie Ann Smith  
Discussant: Robert McKay
8. Saturday 25 October 2008: 'Animal Futures'  
Speakers: Steve Baker, Sarah Franklin, Susan McHugh  
Discussant: Simon Glendinning
9. Saturday 6 December 2008: 'The Place of Animals'\*  
Speakers: Steve Hinchliffe, Lewis Holloway, Chris Wilbert  
Discussant: David Demeritt
10. Saturday 21 February 2009: 'The Future of Animal Studies'  
Speakers: Erica Fudge, Donna Haraway, Tom Tyler  
Discussant: Erica Fudge

The three meetings marked \* ('Anthropology and Animals', 'Companion Animals', and 'The Place of Animals') denote meetings during which the first 90 minutes will not be given over to papers as at the other meetings, but will be organised around a discussion of selected reading materials that will be circulated (electronically or otherwise) before the meeting. All attendees will be asked to read these materials and send in questions/comments in advance. The discussion will be led by two leading scholars in the chosen field. Details of readings and when and where to send questions and/or comments will be circulated via the mailing list which can be joined by emailing Sally Borrell at [sb1211@mdx.ac.uk](mailto:sb1211@mdx.ac.uk). Please include your name, postal address and institutional affiliation (if any) in your email.

# CULTURE IN THE WILD: UTOPIAN FANTASY OR PRACTICAL NECESSITY?

*Mo Dodson would like to start a continuing discussion focused on the question: “What kind of ‘culture’ do we need to support a sustainable global society?”*

*Text by Mo Dodson*

For the purposes of a discussion about sustainability, the question of culture itself requires revisiting. The Marxist debate about base and superstructure, and about the nature of art and culture can very usefully be the starting points for this discussion. This is not because the Marxist conclusions on these questions are necessarily valid. On the contrary, I believe they are often invalid. The terms of the questions posed by Marxism, however, are urgently and importantly relevant.

Western Marxists, such as Raymond Williams, argued that the idea that the economic/technological base of human existence was the ‘cause’ of all other human activity was too simplistic. Williams argued for a more complex notion of base and superstructure itself. The base, ‘primary productive forces’, could be seen more intelligently as “...the primary production of society itself, and of men themselves, the material production and reproduction of real life.” (p.35, *Problems in Materialism and Culture*, 1980). At certain points, Williams argued, what we call artistic activity can be a material practice that produces us. Indeed, this idea can be found, by implication, in Marx’s early writings (see especially his 1844 essay on ‘James Mill’ – pp. 188-203 in *Karl Marx: Early Texts* ed. by D. McLellan, 1971). In *The Long Revolution* Williams argues that the artist, in creating the work of art, creates him or herself.

On the other hand, Williams was clear that we could not get rid of the base/superstructure model. Our real, material relations to the natural environment and to each other are primary, and if these go wrong, then everything else goes wrong. ‘Culture’, ‘Art’, ‘Law’, ‘Religion/Cosmology’ become distorted by the twisted pathologies of our relations to the environment and to each other.

This is the value of Marx and Marxism. It has clearly demonstrated the importance of our necessary and deep relation to the natural environment. In modern terms, this relationship is called ‘economic activity’. But as Williams has pointed out, this term is modern, after capitalism and industrialisation.

Williams was not clear enough on the difference between post and pre-industrialisation. He did not go back far enough. Indeed, the relevant literature on Hunter-Gatherers was not readily available to him, and he never seemed to have sought it out. In terms of our long history on earth, this relationship between us and nature needs to be described by a term that is very different from ‘economics’.

What a Hunter/Gatherer does to survive is so radically different from what a Modern Person does to survive that we cannot put them into precisely the same categorical basket. Hunter/Gatherers relate to nature directly: they kill and eat nature, but this is seen as a personal relationship between themselves and the animals, plants or even minerals they take. Modern People do not kill what they eat as a matter of course. They employ, by implication, someone else to do this for them. For the Modern Person, food is essentially a non-living thing, inanimate. For the Hunter/Gatherer, ‘food’ is not only always living, or once-living, but also a ‘person’ in Martin Buber’s terms, a ‘Thou’.

This is what most Marxists cannot ‘stomach’: ‘animism’ in its deepest sense (including the animism of mineral objects). And it is here that they go radically wrong. For not only do we necessarily relate to other humans socially as part of our attempt to take food and tools from the environment: we also relate socially to the environment itself at the moment of ‘eating her/him’.

If we refuse to see the environment as a ‘person’, a ‘Thou’, to whom we relate socially at

this intimate moment of transforming her into us, then we are ecospheric sociopaths at the best; at the worst, we are ecospheric psychopathic mass murderers. Our awareness of reality has been so blunted as to make us collectively pathological. And this ecospheric psychopathology results in a collective psychopathology towards each other.

We have, it has been argued by many writers from many perspectives, been collective psychopaths since the beginnings of civilisation (c. 4000 B.C.), but with the 20<sup>th</sup> Century the disease has become a plague that dwarfs all other plagues. Political oppression, man-made famine, war, imposed poverty on the majority of humans alive today... These symptoms of the disease are much worse when we look at the numbers: each year up to tens of millions people die of lack of proper nutrition, potable water and basic sanitary conditions. The largest famines (all due to human interference) in history occur in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. War, political and religious oppression of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century have killed more people than have been killed by similar means in the entire history of humanity on the planet (at least 140,000 years).

Our notion of the universe as a meaningless space into which we happen to have been inserted by some accident of chance is partly a symptom of this pathology, and partly a contributing cause. The cosmologies of hunter-gatherers have celebrated the ecosystem itself – for example the rainforest for the Mbuti ‘pygmies’ of Cameroon is for them ‘Mother’ and ‘Father’. Many traditional Native Americans see the earth as their mother, perceiving ploughing and oil extraction as harmful to the skin and blood of their mother. Pre-Christian northern Europeans saw the gods looming from the forests, skies and underworld as entities to be feared and respected. Our rapidly ‘developing’ world sees nature as a resource to be exploited and abused for commercial purposes.

On the margins of global commerce is a range of alternative approaches to nature, from Nature Philosophers to Radical Primitivists. There is also an active movement of NGOs reforming key practices – from the Soil Association to Friends of the Earth. But none of these movements has produced a viable notion of what a ‘sustainable culture’ might be.

Cultural sustainability raises questions about:

- Social and political systems and relationships
- Group identity
- Personal identity
- Belief systems
- Cultural practices, music, dance, grooming, ceremonial

- The integration of all of the above with a sustainable ‘economic’ practice

The Navajos say that the main purpose of our being here is to create ‘beauty’. By this they mean a harmonious relationship between all things. They do not see a separation between their cosmology, their styles of dress, their food and tool making, their social relations and the beauty of their ceremonial music, dance and art.

This is not the same as ‘Wildlife’ photography and film, important and exciting as that is sometimes. It is not the same as ‘Art’ that attempts to capture the non-human living world as well as the human world, though that can be beautiful and inspiring. Nor is it the same as intellectual debates that scientists and academics carry out, even those that aim to be holistic in philosophy (such as the work of the Schumacher College), essential as these are.

David Fleming has said, “There needs to be art, music, architecture; beauty in clothes and manners. There are lots of reasons for this. Without beauty, local community would become unbearably boring: there is a limit to the number of conversations you can have about solar panels without needing to get away.” ! (p.52 *The Ecologist* No. 48, 2006). Fleming here ignores the major critiques of this separation of art from other activities. Weber, one of the founding fathers of modern sociology, deplored the way in which modern ways of life excluded us from acting with personal passion and feeling when we engaged in most human activities, creating the warped specialisations of erotic and aesthetic activity so characteristic of modernity. If we are to succeed as a species for even a little longer, we will need to combine economic, social, religious, aesthetic and scientific spheres into a far more holistic and integrated sphere. We will need a culture of the people, an ‘ordinary culture’ to paraphrase Williams, that is also deeply passionate, passionately deep and connected to the ‘universe’ as a whole. From small-scale hunter-gatherer and ‘tribal’ cultures to some folk and early ‘popular cultures’ (in P. Burke’s sense), we may find some of the principles for such an integrated and whole culture, a culture in the wild.

*Starting from the next academic year, this will be a series of seminars and colloquia, with invited speakers taking place at Regents College, London. For more information please contact Mo Dodson dodsono@regents.ac.uk*

*Mo Dodson holds an MPhil from Goldsmiths' College (expecting Ph.D 2006) holds a Diploma in Art and Technique of Film from the London International Film School, and another in Modern Social and Cultural Studies from the University of London. He was formerly the Principal Lecturer in Cultural History and Media Studies at London Guildhall University. He lectures at other study abroad organisations in London, CAPA and Regents College. He is a regular contributor to the New Statesman and other journals on contemporary British Culture. He has collaborated on two books in the field.*



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