

**The Zoological Apparatus—Chris Marker, Simone Forti and Joan
Jonas' artistic engagement with animals**

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Abstract

Zoos make animals visible. By exhibiting, editing, framing and fixating the living beings they detain, zoological gardens—and by extension other apparatuses of exhibition of animals, namely aquaria, dolphinariums, safari parks, wildlife “sanctuaries” and petting farms—activate specific modes of looking and being looked upon, which transform the status and nature of the displayed animals and condition the ways in which they are observed, conceptualised and considered.

My research is set to investigate how the conditions of exhibiting living animals in zoological gardens create specific modes of observation and inquiry—not only for viewers during their leisure time but also for artists who chose this environment as a source of intellectual, affective and creative input. The research is rooted on the work of three germinal artists—Chris Marker, Simone Forti and Joan Jonas—whose time-based practices (film, video, performance, dance) consistently engaged with zoological exhibitionary apparatuses. Through the discussion and contextualisation of their work, I aim to comprehend the conditions, possibilities and limits to their engagement, responses to and critiques of the zoo, in order to analyse contemporary art as an exhibitionary practice parallel to that of the zoo. I therefore consider discourses about the format of the exhibition, which are largely framed within the disciplinary ambit of art history, architecture and exhibition studies, expanding them towards a realm where the museological, the artistic and the display of the living contribute to one another in thinking the exhibitionary.

Discussing the three artists’ work, I observe how the zoo’s agenda combines entertainment allure, educational aims, colonial narratives and scientific legitimisations, which support one another in entangling animals, infrastructure, optical devices and visitors, thus feeding an important thread of theory across critical animal studies about the effects and purpose of zoological gardens. I also reflect on how confinement, torture and spectacle work hand-in-hand across an exhibitionary logic in which the exhibition of living beings relates to other configurations of display, distribution, and interaction of the museological experience of “nature”.

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Introduction—From Zao to Zoo

Zoological encounters in Chris Marker, Simone Forti and Joan Jonas' work

The word zoo, generally speaking, suggests little more than a highly odoriferous collection of interesting and unhappy animals. Actually however, the syllable "zoo" originates in that most beautiful of all verbs, zao: "I am alive". Hence a zoo, by its derivation, is not a collection of animals but a number of ways of being alive.

—E. E. Cummings, "The Secret of the Zoo Exposed"¹

While manifesting an interest in animals, "zoological", the adjective, often finds itself at the zoo, inside that pantomime of wildlife most zoological gardens set in place.² Once at the zoo, the term "zoological"'s intention of being *with* animals mutates into confining and displaying animals. The zoological becomes a typified space and practice, a site and an apparatus of exhibition in which contingent entertainment justifies indefinite imprisonment. The legitimations presented by animal parks aren't simply reinforcing the manners in which detained life is exhibited in the promise of pleasure and learning for others. These legitimisations also facilitate the perpetuation of ideological intentions—embedded in obsolete nationalistic, patriotic, and imperialistic values—that still pervade some aspects of present-day society. If these agendas have been questioned by recent and current waves of rethinking, revising and decolonising the institutions and practices of modernity, they remain firmly in place when it comes to the zoo.

Ironically, as poet E. E. Cummings writes, the *zao* the zoo ought to celebrate—the multiple manifestations of the living on Earth—is often reduced to little more than a performance, a representation, a display. A lion confined to a small enclosure represents the "wild" and free lion of the savannah, a beluga whale kept in a tank is an index for the groups of beluga whales

¹ E. E. Cummings, "The Secret of Zoo Exposed", in *Vanity Fair* (March 1927), 66.

² The term "zoological park" was first used for the Halifax, Washington, D.C. and the Bronx zoos, which opened in 1847, 1891 and 1899 respectively. The abbreviation "zoo" first appeared in print in the United Kingdom around 1847, when it was used by the Bristol Zoo (which opened in 1836). John Berger notes how "'About 1867', according to the London Zoo Guide, 'a music hall artist called the Great Vance sang a song called 'Walking in the Zoo is the OK Thing to Do', and the word 'zoo' came into everyday use". John Berger, "Why Look at Animals?" (1977), in *About Looking* (London: Writers and Readers, 1980), 12.

that live and roam around the Arctic ice pack. This research departs from the above-mentioned concerns to examine the ways in which animals are looked at by three contemporary artists who made work at and about the zoo. It considers the potential of these three artistic gazes to initiate basic relational gestures between humans and other animals; to observe how this gaze brings to light the conditions in which animals are subjected to systems of public exhibition, serving quasi-exclusive human purposes and profits; and to imagine the manners in which art is capable of tackling the apparatuses set in place to legitimise both those conditions and the sorts of relationships naturalised by them. It does so while standing at the intersection of art history, performance and artists' cinema studies, exhibition studies, and the ecologist ramifications of cultural theory. More specifically, this research aims to study animal-human gazes that emerge from a contemporary artistic sensibility and intentionality, in order to understand the potentialities and the limits of the artistic in relating to and engaging with systems of exhibition and spectacle of animals.

Undisciplined Bodies

This research is embedded in both a philosophical project and an ethical-political project, which are interdependent and inseparable. I aim at investigating the possibilities for and limitations of artistic formulations to engage in sensorial, material and ethical manners with animals. I discuss the outcomes of Marker, Forti and Jonas' relationship with animals, particularly (but not exclusively) their interactions with captive animals living in apparatuses of public exhibition and display, such as zoological gardens and aquaria. These three artists are taken as case studies that exemplify contemporary art's capacities and limits to dissipate binary conceptions (such as human/animal or spectator/exhibit), which I consider to be at the basis of an anthropocentric imagination of a world that conceives of zoos as not only possible, but also as desirable spaces. I also observe how their work is limited by the societal, ideological and material constraints constituted and reinforced by the zoo.

The guiding mind that accompanies me throughout this analysis is Michel Foucault—in particular the philosopher's reflections on the interdependency between the body, the apparatuses of power and those of exhibition and detention. Spending time with Foucault at the zoo, I discuss how the practices and images of Marker, Forti and Jonas participate in a project of ontological reform (towards the demystification of human powers and privileges) and ecological

emancipation (through the revision of hierarchical animacies, towards a different conception of the rights, powers, obligations and restrictions of the living).

In agreement with author Matthew Chrulew, I believe that “Foucault’s thought offers indispensable tools for [...] an exercise in the production of knowledge about animal subjects, knowledge that relies upon and in turn helps produce and refine technologies of power over those animals”.³ Foucault’s ideas provide an important way to recognise animal subjectivity and to raise awareness about the technologies of legitimisation and normativity of power imposed on them. It is from this perspective that I identify distinctive procedures in Marker, Forti and Jonas’ work with animals; that I analyse the logistic, technical and artistic means they employed to do so; and that I discuss the manners in which the artists adopted and questioned societal and cultural structures that allowed them to encounter and relate to animals. Art here is considered not simply as a means to tell or illustrate old and new stories, but also as a valid knowledge-production apparatus; a system of interrogating the manners in which stories have been and can be told; and a device with which to suggest other potentialities for those stories to activate the need for changes to the perceptions that shape norms and legitimise laws.

The result is a research that reveals fundamental traits of their artistic identity, inscribes their contributions within the basin of critical animal studies and contributes to the wider reflection on the potentialities of these artists’ animalist engagement in the time of “environmental trouble”, paraphrasing Donna J. Haraway. It also contributes to placing Foucault’s ideas in a more contemporary intellectual scenario that transcends his human-centric views, broadening them towards a wider consideration of the living beyond an anthropocentric worldview.

In their animal interactions and representations, I argue that Marker, Forti and Jonas use the camera in an original and meaningful manner (greater in Marker and Jonas, but also present in Forti); an object whose material agency, to quote Jane Bennett,⁴ they flexibly locate across cinema and photography, video and performance, dance and drawing. The camera itself is also an object that traverses the human, animal and machine spheres. I propose that these three artists conceive

³ Matthew Chrulew, *Foucault and Animals* (Matthew Chrulew and Dinesh Joseph Wadiwel, eds) (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2017), 222.

⁴ Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter, a Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), xiii.

of the camera as a partner in their undisciplined forays into the animal realm, and a partner in their response to the material and cultural framings of the animals they captured and twisted with their work. Considering how the three artists work with their image-capturing devices, I discuss how these cameras enable their bodies to see and hear beyond their bodily limitations, and also allow them to be heard and seen differently. I also discuss how the camera participates in a logic of shooting that is inherently entwined with the capture of life. In addition, I pay attention to how such a nonhuman element as a camera, alongside animals and even other external elements, shapes the perceptions of both makers and viewers. Following Haraway's cyborg figuration, which celebrates the permanent presence of the technological in the human,⁵ and Vinciane Despret's concept of "becoming-with", which offers "a new manner of becoming together, which provides new identities"⁶ and modes of existence in hybridity, I propose that Marker, Forti and Jonas manifest their hybridity particularly well when engaging with cameras and bodies.

This hybridity is aligned with their propensity to bypass the material classifications that distinguish one kind of artistic practice from another, as well as towards the perimeters that differentiate an exhibit from a spectator. Besides this undisciplined character of the three artists, what attracted me to them was their attraction to animals—their interest in making work with and about them, and their frequent visits to animal parks. I was also attracted by what I identified as an inclination towards another form of undiscipline: their disregard for ontological divides, namely those that distinguish an animal from a human, or the living from the non-living. I consider this inclination of upmost importance: its configurations, manifestations and effects are discussed throughout this dissertation.

Why the Zoo

It may seem like a contradiction that a thesis invested in understanding art's contribution to dismantling the physical and ideological systems of separation of humans and animals chooses such a conservative site of taxonomic reinforcement and exhibitionary violence as the zoo (or aquarium). Yet the zoo is a place that, like few others, can reveal the complex relationship western

⁵ Donna J. Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto", in *Manifestly Haraway* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2016).

⁶ Vinciane Despret, "The Body We Care For: Figures of Anthro-zoo-genesis", *Body & Society* Vol. 10 (2–3), (London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 2004): 122.

humanity has established with nature, wildlife and also with multiple expressions of racial difference. The zoo also participates in that combination of collecting, cataloguing, displaying and profiting which has shaped a crucial part of western culture and founded its core apparatuses of discourse, transmission and education around an exhibitionary logic.

Even (and in fact perhaps especially) today, zoological exhibitionary apparatuses continue to deliver countless spectacles of otherness, which ought to be theoretically revised so that actual changes can also be conceived.⁷ With Foucault, I aim to “pronounce a discourse that combines the fervour of knowledge, the determination to change the laws, and the longing for the garden of earthly delights”.⁸ This longing for a garden of earthly delights is both figurative and concrete, considering how my discourse is largely about artistic engagements with animals kept in zoological parks.

Often conceptualised, marketed and disguised as a haven, the zoo was, and continues to be, a space of animal confinement, repression, medicalization, production and reproduction (of bodies, inequalities and ideologies). Also a space of death, considering how many animals zoos mistreat and kill, dying of direct and indirect exposure.⁹ Zoos have justified their existence by emphasising their social, educational and scientific missions: by presenting themselves as spaces where families learn through enjoyment and scientists learn through preservation. As such, zoos have remained largely untouched by the attempts to revise the apparatuses and orders of modernity—as well as by its forms of spatialisation.¹⁰

⁷ Historically zoos have also celebrated and displayed the othering of “other” humans via ethnological expositions. Though rare, this tradition has continued to exist to the present day. In June 2005, for instance, the Bavarese Augsburg Zoo hosted an “African village” hosting African crafts and performances. On the topic, see Nina Glick Schiller, Dana Dea and Markus Höhne, “African Culture and the Zoo in the 21st Century: The “African Village” in the Augsburg Zoo and Its Wider Implications”, Report to the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, 4th July 2005. During the same summer, in August 2005, the London Zoo displayed an exhibit entitled “Human Zoo” featuring four volunteers wearing fig leaves and bathing suits for four days. Its aim was, according to the zoo’s spokeswoman Polly Wills, to allow audiences to see “people in a different environment, among other animals”, teaching them “that the human is just another primate”.

⁸ Michel Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge—The History of Sexuality Volume I* (1976) (London: Penguin Books, 1978), 7.

⁹ According to the BBC, European Association of Zoos and Aquaria’s “director Dr Lesley Dickie estimates that somewhere between 3,000 and 5,000 animals are “management-euthanised” in European zoos in any given year”, in Hannah Barnes, “How many healthy animals do zoos put down?” *BBC News* (27 February 2014). On the subject, see also Jessica Pierce and Marc Bekoff, “A Postzoo Future: Why Welfare Fails Animals in Zoos”, in *Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science* Vol. 21 (2018), 43-48.

¹⁰ On this subject, see Vincent Normand, “Apparatus and Form: The Split Identity of the Exhibition”, in *Theater, Garden, Bestiary A Materialist History of Exhibitions* (Vincent Normand and Tristan García, eds.) (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2019), 94-115.

Central to this thesis, then, is my belief that it is important to discuss and problematise this set of tensions between entertainment and exhibition, science and preservation and permanence and obsolescence. These three artists' unusual optics and languages propose new visions and viewpoints, and trigger affective and transformative drives towards it. With these intentions in mind, I looked at their work with a desire to understand what led them to the zoo in the first instance and in each repeated visit, how they responded to it and what the outcomes were of such interactions.

I investigate how Marker, Forti and Jonas address the zoo's system of utilitarian subjectification of animals, which Chrulew describes as "a form of productive and subjectifying ethopower that operates upon nonhuman animals as experiencing subjects and resisting agents in its task of nurturing their life, health and welfare".¹¹ I argue that despite their limits, the three artists' work introduces possible openings towards a compassionate awareness of the practices and environments created by the zoo. I also argue that their work addresses three distinct poetic manners in the recognition of the animals' subjectivity and individuality.

Moving from the space of the zoo to the bodies of those occupying it, I look at how exhibits and these three artistic visitors constituted one another. I embrace Foucault's proposal of the body as a stage whereby relationships of dominance and subjugation are performed, to discuss how these three artists made work that reveals how the zoo's exhibitionary apparatus contributes to the writing of a genealogy of power based on the legitimisation and naturalisation of speciesism. I therewith insert some works by Marker, Forti and Jonas in a zoopolitical ethical agenda which, while acknowledging that the human-animal relations that take place at the zoo are largely determined and controlled by human action, also recognises a nonhuman potential to subvert those exact systems of sovereign control humans operate in their relationship to zoo animals.

Zoos insist and persist. Their insistence is largely justified by an ancient history of human interest, desire and curiosity for wild animal life. They are also connected to a wider history of human economical interest in animals. Creatures economically appealing to humans don't tend to end

¹¹ Matthew Chrulew, "Animals as Biopolitical Subjects", in *Foucault and Animals* (Matthew Chrulew and Dinesh Joseph Wadiwel, eds.) (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2017), 235.

up well. Their coming into being signals a formula of inverse proportion between the diminishing of a direct encounter with animals and the rise in attempts to establish contact with them. On this topic, John Berger observes how “Public zoos came into existence at the beginning of the period which was to see the disappearance of animals from daily life”.¹² As Michael Lawrence and Karen Lury maintain, “the zoo allows for the active fantasy of impossible relationships and for the playing out of messy desires and hybrid identities”.¹³ Public zoos have been, from their inception up to and including modern times, a space of desire and projection, whose groundings the three artists explore and question.

These projective desires are as much individual as they are collective, for these fantasies have also been embedded in individual and collective expressions of power and wealth, their agendas of geopolitical, social and economical dominance shaping the configuration and rhetoric of the zoo. Environmentalist philosopher Keekok Lee notes how “Zoos started off as the private collections of kings and princes, aristocrats and the very rich”.¹⁴ Peter Sahlins’ studies this very history in his in-depth examination of the case-study of the “theatre-garden-state” of the Royal Ménagerie of Versailles (the predecessor of the Zoological Garden of the Jardin des Plantes in Paris), where “the king’s military and civil engineering of nature and his perfection of nature in the artifice and ornamentation of the gardens were both the material manifestation and symbolic legitimation of royal majesty and its absolute powers”.¹⁵ If the creation and distribution of zoos often attests to societal development, this improvement is often connected to wealth originating from imperialist and colonial explorations, from which many of the exhibits originate and which science legitimates. Historian Patricia Fara has discussed “how science and the British Empire grew rich and powerful together”.¹⁶ Her study of the British colonial regime exposes striking parallels with the symbiosis between imperialist regimes, the boost of naturalism during the 18th century and the public exhibition of wildlife. In a chicken and egg situation, modernity’s political culture of dominance and the structuring of the age of display and classification of nature supported one another in an exceptionally effective manner. Studying the Tokyo Imperial Zoo,

¹² Berger, “Why Look at Animals?”, 21.

¹³ Michael Lawrence and Karen Lury (eds.), “Introduction”, *The Zoo and Screen Media* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), xi.

¹⁴ Keekok Lee, *Zoos: A Philosophical Tour* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 89.

¹⁵ Peter Sahlins, *1668: the year of the animal in France* (New York: Zone Books, 2017), 23.

¹⁶ Patricia Fara, *Sex, Botany and Empire—The Story of Carl Linnaeus and Joseph Banks* (London: Icon Books, 2003), 157.

historian Ian Jared Miller observes how “mass culture and mass literacy helped to knit the zoo into the broader social fabric [...] Zoos developed out of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century traffic between European nations and their colonies to become something truly global”.¹⁷ As I will later discuss, in works such as the video haiku *Zoo Piece* (1990), Marker portrays the lurid conditions of zoo animals, which on the hand dismantles this narrative of scientific and hygienic efficiency associated to the zoo and on the other hand contributes to question if zoos are actually an improvement from the conditions of the “primitive” and “wild” environments from which the animals were removed.

As mentioned, the history of animal exploitation and abuse feeds into the history of human prejudice, oppression and exploitation of life: human, nonhuman, and natural wildlife resources, and has often offered an appropriate test site to experiment with the efficiency of capitalism, colonialism and necropolitics, whose outcomes have constituted cultural, social and historical narratives.¹⁸ The history of animal exploitation has been written alongside a larger history of western discrimination against human life considered “other”, life that lay outside the western, white patriarchal, normative canon—what Haraway defined as “the dominations of ‘race’, ‘gender’, ‘sexuality’, and ‘class’, and their geographies of power”.¹⁹

To a large extent the justification of violence and domination operated through the othering of animals has been a rehearsal and continues to legitimise and validate wider operations of othering of non-normative humankind. This has been highlighted by authors such as Peter Singer, whose early use of the neologism speciesism²⁰ and intersectional perspectives in analysing the correlations between the discrimination of “othered humans” and “othered species” was crucial for subsequent and necessary developments in related theoretical and literary discourses.²¹ Writing from the perspective of Black Animal Studies, Bénédicte Boisseron examines how “[t]he

¹⁷ Ian Jared Miller, *The Nature of the Beasts—Empire and Exhibition at the Tokyo Imperial Zoo* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2020), 7.

¹⁸ On the topic, see, for instance, Elizabeth DeLoughrey, Jill Didur and Anthony Carrigan (eds.), *Global Ecologies and the Environmental Humanities—Postcolonial Approaches* (New York and London: Routledge, 2016).

¹⁹ Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto”, 21.

²⁰ Speciesism was coined by animal rights advocate Richard D. Ryder in 1970, a neologism referring to the exclusion of animals from legal protections available to human being animals, a discrimination aligned with parallel forms of human discrimination such as ableism, racism and sexism.

²¹ Peter Singer, *Animal liberation: A New Ethics for our Treatment of Animals* (New York: New York Review, 1975).

black-animal subtext is deeply ingrained in the cultural genetics of the global north, an inherited condition informed by a shared history of slavery and colonization”.²² Investigating the problematic association of racialisation and speciecism, Boisseron considers that “contesting the divide with a racial paradigm indeed carries the potential effect of reinscribing a discriminative approach” against arbitrary ethnical divides. Yet, it also allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the common fabrication of the “other” as a Western fantasy, arguing that “there is no denying that there are important parallels to be drawn between the rationale behind opposing animal oppression and that behind condemning discrimination against minorities”.²³

In tandem with these considerations and approaches, Ecofeminist positions have been fundamental to strengthening such an intersectional approach to questioning complementary forms of oppression, calling for direct action to face the urgency of the environmental crisis while remaining lucid in relation to their own rhetoric and methodologies. Investigating the sort of animal welfare that can be fostered through visual studies, Kari Weil discusses the possibilities and limitations of the intersection of studies of visibility and visual representations that consider “marginalized and silenced” groups, namely those constituted by women and minorities. She observes how “Previously marginalized or silenced, these groups were no longer to be confined to the status of object but rather were to be subjects or authors of their own representations; their voices were speaking loudly and demanded to be heard”. However, in the same moment in which she identifies and articulates these claims, she queries whether “it is possible to render nonhuman animals visible without fixing their meanings”.²⁴

This particular line of enquiry is an important facet of this thesis’ investigation, as it challenges the ideals of even the most engaged systems of visual depiction of the marginalised, making it clear that any representation is, still, a projection and crystallisation—a topic that will be attentively debated in relation to Jonas’ work in the third chapter. Operating with a parallel agenda, and adopting an intersectional approach that concerns postcolonial and queer ecologies and their politics of representation, Paul B. Preciado acknowledges the importance of “the emergence of a new transfeminist and anti-colonial planetary movement that places at the centre

²² Bénédicte Boisseron, *Afro-dog: blackness and the animal question* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), ix.

²³ Boisseron, *Afro-dog* (2018), xii.

²⁴ Kari Weil, *Thinking Animals: Why Animal Studies Now?* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 25.

of the struggle the right of every (living) body to enjoy its living condition”.²⁵ This struggle for the entitlement to pleasure and wellbeing becomes, therefore, a goal that brings together humans and nonhumans under the same rights.

These rights comprise those of non-normative and vulnerable human bodies, whose movements and body parts have often been animalised. “To call someone an animal is to render them a being to whom one does not have responsibilities, a being that can be shamelessly objectified”, acknowledges artist and disability activist Sunaura Taylor, while also wondering whether “it is possible to reconcile my own identification with animals with the fact that animalization has contributed to unspeakable violence against humans?”²⁶ Through her engagement with disability studies, Chen reveals how often the comparison of humans with other animals is one of degradation. She notes that “vivid links, whether live or long-standing, continue to be drawn between immigrants, people of color, laborers and working-class subjects, colonial subjects, women, queer subjects, disabled people, and animals, meaning, not the class of creatures that includes humans but quite the converse, the class against which the (often rational) human with inviolate and full subjectivity is defined”.²⁷ It is not only the human-animal binary that matters here. When writing about predation as a gesture that shapes the Anthropocene, anthropologist Nayanika Mathur reflects on how “mutual predation is not, however, restricted to animals and humans in this epoch. Rivers, mountains, soil and even the gods are furious at humans for their wanton destruction”.²⁸ Anthropologists Mario Blaser and Marisol de la Cadena corroborate this view when problematising the human monopoly of personhood: “Environmentalists claim that accelerated extraction destroys nature; investors claim that it develops backward regions. We hold that what is currently being destroyed is also other-than-human persons because what extractivist and environmentalist practices enact as nature may be, also, other than such”.²⁹

²⁵ “L’émergence d’un nouveau mouvement transféministe et anticolonialismes planétaire qui place au centre de la lutte le droit de tout corps (vivant) à jouir de sa condition de vivant” (my translation) Paul B. Preciado, “Sauvons le clitoris planétaire” [Let’s save the planetary clitoris], text read during the radio emission of France Inter, 18 March 2019.

²⁶ Both quotes from Sunaura Taylor, *Beasts of Burden: Animal and Disability Liberation* (New York: The New Press, 2017), 201.

²⁷ Chen, *Animacies*, 95.

²⁸ Nayanika Mathur, “Predation”, Cymene Howe & Anand Pandiran (eds.) *Anthropocene Unseen: A Lexicon* (Punctum Books, 2020), 344.

²⁹ Mario Blaser and Marisol de la Cadena, *A World of Many Worlds* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2018), 2.

This thesis participates in addressing these concerns by highlighting how certain apparatuses have helped to consolidate and reinforce these views, and by proposing different perspectives that offer peculiar viewpoints to these matters.

Noli me tangere

I consider it important to question the logic of the zoological garden as a particular site from the point of view of contemporary art and artists' time-based media, because the zoo relies on exhibitionary traditions that are historically, materially and ideologically aligned with forms of public exhibition and entertainment such as the theatre, the museum and the cinema—sites where the artistic is performed, exhibited and experimented. Zoos edit, frame and select the materials they present, constituting a world of their own, just like with an exhibition or a film; they are spaces of desire but also of knowledge-production, and of projection and identification associated with the observation of performing, moving bodies. They also share parallel traditions of making public displays of rare, curious and valuable items.

Public zoos, as they are known today, emerged at the end of the 18th century. The Ménagerie du Jardin des Plantes, as previously mentioned, which was the first public zoological garden of Paris, was visited extensively by Marker, whose film *La Jetée* included a snippet shot of the nearby Galerie de Paléontologie et d'Anatomie comparée [Paleontology and Comparative Anatomy Gallery] of the Natural History Museum of Paris (founded 1794). The zoo was created to host the animals of the Royal Ménagerie of Versailles, initiated by Louis XIV and conceived by architect Louis Le Vau in 1663. Its star-shape configuration allowed the various animal environments to gravitate around a central tower which provided an elevated and panoptical view of the garden. A cosmic glimpse of the garden of Eden for the privileged few. During the Revolutionary period, when many of the royal animals were killed by an enraged mob, symbols of aristocratic power as they were, the surviving specimens were rescued and taken to the Jardin des Plantes in Paris.³⁰ The Paris menagerie's planning allowed for the circulation of visitors within the park, with individual animals located in separated and individual cages and pens that could be accessed and observed from various points of view. Such transformation signalled, according to Sabine Nessel,

³⁰ France's main botanical garden, it was first called Jardin royal des plantes médicinales and commonly known in the 17th century, when it was originally founded, as the Jardin du Roy.

a “transition from the menagerie to the modern zoo, as well as from the aristocratic cosmos to that of the middle class”,³¹ as it marked the change in the constituency of visitors, shifting from the aristocratic elite to the bourgeoisie, who were now able to access previously denied visions.

Vienna’s Tiergarten Schönbrunn, the world’s oldest public zoo, had opened its doors a few decades earlier, in 1752, conceived by emperor Franz I for the Habsburg-Lorraine’s new summer residence in Schönbrunn. Initially only the imperial family was allowed to visit the zoo, a privilege that in the 1770s, following Franz I’s death in 1765, was extended to school children, diplomats and special guests. In 1778, the menagerie, palace and park were open on Sundays to “decently dressed persons”, revealing a prevailing association to privilege, and it then gradually opened up to the public to visit.³²

The Madrid Zoo opened in 1774, when king Charles III ordered the construction of a *Casa de Fieras* [Dangerous Animal House], which also held fights between lions, tigers and bulls, in the Buen Retiro Palace Gardens. The zoo’s specimens came mainly from the Spanish colonies in Latin America and the Philippines. The London Zoo, first called a menagerie, then a “Zoological Forest” and established as the world’s first scientific zoological garden, opened in 1828. In the beginning, it could only be visited by the fellows of the Zoological Society of London, founded two years earlier by British colonial statesman Stamford Raffles. In 1847, it opened to the general public to help with management costs. It was followed in England by the Bristol Zoo, founded in 1835 by a local physician to stimulate “the observation of habits, form and structure of the animal kingdom, as well as affording rational amusement and recreation to the visitors of the neighbourhood”, a mission that expressed the combination of educational, scientific and leisure purposes that has shaped the zoological garden ever since.³³

The second half of the 19th century saw the emergence of zoos beyond Europe, with the Port Elizabeth Museum in South Africa opening in 1856, Kerala’s Thiruvananthapuram Zoo in 1857 and

³¹ Sabine Nessel, “The Media Animal: On the Mise-en-scène of Animals in the Zoo and Cinema”, in *Animals and the Cinema: Classifications, Cinephiliias, Philosophies* (Sabine Nessel et al) (Berlin: Bertz and Fisher), 36.

³² On the history of Vienna’s Tiergarten Schönbrunn, see Mitchell G. Ash and Lothar Dittrich, *Menagerie des Kaisers, Zoo der Wiener* (Vienna: Pichler Verlag, 2002).

³³ From <https://bristolzoo.org.uk/zoo-information/history> (accessed 01.08.2021).

the Royal Melbourne Zoological Gardens in 1862. In the United States, the Central Park Zoo in New York opened in 1861 and the New York Zoological Park (the Bronx Zoo, now the Wildlife Conservation Park), which Forti frequently visited, in 1899, and later still was the opening of the Zoo of Rome, within which Forti worked extensively at the end of the 1960s, which only opened in 1911.³⁴

Across times and spaces, zoos strongly relied on rendering beings as specimens, engaged in what we could call an operation of “detheatralisation” of nature.³⁵ This should not be read as a removal of the *mise-en-scène* of the museum (considering, for example, the representational efforts of the diorama and its relation to the constitution of various narratives within what Vincent Normand defines as the Natural History Museum’s “particular configuration of enclosure maintained by a specific form of visual technology”³⁶). What I mean is that in the effort to standardise and select “normal” individuals that lacked any remarkable features, the museum was removing the sensational quality of the typical “freak show” and/or circus from the display of nature, just as it was simultaneously beginning the process of distancing itself from the Wunderkammer. Thus, the spectacular, live event gave way to the quantitative accumulation of a variety of specimens (for instance, the Natural History Museum of London has eight million butterflies). This gesture was, of course, also accompanied by the de-animation of beings—museums surely liked their animals dead, even if they shouldn’t look dead but instead arrested of life, in order to constitute, as described in Chris Marker’s film *La Jetée* (1962) “a museum filled with ageless animals”.

The gradual evolution of the zoo was also signalled by architectonic and infrastructural improvements of the animal enclosures that accompanied this gradual separation of the site for performance and the site for exhibition. The circus-like logic of the menagerie started giving way

³⁴ For a thorough historical overview of the worldwide establishment of wild animal collections, see Eric Baratay and Elisabeth Hardouin-Fugier, *Zoo: A History of Zoological Gardens in the West* (London: Reaktion Books, 2004); Nigel Rothfels, *Savages and Beasts—The Birth of the Modern Zoo* (Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 2002); *Zoo and Aquarium History Ancient Animal Collections To Zoological Gardens* (Vernon N. Kisling, ed.) (Boca Raton, Florida: CRC Press, 2000); and *New Worlds, New Animals: From Menagerie to Zoological Park in the Nineteenth Century* (Robert J. Hoage and William A. Deiss, eds.) (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

³⁵ On the topic, see Matthew Chrulew, “From Zoo to Zoöpolis: Effectively Enacting Eden”, in *Metamorphoses of the Zoo: Animal Encounter after Noah* (Ralph R. Acampora, ed.) (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010), 193-219.

³⁶ Vincent Normand, “Chessboards and Brambles”, in *Pierre Huyghe* (Paris, Cologne, Los Angeles: Centre Georges Pompidou, Ludwig Museum, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2013), 219.

to the display and circulatory frame of the exhibition site. The zoo gradually became the place where visitors would go to see animals as performers of themselves—as monuments of their own disappearance in the wild and, as Berger argues, as monuments to the disappearance of humankind’s spontaneous encounter with wildness and danger. Standing for zoological classification and order as the German animal merchant and zoo manager Carl Hagenbeck (1844-1913) stood for zoological illusion and wonder, the Swiss biologist and zoo manager Heini Hediger (1908-1992), introduced important “biopolitical reforms at the basis of modern methods of welfare-centered zookeeping”.³⁷ In his 1942 book *Wild Animals in Captivity*, Hediger proposed that zoos should follow the tasks of “Recreation Education Research Conservation” (in this order), a logic that he would further elaborate in his later book *Man and Animal in the Zoo* (1965), in which he argued that zoological gardens should prioritise a hierarchy from top to bottom of people, money, space, methods, administration, animals and research.³⁸ Hediger’s criteria asserted zoos’ priority towards audiences and recreation. Indeed, it is not only the sharing of parallel traditions of making public displays of precious items that zoos share with other museums and theatres. Audience behaviours are also aligned.

Between the end of the 19th and the first decades of the 20th century, zoos assumed a relatively standardised display system and configuration that was widespread across the global centres of urban societies. Their variations of display concerned scale (numbers of specimens exhibited, size of their confinement areas, circulation possibilities for visitors), infrastructure (affecting the living, dwelling and working experiences of specimens, carers and visitors) and narratives (balancing the distinct but interrelated agendas of spectacle, education, preservation and scientific research). Investigating the experiences generated by time-based art, Peter Osborne revisits Walter Benjamin’s examination of the tension between distraction (*Zerstreuung*) and attention (*Aufmerksamkeit*) in the context of cultural reception, in which he identifies distraction as modernity’s perceptual mode. Osborne departs from Benjamin’s analysis that “The sort of distraction provided by art represents a covert measure of the extent to which it has become possible to perform new tasks of apperception [...] Reception in distraction—the sort of reception which is increasingly noticeable in all areas of art and is a symptom of profound changes in

³⁷ Chrulew, “From Zoo to Zoöpolis”, 193.

³⁸ Heini Hediger, *Man and Animal in the Zoo* (1965) (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969).

apperception”.³⁹ Commenting on Benjamin’s understanding of how “Art distracts and is received in distraction”, Osborne observes that “We go to the gallery, in part, to be distracted from the cares and worries of the world. To be so distracted we must attend to the artworks on display”.⁴⁰ A parallel predisposition is activated during a visit to the zoo, which, like the museum, theatre or movie theatre, is a public space that monetises the entertainment, attention and wonder of audiences, and whose publicly accessible worldwide distribution precedes of a century Benjamin’s theories on western modernity’s processes of apperception through attention and distraction.

Marker, Forti and Jonas are considered for their involvement with the displays, aesthetics and politics of incarcerated and domesticated animals. But, as mentioned, the three artists express an interest in animal life that goes beyond the context of the zoo. This interest is also central to this investigation, and its consideration of artistic practices that look at animals and the ways in which animals are looked at from the points of view of art.

Topoi

The artistic perspectives analysed through this thesis offer important portraits, revisions and critiques of such relatively stable history, function and institution of the zoo. When in 1990 Marker included footage of a cage crammed with distressed domestic cats in his short video *Zoo Piece*, he shattered expectations and conventions. The images of those domestic animals behind bars in a zoo enhanced the perception, through an empathetic process, of the distress and anxiety of other zoo animals. By drawing viewers into contact with closely familiar animals—familiar in the sense of common, but also of pertaining to the sphere of the family, the so-called pet—the distressed cats disrupt the narrative, so often promoted by zoos, that animals are given an easier and better life within their walls. Marker dismantles the illusion of the paradisiac garden, where privileged animals live free from the dangers of wild, infested, war-torn, impoverished and threatened zones, to show the zoo as a site of detention, control and torture. If the zoo is presented as a carcerary device for animals who deserve no punishment, Marker also evidences how the system of the prison and its supposed application of the modern myths of hygiene and

³⁹ Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility” (Third Version, 1939), 268-69.

⁴⁰ Peter Osborne, “Distracted reception: time, art and technology”, in *Time Zones Recent Film and Video*, Jessica Morgan and Gregor Muir, eds.) (London: Tate Publishing, 2004), 68-9.

medical control of the body for the benefit of the detainees, is due to fail.

A few decades earlier, in 1974, Forti made a video that reveals, in a previously unseen manner, her consciousness of the state of confinement experienced by the animals she frequently visited in zoological gardens. In this black-and-white, untitled and roughly edited video, the artist combined footage of lions and bears in a zoo with documentation of a performance in which naked, she crawls on a dirty, derelict room and sings a song about loss and grief. As I will argue, the performance appears as Forti's deliberate attempt to recreate the living conditions of the animals she was in contact with. Naked, she is vulnerable, shameless, asexualised, less woman and more animal. She incorporated the animals' rhythms and gaits not as a process of mimesis but part of assuming a secondary, deprioritised position in which she learns from animals. It is also a way of dealing with trauma and grief. She is not using humour, as she often does. Instead, she is grave, violent, almost maniacal, embodying and transmitting the living experience of zoo animals.

Jonas' recent performance *Moving Off the Land II* (2019) features a moment with images of a beluga whale interacting with a child in an aquarium in North America. The projected body of the whale is almost exactly to scale, a spectral transposition of this animal, already separated from her original environment and turned into an exhibit, to yet another anthropogenic setting that fails to recognise her agency, this time a performance space in a museum. The footage of the whale is both amusing and disturbing, seductive and horrifying, familiar and uncanny. It attests that to be an animal in a zoo (and aquarium) is to be a private-public body deprived of basic rights, such as those of establishing interactions with other animals, exploring territories, deciding upon feeding, sleeping and socialising patterns, including reproduction and offspring bearing. It reveals how the body of a confined animal is a body subjected to being permanently captured, used, exposed, scrutinised and objectified. At the same time, with its incorporation of the reflexes in the aquaria's glass, this scene reveals how viewers will never be fully capable of seeing an exhibit, as there is a blind spot, a reflexive interference that supports the phenomenal resistance of who is being seen.

Cases of artistic renderings of zoo animals such as these are extensively analysed in each chapter. They testify to how the artists discussed in the thesis engage with the logic and conditions of the

zoo and the poetic, artistic, oblique but also poignant manners in which they convey its reality and profoundly ambiguous nature. This ambiguity—considered as the co-presence of competing but opposing affects and states of being—is inherent to the zoo and also to the relationships established in processes of animal rearing and domestication. Indeed, Marker, Forti and Jonas' works often explore the emotional and perceptive conditions of ambivalence that characterise the zoo in its physicality, temporality and affective charge.

In these investigations, their approaches resonate with Foucault's concept of heterotopia.⁴¹ First mentioned by the philosopher in relation to language to describe a lack of words, a sort of aphasia, the notion of heterotopia will later play an important role in the analysis of what he considered his present-day's anxious relationship to time. Foucault argued that "the anxiety of our era has to do fundamentally with space",⁴² a space that is "fantasmatic"⁴³ and is both internal and external to humankind. He identified two spatial concepts defined by the sets of relations they establish. The first are utopias, "sites with no real place [...] fundamentally unreal places".⁴⁴ The second are heterotopias, "which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted".⁴⁵ Foucault's heterotopias are places of layered signification and are devoted to the perpetual accumulation of time: environments that juxtapose fragments of different contexts and whose vocation is to induce illusion through the

⁴¹ Foucault's first mentioned the concept of heterotopia in his preface to *The Order of Things—An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (1966). He describes heterotopias in relation to the loss of language, a sort of phenomena of aphasia. Heterotopias are, he argues, "disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this and that, because they shatter or tangle common names, because they destroy 'syntax' [...] desiccate speech, stop words in their tracks, contest the very possibility of grammar at its source; they dissolve our myths and sterilize the lyricism of our sentences". (Michel Foucault, "Preface", *The Order of Things* (1966) (London: Routledge, 2005), xix).

In the same year, Foucault presented "Les heterotopies" [The Heterotopies] and "L'utopie du corps" [The Utopia of the Body], two radio conferences broadcasted by France Culture radio on respectively, the 7th and 11th December, 1966, as part of the radio programme *Culture française*, produced by Robert Valette. The following year, on the 14th of March 1967, Foucault gave a conference at the Cercle d'études architecturales de Paris entitled "Des espaces autres" [Of Other Spaces]. The conference's text was first published in the French architecture Journal *Architecture/Mouvement/Continuité* in October 1984 (pp. 46-49). Also in 1984, a few months before his death, Foucault revised this text for a conference held on the occasion of the architecture exhibition "Idea, Process, Results" at the Martin-Gropius Bau in Berlin (15 September – 16 December 1984). Although not reviewed for publication by the author and thus not part of the official corpus of Foucault's work, the manuscript was translated from the French as "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias" by Jay Miskowiec.

⁴² This and other quotes refer to the English version of Michel Foucault's "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias" (Jay Miskowiec, trans.) (1984), 2.

⁴³ Foucault, "Of Other Spaces", 2.

⁴⁴ Foucault, "Of Other Spaces", 3.

⁴⁵ Foucault, "Of Other Spaces", 3.

recreation of habitats and situations that are folded into one another, reaching beyond their physical and temporal now:

The heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible [...] thus it is that the cinema is a very odd rectangular room at the end of which, on a two-dimensional screen, one sees the projection of a three-dimensional space, but perhaps the oldest example of these heterotopias that take the form of a contradictory site is the garden [...] a sacred space that brought together [...] the four parts of the world, with the navel of the world at its centre.⁴⁶

These spaces of otherness disturb, shatter, transform. They offer something outside reality. They are worlds within worlds, mirroring and then distorting. Heterotopias, Foucault argues, “take quite varied forms, and perhaps no one absolutely universal form of heterotopia would be found”.⁴⁷ Foucault’s examples range from institutions (boarding schools), civic engagements (military service, honeymoon trips), institutions of care and confinement (rest homes, psychiatric hospitals, prisons) and urban infrastructures (cemeteries, museums, libraries, theatres, cinemas and gardens—“the smallest parcel of the world and then it is the totality of the world”⁴⁸—from where he considers the modern zoological gardens to spring).

Heterotopias mirror the development of the encyclopaedic culture of accumulation and organisation, also visible in the zoo, where rarity and quantity, norm and exception, are balanced. Considered from the point of view of Foucault’s ideas, the operative logics of zoological parks become particularly noticeable. Zoos juxtapose incompatible sites, presenting a sampled, condensed fauna: Asian Elephants and Eurasian owls a few meters apart, as documented by Chris Marker’s *Zoo Piece*; brown bears and Savannah giraffes together, as attested by Simone Forti’s zoo drawings from the late 1960s; beluga whales and Mediterranean octopuses kept meters apart, as they are also brought together in Joan Jonas’ *Moving Off the Land II*. Providing an experience of compressed, but also hallucinatory observation, zoos perpetuate the positivist

⁴⁶ Foucault, “Of Other Spaces”, 6.

⁴⁷ Foucault, “Of Other Spaces”, 4.

⁴⁸ Foucault, “Of Other Spaces”, 6.

tradition that to see is to learn, but with an added twist—for how much can one learn when seeing an assemblage of simulacra?

As it will be observed throughout the three chapters, there are other spaces beyond the zoo, other circumstances beyond the zoological exhibitionary apparatus and even other life forms beyond animals that are featured in this research. The different relationships that Marker and Jonas established with various companion animals throughout their lives, which attest to their closeness and reciprocity or the garden diaries Forti kept while living in rural Vermont during the 1980s, in which she described her daily activities working and living in the countryside and kept track of her gardening efforts, are some of the situations that expand this research beyond the space and logics of the zoo. The artists' engagement with other public, theatrical, dimensions beyond the zoo, in which the logics of exhibition and performance are enacted, but also those of observation and surveillance, also play an important role in this research. The different chapters will also visit bullfight rings and hunting fields (in Marker's case), crossing desert beaches and forests (Fort, Jonas) and accessing virtual digital environments (Marker's edification of a *Second Life* environment) in which their engagement with the nonhuman will be further discussed. The discussion on how anthropogenic oceans, kelp, branches, trees, onions, cats, and dogs⁴⁹ figure in Marker, Forti and Jonas' work will complement the analysis of their relationship to the zoological apparatus and the detained animals that are featured in the three artists' works.

Structure

The structure of this thesis is divided in three chapters, each focusing on one artist. The chapters are arranged chronologically, following Marker, Forti and Jonas' birthdate and the moment in which they started making art. The thesis concludes with the discussion of a recent project by Jonas, which occupies a substantial part of the second half of the third chapter. The chapters dedicated to Forti and Jonas are complemented with an interview made with each artist for the purpose of this thesis, fragments of which are also part of the discussions of their work.

Chris Marker passed away the year before I enrolled in the PhD programme. I had important discussions for the thesis with former Musée National d'Art Moderne Centre Georges Pompidou new media curator Christine Van Assche and Musée National d'Art Moderne Centre Georges

⁴⁹ I thank Eben Kirksey for this phrasing of the figures that populate this thesis.

Pompidou media curator Etienne Sandrin, who were close to him personally and professionally, and who shared with me their knowledge and access to Marker's archive. Given Marker's privacy and resistance to speak about himself and his work, I have opted not to include any third-person accounts which might have stood for an impossible interview.

Each of the three chapters opens with a portrait of the respective artist in the company of an animal, an image chosen to introduce key aspects of their work that are subsequently discussed. I take into account the different typologies of work each artist made, observing how their practices were more or less permeable to their respective biographies in manners acknowledged and also ignored by the artists. This made me devise a different methodology for each chapter, which justifies the variations in tone, approach and the kind of biographical elements and contextual references provided for each artist.

Chapter One discusses Chris Marker's depiction of animals in the context of zoological parks and domestication. As Marker searched for spontaneous encounters with individuals and situations that would allow him to have a peculiar sense of the places he visited, I also search for details and punctual appearances in Marker's work as a mode of structuring my research in relation to his work, staying close to it. I contextualise the emergence of his practice and his cross-disciplinary approach, identifying a parallel predisposition to depict the entanglement of human and animal lives. The research then focuses largely between the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s. Elaborating on Marker's relationship to animals and animal-images, I provide a detailed discussion of how the expansion of his moving-image-based work from the cinema to other systems of circulation and reception (such as the television and the museum) coincides with an increase of animal presences in his work. I argue that these presences traverse Marker's entire body of work and become particularly visible (because more concentrated and systematic) when he starts imagining other spaces, for another form of cinema. I argue that these other, different spaces allowed for the emergence of his interests in more incisive manners, in which simultaneity, non-linear sequences, shorter lengths and a different mode of audience apperception allowed for their manifestation. I also identify a series of key works—namely the series of video haikus from the early 1990s, some of which initially featured in the multimedia artwork *Zapping Zone* (1990), and the television series *The Owl's Legacy* (also from 1990)—which I discuss in depth, commenting on the role played by zoological gardens and domestication in allowing Marker to film certain animals

while conditioning the kind of observations produced.

Chapter Two considers Simone Forti's interest in nature and her engagement with animals. My aim is to contribute to the recognition of the outstanding legacy of her work in the context of contemporary art and to assert its importance for cultural and critical animal studies. I attend to Forti's biographical elements, discussing how she incorporates family histories, personal recollections and affects in her practice and analysing how, as an artist radically open to change and improvisation, her life events often shaped the courses and directions her work followed. I propose that in Forti's work the incorporation of animal and natural movement studies was not limited to the period between the late 1960s and 1970s, as is often theorised. Instead, I argue that animal and wider natural interests manifest themselves throughout her entire career. To demonstrate this, I discuss artworks of different kinds (poems, drawings, choreographic pieces, performances and video pieces) made at different moments, paying particular attention to a series of lens-based works shot in urban animal sites (the zoo and stray colonies), reflecting on how they epitomise Forti's unique way of embodying the transmission of her observations of animal behaviour, their modes of expression and locomotion. When writing about Forti, author Pamela Sommers argues that "performance is a path toward knowledge and knowledge is shared with an audience".⁵⁰ This is a fitting description of how I argue that Forti's embodied nonhuman knowledge and affects are transmitted to the audiences of her work. Through them, I maintain, may arise a consciousness of what it means both to exist, move and communicate through another body, a body that, in its difference, also experiences confinement and deprivation.

In Chapter Three, I contextualise Joan Jonas' work from an optics of critical animal studies, as in the other chapters, arguing that the institutional and curatorial growth of interest for her persona and practice coincide with its significant mobilisation towards environmental and ecological topics. I attend to the ways in which animals have participated in her work, particularly her companion dogs, and to how the artist engaged with the conditions in which these animals were accessed, made available and exhibited. Some of Jonas' recent works were made in the context of animal exhibition sites, zoos and aquaria. When discussing these works, I trace the evolution of the artist's engagement with animals throughout her career and her consideration for the site

⁵⁰ Pamela Sommers, "Simone Forti's "Jackdaw Songs"", in *The Drama Review*, Vol. 25, No. 2, Reinterpretation Issue (Summer, 1981): 124.

of the zoological park. I then focus on the description and discussion of the recent performance piece and resulting exhibition *Moving Off the Land II* (2019-20), which broadens the concerns of this thesis to address a contemporary artwork made with an overt environmental consciousness and concerns. This piece allows me to study a contemporary artistic approach to public zoological collections and the manners in which it may be influenced by a growing environmental and ethical sensibility towards animals. *Moving Off the Land II* also provides me with the means to assess the observational and relational modes these zoological exhibition spaces propitiate and induce and also to discuss their limits. The analysis of Jonas' work, therefore, contributes to this thesis' purpose of interrogating and verifying the importance of artistic expressions that engage with naturalised systems of human-made observation of nature.

Across the three chapters, I aim to demonstrate the importance of Marker, Forti and Jonas' work for a comprehensive, updated and inclusive debate of contemporary art's possibilities to present new visions to old zoos. Their works rely on unorthodox forms of research that consider subjective viewpoints and poetic renderings as important as any other system of objectivity. I maintain that this balance between poetry and objectivity is crucial to trigger different perspectives and a higher awareness towards the modes in which animals are instrumentalised and objectified in many contemporary sites of animal display, which persist due to how their apparatuses and the rituals they propitiate are firmly inscribed in society. With this thesis, I actively align myself with these characteristics that I identify in these three artists' works as a form of research methodology to further assert the need to think and rethink our human relationships with animals from various perspectives and in temporalities that consider their past and present and future outcomes.

Animots

I follow these lines of enquiry while discussing the practice of three artists who featured animals extensively in their work: Chris Marker (1921-2012), Simone Forti (b. 1935) and Joan Jonas (b.1936). Active between the last decades of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century, coming from distinct western cultural traditions and moved by different yet complementary interests, Marker, Forti and Jonas possess an *undisciplined* approach in what concerns fields and media. Undisciplined because their work freely traverses the expressive means of various disciplines, comprising those of cinema, performance, visual arts and dance, and invents their

own methodologies and languages. Borrowing Jonas' words, for these artists there seems to be no "major difference between a poem, a sculpture, a film, or a dance".⁵¹ Given this thesis' investment in thinking the present-future of zoological displays, I favoured recent artistic stances that occur between the last decades of the 20th and the present day. Marker was active from the 1950s until his death in the early 2000s; Forti's work with zoological matters started in the late 1960s and continues up to the present; and Jonas' practice, also traversed by animal presences, and manifested an increasing interest in sites of zoological display during the 2010s. Methodologically, I align the research with the individual practices of the three artists. Therefore, each chapter is structured according to those features that I considered essential constituents of the artists' identity, following the nature of their work: I accompany Marker's interest in investigating how memory is embedded in geopolitics through his attention to animals and technology; I remain close to Forti's quest for a New Dance through the rediscovery of the movements of a human-animal body; and I discuss Jonas' growing environmental awareness through the various animals she is close to. As a whole, I align myself with the transdisciplinarity of the three artists, seeing their work as the exploration of a biopolitics of the zoological apparatus across different contexts and media.

Before delving into the philosophical, ethical-political roots and ultimate ends of this research, I need to make a few clarifications in relation to terminology and language use, as they also reflect positions that concern the conceptual framing and ethical grounds upon which this thesis stands. I adopt the term "animal/animals" throughout this research. When possible, I write about animals in the plural as to sustain the diversity and heterogeneity of this ensemble of beings. Jacques Derrida proposed the neologism *Animots*, which I use to name this sub-section, as a term that results from the conjunction of "animal" and "mot" (word) and when spoken sounds like the French *Animaux*, in the plural, echoing animal diversity and richness.⁵² I therefore follow Derrida's celebration of the heterogeneous multiplicity of animal life. There are, then, various reasons for why I have chosen the term 'animals.' The first concerns its unmediated, direct character and affective potential. Gregory Bateson wrote that "the word cat has no fur and cannot scratch".⁵³ I

⁵¹ Joan Jonas, "Closing Statement", in *Joan Jonas Scripts and Descriptions 1968-1982* (Douglas Crimp, ed.) (Berkeley, CA: The University Art Museum, University of California Berkeley, 1983), 137.

⁵² Jacques Derrida, *The Animal that Therefore I Am* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008).

⁵³ Gregory Bateson, "A Theory of Play and Fantasy", in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 177.

disagree. The word cat, as the words “ant”, “snake” or “fish”, triggers vivid recollections, strong affects, feelings of joy, fear and excitement that scratch, bite, hiss and caress. Likewise, the word animal has fur and will scratch. It also has hairless skin like a snake, cloven hooves like a sheep and feathered wings like a bird.

The term also echoes John Berger’s germinal essay “Why Look at Animals?” (1977). I follow Berger’s writing about animals as animals, and do not use more contemporary jargons such as more-than-human, non-human or other-than-human. There are a few instances, however, in which I need to adopt specific classifications and distinctions, for those that comprise the human in contrast with different manifestations of the living (not only animals). In these cases, I have opted for the term “nonhuman”.⁵⁴ In the same way I call an animal an animal, I also describe Marker, Forti and Jonas as “artists”, a more generic term than the terms “filmmaker”, “choreographer”, “dancer”, or “performer”, often applied to define the artistic identity of the various artists I refer to. The definition of artist stands for a predisposition towards creativity and the making of artworks, regardless of the shape they assume. At the same time, the artistic backgrounds that Marker, Forti and Jonas’ work dialogues with and participates in require the adoption of specific terminologies which, despite sharing concepts with my own background in contemporary art history, also have their own distinctive lineages. In light of the fact that I am largely analysing Marker’s non-cinema practice (installations for museums and galleries, video pieces, television series) and how Jonas mostly operates and performs in the institutional context of contemporary art, it was Forti’s work that required more dedicated attention to language, due to the ways it has been extensively presented and discussed in the field of dance and contact improvisation.⁵⁵ I adopted the terminology used in *Contact Quarterly*, contact improvisation’s major vehicle of communication, when writing about Forti’s work, alongside references provided by dance theorist Valerie Monthland Preston-Dunlop’s book *Dance Words* (1995).⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Despite acknowledging the historical and scientific relevance of this concept, crucial to basilar works such as Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* (1859), and recognising its more contemporary uses, as in Donna J. Haraway’s *The Companion Species Manifesto* (2003) and *When Species Meet* (2008), I also avoid using the term “species”.

⁵⁵ On the history of Contact Improvisation, see Lynne Anne Blom and L. Tarin Chaplin, *The Moment of Movement: Dance Improvisation* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1988); “Harvest: One History of Contact Improvisation, a talk given by Nancy Stark Smith at the 2005 Freiburg Contact Festival”, in *Contact Quarterly* Vol. 31, No. 2 (Summer/Fall 2006); and “Steve Paxton’s Talk at CI36, Contact Improvisation’s 36th Birthday Celebration in Huntingdon, PA, June 13, 2008”, in *Contact Quarterly*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (Winter/Spring 2009).

⁵⁶ Valerie Monthland Preston-Dunlop (ed.), *Dance Words* (London: Routledge, 1995).

Such research would not have been possible without the outstanding impulses and contributions of intersectional approaches that have radically transformed (by which I mean emancipated) the humanities, contributions that have made and continue to make different disciplines and areas of study more conscious of the bias, gaps and systems of discrimination and invisibility that were long legitimised by academia. The practice of thinking with and writing about animals pays tribute to and aligns itself with the modes in which the struggles against race, gender and disability discriminations have long since been fought, conceptualised, argued and narrated. These positions emerge from within and are reflected in the weight of Feminist, Ecofeminist, Queer and Black Feminist ecological authors whose voices are heard throughout the research; their names, terminologies and ideas infiltrating its body, footnotes and bibliographical references. Karen Barad's concept of entanglement, Jane Bennett's notion of material agency, Bénédicte Boisseron's thoughts on domestication and race, Mel Y. Chen's critique of animacies, Vinciane Despret's definition of becoming-with, Donna J. Haraway's invitation to stay with the trouble, Saidiya Hartman's method of speculative fabulation, Astrida Neimanis' embodied phenomenology and Christina Sharpe's revision of the western genealogy of knowledge are fundamental to this thesis. By taking them to the zoo with Marker, Forti and Jonas, I aim at further enmeshing areas that are complementary in myriad ways. I am, therefore, asserting the value of their work in the interdisciplinary field of critical animal studies, whose understanding of theory and academic research as activism and its engagement in fostering new ethics between humans and other animals is crucial for dealing with our present-future of environmental change.



1

Chris Marker's Bestiaire

[Humanity] no longer treats animals as animals, in the name of the duty of dialogue with them, but as human substitutes. The old maid and her parrot, the divorcee and her cat, Léautaud and his monkey, betray humanity and betray animality. [...] Between animal repression, animal sentimentality, the royal poodle, the clown monkey, the exhibition cat and the haughty indifference of the wild animal, an intercession should be made.

—Chris Marker¹

In a black-and-white, now well-known photograph, a man and a cat share the same fate: they are about to be engulfed by the rising water that fills the space in which they sit. Or so it seems, if those looking at the image are to believe the Titanic sign hanging in the background, which suggests the two individuals are on board the sinking ship. The man is middle-aged, bald, wears a shirt, a leather armband (maybe a watch?) and holds a film camera. His left eye is closed; the right looks through the camera, pointed towards viewers. He is either filming something outside the frame, filming those looking at him, or documenting the deluge. Perhaps all of these at once.

This is a wisely constructed *mise-en-abyme*: the camera and the surface of the printed photograph mirror one another in an interplay of reflections. The cat stands to the man's left ("cats are what is left of the left", Marker said in his 1977 film *A Grin without a Cat*). Only his muzzle is visible; the rest of the body is submerged. His eyes, wide-open, don't appear to notice the rising water: like the man, the cat's gaze is set outside the frame. Man, camera and cat face in the same direction, their attention and gazes synchronised.

Compared to the man, the cat is very large, too large even: his head is almost as big as the man's face. There's a clear disproportion between the two and this unbalance exposes the image's

¹¹ Chris Marker, "Le chat est aussi une personne", in *Esprit* 20/1 (January 1952).

artifice, revealing it is a collage: an assemblage of various photos composed, edited and constructed to create a story. The event of man and cat inside the sinking vessel, spending their last moments recording and observing either their own fate or the reactions of those looking at them, is a construction, a trick and a juxtaposition that brings together person, animal and machine to create a new situation. But, despite this apocalyptic pantomime, an element of veracity makes this image relevant: until recently, this was one of the very few existing portraits of Chris Marker.

Often choosing to represent himself through charades and wordplays, many of them involving animals, Christian Hippolyte François Georges Bouche-Villeneuve (29.07.1921 – 29.07.2012) was a major figure of 20th century film culture. He left behind an immense body of work, signed under different names and pseudonyms, the most famous of which is Chris Marker. His legacy is vast and varied, encompassing films, videos, photos, television programmes, texts, installations, Internet and digital experiments. These categories ramify into a myriad of sub-genres that reveal how Marker engaged with cinema (working with fiction, documentary, essay film, animation), photography (travel journalism, portrait, documentary), television (live broadcasts, educational series), text (short stories, poems, critical essays, journalistic accounts, film scripts) and art and digital experiments (multimedia installations, CD-ROM, an environment on Second Life), often engaging with memory and archive.

A polymath, Marker became professionally active at the end of the Second World War, when he was affiliated with a series of cultural and educational initiatives with a strong civic vocation, namely the French New Left literary magazine *Esprit*,² the publishing house Éditions du Seuil and two popular education associations, *Peuple et Culture* [People and Culture] and *Travail et Culture* [Work and Culture]. Marker remained politically active until the end of his life. In 2011, the year

² After the Second World War, *Esprit* was relaunched by French philosopher Emmanuel Mounier (1905-1950). Marker contributed to the magazine from 1946 to '55, mostly featuring actuality articles and literary and cinema critique. His first known text, dated 1 May 1946, and signed by Chris Mayor, was entitled *Les vivants et les morts* [The Living and the Dead] (768-785), <https://esprit.presse.fr/archive/review/article.php?code=23760&content=Chris+Marker>. (accessed 23.12.2018). The same issue also features an article by André Bazin, *LES ARTS. LE CINEMA: Crise du cinema français? Scarface et le film de gangster*. The last text, from March 1955, was entitled *On the Waterfront*: <https://esprit.presse.fr/article/chris-marker/on-the-waterfront-20107> (accessed 23.12.2018).

before he died, the 90-year-old artist uploaded the video *Stopover in Dubai* on Youtube.³ It consists of unedited CCTV footage of the Dubai State Security tracking a Mossad hit squad on its way to assassinate Hamas commander Mahmoud al-Mabhouh in his hotel room in January 2010.⁴ Preceding *Stopover in Dubai* were over 70 years of incessant curiosity, experimenting and making which left an outstanding legacy, whose relevance this thesis aims to consolidate. Acknowledging how Marker's work and language have been profoundly studied, my thesis will focus on a field less explored by Marker's scholarship: his attention towards animals and the contribution of his work to animal studies and zoo studies. I will identify and argue that his attention towards animals traverses the core areas that define his outstanding legacy, supporting his creation of the format of the audiovisual essay, inhabiting his engagement with pedagogy and education and supporting his passion for new media and technologies.⁵

I will do so by providing an initial general introduction to his work, in which I will highlight the importance animals bore throughout it. Often I will discuss animal visions and encounters that, while not happening literally at the zoo, reveal a regime of spectacle, detainment, violence and exposure to human action that are parallel to the more direct references to the exhibitionary display apparatus that will be the object of analysis in a later part of this chapter.

Indeed, I will subsequently detain myself in a specific temporal frame—between the end of the 1980s and the first half of the 1990s—arguing that this is a key moment for Marker's exploration and integration of animals in his work, a moment accompanied by a gradual expansion of the sites and typologies of presentation of his work from the cinema to the television and the gallery space. I will discuss and provide a new reading of a series of works he made during that period: the television series *The Owl's Legacy* (1989); the installation piece *Zapping Zone* (1989), and in particular "Zone Bestiaire" [Bestiary Zone], as one of its core elements; and a set of what he

³ On Marker's website Gorgomancy (<https://gorgomancy.net/>) and on his Youtube video channel Kosinki (<https://www.youtube.com/user/Kosinki>). Following Marker's death, the video was removed from the Internet by the French Institut National de l'Audiovisuel, which now detains its copyright, altering the spirit of freely distributing online content with which Marker uploaded materials such as this one.

⁴ The video is available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ijVK6-85RkU> (accessed 20.08.2021). Marker often used classical music in his work. In this case, the video is accompanied by Henryk Górecki's *III. Allegro, Sempre Ben Marcato* from the "String Quartet No. 3 ('...songs are sung')" (2005) by the Kronos Quartet.

⁵ On Marker's attention central places, see Nora M. Alter, *Chris Marker* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 15.

entitled “Video Haikus”—short video works made between 1990 and 1994, which were also included in various versions of *Zapping Zone*. In discussing these works, I will attend to the affects, ethics and positions Marker revealed towards the animals he engaged with, reflecting on the possibilities and limits of these works and his motivations and convictions. If this temporality grounds a substantial part of my research, it is also functioning as an anchor from which I will move backwards and forward—attuned to Marker’s nonlinear narratives and spatiotemporal shifts—to elucidate how Marker’s attention to and inclusion of animals traverses his overall practice.

A Clowder of Cats

In pursuit of the delicate and ephemeral richness of the world, Marker committed his life to weaving together encounters, thoughts and recollections, his own and others’, using an array of different media to do so. I argue that an attentive observation of his work should operate across disciplinary boundaries and make use of interconnected lines of analysis. Images, in Marker’s hands, become a mongrel, or better, a stray cat who decides to leave her clowder to explore the world. While being conventionally appraised for his work as a filmmaker, to grasp the full complexity of his oeuvre it is important to consider his vast range of interests, which he brings together through original associations which reveal his conceptual and formal strategies and resources.

These strategies include the creation of original relationships between still and moving images; the adoption of a personal logic and systems of “collage” (understood as processes of bringing together disparate references, elements and sources, under the same surface, space or temporality) to trigger unusual associations; the formulation of original concepts of time, space and memory; an interest in experimenting with formats and modes of visualisation; and a non-hierarchical, horizontal approach to filmmaking in which different lengths (feature, medium, short) and genres (documentary, essay film, fiction, animation, videoclip, advertisement, television broadcast, non-narrative pieces) are given parallel value.

Media theorist Nora M. Alter argues that “when Marker was establishing his career as a filmmaker, auteur theory was one of the dominant modes of understanding filmic production [it]

included not only the notion that each director had a recognizable style but also implied a sincere belief in film as an art form that was fundamentally related intellectually to the other arts”.⁶ Taking this formative influence into account, and considering how it is observable in his work, a cross-disciplinary analysis of Marker’s work stimulates the emergence of major artistic traits and intellectual concerns he defined and systematised from his early career onwards, which built up a consistent grammar of forms, matters and figures that reappear throughout his activity. Artistic research has been a fundamental terrain of operativity that is performed beyond strict disciplinary limits, with the artistic realm modulating a space where methodologies and methods, questions and interests, fields and vocabularies can be rethought, reinvented and reassembled.

Crossing these various traits and concerns, I am interested in paying attention to the different manners in which Marker related to animals, and their implications. Given his outstanding engagement with lens-based media (photography, film, video), I observe, through the discussion of some of his works, how the filmic apparatus is embedded in a logic of capture: how the verb “to shoot” has a dual nature of killing and filming, and what the implications of this duality are for a filmmaker as interested in the living as in the dead. I argue that animals are a constant presence in Marker’s work and life, that they manifest themselves across the various supports and contexts in which he operated and that they are also present in his private and domestic spheres, lying off-screen or hanging around in his studio and continuing to influence his practice, even while remaining off-lens. If Marker brought the animals to his work, the animals bring Marker to this thesis and justify his presence in it. In looking at how Marker looked at animals, I approach the peculiar, confused, contradictory even, but certainly intense and constant relationship he established with animals. I observe the extent and limits of his engagement with them; the distinctions he made between the animals he kept, the animals he observed during these journeys and the living, dead and symbolic animals he thought and dialogued with. [Fig. 1.2]

I also aim to discuss and analyse Marker’s animistic and anthropomorphic relationship to animals in order to contribute to widening discussions about what it means to think of animals as fellow persons, and the implications of such positions for the future of a world transformed by anthropogenic action. I am invested in proposing a location for his work within a wider discussion

⁶ Alter, *Chris Marker*, 4.

about how culture, particularly artists' time-based media looks, thinks and engages with animals, and how artists' cinema responds to the cultural framings that bring animals to a human sphere and presence through such exhibitionary apparatuses as the museum, the cinema and the zoological garden.

I argue that animals matter for the discussion of Marker's work because they reciprocate one another. If he offered new ways to conceive of the uniqueness and individuality of individuals, likewise animals provide an important perspective on his work: a red thread that traverses it over time, uniting moments, topics and narratives. Inversely, Marker also offers a newly relevant way of seeing and relating to them: the way in which he addresses and represents them is at once an exceptional case of a filmmaker with a particular sensibility, and a paradigmatic case-study of a cultural framework through which we can observe the extent to which a white European man of the mid-/late 20th century was capable of relating to animals. This interdependency creates the opportunity to investigate the sensibility towards animals in zoos and domestic environments in such context and moment. If Marker's work can tell us something about a given period and allow us to observe and trace what has changed since then, it can also offer clues about what can still change in terms of care, respect and recognition of the rights of animals, which is one of the ways the animals of the past may help those of the present and future.

Marker's political engagement with militant movements that shaped the Left throughout the 20th century has traversed his entire work—from earlier pieces such as the 1953 short film *Statues Also Die*, made in collaboration with Alain Resnais and Ghislain Cloquet, to the above-mentioned short video *Stopover in Dubai*, from 2011. I argue that his films, videos and installations are sites of contestation that pay attention to how power is built, negotiated and imposed. Forms of dominance and control are at the heart of his cinema, whose unique combination of images, voice, sound and music, creates meaningful messages charged with affective and political content. His films, photos, books and other works are charged with an affective and aesthetic surplus—often generated by the attention to children, nature and animals whose lives are at once entangled and outside the political. If this surplus distracts from the major topics explored in his work, it also grounds them in a representation of reality in which the banal is infused in a poetic that resists the world's major political events, and in which the apparently insignificant and banal

detains a compelling, if not transformative, affective charge.

The intersection of Marker's political engagement and his investigation of the operativity of power and governance with his systematic depiction of animals in anthropogenic contexts (domesticity and confinement), resonates with Michel Foucault's interests in the administration of life (his concerns for biopolitics as a system "to ensure, sustain, and multiply life, to put this life in order"⁷) and his writings on the correlation between power, order and normativity. Foucault's writings—in particular those concerning the porosity between the intimate, the domestic and the public, as well as his attention to systems of operativity and the spatial techniques of modern disciplinary societies (and his observations on how the panopticon was central to 1970s societies)—are crucial for my discussion on how Marker positioned himself as an artist whose work fostered collective political knowledge and discourse, whilst also engaging with the depiction and framing of nonhuman life, often revealing its entanglement with the human administration of biopower.

Topics, patterns and subjects emerge as the activity of making films is subsumed under the artist's broader experiments in ways of seeing, thinking and acting politically. There is here a need to observe the world not from a distanced, unified point of view but through a system in which details are zoomed, assembled, edited, brought forward. The methodological tools adopted traverse film and cinema studies, environmental and animal critical studies to provide an analysis of Marker's works as at once comprehensive and contextual, but also displaced and unstable. This analysis takes affects and emotions into consideration when approaching a topic that, like few others, creates direct associations between the man and the artist, the amateur and the expert, the curious observer and the professional image-maker. It links films, photographs, installations and other time-based media, and concerns itself with the ways in which these associations look at (and in looking often exchange looks with) animals, and the kind of political and ethical considerations emerging from them.

This quest for the animals in Marker's work engages with an attempt to find a less anthropocentric approach to responding to the materials encountered. I will attempt this by disturbing the

⁷ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume I: An Introduction* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 138.

classical order in which the senses and cultural frameworks operate. For instance, sounds, textures, rhythms, movements and the expressions of different bodies are considered as important to comprehending and experiencing a work as the visual and verbal components which generally dominate a system of “reading” a cultural object. This commitment does not prevent the thesis from attending to important features that characterise Marker’s artistic vocabulary, which are shaped by his own humanistic position, namely, as we will later observe, his interest in the gaze and the complex relationship that his work establishes between images and spoken words.

In parallel to discussing the modes in which animals encounter Marker and enter his work and imagination, I have assembled three bodies of work that allow me to focus on different ways of encountering and relating to animals and their different outcomes. These also shape this chapter’s structure.

In “A Cat Without a Grin” (an inversion of *A Grin Without a Cat*), I examine moments of Marker’s cinema to look for traces of an environmentalist consciousness in a moment of an incipient ecological awareness, and to observe the modes in which this preoccupation manifested itself in his films. I isolate and assemble fragments from some of his best-known films—*Sans Soleil* (1982), *Statues Also Die* (1953), *La Jetée* (1962), *Letter from Siberia* (1958) and *A Grin Without a Cat* (two versions, 1977 with 240 mins. and 1996 with 179 mins.)⁸—to discuss their significance and to comprehend the intentions, questions and assumptions behind the decisions to include these animal presences in films whose topics are not directly traversed by animal life.

“A School of Owls” is dedicated to the discussion of the television series *The Owl’s Legacy*, which I propose as an important manifesto of Marker’s animistic and symbolic relationship to animals. In it, I observe how the figure of the owl offers the guiding principles for the complex interweaving of thirteen thematic episodes conceived for large audiences.

In “Dancing Elephants”, I discuss Marker’s interest in spatialising his work in the context of contemporary art institutions and comment on the freedom this change of context gave him in placing his interest in animals at the forefront of his practice; I take a close look at the series of

⁸ In most cases, I have chosen to use the English title of films and other works with the exception of those occasions in which the French, original version is better known to an English readership, as in the case of *La Jetée* [The Jetty], which is seldom translated.

“video haikus”, arguing that these short animal videos consolidate his bestiary like no other work, bringing together an ensemble of animal presences which have copious but dispersed presence throughout his films, writings, drawings, collages and photos.

In this three-fold analysis of Marker’s work, I define two major apparatuses: the zoological display and the relationship with companion animals, considered as a system purposefully put in place to bring humans and animals closer. Taking into account their similarities (both transform and un-wild animals, framing them within a human setting and largely serving a human purpose and benefit) and differences (the former renders animals public, the latter private, the former offers episodic encounters, the latter assumes a relationship of continuation), I observe how they shape Marker’s imaginary, condition his relationship to animals and, by extension, how they shape his work.

A Cat Without a Grin

Marker’s interest in the face and the gaze—in the exchange that happens when the eyes of an individual (human and nonhuman) meet the eyes of another individual or machine— is a defining aspect of his practice, one that is central for the sorts of interactions and depictions he made of the individuals he encountered, including animals. Despite this interest, Marker was known for his aversion to being photographed: with very few exceptions, he consistently avoided the gaze of the camera. Until recent years, images of Marker were rare.⁹ Often, when asked for his portrait, he would send a photo or a drawing of his cat Guillaume-en-Egypte, represented as an orange, bipedal, speaking cartoon: a highly anthropomorphised animal. Marker reinforced his association with the image of the cat to such extents that he even replaced his photo ID cards with images of Guillaume. [Fig. 1.3] Similarly, he resisted interviews and in the few interviews he gave, he also made the cat to “speak” on his behalf. Guillaume remained a participant of Marker’s work, active even after his (and Marker’s) death, when he was turned into his alter-ego. An early example of this transposition of Marker’s voice to the cat appears in the compilation of web interviews “Mes neuf vies sont très remplies” [My nine lives are very full], answered from the perspective of the

⁹ More precisely these images remained rare until the exhibition “Chris Marker”, organised by the French cinématèque, Paris, curated by former Centre Georges Pompidou new media curator Christine Van Assche together with film scholar Raymond Bellour and writer Jean-Michel Frodon, held during Summer 2018 in Paris and Autumn 2018 at BOZAR in Brussels.

cat, by then no longer alive.¹⁰ Another example of how Marker made the cat replace and accompany him is to be found in the image that opens this chapter, which may be considered as a wider representation of Marker's practice and a testimony of the thick layering of materials that often characterised his language and method.

It's not only Marker's identity that was entangled and combined with that of Guillaume. Marker's work is marked by the creation of surprising and unusual associations achieved through "collages", or montages, that generated associative forms of meaning in which the different parts of which they are composed resonate with one another. The relationship between the process of collage and montage (or the perception of montage, as an original system of collage) was identified at an early stage of Marker's work by film critic André Bazin. In his analysis of the collaboration between Marker, Alain Resnais and Ghislain Cloquet in *Statues Also Die*, Bazin notes how Marker's montage reveals "not only a brilliant but also a subtly new way—poetic and intellectual at the same time, playing simultaneously on the shock of the images' beauty and the conflagration of their meaning, the text intervening all the while like the hand which strikes pieces of flint against each other".¹¹ Reflecting on the importance of Bazin's thoughts on Marker for the thinking of cinema, author Jennifer Stob argues that "Bazin developed some key rhetorical metaphors in an effort to capture the promise and the menace of Marker's innovative montage technique".¹²

Bazin would revisit the qualities of Marker's montage when reviewing two later films of his. He praised the "dialectic between word and image" when writing about *Sunday in Peking* (1956) and further revealed his admiration for Marker's innovative use of montage in *Letter from Siberia* (1957), arguing that "for Chris Marker, it is not the image that constitutes the raw material of the

¹⁰ "Mes neuf vies sont très remplies (interview de Guillaume-en-Égypte)" [My Nine Lives are Very Full, interview of Guillaume-en-Égypte], published in the web magazine *Poptronics* (31 October 2009) [special issue dedicated to Guillaume-en-Égypte in Brazil], https://www.poptronics.fr/IMG/pdf_Poplab_GEE-Brazil.pdf (accessed 14.10.2020).

¹¹ "tout à la fois poétique et intellectuelle, jouant simultanément du choc de la beauté des images, et de la conflagration de leur sens, cependant que le texte intervient comme la main qui entrechoque les silex". (My translation) André Bazin, "Les films meurent aussi: encore la censure", in *France Observateur* (17 January 1957): 19.

¹² Jennifer Stob, "Cut and spark: Chris Marker, André Bazin and the metaphors of horizontal montage", in *Studies in French Cinema* (12:1): 35.

film. This is not exactly the 'commentary' but the idea".¹³ Bazin further highlighted Marker's unique contribution to advancing the interplay between images and ideas in cinema, noting how he "brings to his films an absolutely new idea of montage, which I shall call 'horizontal' [...] Here, the image does not refer back to that which precedes it or to the one that follows, but laterally, to what is said about it. [...] Montage is made from the ear to the eye".¹⁴

Bazin's observations are crucial. Yet, there is more than a sensorial and perceptive quality to Marker's films. Sarah Cooper reflects on the importance of "the imaginative space" triggered by Marker's use of montage, which she argues "is not the literal onscreen visualization of a creative emotional geography [...] Rather, it emerges beyond the visual realm, indebted to the verbal, but reducible to neither, brought out image upon image in the light of the mind, poetically rather than mathematically or geometrically".¹⁵

Such an irreducible logic of montage and assemblage which defines his work also shapes the analytical framework through which each of his works will be discussed in this chapter. At the same time, this chapter's opening image is also a monument to the triangular relationship that Marker established with the camera and cat. In this image, as in other occasions in which Guillaume appears, the cat is at once a mask and a concrete animal, a unique entry point to Marker's private life and a gatekeeper who prevents further intrusion. Marker was conscious about the ways in which the cat stood on this threshold between privacy and publicness. In one of "Mes neuf vies sont très remplies" interviews, in response to the questions "Which of them is doing the lesson and pointing the way?" and "Who, you or him, is the most adventurous of the two?" Guillaume answers: "It's me, of course, but I do not say it too much. There are enough people who tell their lives on TV. Let's say that for a human, it is acceptable. We complete each other. I have ideas, him a little technique, we are like Socrates and Plato. Seek who is Socrates".¹⁶

Following Marker's death in 2012, his archive and estate were transferred to the custody of the French cinématèque. The exhibition "Chris Marker, les 7 vie d'un cinéaste", held during the

¹³ "Ceci d'abord: que chez Chris Marker, ce n'est pas l'image qui constitue la matière première du film. Ce n'est pas non plus exactement le "commentaire", mais l'idée". (My translation).

¹⁴ André Bazin, "Chris Marker: Lettre de Sibérie" [1958] in *Le Cinéma français de la Libération à la Nouvelle Vague (1945-1958)* (Paris: Cahiers du Cinéma, 1998), 259.

¹⁵ Sarah Cooper, "Missing Marker", in *The Cine-Files* 12 (Spring 2017): 3.

¹⁶ "In "Guillaume-en-Égypte au Brésil", *pop'lab*: 12.

Spring-Summer of 2018 and curated by Christine VanAssche, Raymond Bellour and Jean-Michel Frodon, made public an unprecedented amount of material (documents, images, objects) that gave a new insight to Marker's life and history. This event, and the accompanying catalogue, evidence how Marker's personal sphere was deeply inscribed by a profoundly animistic imaginary and was populated by nonhuman presences, from real animals to toys and sculptural representations: by many animals, both themselves and representations, alive and dead, close and distant. The exhibition revealed, for the first time, anecdotes about Marker's relationship to animals.

In the catalogue of the exhibition, Pompidou Centre New Media experts Judith Revault d'Allonnes and Étienne Sandrin's text "Nom d'un chat!" [Name of a Cat!] reveal how Marker's childhood cat, Riri, became the subject of his first cinematographic experience:¹⁷ "frame after frame, I began to draw a sequence of poses of my cat (who else?) by inserting some boxes of commentary. And all of a sudden, the cat was part of the same universe as the characters of Ben Hur or Napoleon. I was on the other side of the mirror [...] I was quite proud of the result, and by unrolling the adventures of the cat Riri I [...] announced 'my film'".¹⁸ D'Allonnes and Sandrin also highlight how another domestic cat triggered the inception of Marker's filmmaking activity. When dying, the cat Guillaume was literally rendered into a digital figure: "it was only the—true—death of the-cat, in the 1990s, that Guillaume-en-Egypte—a case of metempsychosis—moved from the private sphere to public life. He accompanies Marker's movement towards new technologies and the Internet—as the cat Riri had accompanied his initiation to the cinema".¹⁹ Animals were also present in Marker's early career, as in the 12-minute slapstick short animation *The Astronauts* [Les astronautes] (1959), a collaboration with Polish filmmaker Walerian Borowczyk (1923-2006).

¹⁷ Judith Revault d'Allonnes and Étienne Sandrin, "Nom d'un chat!", in *Chris Marker*, (Raymond Bellour, Jean-Michel Frodon and Christine Van Assche, eds.) (Paris: Cinématèque française, 2018), 376-81.

¹⁸ From the original: "cadre après cadre, je commençai à dessiner une suite de poses de mon chat (qui d'autre?) en insérant quelques cartons de commentaire. Et d'un seul coup, le chat se metta à appartenir au même univers que les personnages de Ben Hur ou de Napoléon. J'étais passé de l'autre côté du miroir [...] J'étais assez fier du résultat, et en lui déroulant les aventures du chat Riri je [...] annonçais 'mon film'" (my translation). D'Allonnes and Sandrin, "Nom d'un chat!", in *Chris Marker*, 377.

¹⁹ From the original: ce n'est que la mort—véritable—du chat, dans les années 1990, que Guillaume-en-Égypte—un cas de métempsychose—passe de la sphère privée à la vie publique. Il accompagne le mouvement de Marker vers les nouvelles technologies et l'Internet—comme le chat Riri avait accompagné son initiation au cinéma. (My translation). D'Allonnes and Sandrin, *Chris Marker*, 378. On the topic of Marker's partnership with the image and figure of Guillaume for his movement towards other technological means, see the conference "NEW MEDIA? CARTE BLANCHE TO FILIPA RAMOS", Centre Georges Pompidou, 15 May 2017: <https://www.centrepompidou.fr/cpv/resource/c5ppxoerKG86jM> (accessed 30.08.2021).

Using collage and manipulated photography, *The Astronauts* tells the story of an amateur astronaut who builds a rocket in company of an owl (Marker argued that his main contribution to the film was lending his owl Anabase, which can be seen in the film, framed in a Joseph Cornell-like box)²⁰ [Fig. 1.4] or a short sci-fi film *The Heat of a Thousand Suns* [La Brûlure de mille soleils] (1964), directed by French filmmaker Pierre Kast (1920-1984) for which Marker wrote the screenplay featuring an amateur poet who, traveling in time with a cat named Marcel and some robots, falls in love with an alien woman. *Long Live the Whale* (1972) is another short film about an animal. Co-directed with Italian filmmaker Mario Ruspoli (1925-1986), it uses footage from Ruspoli's previous *The Men of the Whale* [Les hommes de la baleine] (1956), which they combined with found footage of whale hunt. It was made to coincide with the 1986 moratorium on whaling, which was largely ignored by major whaling countries such as Japan and Russia.

From the mid-1980s onwards, animals, who had a permanent yet discrete appearance in Marker's cinema, became more visible, occupying the foreground of his work— particularly through a series of short videos that directly revealed Marker's animal poetics. Deprived of the commentaries and narrative inclusions that characterised many of his films, these short pieces (some lasting no longer than a minute), enable the careful observation of Marker's relationship to animals. They attest to the interplay between the conception of animals as abstract, projected upon and deeply anthropomorphic entities, and an attentive consideration of them as individual animals, with their own way of being in the world and an ungraspable strangeness and opacity. These animal-related works from the mid/late 1980s were incorporated in the multimedia installation *Zapping Zone* (1990). This decision may suggest that Marker found in these short, non-narrative experimental animal videos a way to migrate from his screen-based work towards a three-dimensional spatialisation, which he often utilised in art-related contexts (a topic I will develop later). During the same period, Marker was also working on the television series *The Owl's Legacy* [L'héritage de la chouette] (1989), which will be analysed in detail here. But to close this short account of the major animal features in Marker's work: in 2004 he made *The Case of the Grinning Cat* [Chats perchés] (2004), a film about the quest for the mysterious graffiti of yellow cats that appear throughout Paris. A few years later, in 2007, the short video *Leïla Attacks* offers

²⁰ *Les Astronautes* won the 1959 Research award of the Venice Film Festival, the International Press Federation Award at the Oberhausen Film Festival and the Golden Medal of the Festival of Bergamo.

a rare insight to Marker's domesticity through a mock action movie between the late Guillaume and Leila, a rat, set in his apartment. Marker called the rat Leila, the code name French journalist Florence Aubenas was given by her capturers in 2005, when she was held captive for five months in Iran.

Despite being generally considered less significant than other subjects in the literature and scholarship on Marker's work, Marker's love for animals did not go unnoticed. As author Monika Dac remarks, "When [animals] are not protagonists, they appear in almost all his films in one form or another, or are photographed and narrated in his books".²¹ Alter's book *Chris Marker* (2006) pays tribute to these frequent companions by dedicating each chapter's title to one of the key animal figures that populate Marker's artistic imaginary: "The Cat Who Walks by Himself", "The Elephant's Memory", "The Wolves" and "The Wise Owl". These are indeed some of the most prominent animals in Marker's imagery. Similarly, Dac notes how "among all the animals, three of them hold a special place. First of all, the cat, [...] then the owl, who "is beautiful, kind and deep" [...] Finally, the elephant".²²

The cat, the owl and the elephant are indeed recurrent presences in Marker's imaginary, imagery and operativity. Marker presented himself as a cat, surrounded himself by totemic owls and named his film production company after the Russian word for elephant, Slon. The cat is a domestic animal: frameable, containable yet always opaque. The owl stands at the brim where the human and the natural dissolve into one another: the wise owl of philosophy seen more by people in drawings than in real life. The elephant's captivity has informed so much of cinema's imaginary, from Edison Manufacturing Movie Company's 1903 film of Topsy's electrocution, to Walt Disney's *Dumbo* (1941), from contemporary art video installations, through Douglas Gordon's *Play Dead; Real Time* (2003), to Diana Thater's *A Runaway World* (2017).

The cat, the owl and the elephant will also be important figures and means for this chapter,

²¹ From the original: "Lorsqu'ils ne sont pas protagonistes, ils apparaissent dans presque tous ses films sous une forme ou une autre, ou sont photographiés et racontés dans ses livres", Monika Dac, "À l'affût d'une "clandestinité du bonheur": les animaux chez Chris Marker" [Looking for a "clandestinity of happiness": animals in Chris Marker], in *Chris Marker*, 111.

²² From the original: "Parmi l'ensemble des animaux, trois d'entre eux tiennent une place toute particulière. Tout d'abord, le chat. [...] ensuite, la chouette qui "est belle, aimable et profonde" [...] Enfin, l'éléphant". Dac, "À l'affût d'une "clandestinité du bonheur"", 112.

allowing me to observe how Marker engaged with these animals and to comment on the occasions he created to get close to them and make them participants of his work. These three figures help to reveal how Marker's cinema tends to a human- with-animal cinema. Marker often depicts individuals (himself and others) interacting with animals, as his human-with-animal cinema is one dominated by human presences and anthropogenic transformations. But these depictions trigger change. The process of capturing and rendering these animals pushes him physically beyond the borders of the movie theatre and conceptually beyond the language of cinema. The perception of these animals is also transformed in the process. They are at once individualised, extrapolated from the abstraction of being a mere cat in a house, an owl in an Ancient Greek coin, or another elephant in a zoo to become the cat Guillaume-en-Egypte; the little owl, snow owl or tawny owl whose gaze is an event of singular action; the elephant who dances on her own and regains her own body. Technological, material and spatial change accompany epistemological change. In the same manner as Marker traced and followed these animals in the world, I will follow and trace these animals in Marker's work, allowing them to manifest themselves concretely, politically and poetically and to reveal how they existed both as flesh-and-blood creatures, as well as what it meant for them to be transposed to animal-images in his works, and how this transformed or highlighted different perspectives on animal life.

Anthropogenic Times

Animals in Marker's cinema frequently appear in environments conditioned by human presence. More often than not, he doesn't offer visions of a wild, untouched world deprived of human traces. Regardless of the wider setting, Marker's landscapes and environments are almost always populated with people. Even scenes of remote locations incorporate human signs. A particularly well-known scene of *Description of a Struggle* [Description d'un combat] (1960)—a film that looks at the (then) recently-founded country of Israel, its dreams, hopes and realities—is defined as much by its sandy, arid landscape, punctuated by the passage of camels, as it is by the contrasting road signs (a bump alert and a McDonald's ad) which replicate the camel's humps, and add a note of humour that challenges the cliché of the desolate trope. [Fig. 1.5]

With his insistence on depicting a world in which the natural is traversed by traces of human presence, it is worth asking if Marker could have anticipated and initiated a cinematic reflection

on what later became defined as the Anthropocene.²³ There can be little doubt that Marker was operating in a different context and time from the current conceptualisation of the Anthropocene. The first steps towards political ecology in France were taken in the wake of May 1968, with their early relevance emerging during the 1974 presidential elections, when the agrarian engineer René Dumont (1904-2001) ran for president as an ecologist. In the 1980s, the French political movement was reshaped around Les Verts [the Green Party, active from 1984 to 2001], and was aligned with similar organisations in Europe. At the same time, the magazine *Esprit* (to which, as mentioned, Marker was a regular contributor) published a few articles about the early steps of political environmentalism in France, namely editor Olivier Mongin's text "Les Enjeux du Mouvement Écologique" [The Challenges of the Ecological Movement] (1978).²⁴ However, there is no record of Marker's direct engagement with the ecological struggles of his time. As mentioned by Anne-Lorraine Bujon and Carole Desbarats, Marker's struggles were located elsewhere; they belong to "a generation that, coming out of their 20s from the resistance to Nazism, constituted itself in the fights for liberation, decolonisation, in an ample gesture that is not satisfied by a 'national perimeter'".²⁵

His early interests were rooted in a response to the post-war context and to the political transformations that unfolded in the following decades. Decolonialism may indeed bear the seeds for environmental change, for questioning the legitimisation of exploitation and extraction that colonising countries subjected others to. Marker's engagement with post-colonial positions can be traced back as early as 1953 in *Statues Also Die*. Its title suggests that not only people but also objects perish, an early reference to Marker's interest in animism that will reveal itself in the manners in which he brings together objects, people and animals in horizontal, non-hierarchical relationships throughout his work. It is also seen through the manners in which all sorts of entities are capable of acting upon the real. In *La Jetée*, for instance, the images that haunt the memories of a man determine his own future. In *Sans Soleil*, Marker establishes a series of parallelisms

²³ The term was coined in 2000 by atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen to define the geologic epoch in which human action is considered as the main cause of climate change and transformation of biodiversity. It became a major driving force behind the theoretical framework of the environmental humanities.

²⁴ Olivier Mongin, "Les enjeux du mouvement écologique", in *Esprit*, n° 2 (February 1978): 145-50.

²⁵ "Une génération qui, au sortir de la résistance au nazisme, à vingt ans, s'est construite dans les luttes de libération, de décolonisation, dans un geste ample qui ne se contente pas du 'périmètre national'" (my translation), Anne-Lorraine Bujon and Carole Desbarats, "Introduction", in *Esprit—Les Engagements de Chris Marker* (May 2018): 38.

between Japan and Guinea-Bissau, two non-western cultures grounded in animist beliefs, such as the temples Japanese build to enshrine cats and the funerary ceremonies of disused dolls or the carnivalesque bestiary that parades in Guinea-Bissau, turning people into outlandish animalesque creatures. In *The Owl's Legacy*, as will be discussed, intellectuals are paired with guardian owls who seem to guide their thoughts about Ancient Greece. People, animals, images, things—they all have the capacity to affect and transform the real in Marker's world.

Statues Also Die presents a harsh critique of the effects of French colonialism on Sub-Saharan Africa. Almost at the end, it changes tone and rhythm, in a scene Nora Alter describes as “an unusually disturbing sequence, featuring the violent death of a disembowelled gorilla”.²⁶ This scene is constituted of two quick shots, one of the animal falling backwards, the other of the dead animal lying on the ground. It is not rare to see animals dying or agonising in Marker's work. In this case, the death of the gorilla becomes a double, if not triple death: the death of the individual gorilla, the death of those who experienced centuries of abuse and torture and the death of their culture and identity, which has been erased, subjected and commodified by the perverse association between colonialism and tourism. If in this dead gorilla we can find an early testimony of Marker's interest in cultural responses to death (as Catherine Lupton argues, “Marker's preoccupation with cultures that find a way to accommodate death, rather than fearing and repressing it”²⁷), we also find the death of those delicate ecological threads that, with the passing of the years, will reveal a much wider catastrophe—that of the inevitable decay of our planet.

The brutality of this scene opens way to investigate whether Marker shared the incipient environmental concerns of his time. Other moments that reveal such awareness occur through the triangular relationships he weaved across humanity, nature and technology, which appear throughout his work. On this subject *Sans Soleil's* narrator, “the veiled self- portrait of Chris Marker”,²⁸ presents an essentialist association between arcade games, industrialism and ecology:

At the beginning the game was familiar: a kind of anti-ecological beating where the

²⁶ Alter, Chris Marker, 59.

²⁷ Catherine Lupton, *Chris Marker—Memories of the Future* (London: Reaktion Books, 2004), 158–59.

²⁸ Daniel Porter, “Wounded Time—Periodical Dusted Notes on Sans Soleil”, <https://chrismarker.org/chris-marker-2/wounded-time/> (accessed 29.11.2020).

idea was to kill off—as soon as they showed the whites of their eyes— creatures that were either prairie dogs or baby seals, I can't be sure which. Now here's the Japanese variation. Instead of the critters, there's some vaguely human heads identified by a label: at the top the chairman of the board, in front of him the vice president and the directors, in the front row the section heads and the personnel manager. [...] Video games are the first stage in a plan for machines to help the human race, the only plan that offers a future for intelligence. For the moment, the inseparable philosophy of our time is contained in the Pac-Man. I didn't know when I was sacrificing all my hundred yen coins to him that he was going to conquer the world. Perhaps because he is the most perfect graphic metaphor of man's fate. He puts into true perspective the balance of power between the individual and the environment.

Sans Soleil was shot in 1982, at a moment in which the impact of human action on the planet was still measured as the “balance of power” Marker describes when commenting on how the violence against nature and wildlife was being normalised by its replication in a “whack-a-mole” type game in which players were encouraged to kill as many animals as possible to accumulate credits. Subsequently, the killing of the animals was replaced by the killing of patriarchal figures: two wild, untameable, feared entities upon which violence could be seen as a fun game. They are somehow replaceable in their being subjected to gratuitous violence, or even more, in their deserving gratuitous violence. But while the CEOs allow for the release of a feeling of revenge—the employee is hitting the representation of the employer—the animals stand for a replication of a hunting game whose pleasure arises from the immediate gesture and associated imaginary of hunting and killing.

In 1977, Marker made the four-hour long *A Grin Without a Cat* [Le Fond de l'air est rouge], in which we retraced almost ten years of polyphonic struggles and revolutionary utopias, from Vietnam to Havana and Santiago de Chile, also looking at Che Guevara's presence in Bolivia, the turmoil at the Sorbonne and French philosopher Régis Debray's time in prison. [Fig. 1.6] *A Grin Without a Cat* also documents the concrete environmental and public health effects of human-led actions and their consequences for humans and animals alike. The film looks at the Minamata

poisoning, one of the major cases of pollution-induced diseases in Japan, caused by the Chisso Corporation chemical factory, which, between 1932 and 68, released methyl mercury into the city's industrial wastewater, causing a major environmental disaster. Mercury accumulated in the marine life of the Minamata Bay and Shiranui Sea. When consumed, fish severely poisoned the area's human and animal population. The film portrays this situation by integrating footage of Japanese filmmaker Noriaki Tsuchimoto's films on Minamata, featuring images of humans and cats, who are brought together by their similar suffering, their bodies convulsing, trembling and collapsing in pain under the toxic effects of the mercury poisoning. This form of resistance is the only possible response to the combination of capital and local politics and the toxic offspring they cause.

In 2015, the editors of the book series *Critical Climate Change*, claimed that "the era of climate change involves the mutation of systems beyond 20th century anthropomorphic models and has stood, until recently, outside representation or address".²⁹ Recent years have seen an exponential growth of responses—theoretical, literary, artistic—to the Anthropocene. These contributions are often rooted in ideas and images made by those who, operating outside more recent terminology and concepts, were nonetheless engaged in bringing forward the effects of human-led activities on the planet and its inhabitants, both living and non-living. While not engaging directly with this situation, Marker's films bring to light the impact of human action on the planet. Some of the principal spectres and monsters of the Anthropocene have a predominant role in Marker's oeuvre. They manifest themselves in his portraits of landscapes haunted by narratives of progress, of meteorological elements conditioned by human action; of life threatened by uneven distribution of toxicity, of beings sickened by pollution, killed by selective slaughter, conditioned by the violence of extraction. A striking case opens this chapter, the image of the filmmaker, accompanied not by a wild animal but by his cat—a domesticated animal with a long history shared with humans—dwell in a post-apocalyptic scenario in which the end of life seems to be approaching, as indicated by the rising levels of the water around them. Behind them lies an allusion to the upmost symbols of cinematic ruins, the Titanic, which sank when it crashed into

²⁹ Tom Cohen and Claire Colebrook, introduction to the *Critical Climate Change* series, Open Humanities Press, 2015.

a drifting iceberg in 1912, a hazard that is now becoming more common due to climate change.³⁰

Lingering on a similar catastrophic mood, *La Jetée* depicts a post-nuclear Paris whose sole living creatures other than humans are animals widely regarded as an urban, disease-carrying pest: “above ground, Paris, as most of the world, was uninhabitable, riddled with radioactivity. The victors stood guard over an empire of rats”.³¹ *La Jetée*’s main character struggles to recall his encounter in an observation platform (the jetty) whose characters have to visit a museum in order to see animals—all dead. [Fig. I.7] Social unrest, state violence, the dispersal of toxicity, human-made infrastructures to facilitate transport relying on elevated fossil fuel consumption, the extinction of wildlife—all of these are present in *La Jetée*, announcing a grim future for humanity. Similarly, the final scenes of *A Grin Without a Cat* stage a comparison between a pack of wolves that is being culled and the manner in which left-wing revolutionaries were being brutally oppressed and led to extinction all over the world, from France and Czechoslovakia to Vietnam and Latin America. Accompanying the wolf culling images, the narrator reveals how he:

would remember the end of the film as he completed it in 1977, comparing the arms trafficking of the great powers with the process of culling as practiced by remote controlled technicians trying to keep the wolf population down to a manageable level. But guess whom they are arming today? A comforting thought though: Fifteen years later, some wolves still survive.³²

The strength of the political message of this sequence—the revolutionary as a lonely wolf on the verge of extinction, who despite being chased by those in power manages to survive—is accentuated by the environmental gravity of the situation depicted in the images. These offer a

³⁰ “Huge fleet of icebergs hits North Atlantic shipping lanes: About 450 icebergs—up from 37 a week earlier—have drifted into waters where Titanic sank, forcing vessels to divert and raising global warming fears”, in *The Guardian* (6 April, 2017), <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2017/apr/06/huge-fleet-icebergs-north-atlantic-shipping-lanes> (accessed 01.11.2018).

³¹ From the script of *La Jetée*, available at: https://www.markertext.com/la_jetee.htm (accessed 31.11.2018).

³² Original, in French: “Imaginez maintenant que celui qui a fait ce montage 1977 se voit soudain offrir l’occasion de regarder ces images après un long intervalle. Ce sera par exemple 1993, quinze ans après, l’espace d’une jeunesse [...] Ainsi notre auteur s’émerveillera des ressources de l’histoire qui a toujours plus d’imagination que nous. Il pensera à la fin du film tel qu’il l’avait conçu en dix neuf cent soixante dix sept quand il comparait le trafic d’armes des grandes puissances à ces sélectionneurs volants dont le travail est de limiter les populations de loups à un chiffre acceptable. Devinez qui elles arment aujourd’hui? Une pensée consolante cependant: quinze ans après, il y avait toujours des loups”.

lucid, even if partial vision of humans not simply killing wild animals but doing so with the aim of intentionally reducing an animal population that has been framed and understood to be a threat to human life and economy. The elimination of potential human natural predators is an important chapter in the history of the consolidation of modernity. Marker contributes to it with these essential moments that address matters of biopolitics that are at the core of this chapter. Just as the utopian hopes for a better world were being laid down in the late 20th century, so too were human- animal relations becoming more unbalanced, artificial and frail. In the late modernity, those who resisted, who stared back, confronting the gaze of the menacing other,³³ were also those who were chased and exterminated due to the dangers they supposedly posed to society.

The killed gorilla of *Statues Also Die*, the Minamata cats and the culled wolves, are shocking but not exceptional images in Marker's work, which includes several instances of animal mistreatment and suffering. As Alter points out, "a giraffe is slaughtered in *Sunless*, wolves are shot in *Grin without a Cat*, and whales are stalked in *Vive la baleine*".³⁴ Many of the animals that Marker films encounter humans who mistreat, abuse, hunt and kill them, or simply ignore or even mock their agony. Marker's position is ambiguous and unclear. For example, *Letter from Siberia* includes a short scene with a horse who struggles to walk because his front legs are tied together, no commentary accompanying it. The film also includes a scene of sarcastic absurdity when the narrator tells of a bear chained and looked after with a "fatherly concern" by his owner who "will soon eat him".³⁵

Animal death and suffering manifest themselves in several configurations across Marker's work, some of which expose contradictions and unresolvable ethical dilemmas concerning societal positions, but also his own stances towards animal life. Similar to what I will discuss in relation to Forti and Jonas, Marker's position can be ambivalent, standing in a delicate balance between the

³³ On the importance of the gaze in animal-human relations across Marker's work, see Kierran Argent Horner, "The Equality of the Gaze: The Animal Stares Back in Chris Marker's Films", in *Film-Philosophy* 20 (2006): 235-49.

³⁴ Alter, Chris Marker, 59.

³⁵ "On the outskirts of Yakutsk, as we were coming back to town, an interested audience was watching the antics of Ushatik the bear. He'd managed to slip his leash and was demonstrating his anarchist tendencies with the shifty quickness of a puppy. For a moment it even looked like he was going to get his paws on Boris Sergeivich's motorcycle. Had Ushatik been corrupted by the movies? Was he going to ride away like the trained bears in the Moscow circus? But no, his greediness got the better of his thirst for freedom, a touching sight. But let cynics be comforted: Boris Sergeivich watches over Ushatik with such fatherly concern because he's thinking of the day not so far away when he's going to eat him".

activation of parallel apparatuses of biopower that condition and cause suffering to animal life and the mode in which these activations require technical and aesthetic transformations that bear perceptive and affective changes. Besides the more obvious case of *La Jetée*, a film that tells the story of a death, *Sans Soleil* offers two moments that are particularly significant to this chapter. The first happens in the beginning of the film, when footage from people visiting a cemetery during a day of the dead in Japan are combined with images of dead cattle in the Sahel, in Sub-Saharan Africa. They are accompanied by the narrator's account, reflecting on this juxtaposition: "My constant comings and goings are not a search for contrasts. They are a journey to the two extreme poles of survival", she says. The images of the dead cows are followed by those of a carnival in Guinea Bissau, groups of individuals dancing, wearing colourful, cartoonish cow and other animal masks. [Fig. 1.8] Three possible conditions of lifelessness—the buried humans, the dried skins and bones of the cattle lying on the desert and the animal-object masks (a double persona, hiding the bearer and standing on behalf of a non-existing animal)—are explored and put together without any given hierarchy ascribed between them, revealing the same animistic propensity that Alter describes: these images "function somewhere between humans and objects, animate and inanimate actors, agents of fiction and figures of contemplation".³⁶ In this sense, Marker's animism is less concerned with the classical "attribution of a living soul to plants, inanimate objects and natural phenomenon" and "the belief in a supernatural power that organizes and animates the material universe", as proposed by the Oxford English Dictionary, and instead pictures the complex, interdependent connections that shape existence.³⁷ More aligned with Graham Harvey's conceptualisation of the term, Marker's work seems to acknowledge that "the world is full of persons, only some of whom are human, and that life is always lived in relationship with others".³⁸

Later in *Sans Soleil*, another geographic coupling is formed via footage of a group of Japanese children mourning the death of a Panda at a ceremony at the Ueno Zoo in Tokyo. The narrator tells of someone who:

was pleased that the same chrysanthemums appeared in funerals for men and for

³⁶ Alter, Chris Marker, 59.

³⁷ "Animism", in *Oxford English Dictionary* (2018), <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/animism>.

³⁸ Graham Harvey, *Animism: Respecting the Living World* (Second edition) (London: Hurst, 2017), xiii.

animals. He described to me the ceremony held at the zoo in Ueno in memory of animals that had died during the year. For two years in a row this day of mourning has had a pall cast over it by the death of a panda, more irreparable (according to the newspapers) than the death of the prime minister that took place at the same time. Last year people really cried. Now they seem to be getting used to it, accepting that each year death takes a panda as dragons do young girls in fairy tales.

This scene is intercalated with images of a giraffe being brutally chased and hunted. They echo the violence of Peter Kubelka's giraffe killing moment in *Our Trip to Africa* [Unsere Afrikareise], his 1966 found-footage film critique of Austrian upper-class safaris in Africa. This sequence attests once more to Marker's ambiguous stance towards the subjects he depicts. Here too, his position is undeclared, only resolved in the edit—the absurdity that emerges from the coupling of images, the violence conveyed by sound. Viewers seem to be expected to make their own judgements, to assume an active position of elaboration on what is presented.

There is no straightforward critical examination of colonialism and its subsequent decline into western tourism in Africa, as in Kubelka's film. Instead, the meaninglessness of the moment, emphasised by the sounds of gunshots paired with the hunting scenes establishes a dichotomy of absurdity between the children mourning a dead panda and the hunting footage: two sides of the same coin of abusing animals for human leisure and pleasure—one by displaying them in a zoo, the other by killing them for a trophy. The hunting of the animal is juxtaposed with the hunting of humans—as the giraffe scene is followed by footage set in a similar subtropical region, this time of the guerrilla soldiers in Guinea Bissau during the independence war against the Portuguese army. The camera follows the pace of the running men in the dry vegetation, a subjective viewpoint that turns the hunter into the hunted. This edit, in its coupling of unrelated footage and use of sound to create meaning offers a good example of Bazin's reference to Marker's "horizontal montage", in which, as previously quoted, an image "does not refer back to that which precedes it or to the one that follows, but laterally, to what is said about it. [...] Montage is made from the ear to the eye". This strategy of pairing images of violence echoes the use of images in *A Grin without a Cat*, which blurs the boundaries between life and death and human and animal conditions.

The film opens and closes with a moment of devastating aggression towards both innocent people and animals, in which the register and severity of that aggression is presented on equal terms. The first part of the film, "Fragile Hands", starts with the firing squad scene on the deck of Sergei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) and follows with a fast edit of footage of civilians in various parts of the world being brutally abused, sometimes killed with impunity, by the forces of law and order. The second part, "Severed Hands", ends with the footage from a helicopter culling operation executed in which men armed with guns shoot wolves in a grassland environment. The images are filmed from two viewpoints. The views from the ground present the perspective of the wolves; the camera faces upwards, towards the helicopter shooter, triggering a sense of empathy with the wolves by giving viewers the sense of what it is to be a helpless animal being chased and killed with humans equipped with military equipment. The views from the helicopter place viewers in the position of the hunter. The wolf, who is about to be killed, looks back. [Fig. 1.9]

Showing, rather than telling, Marker is trusting in the strength of cinema, the affective power of images and sounds, the emancipation of spectatorship. In a 2003 interview, he dwelled on this ambiguity, noticing with pleasure how it was resolved by a small anonymous note published in a program in Tokyo, which read:

Soon the voyage will be at an end. It's only then that we will know if the juxtaposition of images makes any sense. We will understand that we have prayed with film, as one must on a pilgrimage, each time we have been in the presence of death: in the cat cemetery, standing in front of the dead giraffe, with the kamikazes at the moment of take-off, in front of the guerrillas killed in the war for independence. [...]

By treating the same subject 20 years later, Marker has overcome death by prayer.³⁹

But has he? It is important to question the inclusion of this sequence and what it tells us in relation to the recognition of animal personhood and individuality. This moment, in which technology, the

³⁹ Samuel Douhaire and Annick Rivoire, "Rare Marker", in *Libération* (5 March 2003), https://www.liberation.fr/cinema/2003/03/05/rare-marker_457649/ (accessed 19.08.2021). Translated as "Marker Direct: an interview with Chris Marker", *Film Comment* (May-June 2003), <https://www.filmcomment.com/article/marker-direct-an-interview-with-chris-marker/> (accessed 19.08.2021).

militarization of habitat control and the fantasy of death are deeply implicated in one another, raises questions concerning the legitimacy of filming an animal being killed. In shooting this scene, the cameraperson (who is probably not Marker, as the film uses a wide array of found footage) is participating in the event by being in the helicopter and by repeating the gesture of shooting, once to kill, twice to arrest, crystallise and eternally replay that death. This scene echoes the writings of Emmanuel Levinas on the ethical responsibility of the gaze. “The face speaks to me and thereby invites me to a relation”,⁴⁰ Levinas writes, grounding kinship and ethical responsibility in the moment the self faces the gaze of the other. Inasmuch as Levinas fails to grant animals with the possession of a face, with this returned gaze of the wolf—as with all the many other gazes that return throughout his work—Marker questions and challenges Levinas by giving visual evidence of the existence of the face of the animal. At the same time, he is participating in this scene, replicating and reproducing its violence in an unresolved contradiction. Yet he also challenges the anthropocentric, vitalist traditions of humanism, contributing to the advancement of more holistic, inclusive and humane modes of thinking personhood beyond gender, status and species, which depart from the verb to get to the noun: to face one needs a face. In this case, he chose wolves, whose visual, cultural and genetic closeness to dogs places them in a similar position of in-betweenness, situated across the human and other animals, messing up the confines between the pet and pest, perpetuating ancient forms of kinship and defying the differentiation between the cultural and the natural. They are an archetypal figure for Marker to expose the aforementioned limits. The prayer is there, but the violence has not been eased.

On the Threshold of Personhood

Throughout modernity, animals have been inscribed in an ontological tradition (philosophically represented here by Levinas, but one born from a chain of Cartesian predecessors and followers) that, in refusing to acknowledge their countenance, excludes animals from an ethical system. To a large extent, to be an animal means to exist outside of ethical accountability. It is to be vulnerable, exploitable and exposable to forms of gratuitous and arbitrary abuse that are disconnected from logics of wrongdoing and punishment. To be an animal is to be liable to harm, injury, abuse and death.

⁴⁰ Emanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, translated by Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 198.

Several authors have reflected on how animals fail to be considered as victims. Looking at how the law makes and unmakes human and nonhuman persons, author Colin Dayan reflects on dispossession as the attribute of that who has nothing and is entitled to nothing. She says, “to be disposable is not having the capacity to be dispossessed—to be nothing more than dispensable stuff”.⁴¹ Wondering “what kind of person is a dog”, writer David Teh refers to René Girard’s anthropology of sacrificial violence in order to analyse the animals’ symbolic function, recalling Girard’s argument that the relation to the sacrificed ones “cannot be defined in terms of innocence or guilt”.⁴² Preceding these more contemporary reflections, in his essay “Name of a Dog, or Natural Rights”, Levinas reflects on his encounters with Bobby, the dog, while he was a prisoner during the Second World War. The essay, as John Llewelyn suggests, “proposes an analogy between the unspeakable human Holocaust and the unspoken animal one”.⁴³ Yet, as Deborah Bird Rose argues, Levinas’ insistence that “dogs are without ethics and without logos” perpetuates humanism’s reinforcement of the insurmountable boundary between different forms of life, mimicking “the structure that underlies the possibility of genocide” and re-inscribing “the big dualisms of Western thought”—not least the human self- perceived separation from other animals.⁴⁴

Despite never embarking on theoretical or political debates concerning speciesism or animal rights, by including scenes of animal abuse, culling and slaughter, Marker turns viewers into witnesses, challenging them to respond to what they've seen. Snippets of the wolves being shot, their bodies twisting and jerking in the air are featured several times, an edit that forces viewers to repeatedly encounter those moments of suffering. The same scene of the animal, first alive, then dead, is presented again and again. This repetition enables a critical evaluation of the facile, generalised gesture of killing animals, and acts as a mode to awaken viewers from their numbness towards animal sufferance. The scene replays those exact same images, that most viewers will probably not want to see, again and again. With this, Marker enhances the violence of the gesture,

⁴¹ Colin Dayan, *with dogs at the edge of life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 2.

⁴² David Teh, “The Lowest Form of Person: Dogs, Excess and Symbolic Exchange in Contemporary Thailand”, in *Focas 6: Regional Animalities* (Lucy Davis, ed.) (Singapore: Forum on Contemporary Art and Society, 2007): 22–24.

⁴³ John Llewelyn, “Am I Obsessed by Bobby? (Humanism of the Other Animal)”, in *Re-Reading Levinas* (Roberta Bernasconi and Simon Critchley, eds.) (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 235.

⁴⁴ Deborah Bird Rose, “Bobby’s Face, My Love”, in *Wild Dogs Dreaming—Love and Extinction* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011), 30–31.

its accumulative logic (how many wolves were killed like this? How many more do we need to face in order for it to matter?) and questions the balance between the extended exposure to violence and its putative normalisation through repetition.

At the same time as the human becomes that who kills without pity or need, it is also defined as that who avoids facing/looking at death. Writing about a scene of “reckless and brutal” violence during Jacques Cousteau’s film *The Silent World* (1956), author Colin Dayan comments on how the sole individual who looked at the victims of a mass slaughter of whales and sharks was a dog:

Only one nonhuman creature remains alive as witness: a dog. The dog looks at them. Then he gets up and walks away. After carnage too atrocious for words, only the dog responds with what we can interpret as spot-on in its gentle, unremitting regard. We can never know what the dog’s exit means, if it means anything at all. I am captivated by the momentous incomprehensibility of this canine presence. It somehow matters so much or not at all that the action is as close as we get to ethical sensibility in the film. Not instrumental in its moralism, but rather another kind of consideration that is not contemptuous or peremptory. In its reticence and muteness pregnant with meaning, the dog regard matters, even though viewers don’t know what to make of it.⁴⁵

Predicting their permanence, their haunting ability to linger on the viewers’ minds long after the screening, these images appear repeatedly, both challenging the threshold between life and death and underlining the relationship that cinema (and photography) have with the crystallisation of life and with what Bazin calls the “mummification of change”.⁴⁶

This process of mummification may be literal, as when Marker depicts the animals exhibited behind the vitrines of the gallery of evolution of the Natural History Museum of Paris in *La Jetée*. The film’s narrator describes it as “a museum filled with ageless animals”. This suspension of time happens because the animals were arrested of life twice: first by being killed and preserved in the

⁴⁵ Dayan, *with dogs at the edge of life*, xi-xii.

⁴⁶ André Bazin, “The Ontology of the Photographic Image”, in *Film Quarterly*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (Summer 1960): 8. (Originally published as “L’ontologie de l’image photographique” *Qu’est-ce que le cinéma?* [Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2002], 9-17).

museum, second by being captured by a camera and crystallised in film. In other cases, Marker further pushes the life-death condition of the animals to an in-between, half-way state, presenting animals that are both living and dead, as Sans Soleil's domestic cats of Minamata, victims of mercury poisoning: zombie-like characters whose situation conflates the genre of the film essay with that of the horror film.

Observing the importance of animal presences in Marker's films as defining features of his signature and identity, Lupton notices that

“[F]ollowing a decade of close involvement with militant political film collectives that began in 1967 with his instigation of *Far from Vietnam*, and culminated in 1977 with the French release of the two-part, four-hour *A Grin Without a Cat* [...] the reappearance of cats, even in this thoroughly politicized context, is a signal that Chris Marker was beginning to re-emerge from the anonymity of unsigned militant productions, and to reintroduce into his work the familiar tokens of his own distinct presence”.⁴⁷

Ten years later, Marker would embark in a long tribute to that other cat with wings that is the owl.

A School of Owls

It all started on the 25th of June 1987. The project of a television programme dedicated to Greek culture had just crystalized. We had upon us the spectre that haunts the continents of the cultural documentary and that Chekhov defined for eternity: To say the things that intelligent people already know and that idiots will never know.⁴⁸

Addressing the vast audience standing in-between the “intelligent” and the “idiots”, *The Owl's Legacy* was one of Marker's most ambitious projects. The 13-episode, 338-hour television series was filmed over two years (1987-1989), featuring a vast number of important personalities of the academic and cultural scene of the second half of the 20th century to trace the remains of Classical

⁴⁷ Lupton, *Chris Marker*, 109 and 147.

⁴⁸ From the introduction to Episode 1 of the series.

Greek culture. For each segment, Marker brought together the thoughts of different speakers to create compelling and highly articulated reflections about 13 varied topics, which ranged from music to misogyny. Adopting a sophisticated combination of registers and tones, Marker's *The Owl's Legacy* wasn't simply filling the pedagogical purposes of a certain television tradition of the epoch.⁴⁹ It also established an ambitious system of circulation of information, at once fragmented, layered, complex and wide-reaching. The programme had a voice and a position. If its topics might appear to reinforce the importance of the Classical legacy and its universalist cultural dominance, it in fact generated a critical assessment of the relationship between the well-established imaginary of Greece as the birthplace of Western culture and what Jacques Rancière defined as "the limits of such influence and the gap between words and reality".⁵⁰ As I will discuss further, the concepts often understood to have informed the traditions of humanism and classicism were questioned, revised and problematised through an interplay of causes and consequences between ancient past, recent events and the present moment.

Being particularly interested in comprehending what was exactly this School of Owls Marker edified, and what it left behind, I here introduce, describe and analyse the series—its structure, content, articulation and aesthetics. I attend to the role that each owl plays throughout the series and adopt a methodology and line of inquiry akin to Marker's engagement with the past to understand the future.

Marker started working on *The Owl's Legacy* during the Summer of 1987. By then, he had already made 13 out of his 16 feature films, shot 9 short films out of the total of 17 he would make and he had also taken part in 36 of the 38 collaborative films he worked on with other filmmakers. A work of maturity, *The Owl's Legacy* was made after those which are considered his major achievements, namely *La Jetée* and *Sans Soleil*, and came in- between the two versions of *A Grin*

⁴⁹ Thematically, the series matched a late-20th century revisionist and eclectic trend in cultural production attuned with the plural, relativist, questioning and even cheeky positions of postmodernism. Its polyphonic re-evaluation of history also fitted well within the engaged energy of the recently founded British Channel 4 (1982), whose programmes reinforced experiments in radical pedagogy, were embedded in a revisionist spirit, gave voice to divergent opinions and unrepresented threads in television. Though markedly more white and male-dominated than some of the voices in Channel 4's other broadcasts, the series was an important experiment in questioning the foundations of the classical West, and inquiring upon the bastions of European culture and identity.

⁵⁰ "Les propos de Marker n'est pas de montrer comment la Grèce antique a pesé sur les temps modernes. Il serait bien plutôt de montrer les limites de cette influence, de marquer plus généralement l'écart entre les mots et les réalités". Jacques Rancière, "Les métamorphoses de la chouette", in *Chris Marker* (2018), 325.

without a Cat (the longer one, of 1977, and the 1993 re-edit). The series was commissioned and co-produced by La Sept-Arte with Attica Art Production and FIT Production.⁵¹ It was originally planned to be jointly broadcasted on television by La Sept (owner of the broadcast rights in France), the British public service television broadcaster Channel 4 (UK broadcast rights) and the Greek National Television (Attica Art Production detained the Greek and worldwide broadcast permissions). The series' actual broadcast history was less structured as initially planned and it ended up being presented in fragments in France.⁵² It was also broadcasted on Channel 4 in 1991 and presented at some film festivals in Europe and the US.⁵³ It was never shown on Greek television. In 2007, during the 1st Athens Biennale, the artistic duo Otolith Group made an installation of the series entitled *Inner Time of Television* (2007), which became its first presentation in Greece. [Fig. I.10]

The series required Marker and his team to do a considerable amount of travelling, as it was filmed in five cities and three continents (Paris, Tbilisi, Athens, Berkeley and Tokyo).⁵⁴ During the two years of its production, Marker interviewed 59 guests, amidst which political philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis, composer Iannis Xenakis, philosopher of science Michel Serres, classicist George Steiner, actress Catherine Belkhodja (who also features in Marker's *Level Five*, in the installation *Silent Movie* [1997] and short video *Owl Gets in Your Eyes* [1994]), classicist Manuela

⁵¹ La Sept-Arte was French producer Thierry Garrel's documentary unit of the French television broadcaster and production company La S.E.P.T., which was operative from May 1989 to May 1992, when it lost its broadcasting license to the Franco-German cultural television channel Arte. Attica Art Production was Alexander S. Onassis Public Benefit Foundation group, Greece. FIT Production had the participation of Sofica Images Investissements, Centre National de la Cinematographie, Trebitsch Produktion International GMBH Société Nationale de Programme France-Regions FR3.

⁵² On La Sept from the 12th to the 28th June, 1989, and re-presented in fragments on the public channel France 3 from the 9th to the 30th of February, 1990, and from the 8th to the 28th of September, 1991, in the programme "Océaniques". *Symposium* shown on 12/06/1989 (La Sept) and 09/02/90, 08/09/91 (F3 Océaniques); *Olympics* shown on 12/06/1989 (La Sept) and 09/02/90, 22/09/91 (F3 "Océaniques Aventures de l'esprit"); *Democracy* shown on 13/06/1989 (La Sept) and 16/02/90 (F3 Océaniques); *Nostalgia* shown on 13/06/1989 (La Sept) and 16/02/90 (28/9/91) (F3 Océaniques); *History* shown on 19/06/1989 (La Sept) and 23/02/90 (F3 Océaniques); *Mathematics* shown on 19/06/1989 (La Sept) and 23/02/90 (F3 Océaniques); *Logomachy* shown on 20/06/89 (La Sept); *Music* shown on 20/06/89 (La Sept); *Cosmogony* shown on 26/06/1989 (La Sept) and 30/02/90 (F3 Océaniques); *Mythology* shown on 26/06/1989 (La Sept) and 30/02/90 (F3 Océaniques); *Misogyny* shown on 27/06/89 (La Sept); *Tragedy* shown on 27/06/89 (La Sept); *Philosophy* shown on 28/06/89 (La Sept).

⁵³ 33rd London Film Festival, 10-26 November, 1989; San Francisco International Film Festival, 1990; Internationalen Kurzfilmtage Oberhausen, April 1990; Mostra internazionale del Nuovo cinema. *Francia: Tra una Nouvelle vague e l'altra* (2-11 June 1989), Pesaro, 1989.

⁵⁴ Information provided by Kodwo Eshun in the set of interviews arranged by Catherine Lupton, "The Owl's Legacy: in Memory of Chris Marker", in *Sight and Sound* Volume 22, Issue 10 (October 2012), <http://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/sight-sound-magazine/features/owls-legacy-memory-chris-marker> (accessed 10.09.2014).

Smith and filmmaker Elia Kazan.⁵⁵ Marker combined the contributions of all guests together with a vast selection of archival footage (fiction and documentary films, other television programmes, newsreel and still images), with each person's thoughts being placed in relation with others' ideas. The series features both dialogues (or sometimes group monologues) which were filmed during several staged and highly-scenographic banquets held in Tbilisi, Berkeley, Athens and Paris, and individual interviews. The episodes of *The Owl's Legacy* have the roughly same length of 26 minutes.⁵⁶ Each introduces a term of Greek etymology: 1: *Symposium or Accepted Ideas*, 2: *Olympics or Imaginary Greece*, 3: *Democracy or the City of Dreams*, 4: *Nostalgia or the Impossible Return*, 5: *Amnesia or History on the March*, 6: *Mathematics or the Empire Counts Back*, 7: *Logomachy or the Dialect of the Tribe*, 8: *Music or Inner Space*, 9: *Cosmogony or the Ways of the World*, 10: *Mythology or Lies Like Truth*, 11: *Misogyny or the Snares of Desire*, 12: *Tragedy or the Illusion of Death* and 13: *Philosophy or the Triumph of the Owl*.⁵⁷

The desire to empower and emancipate spectators seems to be at work in *The Owl's Legacy*. The series presents dense discourses spread across different segments, articulated through a complex montage that allows for the parallel existence of multiple lines of thought. This manner sometimes reinforces ideas and other times displays, even enhances, contradictions and disagreements. The edit draws individual arguments into a sort of deferred dialogue, in which various speakers confirm, pursue and challenge each other's theories and impressions. These individual discourses interweave personal and cultural memory, as the speakers often depart from their own remembrances and experiences to analyse wider features of the Greek imaginary.

⁵⁵ Full list of participants is: Daniel Andler, Theo Angelopoulos, Jostas Axelos, Catherine Belkhodja, Linos Benakis, Richard Bennett, Christiane Bron, Cornelius Castoriadis, Sophie Chaveay, Dimitri Delis, Patrick Deschamps, Marcel Detienne, Arielle Dombasle, Françoise Frontisi-Ducroux, Kostas Georgousopoulos, Mark Griffith, David Halperin, Mina Himona, Angélique Ionatos, Viatcheslav Ivanov, Michel Jobert, Lee Kaminski, Lika Kavjaradze, Elia Kazan, Nancy Laghlin, François Lissarrague, Baltasar Lopes, Otar Lordkipanidzé, Merab Mamardachvili, Fouli Manelopoulos, Guivi Marvelachvili, Matta, Melina Mercouri, Sopiros Mercouris, Alex Minotis, Oswyn Murray, Michael Nagler, Yukio Ninagawa, Tatiana Papamashou, Amy Phillips, Marios Ploritis, Thomas Rosenmayer, Mihalis Sakellariou, Renate Schleisser, Alain Schnapp, Michel Serres, Giulia Sissa, Manuela Smith, Deborah Steiner, George Steiner, Nikos Svoronos, Leonid Tchelidzé, Evi Touloupa, Vassilis Vassilikos, Jean-Pierre Vernant, John Winkler, Iannis Xenakis and Atsuhiko Yoshida.

⁵⁶ Episodes 7, Logomachy; 8, Music, and 9, Cosmogony are 24 minutes.

⁵⁷ Original titles: *Symposium ou les idées recues*, *Olympisme ou la Grèce imaginaire*, *Démocratie ou la cité des songes*, *Nostalgie ou le retour impossible*, *Amnésie ou le sens de l'Histoire*, *Mathématique ou l'Empire des signes*, *Logomachie ou les mots de la tribu*, *La musique ou l'espace du dedans*, *La cosmologie ou l'usage du monde*, *La mythologie ou la vérité du mensonge*, *La misogynie ou les pièges du désir*, *La tragédie ou l'illusion de la mort*, and *La philosophie ou le triomphe de la chouette*. In terms of continuities of approaches, methods and topics in Chris Marker's work, it is worth noticing the thematic affinity between *The Owl's Legacy* in general and in specific in its part 2, *Olympics or Imaginary Greece*, which focused on the cultural significance of the Olympic Games, and his first feature film, *Olympia 52*, made during the 1952 Summer Olympics, which were held in Helsinki, Finland.

Tones shift frequently— not only in the transition between one speaker and another, but also within the discourse of each individual. Accounts range from academic precision and in-depth analysis to private narratives about childhood memories—even colloquial and humoristic moments, as when George Steiner refers to Socrates as a “cosmic pain in the ass”.⁵⁸

From Zapping to Flapping

Despite an ambiguity in relation to the levelling of the programme’s content to fit the context of television broadcast, Marker was certainly conscious that the members of the public addressed through television programmes differed from those watching his films on the cinema. In that sense, his television projects are aligned with his experiments in exploring the possibilities of communication to larger audiences beyond the remit of the cinema, as with his early publishing activities (namely the “Petite Planète” and “Regards Neufs” book series) or the seven multimedia installation pieces he made for contemporary art museums and exhibitions.⁵⁹

Two of these installations are of particular relevance here due to their affinity with the format and topic of *The Owl’s Legacy*. The first was made in 1978 and was a commission from the Pompidou Centre on occasion of the exhibition “Paris-Berlin, Rapports et contrastes France Allemagne, 1900-1933” [Paris-Berlin, France-Germany Relations and contrasts, 1900-1933].⁶⁰ Entitled *Quand le siècle a pris formes* [When the century was formed], the work was a major exercise in subjective historiography, in this instance less dependent on others’ opinions and viewpoints than *The Owl’s Legacy* and more an exercise of experimentation with montage and assemblage. The work was a 12-minute video installation wall, formed of 12 monitors arranged

⁵⁸ “Ça a dû être un emmerdeur cosmique, c’est-à-dire un homme insupportable dans une ville. Ça a dû être le principe même du malaise intérieur. Un homme qui au coin de la rue arrête le ductus de la pensée quotidienne en disant «Mettez-vous à réfléchir!», c’est atroce, c’est très très difficile à supporter”. In part 7, from 20’05’’-20’20’’. [Socrates must have been a cosmic pain in the ass, an unbearable guy in that city. He must have been the epitome of internal conflict. A guy who, in the middle of the street, stops his daily thoughts and says “start thinking!” It’s terrible, very, very difficult to bear].

⁵⁹ *Quand le siècle a pris formes* (1978, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris), *Zapping Zone* (1991, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris), *Silent Movie* (1995, Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, Ohio), *Immemory One* (1997, Centre Georges Pompidou), *Immemory* (1998, CD-ROM released at the Centre Georges Pompidou), *Roseware* (1999, Tàpies Foundation, Barcelona) and *Owls at Noon Prelude: The Hollow Men* (2005, Museum of Modern Art, New York).

⁶⁰ The exhibition, curated by then Centre Pompidou director Pontus Hultén, took place from the 12th July to the 6th November 1978. Marker finished the work very late and therefore the installation did not figure on the catalogue and there is no known visual documentation of it. A dossier of the production of the work, including contracts and research materials, is kept at the archives of the Centre Georges Pompidou. More information on the project on Chris Marker’s website <https://chrismarker.ch/introduction-aux-installations-de-chris-marker.html> (consulted 09.12.20).

in a rectangle of three by four screens, each of which broadcasted combined found footage from World War I and the Russian Revolution. Here, Marker's intentions were largely technical and concerned testing the medium's specificity, in order "to see if the video equipment made it possible to create a time difference between the televisions, that is to say that the film starts on half of the televisions at time zero, and on the others with a few seconds of intervals, which would create an interesting doubling of rhythm and perception".⁶¹ [Fig. I.11] Marker's most important experiment in media installation was also influenced by television. *Zapping Zone (Proposals for an Imaginary Television)* is a complex multi-media environment made for the exhibition "Passages de l'image", held at the Pompidou Centre in 1990⁶² and curated by Catherine David, Raymond Bellour and Christine Van Assche. [Fig. I.12] It was the second installation made by Marker for the Centre Pompidou (the first being *Quand le siècle a pris formes*). Though it cannot be proven that there is a direct correlation between *Zapping Zone* and *The Owl's Legacy*, it appears clear that working on the series and installation during the same period led to the two mutually influencing each other.⁶³ If *Zapping Zone* denotes Marker's characteristic montage signature—a "satori-bricolage" form, as he named it, which consists of a permanent interplay between personal memories and archives, and found footage of world events⁶⁴—it also incorporates the gesture of "zapping" itself, inherited from television, both in its title and in its organisation. Zapping refers to the rapid switching of television channels, widespread during the late 1980s when remote controls became more widely accessible.⁶⁵

The installation both situated and emphasised the tendency to zap as a means of empowering viewers, encouraging them to actively switch from one broadcast to another, to decide what to watch first and what next, while exploring the spatial distension and experience of simultaneity that television-watching could not offer. A "zone" of zapping therefore becomes an alternative space to the zapping that occurs inside the zone of television—an inversion that dismantles a passive spectatorial logic and activates an action in which spectators are also participant. Beyond

⁶¹ From <https://chrismarker.ch/introduction-aux-installations-de-chris-marker.html> (consulted 09.12.20) [my translation].

⁶² The exhibition was held between 18.09.1990 – 13.01.1991.

⁶³ Christine Van Assche alludes to it in "Zapping Zone (Proposals for an Imaginary Television), "le métissage des genres"", in *Chris Marker*, 330-37.

⁶⁴ See Chris Marker, *Logiciel/Catacombes*, note d'intention, Archives Centre Pompidou / Nouveaux medias, Paris, 1985.

⁶⁵ On the history of remote control, see Johan Grimont, "Remote Control: on Zapping, Close Encounters and the Commercial Break" in *Are You Ready for TV?* (Barcelona: MACBA, 2010–2011), 37- 56.

this potential expansion of the function and contents of television broadcast, *Zapping Zone* also attempted to engage audiences in its creation, generating a unique space and time within itself. [Fig. I.13] What Marker seemed to be proposing was a form of television—as an apparatus and as an entity that produced content—that was expanded in space and that exploded in a multiplicity of simultaneous presentations, a cacophony of rumours and images with different sounds, speeds and temporalities originating from a variety of sources (from the various television monitors spread across the space, in various degrees of heights and depth)—each of them individually competing for the spectators’ attention. A chaotic work in a constant process of reinvention and becoming, *Zapping Zone* becomes a stage in which very different registers gathered by Marker meet in synchronicity (personal recollections of the filmmaker recorded during his journeys; documentation of major political events of the recent years including footage of the war in the former Yugoslavia, the fall of the Berlin wall; and other images captured on television, many of animals, or clips from news announcements). In this sense, the work both predicted the simultaneity of Internet navigation, which he was to later adopt in his various website projects, as well as announcing the entry of digital culture in the museum.⁶⁶ Marker continued working on *Zapping Zone* (originally entitled *Logiciel/Catacombes*) at least until 1994, adding materials, recomposing the various zones that constituted it⁶⁷ and finally re-arranging the display to form his largest and most important installation piece. It is composed of 13 colour monitors, 7 computer programmes (originally on floppy disks), 20 black and white photographs, 4 panels with 80 slides and a maneki neko (a recurrent character in Marker’s film works, the most famous appearance of which is in *Sans Soleil*). One of its sections, *OWLTVJIEWS*, was connected to real-time television images broadcasted at random while a video game invited visitors to catch a small owl. Marker was again teaming up with the owl in this movement of spectatorial participation, as well as with technology, as it was television’s association with a computer that allowed for such

⁶⁶ See Chris Marker, *Logiciel/Catacombes*, note d’intention, Archives Centre Pompidou/Nouveaux medias, Paris, 1985.

⁶⁷ Up to 1992, the Zapping Zones were: Zone Matta (*Matta ’85*) – Zone Tarkovski (*Tarkovski ’86*) – Zone Christo (*Christo ’85*) – Zone Clip (*Getting Away With It*, music video for Electronic) – Zone Frisco (*Junkopia*) – Zone Sequences (extracts from *Le Fond de l’air est rouge*, *Sans soleil*, *Le Joli mai*, *La Sixième face du Pentagone*, *L’Héritage de la chouette*, *La Solitude du chanteur de fond*) – Zone Eclats (*Cocteau*, *2084*, *KFX*, *Statues 1*, *Taps*, *Statues 2*, *Kat Klip*, *Alexandra*, *Vertov*, *Arielle*, *Chouettes*, *Zeroins*, *Moonfleet*, *Flyin’ Fractals*) – Zone Bestiaire (*Cat Listening to Music*, *An Owl is an Owl is an Owl*, *Zoo Piece*) – Zone Spectre – Zone Tokyo (*Tokyo Days*) – Zone Berlin (*Berlin ’90*) – Zone Photos – Zone tv (*Détour. Ceaucescu*). In 1992, Zone Azulmoon replaced Zone tv, and *Coin fenêtre* was added to Zone Bestiaire. In 1994, Zone Séquences was re-edited; Zone tv was reinstated with *Détour. Ceaucescu*, *Montand and Belko Expo*; the two other animal short films, *Slon Tango* and *Bullfight / Okinawa*, were added to Zone Bestiaire; and Zone Bosniaque (*Prime Time in the Camps*) replaced Zone Eclats. See Lupton, *Chris Marker*, 234.

interplay between pre-existing and novel images.

Returning to *The Owl's Legacy*, and conscious of the “archaeology of knowledge” that he was putting in place with his system of generating, collecting, processing and archiving, Marker borrowed a formal organisation device he was familiar with, reciprocating *Zapping Zone's* spatial assemblage, while structuring the series as though it were a book divided into thirteen chapters. The episodes' titles are complemented by their respective subtitles, in which longer, poetic sentences extend the possibilities presented by the Greek keywords and create a thesaurus-like, archival logic, in which various concepts echo and refer to one another, often touching upon authors and works dear to Marker. As Bellour pointed out, some of these subtitles transmit important cultural references and allude to specific authors or ideas: the subtitle of episode 6, *Mathematics*, refers to Roland Barthes' *L'Empire des Signes* (1970) and that of episode 8, *Music*, alludes to Henri Michaux's *L'espace du dedans* (1927-59).⁶⁸

In *The Owl's Legacy*, this rhizomatic system allowed Marker to make films that were well structured, while refusing to follow a linear narrative. This is a characteristic not only of his films but also of the various media he worked with—for instance, in the project CD-Rom *Immemory* (1997), which emerged from his ongoing interest in new media and technology and pursued his concern with the spatialisation of viewing experiences first explored in *Zapping Zone*. *Immemory* opens to a main menu of non-sequential terms: “War”, “Film”, “Memory”, “Museums”, “Photography”, “Poetry”, “Voyages” and “Xplugs”.⁶⁹ Each keyword unfolds into other options (for

⁶⁸ Raymond Bellour, “The Book, Back and Forth”, in *Qu'est-ce Qu'une Madeleine?: A propos du CD-ROM Immemory de Chris Marker*, (Yves Gevaert Éditeur Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1997) 150. Footnote 11. The subtitle of Episode 1 resonates with Gustav Flaubert's *Dictionnaire des idées reçues* (1913); Episode 3, with Rudyard Kipling's 1895 poem *The City of Sleep* (in French *La cité des songes*); Episode 4 with the 1959 film *Retour impossible* by Japanese filmmaker Buichi Saito; Episode 5, *le sens de l'histoire*, with Russian political philosopher Nicolas Berdiaeff's homonymous book;⁶⁸ Episode 7, *Les mots de la tribu*, alludes to Natalia Ginzburg's homonymous 1963 book; Episode 10 to Nicolas Bouvier's book *L'usage du monde* (1963); and episode 13 seems to make reference to the painting *Le triomphe de la chouette*, by French artist Philippe Rousseau (1816-87).

⁶⁹ Raymond Bellour makes one of the few found associations of Chris Marker's modus operandi with the thought of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari: “The sole departure point is the table of contents; there is no point of arrival. Memory has neither beginning nor end. It is always coming back from the past, plunging toward its own future concentrated in a present which it flees. Hooke, who conceives Memory as a “repository of ideas”, thus qualifies “the last Idea formed, which is nothing other than the present Moment” This is also what Deleuze, speaking of Resnais' cinematic transformation of Proust and Bergson, called Membrane-Memory, between inside and outside, actual and virtual. *Immemory* is indeed that of which one cannot conceive any memory, one's own life forming at each instant an opaque while, whence something surfaces upon the screen of memory”. The possible forms of relation between Chris Marker's approach to filmmaking and to his own modes of presentation and interpretation of materials, theories and researches, and the notions of openness, multiplicity and rhizome are to be developed. In “The Book, Back and Forth” (1997), 109-50.

instance, the category “Photography” leads to “China”, “Korea”, “Vietnam”, “Cuba”, “Bosnia” and “WWII”), establishing a complex entanglement of possibilities.⁷⁰

The Metamorphosis of the Owl

While being described as “a television programme dedicated to Greek culture”, *The Owl’s Legacy* wasn’t exactly portraying the survival of Ancient Greece in modern times. Rather it was examining the limits of this influence, the gap between reality and the imaginary this historical moment had generated and the historical consequences of these affiliations. At the same time, it was also investigating what the terms that named each episode really meant, for example the distance that existed between the ideal embedded in the term “democracy” and the concrete manner in which “democracy” worked then and now. The series formed a systematic deconstruction of a certain political and cultural fantasy, rewriting heavily-loaded concepts like democracy as a system of governance of the few (Castoriadis), maths as a petty activity of splitting hairs (Michel Serres), mythology as a facilitator “for a movement of irrational ideas, which eventually led to Nazism” (as religious scholar Renate Schlesier argues when commenting on footage of Leni Riefenstahl’s 1936 film *Olympia*), or charismatic philosophical traditions as self-involved and overloaded, as when Steiner calls Socrates a “cosmic pain in the ass”. This kind of criticism fitted well the spirit of the times. As the Otolith Group mentioned, *The Owl’s Legacy* recalls “a moment in which the meaning of terms like origin, ancestry, inheritance, legacy, history, nationality, race, civilization, authority and the idea of the West was being contested across an increasing number of disciplines”.⁷¹ If this remark may seem exaggerated, particularly when considering how Marker’s references (especially from today’s perspective) remain largely Eurocentric, white and male,⁷² it is striking that Marker exceeded the spirit of his times with the radical questioning of

⁷⁰ Marker created a similar arrangement for *Silent Movie* (1995), commissioned by the Wexner Arts Center, Ohio, for the celebration of the centenary of the invention of cinema. It consisted of a vertical column of five monitors, each playing a 20-minute loop theme: “Journey”, “Face”, “Gesture” and “Waltz” (respectively displayed from top to bottom). The central monitor presented a selection of ninety-four intertitles from silent films. The “moving images travel through a computer interface that assembles an ever-changing array of sequences. At any given moment, each passage is in unique juxtaposition with the other images passing across the surrounding monitors. Coloration, tone, and association are governed by chance contiguities; even the intertitles narrate across a field of fluid relationships [...]. No sequence of images, no set of associative references is repeatable and therefore emblematic of the whole. But all is not unbridled flux”. Steve Seid in *MATRIX* no. 168, published during Chris Marker’s *Silent Movie* at the Matrix Program for Contemporary Art, University of California, Berkeley Art Museum, Pacific Film Archive, Berkeley, California, 1 January – 15 April 1996.

⁷¹ The Otolith Group, *Inner Time of Television* (Athens: Athens Biennale, 2007), 3.

⁷² Largely but not exclusively. Important testimonies such as those of Cape Verdian poet Baltazar Lopes, Japanese filmmaker Yukio Ninagawa and Japanese classicist Atsuhiko Yoshida, alongside a considerable presence of women (Catherine Belkhdja, Christiane Bron, Sophie Chaveay, Arielle Dombasle, Fraçoise Frontisi-Ducroux,

the veracity and fairness of these concepts. He seemed interested not so much in tracing a renewed outline of the actual legacy of Ancient Greece, or in investigating the true definitions of certain foundational concepts, but rather in executing two parallel operations: on the one hand observing, if not inducing, the metamorphosis of concepts and gestures—a true exercise of tracing the journey of ideas and forms—and on the other hand, questioning whether the medium used to execute this investigation could be effective. And in order to do so, he relied on his animal allies.

Rancière argues that the “metamorphoses of the owl interest Chris Marker more than the legacy of classical culture”.⁷³ He is right, but not only in the sense of the transformation of the meaning of words. The ways in which the owl is transformed throughout the series is of utmost importance. One and many owls, these birds appear and reappear in variations in which the recognisable and the new alternate, in a rhythm that both reassures and surprises viewers. The opening and closing titles are the same for all episodes. The opening introduces a *mise-en-abîme* between a real and a figurative owl: tainted in an indigo blue filter, the opening shows the head of a little owl turning slightly. One of the animal’s eyes bears the image of the head of another owl, which is then projected onto the forefront of the screen. This one, within the eye, is a frontal-looking owl engraved in an old silver tetradrachm, while the series’ title appears written on top of it. [Fig. 1.14] Marker introduces one of his most consistent approaches to animals in this short opening: the investigation of the interplay between individual and symbol, reality and myth, biology and history, seriousness and humour. The footage of the living, present-day owl, the image of the artistic owl engraved in the coin and the allusion to the mythological owl that stands for Athena’s wisdom (and synecdochally for Greece) are merged into one another and accompany Marker in his reflections about the past and present, myth and reality of the Classical Greek imaginary. In the closing titles, the real owl appears with no coin image projected onto her gaze.

Mina Himona, Angélique Ionatos, Lika Kavjaradze, Nancy Laghlin, Fouli Manelopoulos, Melina Mercouri, Tatiana Papamashou, Amy Phillips, Renate Schleisser, Giulia Sissa, Manuela Smith, Deborah Steiner, Evi Touloupa) attest to a plural representation throughout the series. Major male voices are dominant, though, and several female presences have a rather passive role, hearing and accompanying the conversations more than actively participating in them. And as Carlos Aguilar writes in the *LA Times*, “Though Eurocentric by design, Marker’s appraisal takes on more global connotation when addressing Japanese culture’s adoration of ancient Greece. The Asian nation’s praise best manifests in the evident parallels connecting Kabuki and Noh theater to the seemingly ephemeral, yet staggering theater performances of tragic tales in Athens and across the Greek territory”, *Los Angeles Times* (30.05.2019), <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/movies/la-et-mn-owls-legacy- review-chris-marker-20190530-story.html> (accessed 19.12.2020).

⁷³ In *Chris Marker*, 325.

She is the one who remains, after all has been questioned and discussed. This final owl resists the projections, conjectures and speculations about her legacy that have shaped and informed the programme. It is she who bids farewell to the viewers as the last, fleeing image before the programme comes to an end.

The owl's association with the imaginary of Greece permeates the whole series. Yet it is not a single owl whose legacy is investigated. This parliament of owls is varied, heterogeneous and wide. The owls of *The Owl's Legacy* are not like the cartoon of Guillaume-en-Egypte, Marker's alter-ego, who, like Lewis Carroll's Cheshire Cat, has a single facial expression and appears and disappears in *Immemory*. At the same time, the owls are not the pretext for a critique, as in the reindeers of *Letter from Siberia*, which humorously expose the transformation of a reindeer into consumer merchandise that suits many purposes such as "Horn Flakes". [Fig. I.15] Sometimes, the series' owls are depicted as actual animals, as in episode 8, *Music*, which centres on the digital treatment and rearrangement of an owl's cry, further consolidating the relationship between animal representation and music that is characteristic of Marker's other animal works of the same period, namely the video haikus *Cat Listening to Music* (1990), *Slon Tango* (1993) or *Zoo Piece* (also 1990). In other moments, however, these owls are turned into literal companion animals, figures that accompany and stand by the speakers' side during their testimonies. Indeed, the series' most preponderant speakers are flanked by an owl, whose presence is at once iconic, enigmatic, risible and sometimes dominating. Some are crafty owls, and are sculptural, such as the large matryoshka that flanks Castoriadis during his interview [Fig. I.16], the flying owl that is suspended next to classicist Christiane Bron [Fig. I.17] or the colourful glass mosaic owl that accompanies Baltasar Lopes. [Fig. I.18] Some are prints, as with the thin white owls that stand behind Elia Kazan, or the photographic reproduction of a great grey owl that accompanies Kostas Axelos, the black and white tonalities of the animal matching those of the Greek philosopher's grey hair and jumper. All the others are figures treated in a video synthesiser with results made specifically for each speaker, exemplifying what film critic Chris Petit described as "Marker's gleeful embrace of new digital media technologies from the 1980s onwards".⁷⁴ These early digital variations on the owl as a portrait, caricature, spirit animal and haunting entity match the

⁷⁴ Chris Petit, "The owl's legacy: in memory of Chris Marker", in *Sight and Sound Magazine* (October 2012), <https://www2.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/sight-sound-magazine/features/owls-legacy-memory-chris-marker> (accessed 19.12.2020).

metamorphic examination of the Greek keywords in reconfiguring this animal in a multiplicity of modes.

Speakers Angélique Ionatos, Michel Jobert, Oswynd Murray, Renate Schleisser, Michel Serres, Giulia Sissa, Manuela Smith, George Steiner, Iannis Xenakis, Vassilis Vassilikos and others are matched by electric owls. [Fig. I.19] The animals appear in various sizes, tones and expressions. They are spectral owls, ghostly creatures projected behind the speakers, echoing Plato's Allegory of the cave in the early digital era. Mediated and reproduced by technology, the owls appear like shadows of an idea, beings from another era that actualise the past onto the future with their electric auras. These are purely cinematic owls, owl-images and owl-concepts, whose legacy remains at once palpable and unreachable.

Formally, the owls create an immersive, abstract, deeply mesmerising environment that transforms the context and space in which ideas are formulated and shared, creating a space of their own, which in some cases replicates and enhances the speakers' personae. In an exercise of anthropomorphism, their physiognomy often replicates the speaker they accompany (Manuela Smith's round face and big eyes [Fig. I.20], Castoriadis' matryoshka-like round and bald owl, Xenakis' austere owl, Michel Jobert's wrinkled owl, Elias Kazan pale, elongated and incisive looking owl...). [Fig. I.21] At once reassuring and inquisitive, they weave together the series by constituting a bizarre parliament of owls.

But they are more than a mere decorative, caricatural or unifying element. As mentioned by Maroussia Vossen, "Chris saw in the owl the perfect sentinel, with her fine hearing and her capacity to scan a large observation field thanks to her head which can turn 270 degrees".⁷⁵ Owls are Marker's creative allies, surveying the speakers, interrogating their truths, toning down their erudition and self-righteousness and adding a tone of ironic scepticism to their statements, a twist that was aligned with the irony and simulacrum that defined the spirit of postmodernism. Corroborating Steve Baker's thesis on *The Postmodern Animal*, these owls have an affective role, as they move viewers "between sentimental compassion and aesthetic satisfaction" and bring an "imaginative thought [that] necessarily challenges the complacency of the age, an unthinking

⁷⁵ Maroussia Vossen, *Chris Marker (le livre impossible)* (Paris: Le Tripode, 2016), 65.

'consensus' of politics and of taste which would prefer 'to liquidate the heritage of the avant-gardes' and instead to 'offer viewers matter for solace and pleasure'".⁷⁶ The owls exist beyond history and memory, neither individual entities nor supporting forms, mutating from one mode of existence to another, one form to another, from sculpture to collage, painting and digital image. Unlike the speakers and their words, which question, problematise and review the distorted (and distortion-prone) imaginary of Ancient Greece, and who perform their erudition and intelligence, the owls aren't there to learn nor teach. They ambiguously project and amplify; they are simultaneously supportive and incredulous: they hear and don't hear, they see and don't see, they exist, but are invisible, at least to the speakers. They stand between invention and reality. Saying nothing, these owls are at once wise and funny, expressive and mute, idiosyncratic and universal, leading viewers to face the paradoxical situation they find themselves in: standing in-between entertainment and seriousness, education and consensus, certification and revisionism, the owls invite viewers to never fully trust the messages nor the messengers, while at the same time luring them to be moved by their sympathy and intelligence.

At the same time, these owls propose a novel relationship to truth, supporting the ideas of those they accompany in this complex exercise of revisionism, and staring directly into the eyes of audiences, inviting them not to trust received ideas blindly nor to trust the medium that is propagating them. After all, these are electric owls, spectres that will disappear as soon as the lights go off, animals whose bodies and sounds were appropriated, manipulated, transposed. It is from this state of ambiguity, of being just an owl and being no owl at all, that they support the pursuit of a different version of historical narrative.

Animal Haikus

Lupton describes how animal presences become more prominent in Marker's cinema at the end of the 1970s, in the wake of his more straightforwardly political phase. Such accentuation of animal presence accompanies the transition from cinema to other apparatuses, such as television and museums and galleries. Ten years later, that animal presence is as strong, if not stronger, as before. Indeed, a series of works made both at the same time and soon after *The Owl's Legacy* reveal a systematic inclusion of animals, which not only lend themselves to a title or a few seconds

⁷⁶ Steve Baker, *The Postmodern Animal* (London: Reaktion Books, 2000), 7 and 18-19.

of reel, but rather become the actual subject matter of the works. Marker made several short-length videos during this period, entirely focused on animals, all of which had a lighter and less ambitious format. Conversely, it may also be the case that the animal footage shaped the format; an exercise of mutual influence and adaptation, in which Marker is led to adopt a more appropriate model for the different animals he made visible and brought to the forefront of his work.

During this transition period, one which is also marked by a major transition of places and formats—from the movie theatre to the gallery and the television—the animals jump from the frames and margins they previously occupied, appearing in personal memorabilia, letters to dear ones, illustrations and cartoons, but also reinforcing Marker's politics as support figures, to the centre of his pictures. Through these works, Marker reveals the amount of time spent with these animals, observing, depicting and filming them, whilst also demonstrating the kind of creative responses he formed to the moments, situations and individuals he encountered. This openness—this willingness to be exposed to the event of meeting the gaze of another life form—characterises his work of this period.

This is particularly visible in the video haikus—short, non-narrative pieces particularly demonstrative of Marker's poetics and which were made not for the cinema but for an exhibition, whereby they played on a loop in small monitors, several of them running simultaneously. Deprived of the voice-overs that characterised some of his major films, these short videos, sometimes lasting only a minute, allow for a closer observation of Marker's relationship to animals. Despite the lack of commentary, the essayistic potential of these works remains as strong and distinct as ever, as the montage and relationship between images, sequences and sound convey information, affects and ideas in compelling and meaningful manners. Some video haikus were part of *Zapping Zone's* "Zone Bestiaire"⁷⁷ and were later assembled to create *Bestiaire aka Petit Bestiaire* (1990-4). Such is the case for *An Owl is an Owl is an Owl* (1990), *Cat Listening to Music* (1990), *Zoo Piece* (1990), *Slon Tango* (1993) and *Bullfight/Okinawa* (1994).

⁷⁷ The other zones being, according to the original plan kept by the Pompidou Archive, *Zone Berlin*, *Eclats*, *Photos*, *Oakley Apple II GS*, *Frisco*, *Graphs Apple II GS*, *Elephant Apple II GS*, *Clip*, *Cycles Apple II GS*, *Matta*, *Sequences*, *Spectre*, *TV*, *Show Apple II GS*, *Super Chouette Apple II GS*, *Tokyo*, *Hyperstudio Apple II GS* and *Tarkovski*.

An Owl is an Owl is an Owl

The video haiku *An Owl is an Owl is an Owl* portrays a different ensemble of owls, this time entirely composed of real animals Marker filmed, mostly in zoos and aviaries.⁷⁸ The video presents some owls simply staring, in almost total immobility, with their eyes only occasionally blinking back to the spectators. Others are depicted when their gaze meets or abandons the camera, either in the moment in which they rotate their necks and face the lens, or when they turn their backs towards it and face the opposite direction. Marker filmed different owls: various eagle owls, a great horned owl, a snowy owl, a barred owl in a tree trunk, a burrowing owl and a group of little owls, with each individual reappearing throughout the video. [Fig. 1.22]

A sequence of digital, distorted voices repeats fairly incomprehensible sentences, uttered over a background of what appears to be a progressive rock tune. Among this cacophony, the phrases “an owl is an owl is an owl” and its simplified version “an owl, an owl, an owl” are heard at the rhythm of the edits of the bird’s movements—a forecasting of Marker’s subsequent work in establishing meaningful articulations between images and sounds in his moving image-based work. Despite its short length, this work offers one of the best examples of Marker’s complex use of sound, which brings together words and images, and of his interest in creating meaningful but not literal associations between what is heard and seen.

A more attentive listening reveals a series of bizarre and slightly surreal enunciations, variations of the sentence that start with “an owl, an owl, an owl an owl, an owl” to evolve into “bubububu, who is bubububu? An owl is an owl is an owl. Who is an owl is an owl... the owl and the pussy cat... after all, an owl, is an owl is an owl... In the beginning was the owl... Who is another owl? An owl is an owl is an owl, another owl, another owl, an owl is an owl is an owl... fox”.

Heavily distorted, the voices enunciating these sentences have been so comprehensively altered as to assure their full disembodiment from those who speak them, be they originally humans or machines. Sometimes moving slower, as the pronounced words haul in their own distortions, and sometimes faster, like hiccups under the effect of helium ingestion, the sentences are expressed in a clearly artificial frequency and pitch, leading us to wonder whether this could be Marker’s

⁷⁸ At 1’ 50”, a sign reading “Owl Aviary” can be seen, indicating that the video, or at least part of it, was shot in an English-speaking country, even if a more precise reference of the actual setting could not be traced.

interpretation of how the birds would hear the original voices, since their perception of sound is certainly different from the human range.⁷⁹ [Fig. I.23]

Giving the video its title, the sentence “an owl is an owl is an owl” recalls Gertrude Stein’s 1913 poem “A Rose is a Rose is a Rose”, an important feminist reference for an artist who predominantly used male cultural references in his work. Stein’s celebration of paradox and her acknowledgement of and insistence on the limitations of language to describe and explore the rich complexity contained within a single figure, is here transposed from flower to animal, encompassing its image, meaning and legacy. In this short contradictory battle with representation and its limits, the owls remain intact, defying explanation, analysis or interpretation.

The two voices that appear within the work seem to be engaging in a dialogue, a sort of conversation formed of questions and answers, as per question: “who is bubububu?” answer: “An owl is an owl is an owl;” question: “Who is another owl?” answer: “An owl is an owl is an owl, another owl, another owl...”. This very primitive, yet almost poetic form of exchange recalls those that were made possible via Marker’s *DIALECTOR*; a computer program he developed and used from 1985 to 1998.⁸⁰ The work was written in Applesoft Basic language on an Apple II (the first home computer mass-produced by Apple Computer) and stored on a 5½ floppy disk. *DIALECTOR*, subtitled “The Second Self”, allows for very simple dialogues between an individual and the machine, made via a straightforward question-answer process in which the computer has been programmed to respond to the questions raised by its users.

⁷⁹ One artistic experiment that deals with the transmutation of human and animal sound, based on speed, imitation and digitally alteration of sounds is Marcus Coates’ 18-minute video installation *Dawn Chorus* (2007), which uses digital methods to explore the relationship between birdsong and the human voice, drawing out similarities and differences between the behaviour of birds and humans.

⁸⁰ “DIALECTOR était une ébauche de programme, interrompu lorsqu'Apple a décidé que programmer était réservé aux professionnels. Il en reste des bribes, probablement incompréhensibles, ainsi qu'un spécimen de dialogue. L'original est quelque part sur des disquettes 5.25 illisibles aujourd'hui. Il est certain que si j'avais pu continuer au rythme de quelques lignes par jour, le programme aurait sans doute une réserve de conversation plus riche”. [DIALECTOR was a draft program, interrupted when Apple decided that programming was to be reserved for professionals. There remain some scraps, probably incomprehensible, and a specimen of dialogue. The original is somewhere on 5.25 disks – unreadable today. It is certain that if I could have continued in the rhythm of a few lines a day, the program would probably hold a reserve allowing richer conversations.]” (my translation). Testimony, from 2010, published on the occasion of ARTE’s programme *DIALECTOR, en conversation(s)*, October 2013. As found at: <http://creative.artetv.fr/dialector> 2010 (accessed 15.04.2015).

An Owl is an Owl is an Owl attests to Marker's exceptional articulation of images and sound. It also revisits an early experiment in combining synthesised sonorities and owl portraits, which appears at 1 hour and 30 minutes of *Letter from Siberia*. There, Marker depicts an individual handling an oscilloscope at the Weizmann Institute of Science, in Israel. The film's voiceover narrator says, in Hebrew: "Signs are not for the eye alone. In Tel-Aviv's Carmel Street market, they express a timeless urge to communicate. To communicate, to define an orderly relationship in things hostile or mystery-veiled. Oscilloscopes deep in computation akin to contemplative birds". At the same time, synthesised sounds can be heard, similar to those that Marker's will use later, in his 1981 short film *Junkopia*. Suddenly, a sound with a loud pitch opens way for an image of two large eagle owls in an aviary, their ears raised up, turning their heads towards the camera in consonance with the sound. The sequence alternates between images of the oscilloscope, its lights flickering, and the faces of the owls, moving their beaks at the pace of the beeps. The voice resumes: "These remote-control owls are seen in Jerusalem's Biblical Zoo" at the same time as images of a sign in the zoo, located in front of the cage of the Serpent Eagle, can be seen. It shows a quote from the Ancient Testament (Job 28:7, *No bird of prey knows that hidden path, no falcon's eye has seen it*). The voice continues, "animals live in the shade of verses taken from the Book of Books". The images revert to an owl, seen inside a cage (noticeable in the iron net behind it), while the voiceover expresses a similar oscillation between the references to the biblical text and the present-day reality of technological Israel, between the metaphoric and the concrete, just like the birds are displayed as abstract representatives of sacred religious writings and portrayed by Marker as actual individuals with expressions and moods of their own:

[S]acred encyclopaedia of exile days, nothing existed outside its record. 'Brother to monsters, ostrich-like,' I greet the flamingo and the owl, 'whose flesh is not to be partaken.' And he, in charge of the oscilloscope, is a skull-cap wearing true believer and of course abstains from owls, and his God is the God of Abraham.

Theory of Sets

The different ways in which Marker's concern with order, classification and language find form are well exemplified in the short video *Theory of Sets* [Théorie des ensembles] (1991), also part of later versions of *Zapping Zone*. [Fig. 1.24] Marker returns to the Bible, this time to revisit the story of Noah's Ark with a cat-shaped ark, proposing a sort of "mathematical deluge" to illustrate

the basics of set theory to children. The story's narrators are two owls, who enumerate and classify the animals. [Fig. I.25] The video offers a good insight into Marker's humour, artistic taste and erudition, combined in a pedagogical tone in a rare example of a work made for a younger audience. Once more, as in *The Owl's Legacy*, humour, iconicity and pedagogy are features brought about by the animals, whose intelligence, allure and atemporality Marker excels in revealing.

The video was entirely made with the digital software HyperStudio for Apple IIGS, the same programme Marker used to create the computer programme *DIALECTOR*⁸¹ between 1985-88 and later to make the large digital owls of *The Owl's Legacy*, a series of the "zones" of *Zapping Zone* and also *Immemory*. While characterised by an aesthetics associated with the inception of digital technology, the layout of the 11-minute video dialogues with the early tradition of cinema, and with the structure of silent film. This decision to merge and blur aesthetic registers could be seen as an attempt by Marker to support a continuative vision of cinema, one which evolves and continues to exist across formats and media. As Alter notes, "the passage of time and the manner in which it is stored and transformed into memory are, for Marker, intimately connected to the medium through which the past is represented".⁸² And if television was the appropriate medium to digest and elaborate the past, considered by Marker as a "repository of memory", he chooses to use such a "modern" digital support to address children, offering a knowledge of the past that combines different aesthetic registers and is looking towards the future.

Such pioneering use of infographics allowed Marker to animate a series of images extrapolated from a vast array of sources. In continuity with Marker's encyclopaedic and eclectic references, many of the images of the figures that are featured in the video are borrowed from historical artistic sources and rendered digitally. Noah, for instance, is a digital version of the painting *A Janitor* (1909) by the Georgian primitivist painter Niko Pirosmani (1862–1918). The animals were inspired by works from disparate sources and authors, ranging from early modernist references (Edvard Munch, Marc Chagall, Max Ernst) to earlier imagery (Master Bertram, Albrecht Dürer, Hieronymus Bosch), to the Austrian animalist engraver Aloys Zötl, the tapestries of *The Lady and*

⁸¹ On the history of the *Dialector*, see Agnès de Cayeux, Andrés Lozano, Annick Rivoire, *History of the Dialector Program*, <https://chrismarker.org/history-of-the-dialector-program/> (accessed 20.12.2020).

⁸² Alter, *Chris Marker*, 91.

the Unicorn and to Charles Schulz's cartoon Snoopy. According to the credits at the end of the video, Marker also rendered animals from concrete animal viewing places, such as the pandas from the Ueno Zoo in Japan, the emus from the Zoological Reserve of the Chateau de Sauvage in France, or the owls from Turkey.

The central figure of the video is Noah's Ark, an entity bearing a strong iconography associated with continuation, memory and rescue, further underlining this possible weaving of a cinema post-film and the suggestion of the memory-carrying function of cinema, which renders and translates atemporal images according to the technologies available at the time of their re-elaboration. In *Theory of Sets*, digital images, most of them still, are alternated with intertitles of short sentences written in large white letters, framed by a white rectangle over a black background, which support and complement the story's narrative. These short sentences are written from two different points of view— one corresponding to the thoughts, questions and ideas of Noah (called "Monsieur Noé" in the film), the other to the observations of a hypothetical narrator. There is no distinction between these voices; it is the layout and typeface of the lettering that differentiates them.

At the same time as this work makes use of digital technology, it bears a strong sense of technological obsolescence and nostalgia, largely generated by Marker's efforts to pair it aesthetically with the layout and graphics of silent movies and by the inclusion of art historical references that lend themselves to the characters of the tale. Marker seems to manifest his nostalgic propensity more clearly when using more contemporary means accessible to him, such as digital graphics and video, which balance the past references with an updated technology, hence preventing a full sense of yearning for a time long gone. For instance, this is also the case of *Immemory*, whose aesthetics are also grounded in the past (and its content is also a tribute to the past).

The video's stillness of the images and their sequential alternation creates the illusion of a slide projection, an effect Marker had previously adopted in *If I Had Four Camels*, also structured as a flow of slides. But while in *If I Had Four Camels* the structure adheres to the plot, which tells of a small group of friends who gather together to discuss the travel photographs they made, in *Theory*

of Sets this effect, combined with the cartoonish images and the low-res aesthetics, suggests an educational presentation or an allusion for children, who are presented with a familiar figure—Noah’s Ark—while being taught mathematics through Noah’s various operations of arrangement and classification. There is no voiceover, only music, with a melody that plays an important role in breaking the static nature of the flow of images and gives the video a strong pace and an engaging rhythm. A musical crescendo induces a sense of tension and excitement in viewers, as intensity builds up alongside the questions that are being posed by the intertitles. As in other films, Marker reveals his predilection for classical arrangements of modern and contemporary composers. In this case, the melody is *Concerto Grosso No.1* by Alfred Schnittke, whose music, a few years later, Marker would also use for his film *The Last Bolshevik* (1993).

The plot of *Theory of Sets*, through which the story of Noah’s archival impulses and dilemmas when fitting all the animals he is carrying in the ark is told, is transmitted through the complementary relation Marker establishes between images and text. The action of the video moves forward thanks to the intensifying interconnection of the questions that are posed. These questions, referring to the animals, evolve from asking “why this one next to the other?” to “why one apart from the other?”, culminating in the dilemma of how to classify the animals in a universal language—“not everyone has the same alphabet”, reads the intertitle card. The text then proceeds to meta-reflections on the system of ordering the animals as things: “before classifying we need to agree upon an idea of classification, on the language of classification; in one word—on the classification of classifications”.

Order, therefore, appears as the policing of classification, both concepts intrinsically associated with one another. The conundrum of compiling and assembling emerges when two owls declare: “all that we have in common, what brings us together, is exactly our being together”. Both the arbitrary nature of collecting and assembling animals and the system of abstraction that is implicit to such a gesture are exposed at the end of the video, when the animals are compared to interchangeable mathematical figures: “since he understood the theory of sets, Mr. Noe understood he also comprehends mathematics—Eureka!—because what are maths but to classify, find, assemble these bizarre animals that are the numbers?” This approach could be considered from two complementary perspectives. On the one hand, Marker could be providing

an animistic reading of mathematics, establishing a parallel between numbers and animals, as independent creatures that have their own independent existence and agency. On the other hand, this could be an allusion to how animals are treated as numbers and data to be managed, sorted and archived.

Theory of Sets thus raises fundamental questions about the logics of the archive and exhibition: “How to arrange things?”, “How to display them?”, “What to keep together?”, “What to separate?”, “How to classify them in a universal order?” Marker thus compares language—verbal and numerical—to the systems of sorting and categorising animals, adopting the mythical figure of a germinal zoo—Noah’s Ark—to do so. This association justifies the parallelism between Foucault’s reflections on the “great process of transforming sex into discourse”⁸³ and the operation of transforming wild animals into controlled, exposed creatures, open to being analysed and rendered in verbal descriptions.

Would it be possible to observe a parallel operation in the constitution of the zoological garden and other spaces of spectacle of incarcerated animals? It seems so, taking in consideration Foucault’s reflections on how “sexuality was carefully confined; it moved into the home” from the 18th century onwards, of how it was not only physically displaced but also ontologically reframed “into the serious function of reproduction” and normalised, as “the couple imposed itself as model”, and also how “repression has indeed been the fundamental link between power, knowledge, and sexuality”. Here, I would also suggest, with Foucault, that from the 18th century onwards, animals were “carefully confined, moved into homes”,⁸⁴ not only physically displaced from the spaces they previously occupied but also ontologically (and materially) framed into a palpable *raison d’être*, that of feeding a complex apparatus of political-scientific-spectacle. Often resembling a Noah’s Ark, which Berger defines as “the first ordered assembly of animals”,⁸⁵ these couples of forced migrants, the first victims of a climate adversity, were saved by humankind through a logics that exhibits “a combination of care for the creatures themselves, and a self-

⁸³ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 22.

⁸⁴ All previous quotes from Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 3.

⁸⁵ Berger, “Why Look at Animals”, 19.

interested foresight for salvaging animal resources for a new world”.⁸⁶ The evolution of this system of thought and action led to the current ethos of preservation and conservation of wildlife, which Donna J. Haraway describes: “At the turn of the millennium, ‘saving the endangered [fill in the category]’ emerged as the rhetorical gold standard for ‘value’ in techno-science, trumping and shunting other considerations of the apparatus for shaping public and private, kin and kind, animation and cessation”.⁸⁷

Zoo Piece

If the zoological has been at the heart of the analysis of Marker’s work until now, it manifests itself in an unmediated, direct manner in the video haiku, *Zoo Piece* (1990). This short video, a collage of footage shot by Marker in zoological gardens, epitomises Marker’s interest in animal-human contacts which I have been discussing throughout this chapter. *Zoo Piece* is a melancholic depiction of a large variety of animals in zoos, confined to their cages, aquariums and other display sites. Different to the previous two works, *Zoo Piece* includes original sound footage from the different zoological gardens he visited, which is accompanied by another sound layer, a soft, unidentified guitar melody in minor tones that adds a veil of poetic sadness to the composition. Seals, ostriches, camels, leopards and apes are portrayed in their daily occupancy of the zoo. The video includes a portrait of a large rhinoceros lying in a grey, dark paved room, facing a tiled wall and barely moving, his small ears slightly twitching, like those of Guillaume in *Cat Listening to Music*. This is a harsh depiction of the space and conditions of the zoo, one to which it is hard to remain indifferent as it portrays confinement, deprivation and solitude at their most acute.

Further highlighting the conditions and sombreness of the zoo, the video closes with a series of images of domestic cats whose confinement is paradoxically as disturbing, if not more so, than that of the other wild animals. [Fig. I.26] Rubbing their bodies and clutching the metallic cages that imprison them with their paws, the animal’s repetitive and strident meows generate a tension and anxiety that contradicts the music’s calmness, and adds a final tone of sadness to the ensemble of animals in the zoo. This video echoes Foucault’s writing on the genealogy of the prison in the menagerie:

⁸⁶ Dominic Pettman, “Affection”, *The Edinburgh Companion to Animal Studies* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 38.

⁸⁷ Donna J. Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis / London: University of Minnesota Press, 2018), 153.

Bentham does not say whether he was inspired, in his project, by Le Vaux's menagerie at Versailles: the first menagerie in which the different elements are not, as they traditionally were, distributed in a park (Loisel, 104-7). At the centre was an octagonal pavilion which, on the first floor, consisted of only a single room, the king's salon; on every side large windows looked out onto seven cages (the eighth side was reserved for the entrance), containing different species of animals. By Bentham's time, this menagerie had disappeared. But one finds in the programme of the Panopticon a similar concern with individualizing observation, with characterization and classification, with the analytical arrangement of space. The Panopticon is a royal menagerie; the animal is replaced by man, individual distribution by specific grouping and the king by the machinery of a furtive power. With this exception, the Panopticon also does the work of a naturalist.⁸⁸

There is a parallel between these displaced animals, once wild, untamed, unruly, and the way in which Foucault describes how the sexuality of the populace, considered "as wealth [...] manpower or labor capacity [...] balanced between its own growth and the resources it commanded"⁸⁹ has been subjected to repression, censorship and codification. What was considered one of the most bestial sides of human nature—sexuality—was to be confined to a strict regime of control to ensure an equally controlled society. Likewise, those creatures whose mere existence—symbolic and concrete—challenged the civilisation process of the West, were subjected to a similar system of regulation (to ensure they existed within the required norms of occupation, circulation and hygiene), visibility (to prevent them from having an intimate, unruly behaviour, and subjecting them to constant scrutiny) and punishment (their condition of wildness was sufficient to determine their right to be captured and kept behind bars, in a system resembling Bentham's panopticon and its intention of showing everything, of hiding nothing).

Cat Listening to Music

Entering the sphere of the domestic, the poetic and intimate video *Cat Listening to Music*

⁸⁸ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. A. Sheridan Smith (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), xv.

⁸⁹ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 25.

(originally titled *Chat écoutant la musique (Entr'acte)*)⁹⁰ (1990) is a portrait of Marker's cat, Guillaume. [Fig. I.27] Laying atop the keyboard of a synthesizer in Marker's domestic environment and listening to a soft piano melody, Guillaume is half-sleeping, half-attentive, his ears flapping in a short moment that becomes an event due to the idleness of the scene, a sign of life and a reaction to something external to the cat's world, his paws lightly kneading on the keyboard. Suddenly, Guillaume reacts to something, faces the camera with his eyes wide open, only to resume his sleeping a few seconds later. Guillaume's status bears no difference to that of a human, as either cat or person could be observed to be in exactly the same situation and mood. This is a unique portrait of an individual, which happens to be a cat. As Marker said:

Guillaume was a real cat, who had adopted me, who was my advisor, my friend, my partner, my inseparable and the only person I accepted with me when I was editing. I could see in the direction of his ears whether he agreed with what I was doing or not. And then he went to the cat paradise. Sometime later, he reappeared as a ghost, he was very eager to intervene, and had ideas about everything. During the morning, while I was listening to the news, he'd arrive with a speech bubble and it was he who placed himself like that in the news. I am but a medium here. Dr. Jekyll and Mister Hyde. Guillaume is everything I am not, he is back, interventionist, exhibitionist, he only asks to talk about himself, we complete each other perfectly.⁹¹

Cat Listening to Music starts with a close-up of the musical instrument's brand and model, a Yamaha DX7, while the camera slowly moves towards the cat. Although the montage is made to induce the sense of observing a single action depicted in continuity and without interruption—as happens in this opening scene—the video's structure relies on a series of cuts, which combine

⁹⁰ The reason for the subtitle 'Entr'acte' is because, like the Reindeer mock commercial in *Letter from Siberia* (see note 16), this piece was originally presented as a three-minute intermission (thus *entr'acte*, between acts) for *The Last Bolshevik (Le tombeau d'Alexandre, 1993)*.

⁹¹ "Guillaume a été un vrai chat, qui m'avait adopté, qui était mon conseiller, mon intime, mon copain, mon inséparable et la seule personne que j'acceptais auprès de moi quand je faisais du montage. Je voyais à la direction de ses oreilles s'il était d'accord avec ce que je faisais ou pas. Et puis il est parti au paradis des chats. Quelque temps après, il m'est réapparu sous forme de fantôme, il avait très envie d'intervenir, et des idées sur tout. Le matin, quand j'écoutais les nouvelles, il arrivait avec une bulle et c'était lui qui se plaçait comme ça dans l'actualité. Je ne suis que le médium là-dedans. Docteur Jekyll et Mister Hyde. Guillaume est tout ce que je ne suis pas, il est ramenant, interventionniste, exhibitionniste, il ne demande qu'à faire parler de lui, on se complète parfaitement". In Chris Marker, "Chats discutent", conversation between Chris Marker and the author of *M. Chat*, *Libération* (4-5 December 2004).

detailed images of the cat's body—in particular paws, eyes and ears—with elements of Marker's studio—photos, speakers, stereo. They induce a straightforward association between images and sound. This can be observed when the cat's furry ears vibrate delicately, or when his paws gently knead on the keyboard: small, sharp claws emerging from the furry fingers, as if those movements denoted the cat's bodily reaction to music. The composition of the images is extremely attentive to detail. There are some moments of particular beauty, as when we see, from above, the cat's horizontal stripes matching the synthesiser's rows of black and white keyboards. Animal and instrument in visual harmony, two longitudinal forms in monotone and in monotonous idleness. Or when a black-and-white, out of focus, ghostly photograph slowly reveals itself to be a portrait of a cat: the memory of a cat, an idea, recollection of a cat standing next the one that is lying on the synthesiser. The ghost of the cat, probably, recalling Marker's words.

The video features a piano melody, Federico Mompou's *Impresiones Intimas: No. 5, Pájaro Triste* (1911-14). As in his last video piece, or in *Slon Tango*, as I will discuss, Marker removed the ambient sound from the original recording. Here there is no trace of sound other than the classical music, uninterrupted, whose duration corresponds almost exactly to the length of the video. The music does not start playing with the video's opening but when the cat appears for the first time, as if viewers were only allowed to hear what the cat was hearing when he appeared on screen. Before the cat there was silence, then there was a "sad bird" ("pájaro triste" in Spanish)—a most adequate title for a cat melody, as most likely a bird would be sad (or in a sad condition) while in the company of a cat.

Aside from the formal question of whether the music was actually being played when the video was originally recorded, other, subtler questions remain unanswered if we also focus on the action these coordinated images and sound supposedly document. Was the cat really listening to music? Do cats have any interest in music? And what does it mean for a cat to listen to music? Did Marker know/suppose that the cat enjoyed listening to music, considering how much he anthropomorphised Guillaume? How much can we believe in his account that Guillaume "was fond of Ravel (any cat is) but he had a special crush on Mompou. That day (a beautiful sunny day, I remember) I placed Volume I of the complete Mompou by Mompou on the CD player to please him..."??

While lying on the synthesiser, Guillaume is neither sleeping nor awake. He is in that state of drowsiness that occupies a large part of cat life, on the threshold between vigilance and sleep: neither/nor, he is in-between: pretending he is asleep while he is awake as a way to induce falling into sleep, or pretending to be awake while sleeping so as to remain (or at least to give the impression of being) alert. Since he is not alone but is in the presence of the artist and a camera (as in the triangulation of cat-man-camera which opened this chapter), I might suggest that the cat is not only playing himself sleeping/alert but that he is also playing with Marker: he is expressing the ambiguity of his gesture to the filmmaker, giving signs of being both asleep and awake (and, one might speculate, of being attentive to the music that may or may not be playing in the room). Guillaume is simultaneously acting in two of the possible senses of play—playing in the sense of performing (acting), and playing as engaging in a ludic activity with someone.

Marker also seems to be playing in different degrees. He is playing while filming this scene: he encountered the cat and filmed him, documenting the setting in which the action took place, the objects that surrounded the cat and the sound equipment, stereo, and speakers that would allow for the creation of a visual association to music. Who knows how much cat napping footage Marker amassed, and whether it was all recorded in a single moment, or was the result of the accumulation of moments of shared intimacy and trust, which the cat allowed and he recorded.

Marker's playful attitude in these animal works can also be seen as an anticipation of the sort of materials that would, almost 20 years later, circulate and be mass consumed on the Internet, whilst also making work that retains an important experimental and artistic sensibility. These two registers aren't disconnected. A project such as *Zapping Zone* anticipates modes of Internet navigation by exploring the possibilities of the multiple, simultaneous forms of access to materials. These videos, in particular *Cat Listening to Music*—considering how cats massively populate the Internet—provide once more an important exemplification of Marker's pioneering artistic spirit, but also his capacity to anticipate desires and habits beyond his own epoch. At the same time, he also reframes the distinct yet parallel functions of domesticity and of the zoo as contexts that facilitate the contact and observation of animals within a context of Internet consumption and video surveillance. As Andrew Burke argues while discussing the impact of Internet animal observation, "Desktops, laptops, phones, and tables are [...] merely the latest set

of screens that remediate and extend the zoo experience”.⁹² This also extends the control and surveillance mechanisms of the zoo, which are transposed from the animal display site to a virtual environment, in which observation is undertaken anonymously and without temporal limitation. Curiously, this modality of contemporary access to animal life bears striking resemblances to the relationship that some experimental traditions of cinema have with lack of narrative—nature is not telling stories—and with time, a time that is expanded, dilated, both circular and in permanent change: “if there is a radical dimension to the online streaming feed, it lies in its similarity to forms of experimental cinema that focus on time and duration [...] these kinds of extended spectatorial experiences [...] allow us to understand both the power and the attraction of streaming animal life”.⁹³ What we find in this work is the confluence of the gestures of care and possibilities of proximity and intimacy with an animal propitiated by domestication and pet-rearing with the exhibition of confined animals in zoological contexts in terms of the modes in which they allow for their visual capture and rendering. *Cat Listening to Music* stands in a triangulation of artistic experimentation, the investigation of the mechanisms of observation and the control of life and awareness of the role played by new technologies of vision in both are equally.

Marker is also playing while editing, a play that encompasses cat, recorded images, sound and viewers, and which manifests itself through the video. *Cat Listening to Music* is not documenting a continuous action recorded in a single moment without any interruption. Instead, it seems clear that Marker wanted to create the illusion of a single shot in which a cat was lying on top of a musical instrument, listening to another form of music while crossing the line between sleep and alertness, inducing viewers into believing that the cat was listening to music. The edit balances the depiction of a quasi-domestic scene and the accurate inclusion of specific shots that focus on the animal’s reactions. The video becomes a sort of make-believe game, Guillaume and Marker being partners in this trickery using their respective expressive surpluses.

The playful triangulation between animal-filmmaker-camera is what makes this work relevant for a non-anthropocentric reading of Marker’s work. It is a playfulness defined by one’s engagement in an activity with the main purpose of enjoyment and recreation (distraction, dissociation not

⁹² Andrew Burke, “Zootube: Streaming Animal Life”, in Michael Lawrence and Karen Lury (eds.), *The Zoo and Screen Media* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 66.

⁹³ Burke, “Zootube”, 67.

about amusing oneself, need for), but also that comprehends an intentional performative gesture between a person and a cat in the presence of a recording device.

Cat Listening to Music is paradigmatic and exceptional. Paradigmatic because it expresses the meticulous care with which Marker portrayed animals in an ambivalence between fascination and control. Exceptional because it portrays Guillaume as the subject of an entire film and as a real cat, not the cartoonish figure that became Marker's alter ego, as when he signed under Guillaume's name or when the digitised cartoon of Guillaume became the host of the CD-ROM *Immemory* and, subsequently, the virtual museum on Second Life.

The Second Life experiment began in 2008, when Marker and digital artist Max Moswitzer, created the online virtual environment *Ouvroir*.⁹⁴ *Ouvroir* incarnates a heterotopic condition, that of the digital realm, which despite not being described by Foucault (as it became widely present in society after his passing) fits well his characterisation of these spatial-temporal entities of projection and layering. Matching well the multi-functional dimension of the heterotopic space, *Ouvroir* is an archive of Marker's most iconic work (from the "Petite Planète" book series to variations of portraits of Guillaume-en-Egypte); a museum (with viewing rooms, an exhibition of photography, an installation resembling *Zapping Zone*); a fun fair located across a series of islets where palm trees, white sands and crystalline waters surround the bizarre architecture; and a movie theatre projecting Marker's films. It is also another mode Marker found to explore his own methodology of layered work and interest in collage. As Dork Zabunyan describes, "it is as if the *Ouvroir* experience allowed Marker to amplify the play of assemblages, echoes and references between these components, which his films were already trying to accentuate: "freely combining meanings", "re-viewing images", "linking them in a different way", "widening their capacity for meaning and expression"". ⁹⁵ The cicerone to *Ouvroir* is Guillaume, who walks like a person but is not mimicking a person; who doesn't talk but shows visitors this immaterial museum and whose cartoonish expression is flat and distant from the more contented *Cat Listening to Music*.

⁹⁴ The title pays tribute to Raymond Queneau's 1960s literary movement *Ouvroir de littérature potentielle* [Work of potential literature].

⁹⁵ Dork Zabunyan, "Second Life, et après?" in *Chris Marker*, 383-84. Original text: "tout se passe comme si l'expérience de l'*Ouvroir* permettait à Marker d'amplifier les jeux d'assemblages, d'échos et de renvois entre ces composantes, que ses films cherchaient déjà à accentuer: "combiner librement les significations", "re-voir les images", "les enchaîner autrement", élargir leur capacité de sense et d'expression"" (my translation).

Dancing Elephants

A later addition to *Zapping Zone*,⁹⁶ the short video *Slon Tango* is yet another important testimony of Marker's direct engagement with the space and conditions of the zoological garden and incarcerated animals, a topic at the core of this thesis, this time focusing on the activities of a single animal. *Slon Tango* portrays an elephant in a zoo, pacing at the rhythm of Igor Stravinsky's piano piece *Tango* (1940). [Fig. I.28] The elephant's body perfectly fits the video's frame, a scale that differs substantially from Guillaume in *Cat Listening to Music*. "Are elephants Russian?" This possibility, suggested in *If I Had Four Camels*⁹⁷ seems further underscored here, which brings together Stravinsky the Russian composer with *Slon*, the Russian term for elephant. *Slon* was also the name of the militant film production company founded by Marker in 1967 (active until 1976). The video bears strong similarities with the footage that opens the visit to Berlin's tiergarten in Marker's film from the same years, *Berliner Ballade* (1990),⁹⁸ revealing that the elephant footage was shot earlier than 1994. Similarly to *Cat Listening to Music*, in *Slon Tango* Marker also makes a work that relies on the interdependency of image and sound, music and animal behaviour, relaxed in the former, joyful and choreographic in the latter.

The possibility of the film adding another degree of experience to that lived during a zoo visit is also visible here. The video presents a single shot of an elephant, pacing around an open-air enclosure, moving back and forward while grabbing pieces of soil and throwing them over her body with her trunk. She repeats a sort of choreography with her back and front legs, interlacing them, sometimes standing on both back and front left legs and sometimes standing on the right ones, ears and tail moving at the same time. There is intentionality in this gesture—she doesn't appear to be playing an act, but rather filling her time with a bodily activity, something that zoo animals frequently do, often developing compulsive, neurotic patterns—called stereotypic behaviour—which in the case of elephants often translates into 'weaving,' a pendulous,

⁹⁶ Later additions to *Zapping Zone* are: *Azulmoon* (1992), *Coin fenêtre* (1992), *Slon Tango* (1993), *Bullfight/Okinawa* (1994) and *E-Clip-Se* (1999).

⁹⁷ As it is mentioned in *If I Had Four Camels* (dialogue): Pierre Vaneck: "How do you say elephant, in Russian?" Nicolas Yumatov: "Slon" Pierre Vaneck: "It's obvious. When asked his name he can only answer: 'Slon!'" Catherine Le Couey: "So the elephants are Russian".

⁹⁸ *Berliner Ballade* was shot four months after the fall of the Berlin Wall and just following the first free elections of the GDR, the film offers a portrait of East Berlin through the words of dissident artists. This medium-length film was one of the first commissions of *Envoyé special*, a France 2 television weekly investigative newsmagazine programme that started being broadcasted in 1990 and has been running until the present day.

continuous movement of the head and body from side to side. As cognitive psychologist Aniruddh Patel argues: “There are zoo and circus elephants that only sway very gently from side to side or forwards and backwards, without lifting their feet. Others have a ground-covering weave, legs spread, accompanied by a swaying of the trunk. There are even some elephants that display a rapid circling of the head or that alternately take a step forward and back again”.⁹⁹

Here, the animal’s elegant and graceful movement does not appear to be directly attributable to a stereotypical behaviour. Instead, she expresses her sense of synchronicity, pace and rhythm, engaging in something that resembles a form of dance. Marker’s pairing of the images with Stravinsky’s *Tango* accentuates the hypothetical bodily expression of the animal as dance, associating her choreographic movement with a melody that bears a strong elephant sense, with the cadence of the trombones resembling the sounds produced by the elephant’s trunk. Yet even if dance can also occur without being a response to sound, it is impossible to know whether she was listening to music or not. In Chapter Three, I will make a parallel analysis of animal movement, discussing how Simone Forti looked for dance patterns in incarcerated animals, which she conceived as the animal’s claiming possession of their own body, and which she incorporated in her own choreographic work.

Slon Tango was shot in Slovenia, portraying the female Asian elephant Ganga, who, according to the record of the European Endangered Species Programme, was born in the wild in 1975 and has been living on her own in Ljubljana since being settled there in 1977, when then President Tito offered her to the zoo, an animal life deeply entangled in human politics. Ganga, whose name seems to allude to the Ganges, is still the only zoo elephant in continental Slovenia.

In the above-mentioned article, Patel argues that there are few animals that have untutored, spontaneous bodily movements that could be considered dance. Among them are birds, cetaceans, pinnipeds (seals and sea lions), some bats and elephants—all animal groups that capable of vocal learning (the capacity to modify acoustic and syntactic sounds, acquire new sounds via imitation and produce vocalisations), a discovery which led them to sustain that vocal

⁹⁹ Aniruddh D. Patel, John R. Iversen, Micah R. Bregman and Irena Schulz, “Experimental Evidence for Synchronization to a Musical Beat in a Nonhuman Animal”, in *Current Biology*, Vol. 19, Issue 10 (26 May 2009): 880.

learning animals are capable of synchronising movements to a musical beat.

It thus seems that Marker filmed a moment of elephant dance and associated the movement of the animal with music by adding Stravinsky's melody to the images. The video doesn't disclose the fact that Ganga has been taught to play tricks, which she regularly performs for the zoo audiences. While it seems unlikely, it remains uncertain if this was a moment of performance or not, because we are not privy to her surrounding aural or physical environment. Whether she is performing because she is ordered or not becomes irrelevant, however, when considering that this animal, who spent almost her entire life in an exhibition mode, subjected to a continuous scrutiny from which she cannot hide, is an in-between creature, neither domesticated nor wild. The transposition of her flesh and body to the screen further enhances her condition: her entire figure fits perfectly the area of the screen, being both comfortable and confined within it, while there is no outside from the public world. Performing for the trainers, performing for the audiences, or performing for the camera all intrinsically define how she performs as a mode of existence.

Bullfight / Okinawa

Another later addition to *Zapping Zone* is *Bullfight/Okinawa* (1994), a short video of a bullfighting tournament, which further reveals Marker's complex engagement with other conditions of animal exhibition and spectacle, beyond the site of the zoological garden, and their interplay of fascination and cruelty. *Bullfight/Okinawa* was shot in the Pacific Island of Okinawa, annexed by Japan at the end of the 19th century, when the country took over the Ryukyu archipelago. Bullfights, locally known as Ushiōrasē, were a Ryukyu folkloric manifestation since the 17th century. Unlike the more aggressive Iberian corridas, which see people molesting bulls for public spectacle, the Okinawa version stages two large bulls fighting against each other—an activity with parallels to human wrestling or sumo. Each tournament consists of ten matches that last from a few seconds to over half hour, depending on the time a bull takes to defeat the other. The animals are accompanied by a bullfighter (seko), whose cry (yagui) and gestures encourage the bulls to fight. [Fig. I.29] Despite its brief duration and simple edit, *Bullfight/Okinawa* combines important features of Marker's work and imaginary and is yet another outcome of his travel

cinema, in particular of his interest in Japan, a country that “haunts him more than any other”¹⁰⁰ and which he visited many times, the first of which during the 1964 Tokyo Olympics (after which he made the 1965 film *Le Mystère Koumiko*).

Bullfight/Okinawa Marker also pursues Marker’s investigation of Japan’s complex relationship with history, cultural memory and trauma, a subject already present in the portrait of the Japanese woman Koumiko in *Le Mystère Koumiko* and which he further explores in his 1997 film *Level Five*, whose plot revolves around the invention of a computer game that allows the film’s main character, Laura (Catherine Belkhodja), to investigate the country’s past, and which also features scenes of an Okinawa bullfight.¹⁰¹ If *Bullfight/Okinawa*’s action is contained within itself—edited documentation of fragments of a bullfight accompanied by a sombre piano melody, the cries of the seko and the rumour of the audience—the bellicose nature of the spectacle inevitably echoes Okinawa’s troubled past. The distance between these two bulls forced to fight against one another and the history of pacifist Okinawa’s participation in the Second World War bear striking parallels. In his *Mémoires d’Outre-Tombe* (1849-50), French statesman François-René de Chateaubriand alluded to Okinawa’s peaceful tradition, describing it as an island where people possessed no weapons. Belonging to Japan, the island was forced to enter the Second World War and, in April 1945, became the stage of the worst Pacific battle of the conflict, during which approximately one quarter of its civilian population was either killed or committed suicide. If Marker pays copious attention to Japan in works such as *Sans Soleil*, *AK* and the book *Le Dépayés* (1982), *Level Five* reveals his knowledge and interest in Okinawa’s participation in the war and how this history has been sublimated in the present. Lupton describes how Marker presents “Okinawa as a site of trauma, which still has the capacity to overwhelm the present, and resists being consigned to a benign and readily consumed historical narrative”.¹⁰² It appears therefore, that these bulls are performing more than themselves. In *Bullfight/Okinawa*, while playing themselves as bulls and replaying a traumatic battle, these animal-images communicate with other images whose existence lies temporally and spatially outside the film.

¹⁰⁰ Original text: “la fascination pour le tour du monde a donc eu pour effet, entre autres, [... que] le Japon a sans cesse hanté son œuvre” [my translation]. In Guy Gauthier, *Chris Marker, écrivain multimédia, ou voyage à travers les médias* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2001), 17.

¹⁰¹ On *Level Five*’s complex exploration of Japan’s traumatic history, see Lupton, *Chris Marker*, 200-05.

¹⁰² Lupton, *Chris Marker*, 204.

In an exercise of transposition characteristic of Marker, the bulls fight in layers. They fight the actual battle that appears in the film and, in doing so, they re-enact the battle that has forever signed this region's history. Fighting with no cause or purpose; fighting in an obsessive manner, repeating the same blows, tricks and strategies without linearity and little variation, these bulls also perform a human stupidity twice: first by having to wrestle for entertainment, second by incarnating the meaninglessness of the war.

It is important here to briefly address Marker's ambivalent relationship to memory and oblivion to consider how the various animals that take part in his work participate in it. He has related to memory as the condition that makes the present, and even the future, possible, if *considering La Jetée's* plot. He has also inserted animal figures as those who do not forget, as the owls in *The Owl's Legacy*, an important stance, aligned with Nicole Shukin's struggle "[a]gainst an understanding of animals as 'perpetual motion machines' that 'live unhistorically,'" ¹⁰³ In the depiction of these brutal scenes of animal spectacle and objectification in Okinawa, and despite the lack of commentary, Marker seems to be depositing in the bulls the suppressed memory of the terrible events of the war that the human audience is sublimating by participating in this spectacle that at once means little and means so much for such a historically-haunted land.

In parallel, the absurd, nonsensical nature of this situation also echoes Marker's interest in surrealism. These scenes could be part of a dream: they belong to a collective reverie that composes the territory's picturesque imaginary and whose roots and motivations remain hard to grasp. The video also shows the opacity of history and culture: the cries, instructions, reasonings and value of what is being displayed cannot be fully discerned; this event lies on the threshold of documentation and fiction. "To invent Japan is a way of knowing it", says Marker's voiceover in *Sans Soleil*. This methodology of invention as a process of knowledge is also applied to *Bullfight/Okinawa*, with the allusion to war emerging through an opaque, nonsensical event of animal violence.

In terms of relationship to spectacle, entertainment and genealogies of oppression, this violence

¹⁰³ Nicole Shukin, *Animal Capital: Rendering Life in Biopolitical Times* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 92.

is not so different from the visions of encaged zoo animals of other “Bestiary” films as *An Owl is an Owl*, *Zoo Piece* or *Slon Tango*. Lying on the paradox of the exhibitionary system—which by displaying the animals is also displaying the violence that makes them visible—these four films offer profound, if fleeting reflections on the troubled ways in which humanity relates to animals, with fascination and cruelty as the two sides of the same coin. *Cat Listening to Music* is distinct from the other three films, presenting the calming vision of Marker’s cat sleeping in his studio. At its core, however, is the ancient operation of domestication, documented and preserved in this scene. In its reliance on care and tenderness, this human-animal relationship is certainly less visibly oppressive, yet it also represents an ambivalent system of care and visibility.

Together, these five works reveal Marker’s “profound attachment to animals”, to borrow critic Bamchade Pourvali’s phrasing.¹⁰⁴ This attachment was also complex. If particularly visible in the “Bestiary”, Marker’s ambivalent relationship to animals shapes and permeates his entire work. Animals inhabit and shape Marker’s aesthetics, poetics and politics. And if this chapter pays particular attention to the works in which Marker related to the spaces and conditions of confined and spectacle animals, the zoo—as the epitome of a dynamic of human fascination and control over animal life—is always there, in his cinema, photography, editorial work and art installations, both as a concrete physical space and as a structure of organisation of relations between humans and fellow animals.

Marker’s attachment to animals is inseparable from, and constitutive, even, of his interest in human cultural and political history and memory; of his inquiry on the relationship between the face, the gaze and the camera; and of the unique way in which his commentary is indissociable from his formal strategies of filming, editing and displaying cinema. As I trust this chapter has revealed, Marker’s work relies on a gaze that is sometimes cruel, sometimes passionate, and that expresses his multifaceted interest and curiosity about animals who share their lives with humankind, as city dwellers, captives and companion animals. As discussed, Marker’s attachment to animals is profound and consistent over time, but can also be acceptant, as indicated by the manners in which he uses animals as a sort of alter-ego signature. The relationships to animals triggered by his artistic gestures and outcomes leave an ethical responsibility and affective

¹⁰⁴ Bamchade Pourvali, *Chris Marker* (Paris: Cahiers du Cinéma, 2003), 66.

potency with the observers, as though it is their role to carry what is being presented elsewhere, towards a concrete desire for change, for the transformation of the conditions and structures in which animals are made proximate to humans. His animalistic gaze potentially awakens, invites reflection, leaving the rest to the beholder, just like his political films.

In Chapter Two, I will engage with the work of Simone Forti, discussing parallel potentialities and limits of the ethical and aesthetical implication of her work with mostly confined animals. Similarly to how Marker often allied with animal-images to make work outside the movie theatre, there were also moments in which Forti moved beyond her core engagement with dance and choreography and embraced drawing, writing and video-making to express and convey her animal encounters. Temporarily aligned during the second half of the 20th century, in depicting the zoological logic, Marker and Forti revealed much about their own artistic identities and quite different expressive means. Brought together under this thesis, alongside the work of Jonas, they offer parallel responses to the complementary of artistic, exhibitionary and zoological apparatuses, exemplifying some of the manners in which art can reflect on the format of the exhibition and problematise the dichotomies between subject and object, exhibited and spectator, producer and consumer—and ultimately culture and nature—that such a format is prone to reinforce. Which is to say, they can provide an important contribution to making audiences aware of these biased divisions through a combination of spatial, temporal, aesthetic and affective reasonings. While dialoguing with the work of Forti, I will discuss how art explores unusual forms of embodied meaning that have the potential of turning knowledge into comprehension and perception into affects.



Simone Forti, Captive spirits

Brown Bear walk; front limb steps and whole side contracts to pull back limb into place.

Boom boo-boom. Boom boo-boom. Boom-boo-boom.

Giraffe: back limb steps, crowds fore limb which steps ahead.

Boom-boom. Boom-boom.

—Simone Forti¹

In the photograph, a young woman in a short skirt and sandals sits on a bench. With her crooked elbow, she braces her handbag to her body, tucking her large sketchpad into her armpit. She is petting a lion cub, and as she gazes down to witness the small but extraordinary fact of her hand on its fur, the animal's face turns towards the camera lens with closed eyes. This is dancer and choreographer Simone Forti on one of her many visits to the zoo during the brief time she lived in Rome in the late 1960s. Far from today's "wildlife sanctuaries" where animals can ostensibly wander freely, as the photo of this uncaged cub might suggest, the Giardino Zoologico di Roma offered a highly controlled environment in which animals lived within tight enclosures; Forti was here indulging in a staged, paid encounter, one that she characterized as "irresistible." Irresistible because she was consistently moved by the creatures she drew and studied—moved as in stirred, or touched, as well as in shifted, or altered.²

Simone Forti's portrait made at the Zoo of Rome in the summer of 1968, which art historian Julia

¹ Simone Forti, "Animate Dancing, a practice in dance improvisation", in *Contact Quarterly* Vol. 26, No. 2 (Summer/Fall 2001), 35.

² Julia Bryan-Wilson's essay "Simone Forti Goes to the Zoo", published in *OCTOBER* 152 (Spring 2015): 26–52 and expanded as "Animate Matters: Simone Forti in Rome", published in *Simone Forti Thinking with the Body* (Sabine Breitwieser, ed.) (Munich: Hirmer Verlag, 2014), 49-58, presents one of the most important critical evaluations of Forti's engagement with animals. Bryan-Wilson argues that Forti's "dance practice changed dramatically as a result of the time she spent in Rome observing animal motions and interaction with other, animate forms of art" (*OCTOBER* 152: 27) to comment on how the contact with animals influenced Forti's practice and artistic expression during a limited timeframe. Here instead, I argue that animal presences are determinant to Forti's overall art.

Bryan-Wilson has chosen to open her important essay on animals in Forti's work, is also the opening for this chapter. I want to acknowledge Bryan-Wilson's company in my own process of thinking about Forti's work, as her text has provided the as-yet most exhaustive and up-to-date study on the influence of animals on Forti's work and ideas. I dialogue with this precise, original and well-informed account by corroborating, expanding and sometimes questioning it. I also attempt to complement it. Beginning with this image allows me to comment on important details the author has not engaged with.

Each portrait that opens a chapter of this thesis attends to an event of self-representation in which an artist was photographed in the company of an animal. In Chris Marker's portrait with Guillaume-en-Egypte and Joan Jonas' portrait with the dog Zina, which open the first and third chapters, both artists face the camera. Marker's image is an assemblage of disparate elements—a characteristic of his eclectic taste and interests—and a transposition of his alter-ego cat into a cinematic and anthropogenic environment, an operation that also defines Marker's relationship to animals. Jonas' portrait also reveals the artist's syncretic taste and influences, in which western and eastern references are displayed in her studio alongside props and fragments of her own work. Jonas holds Zina in an embrace that celebrates the complex modes in which the woman's and dog's identities are brought together. Here, Forti looks at the lion cub she sits with. Rather than focusing on the event of the photography (as Marker) or posing with the animal (as Jonas), she observes the animal seated next to her. This is less a portrait of Forti with a lion than of her attempt to get close to a lion: of her curiosity and haptic and visual attraction towards this animal.

Beyond their individual value, these photographic depictions document the development of human-animal relationships and the normalisation of a proximity that, in the case of the images of Marker and Jonas, reveal the state of pet-rearing in the mid-late 20th century. In Forti's case they also make visible the extent to which zoological parks facilitated the access to exotic animals and disguised violence upon them during the same epoch. While the portraits of Marker and Jonas offer a glimpse of the presence of their respective companion animals in their lives, their imaginary and their art, Forti's image is telling of the role zoological parks played in her work as her primary source of access to animals. At the same time, this image also expresses the important role that chance, spontaneity, improvisation and observation played in Forti's work. As the artist explained, "In the zoo there was this photographer with a lion cub and you paid him to get your

picture taken with the lion. I don't know how many lire he got for it. Maybe he was a friend".³ Fortune, allied with the paid entertainment function of the zoo, made this photo possible.

While this is an important and rare document of Forti's life in Rome, the image also documents how a lion, used as a prop for an "image-souvenir", was forced to sit close to and be petted by a human, to satisfy a fantasy of intimacy that can never be actualised beyond coercion and subjugation to human power and control. It attests to some of the modes in which zoological parks bring together care, desire, violence and torture. I argue that, where it is concerned with the zoo's relationship to control and management of wildlife, this image is as representative of the Giardino Zoologico di Roma in the 1960s as it is of today's renamed Bioparco di Roma. Regardless of whatever the contemporary zoo could provide animals with, in terms of actual and shared space with taxonomically-compatible individuals, zoos continue to act violently upon animals, depriving them from human-free space and from a life determined by aleatory events and encounters. If the techniques of zookeeping improved, these were first and foremost applied to extend life in captivity and improve the success of the institution's biopolitics, which is designed ultimately to ensure the zoo remains economically viable.⁴

The image also lends itself to some contextual readings that emerge from the juxtaposition of the different bodies. The imposition of closeness is expressed anatomically by the two individuals, as the position of Forti's crossed legs matches the lion's crossed front legs in a tension between comfort and discomfort. Seated on the bench, the lion is tethered with a short, tight lead, with little possibility of moving around or escaping. Forti, also seated on the bench, wears a tight miniskirt. Even if it was "the most self indulgent, optimistic 'look at me, isn't life wonderful' fashion ever devised", as designer Mary Quant described her own creation, which she thought stood for "the emancipation of women, the Pill and rock 'n' roll",⁵ a miniskirt limited women's movement and comfort, and conditioned their body posture. This is an unusual attire for Forti, who is generally photographed in casual, loose clothing, mostly trousers and large tops, and whose practice, as I will discuss, was influenced by her own quest for liberation from aesthetic codes and

³ Interview in Los Angeles, February 2019. In appendix.

⁴ On the subject, see Matthew Chrulew, "Managing Love and Death at the Zoo: The Biopolitics of Endangered Species Preservation", in *Australian Humanities Review*, Issue 50 (May 2011), <http://australianhumanitiesreview.org/2011/05/01/managing-love-and-death-at-the-zoo-the-biopolitics-of-endangered-species-preservation/> (accessed 15.08.2021).

⁵ Mary Quant, declarations during the exhibition, "Mary Quant Ran" at Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 6 April 2019 – 16 February 2020, <https://www.vam.ac.uk/articles/the-miniskirt-myth> (accessed 19.07.2021).

other performance canons.

Therefore, while portraying a moment in which a young woman and a lion cub share a sense of unease and discomfort, this photo also attests to the tension between human and animals in the zoological garden and to complex weaving of care, love and violence that also emerges in Forti's work. This tension, frequently addressed in her process and work, will be discussed in this chapter, which reflects on the presence of animals in the artist's multifaceted career. With Pamela Sommers, I agree that "Simone Forti is an animal-watcher. Her natural, unadorned, exceedingly careful style of movement goes far beyond imitations of bird, fish, or cat, into a world dominated by gut-level explorations of sight, smell, sound and touch. Instinct, rather than logic, prevails; danced phrases and patterns stem from the basics of existence: sleeping, locomotion, finding food and shelter".⁶ Forti's attention towards nature, and her work's engagement with animals, are central to this thesis. Her work is vitally important in its capacity for developing considerations of past and present interactions between humans and other animals, and in the potential it bears to revise humankind's relationship to nature.

Beyond Meaning—Purpose and Method

Oscillating between the casual manner in which it was taken and its iconic weight, this image portrays an important moment in Forti's youth that also reveals an interest in animals which traverses her entire career. This balance between chance and iconicity is helpful to initiate a reflection about meaning, a concept I struggled with when writing this chapter.

Despite finding the meaningfulness of Forti's work unquestionable, I was ambivalent about how to attribute meaning to it. On the one hand, I had to ascribe signification to her practice, which attested its relevance to the areas of study this research touches upon. On the other hand, explaining Forti's work often felt like a violent imposition because, as I will discuss, she embraces expressive means that resist interpretation, require little or no words to be experienced and are channelled through bodies rather than being about bodies. Regardless of the epoch (she has been active for more than six decades) and medium her works are made with (including dance, poetry, video and drawing), they tend to be non-linear, improvised and unpredictable, not following

⁶ Pamela Sommers, "Simone Forti's "Jackdaw Songs"", in *The Drama Review*, Vol. 25, No. 2, Reinterpretation Issue (Summer, 1981): 124.

beginning or end points nor calling for fixed definitions.

Once this feature of her practice was identified, I attempted to develop an analytic procedure to think with rather than about Forti's work: close to rather than distant from it. In forming this analytic methodology I was inspired by the work of artist Trinh T. Minh-ha, who has described her approach to subjects as a mode of "speaking nearby" rather than "speaking about".⁷ Similarly, in my research I aimed less at ascribing significance to Forti's gestures and words than to spending time with them, experiencing and describing the affects they produced in me, as a mode through which I could imagine what they may trigger in others. This chapter is a quest for alignment with Forti's practice: an attempt to create a harmonic research in synch with her work, which is created and transformed by what Despret defined as "the miracle of attunement"—seeing what Forti's body (and body of work) makes this thesis do.⁸

The question of how to adopt a methodology of closeness that challenges the sense of distance required for an academic study, whilst also proposing another system of observation—one that cares, is attuned to, and knows from within—encountered other concerns as regards the status of Forti's work. For if I kept questioning the legitimacy and ethics of ascribing meaning—interpreting, analysing, situating historically—to her practice, I was also aware of the importance of inscribing her name in the large narrative of art history of the late 20th century. As journalist Claudia La Rocco wrote in 2010, "If life made sense [...] Simone Forti's name would be writ large, along with the other Judson Dance Theater artists who shattered conventional notions of performance in the 1960s".⁹ Despite being a key figure in the generation of practitioners that came after modern dance, and for the extension of Minimalism's dialogue with performance and dance; despite making art throughout her whole career—including paintings, drawings, sculptures, performances, installations and experimental holography—for far too long Forti was primarily considered a choreographer and dancer associated with improvisation and new dance. Born on the 25th of March, 1935, and active since the early 1960s, it was little more than a decade ago that her status as an artist started being acknowledged in contemporary art's institutional,

⁷ Trinh T. Minh-ha's *Reassemblage* is a 16mm film made in 1982. It presents a study of women and rural life in Senegal, where Minh-ha lived for three years while teaching at the National Conservatory of Music in Dakar. In the film, she expresses her desire to be an unimposing narrator: "I do not intend to speak about; just speak nearby".

⁸ Vinciane Despret, "The Body We Care For: Figures of Anthro-zoo-genesis", in *Body & Society* Vol. 10 (2–3), (London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 2004): 125.

⁹ Claudia La Rocco, "Reliving the '60s, on Screen and Live", in *New York Times*, January 15, 2010.

critical and commercial apparatuses, a recognition that did not affect her position in the context of dance.

This recognition came into form through a combination of events. In 2009, Forti started working with the Los Angeles-based commercial gallery The Box, a collaboration instigated with “Work in a Range of Mediums” (27 June – 25 July 2009), a solo exhibition that included animal drawings and a hologram, *Angel* (1976), both made in relation to her animal movement studies. Forti held regular exhibitions at the gallery (2012, 2015, 2016, 2018), with which she continues to collaborate. Since 2018, she is also represented by Milan’s Galleria Raffaella Cortese (which also represents Jonas). In terms of institutional recognition, in 2014, Forti performed *Illumminnatttionnsssss!!!!* at Paris’ Louvre Museum, an ongoing collaboration with artist and musician Charlemagne Palestine. In the same year, the Museum der Moderne in Salzburg hosted a major exhibition of her lifetime work, “Simone Forti: Thinking with the Body: A Retrospective in Motion” (July – November 2014), curated by its director Sabine Breitwieser. The exhibition was accompanied by the publication of a homonymous book documenting over 200 artworks which attest to Forti’s vast body of work and its examination of the relationship between objects, language and bodies across sculpture, performance, writing and drawing. In 2016, the Vleeshal Center for Contemporary Art in Middleburg presented “Here it Comes”, her first solo show in the Netherlands. Also in 2016, the MIT Press published Meredith Morse’s book *Soft is Fast: Simone Forti in the 1960s and After*. The publication is the outcome of Morse’s doctoral thesis, in which she demonstrates Forti’s major contribution to the constitution of a new form of spectatorship and participatory art.¹⁰ The exhibition “Radical Bodies: Anna Halprin, Simone Forti, and Yvonne Rainer in California and New York, 1955–1972”, organised by the Art, Design & Architecture Museum of the University of California, Santa Barbara, in 2017, provided a cross-disciplinary perspective on her work as a dancer.

From the 2000s onwards, there was a substantial growth of essays, interviews and articles on and by Forti, published both in specialised magazines of contemporary art and by art publishers. In

¹⁰ Morse’s doctoral thesis was completed in 2012 in the University of Sydney’s Department of Art History and Film Studies. In her thesis, Morse argues that Forti introduced a form of direct encounter that departed radically from the spectatorship proposed by Minimalism and prefigured the participatory art of recent decades. This new reading of Forti’s work is based on the combination of art historical analyses with references from dance history, cultural studies and the history of American social thought.

Spring 2019 (May – July 2019), the Kunsthaus Baselland presented Forti's first solo exhibition in Switzerland, a show that paired a broad range of video, drawing and installation works with live performances held in the institution. Soon after, in early 2020, the Getty Research Institute announced the acquisition of Forti's archive, comprising family documents from the early 20th century and spanning her more-than- six-decade long career. This followed the acquisition of the estates of artists such as Allan Kaprow and Yvonne Rainer. Beyond important audio-visual materials and artworks (hers and others'), the archive includes 125 diaries, photos, notebooks and sketchbooks, most of which are unpublished, which document Forti's ideas, poetry, drawings and writing since the 1960s.

For Forti's studies, this research inserts itself into this flux of the recognition of the outstanding legacy of her work by the academia and contemporary art, at the same time as it asserts the importance of her legacy for animal cultural and critical studies. It argues that it is vitally necessary to take her work into account for a comprehensive evaluation and discussion of the role played by contemporary artists in proposing animal-human relations that can reach different audiences—audiences who are therefore given the opportunity to think and rethink these relations from various perspectives, and in temporalities that consider their past and present as well as envisaging their possible and desirable outcomes.

Contemplating how to provide a timely, incisive contribution concerning Forti's work to a flow of recognition within the apparatus of contemporary art that was belated but also vigorous led me to question how to remain original yet receptive and gentle towards Forti; attuned to and at the same time pertinent in relation to the critical reception of her work. This preoccupation also set the methodological framework for this research, as I attempted to devise methods through which I could remain accurate and close to Forti's work, while situating it at the intersection of critical animal studies, critical theory and the history of contemporary art's dialogue with the fields of performance, dance and film studies.

This chapter offers a particularly strong guide for this thesis, offering key case-studies on how a balanced relationship between poetry, pragmatism, care and experimental observation can present novel modes of relating a site that incarnates as many environmental conundrums as that of the zoo. I look at Forti's practice as a whole, rather than attempting to classify and divide it by

the disciplines of dance, literature and art (or grouping it within art sculpture, installation, painting, photography, performance). Privileging practices over disciplines also became a way to identify and bring forward interests she illuminates which are common to various areas of studies. I treat Forti as a “movement artist”¹¹ (a term she uses to define herself): a practitioner who uses the body as a primary resource and source of knowledge—“I am interested in what we know of things through our bodies”, she declared.¹² Movement is considered as the method through which Forti observes, learns, experiments and expresses herself.

While discussing her movement practice, I analyse how it questions the conventions of the nature-culture divide and contributes to dismantling the norms that separate the artistic and natural, mind and body, animal and human, subject and object. I also reflect on how it challenges those conventions that have been naturalized and validated by the exhibitionary apparatus, such as those that induce the separation between spectator and object, stage and audience, viewer and viewed. I consider how in her work with nonhuman life, Forti challenges the distinction between those who detain a perspective and those who are barely entitled to have their consciousness acknowledged, which has also been naturalised by centuries of a western philosophical tradition that only recognises the reason of the human, distinct from animal kind, which is defined by what it lacks, which Derrida enumerates as “speech, reason, experience of death, mourning, culture, institutions, technics, clothing, lying, pretense of presense, covering of tracks, gift, laughing, tears, respect, etc”.¹³ I also investigate the possibilities and limits of Forti’s gestures to comprehend how they engage in beneficial, reciprocal manners with the living (human and beyond), questioning the differentiation between humans and other beings and diluting the artistic and the natural.

This research assumes a twofold position: it attempts to comprehend how the artist contributed to renewing the canon of modern dance by embedding it with traces of the natural world, and to understand how, in doing so, she contributed to critically assessing the ethics of the spaces of exhibition and contact with nonhumans while bringing to light the features of certain animals, whose gaits and traits she brought to her work. Indeed, with the expansion of the environmental

¹¹ *Simone Forti Thinking with the Body*, Sabine Breitwieser (ed.) (Munich: Hirmer Verlag, 2014), 1.

¹² Forti, *Thinking with the Body*, 9.

¹³ Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 135.

humanities and animal studies in recent years, many authors have reflected on how contemporary art has contributed to bridging culture and nature and to bringing together people and other life forms. Yet Forti's contribution to this debate has never been thoughtfully considered or addressed—either informally or within scholarly analysis. Here, I look at how the artist has established forms of recognition, empathy and care that may reconceptualize the relationships between human beings and other life forms. In particular, I reflect on how her work deals with the apparatuses and contexts of the zoological garden and how it relates to the 'being animal' of the animal beings it engages with. Despite there being aspects that have been overlooked by most authors who have written about Forti, the artist's curiosity, sympathy and desire to get close to animals have triggered important creative, conceptual and formal threads of her work.

If inquiries into her own being animal in its difference and similitude with other beings are particularly visible in the work Forti developed between the end of the 1960s and the mid-1970s (generally considered a closed and well-defined body of work), I propose that they have earlier roots and continued manifesting themselves throughout her career. Considering the animal studies to be a fundamental component of her whole praxis, I propose to observe how these interlinked interests and engagements of Forti inform and shape her entire artistic identity and oeuvre.

I start by contextualising the role Forti played in the reconceptualization of dance from the 1960s onwards, taking into account how her interest in nonhuman forms of movement and expression was determinant for this transformation of dance. I discuss how her work contributed to challenging the above-mentioned naturalised divisions between the cultural and natural, human and animal, and how it may invite audiences to reconsider their own human body as an animal one. I also reflect on how her practice challenges the conventional distinctions between disciplines and exemplifies the complementarity that exists between a drawing, a poem, a song and a choreography. The manners and contexts in which the artist renders her work public also conflates the spaces of the museum, gallery and theatre/dance, while testifying to the intrinsic relationship between entertainment and confinement.

I also frame Forti's interest in animals through an intimate, subjective, unaffected and affective

approach, which becomes a decisive aspect for the importance that her work may have in moving audiences and spectators and triggering emotional responses to her motifs and subjects. By moving, Forti moves. I then depart to analyse key aspects of her work and to look at how they were informed by the encounter with animal and vegetal subjects. I often include and interweave biographical references that, without providing a deterministic cause-effect reasoning, help to marry a practice with a life. These references are more frequent and often more substantial than those provided for Marker and Jonas, reflecting not only my methodology for this chapter, but the importance Forti attributes them in her own writing and work.

Reimagining Dance

Forti played an important role in the reconceptualization of dance that was generated by a new generation of choreographers, artists and performers who, from the 1960s onwards, questioned the tradition of western theatrical dance and its affiliations with both highbrow ballet and popular spectacle. As noted by the late dance historian Sally Banes, who wrote the first solid critical account on Forti's work,¹⁴ "the early post-modern choreographers [...] were both bearers and critics of two separate dance traditions. One was the uniquely twentieth-century phenomenon of modern dance; the other was the balletic, academic *danse d'école*, with its strict canons of beauty, grace, harmony".¹⁵ Beyond their dissatisfaction with the styles and theories of modern dance, Forti and her peers did not identify with its expressive means and politics. Critical of modern dance's stances, they wanted both more and less from it. They wanted a dance that rejected previous canons, that approached technique differently, that came up with renewed movements, forms and rhythms and that also reinvented settings, props, stories—a dance that rethought the use of light, decor, costumes, music, narrative and dramatic conventions.¹⁶

This individual and collective effort towards the liberation of dance from its traditional and modern aesthetics and techniques—namely its emphasis on verticality, vigorous movements and style, technical and specialized vocabulary, use of theatre as the space for performance, emphasis on the formal elements of choreography and separation of *décor* and music from dancing—wasn't systematically programmed but was rather enabled through a process of experimentation that

¹⁴ Sally Banes, "Simone Forti: Dancing as if Newborn" in *Terpsichore in Sneakers: Post-Modern Dance* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1980), 20-37.

¹⁵ Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers*, xiii.

¹⁶ For a complete conceptualisation and problematisation of post-modern dance, see Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers* and Michael Kirby, *The Art of Time* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1969).

involved a great degree of participation. In the US, this effort unfolded through a heterogeneous ensemble of performers and choreographers, sometimes organised around collectives (such as the Judson Dance Theater group)¹⁷ that felt the existing canons and references adhered to aesthetics and ideas that differed from their own interests. It is this loose group of individuals that Banes generically classified as post-modern dancers.¹⁸ Forti and others felt uncomfortable within this jargon, due to its association with previous cultural determinations that came after, “post- something), proposing instead the denomination New Dance, which echoes the term New Music.¹⁹ This association also reveals Forti’s intrinsic sense of disciplinary fluidity, and the fact that for her dance was a practice related to many other areas of creativity, such as music. Banes further describes how “[Yvonne] Rainer, Simone Forti, Steve Paxton, and other choreographers of the sixties were not united in terms of their aesthetic. Rather, they were united by their radical approach to choreography, their urge to reconceive the medium of dance”.²⁰ They were dissatisfied with the inheritance of defining aspects of classical dance—including, as previously mentioned, the space of the classical proscenium-based theatre; the vertical, vital posture of the body; and the relationship between objects, sound and bodies—which they wanted to complexify and render more fluid, organic and interconnected. Forti was less interested in disciplining the body and controlling the settings in which dance was presented than in considering the “body as

¹⁷ The Judson Dance Theater was a collective of dancers, composers and visual artists who gravitated around the Judson Memorial Church in Greenwich Village, Manhattan, New York City, between 1962 and 1964, where they performed and gave workshops based on ordinary movement and improvisation. The group emerged out of a composition class held at Merce Cunningham’s studio, taught by Robert Dunn, a musician who had studied experimental music theory with John Cage. They also participated in performance and multimedia art installations elsewhere. The group was constituted by such dancers and choreographers as Yvonne Rainer, Steve Paxton, David Gordon, Alex and Deborah Hay, Fred Herko, Elaine Summers, William Davis, and Ruth Emerson. Dissatisfied with the canon of Modern dance and the limits imposed by it, they proposed a transformation to dance based on ordinary movement and improvisation that became generally known as Postmodern dance. Paxton described how the ensemble was strongly influenced by Forti, whose 1960-61 *Dance Constructions* were like “a pebble tossed into a large, still, and complacent pond. The ripples radiated. Most notably, Forti’s event happened prior to the first performance at Judson Memorial Church by the choreographers from Robert Dunn’s compositional class, and they took courage from it”. [In *Thinking with the Body*, 61] But Forti was not directly involved in the group, as she was personally and artistically involved with Robert Whitman (whom she had married in 1962), who was not close to the collective, and had suspended making her own dance works, which she’d resume in 1967 after separating from Whitman.

¹⁸ Following Yvonne Rainer’s pioneer use of the term “post-modern” to define her work and that of her peers. See Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers*, xiii.

¹⁹ “There was a period in dance in the sixties [...] Some people called this “post-modern dance” but it was not post-modern. I called it “New Dance” because of its common experience with New Music. In fact it linked horizontally to modernism, across the media. To poetry, painting, experimental film, etc. [...] Now post-modern dance focuses on cultural identity, and weaves together traditional threads available in our melting pot culture”. Simone Forti, “BODY, MIND, WORLD” *Oh, Tongue*, (Los Angeles: Beyond Baroque, 2003), 113.

²⁰ Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers*, xvi.

a sensuous medium of the art form”.²¹

Resisting the frontal framing of conventional dance environments and their reliance on a stage and theatrical space, while expressing the influence of sculpture and their interest in triggering physical relationships in spectators, Forti expressed how: “I’m much more comfortable in a gallery. I don’t like to just be frontal. I like to be three-dimensional. It just feels different, more like life. A stage is so frontal, it might as well be a photograph. I like it when we’re all in the same space, so viewers can identify with what they see, they don’t just look at something outside of themselves”.²²

Forti responded to this shared desire for change in dance by incorporating gestural patterns, movements and sounds from the natural world. [Fig. II.2] It was largely outside dance, culture and the human realm that Forti found inspirations and references, as though a reform of dance required a reform of the human. This original approach was crucial in shaping her contribution to the evolution of dance in the last decades of the 20th and the early decades of the 21st century and to moving dance forward, towards its “New” phase.

The “close animal observation times”, as artist Robert Morris named Forti’s practice of spending time looking at and performing with animals,²³ allowed her to surpass western humanist-driven canons and instead to locate postures, rhythms and spatial configurations that proposed holistic, harmonic and unmediated approaches to dance. By looking at and executing animal movements, engaging with them, registering them through drawings and written descriptions and recording them with a video camera, Forti contributed to the invention of New Dance. In the process, she also contributed to bringing the animals she was documenting, engaging with and interpreting closer to audiences. By incorporating and re-enacting animal and natural movements and turning her body into an apparatus of mediation between the bodies of the animals and the bodies of the audiences, Forti exposed the classical sites of spectacle of nature (namely the zoological garden and the natural history museum) to dance and art, and vice-versa. The spaces of exhibition and confinement became part of the spaces for performance. Their temporalities also merged. The movements and situations of these animals could have happened a month, a year, or a decade

²¹ Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers*, xvi.

²² Interview in appendix.

²³ Morris, *Thinking with the Body* 45.

ago, but they kept happening anew each time they were performed, recalling Foucault's conceptualisation of heterochronies and their synchronicity with heterotopias. "Heterotopias are most often linked to slices in time—which is to say that they open onto what might be termed, for the sake of symmetry, heterochronies. The heterotopia begins to function at full capacity when men arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time".²⁴

By observing the actual performers of the spectacle of enclosure that is the zoo, and by participating in it, Forti's approach contributed to challenging the above-mentioned naturalised divisions which an environment such as the zoological garden reinforces via its logics and configuration. Despite being an institutionalised system that provides access to unique visions and learning experiences of the world, the logics and legitimacy of the zoo was questioned by Forti's depictions and interactions. Her drawings often include physical traces of confinement—cages and bars—and behavioural traces too, as she depicts the animals' movements in response to the limited space they live in. In some of her choreographic pieces, Forti uses her own body and the space she is given to express how those are not, for instance, bears roaming free in the forest, or flamingos flying across the water, but animals who were forced to live in tight spaces of confinement.

Exceeding well-defined standpoints such as a form of straightforward activism or a pioneering ecofeminist position, Forti's animal pieces were initiated by her desire to discover the anatomy, movement and gestures of the human body in an evolutionary connection to other animals. As she explained, "I abstracted some of the [animal] gaits, some of the movement games, and took them into my own body [...] My dances were studies, were explorations wherein I ran the various possibilities through my body".²⁵ Interconnecting movement and anatomy studies with behavioural research, Forti followed two main references, which were important to the elaboration of her dance and performance pieces. In work that concerned the correlation between an artistic practice and the investigation of human and animal locomotion, Forti looked at the work of pioneer motion photographer Eadweard Muybridge (1830-1904). His photographic studies, made between the late 1870s and the 1880s, offered a remarkable example of how to combine artistic input and anatomical research. Forti acknowledges Muybridge's influence, in

²⁴ Michel Foucault's "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias" (Jay Miskowiec, trans.) (1984), 6.

²⁵ Forti, "ANIMATE DANCING": 35-36.

particular in relation to her choreographic piece *Huddle*: “in terms of aesthetic someone I was looking at the time was the photographer Muybridge, with the animals and with the people. It’s just seeing the body, the person in action”.²⁶ But her studies did not limit themselves to the interpretation of animal movement and experimentation in her own body and in that of the performers she collaborated with. Indeed, Forti also revealed a strong interest for the relationship between physical and sensorial expression and the mind and consciousness of individuals and groups. For these studies, Forti was inspired by the research of naturalist Konrad Lorenz (1903-1989), in particular his work on the perception and communication of graylag goose and jackdaws, which made its way into her improvisation piece *Jackdaw Songs* (1981) and later into her book *Oh Tongue* (2003), an adaptation of her notebook which includes poetry together, undissociated, from her impressions on dance, the body, writing, her family and US politics. I will explore this body of work later in the chapter, reflecting on the role of Lorenz’s writings to the development of Forti’s interest in a-verbal communication expressions and the collective organisation of bodies.

Forti’s works often integrate the outcome of her readings and references with systems of visual, haptic, aural and physical closeness to animals. This didn’t prevent her work from providing an important contribution to environmental consciousness. These studies both propelled an understanding of her own body, of her locomotion possibilities from a different, nonhuman point of view and of a radical reconceptualization of dance that integrated nonhuman (animal, vegetal) aspects into it. Nonhuman influences helped Forti to help Modern Dance to transition into New Dance. Forti expressed her desire to become a “vertebrate among others”,²⁷ which reveals the sense of horizontal, non-hierarchic relationship with other animals that she aims at instating. The human as an animal, as special and unique as all others. This is a fiction that implies the transition from an existent historical and philosophical narrative in which the human is considered unique, to one where the fantasy of togetherness is achieved. It is also a reality, grounded on biological and physiognomic standpoints in which the human is another animal.

²⁶ *The CNDO Transcripts: Simone Forti*, interview by Anne Kilcoyne, November 23, 1991. Arts Archives, Arts Documentation Unit, Centre for Arts Research and Development (Exeter: University of Exeter, 1991), 5-6. As quoted by Meredith Morse, *Soft is Fast Simone Forti in the 1960s and After* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2016), 15.

²⁷ Forti, *Oh, Tongue*, 134.

In the late 1960s, Forti goes back to the zoo to look at bears, seals, flamingos and elephants; she visits the urban areas in Rome where stray cats live to photograph their presence among the ruins of Classical Antiquity; she spends time studying the anatomy of various vertebrates and understanding how it translated into her own body; and later, between 1988-98, Forti moves to rural Vermont, inhabiting places characterised by their abundant wildlife. These are not activities or gestures that in and of themselves take aim at denouncing the conditions of animals exhibited in zoological gardens, the lives of urban cats whose subsistence and shelter depend on humans, or the habitat loss of wildlife. But despite the absence of a militant agenda, Forti's rigorous methodology of observation and documentation, the consistency in which she experiments with her own body what she observes, the ways in which she integrates the spatial constraints imposed on the animals and her poetic modes of expressing encounters and impressions, can all be said to shape her entire body of work into a manifesto for an awareness of the features and rights of nature. These processes define her singular, "soft"²⁸ approach to being animal. Her consistent depictions render animals visible—whilst also making visible the intrinsic conditions of visibility forced upon them.

Proximity as Method

In attempting to remain close to Forti's work—to think with her work rather than solely about it—I have adopted a methodology of research that not only incorporates but prioritises such proximity. The analysis and discussion of her practice follows parallel lines of observation and research that are attuned to her own methods. This process also prevents the outcome of the research, its rendering,²⁹ from establishing descriptive and conceptual narratives that artificially stabilise what resists interpretation; fixates what demands to be experienced; and fragments what is naturally interwoven.

The problem of the research focuses on how to generate academically accurate content and discourse which is at once rigorous and faithful to sources and references, while maintaining the

²⁸ A concept Forti uses in the poem "Soft is Fast"—"Soft is fast. Soft is fast. Softly I accept these words that were dealt to me", in Forti, "Soft is Fast", *Oh Tongue*, 52. Meredith Morse also entitled her monographic book *Soft is Fast*.

²⁹ To borrow a fundamental concept for Nicole Suskin's definition of contemporary relationships to animal bodies: "Rendering signifies both the mimetic act of making a copy, that is, reproducing or interpreting an object in linguistic, painterly, musical, filmic, or other media (new technologies of 3-D digital animation are, for instance, called "renderers") and the industrial boiling down and recycling of animal remains", in Nicole Suskin, *Animal Capital—Rendering Life in Biopolitical Times* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 20.

necessary respect and fidelity to the shape and identity of a complex, heterogeneous body of work. I've largely adopted a simple methodological rule that is akin to how Forti often proposed sets of instructions for the functioning of a large part of her dance works: "one thing follows another".³⁰

The research reflects some of the natural references that appear throughout her practice, paying tribute to the animal and vegetal world in her imaginary. "An onion that had begun to sprout was set on its side on the mouth of a bottle. As the days passed it transferred more and more of its matter from the bulb to the green part, until it had so shifted its weight that it fell off", she wrote in 1963³¹ about her 1961 work *Onion Walk* or *Onion on a Glass Bottle*, a "'story, or 'dance", about an onion that sprouted in a glass and toppled over", as Yvonne Rainer described it.³² [Fig. II.3] Similarly to Forti's observation of the internal transformation of the onion, this research will operate organically, layer by layer, one thing following the other, "proceeding from the middle, through the middle, coming and going rather than starting and finishing", also attuned to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's proposal for a vegetal model of thought, which overflows from the middle, connecting any point to any other point and is made of lines and changes.³³

I am particularly concerned with avoiding the use of discourse as a tool to crystallise facts and naturalize paths of exploration into sequential and linear arguments. The movement of writing sequences what ought to be transmitted and observed through a system of simultaneous, a-chronological inventions. It also aligns what resists being inscribed with the temporal and physical arrangement of written language (with its linear, univocal direction) and the jargon of academic discourse. Disparate but interconnected notes and recollections observed from throughout Forti's body of work—drafts, schemes and improvisations—get diluted across time, and generate emotional and sensible responses. A linear, chronological account of Forti's work would therefore

³⁰ Yvonne Rainer, "The Performer as a Persona: An Interview with Yvonne Rainer", in *Avalanche* No. 5 (Summer 1972): 54.

³¹ Forti, *5 Pieces: Dancer Report, Dance Report, Dance Construction, Dance Construction, Instructions for a Dance*, 1961, Simone Forti's text contribution to *An Anthology*, ed. La Monte Young, 1961. Reproduced in *Thinking with the Body*, 83. It recalls Anna Halprin's definition of her interest in dance: "My concern is form in nature—like the structure of a plant—not in its outer appearance, but in its internal growth process", in Ann Halprin, "Lecture on Dance Deck", Summer Workshop, June 18, 1960, Series XII, Box 5, Folder 42, AH Papers. Published in Ninotchka Bennahum, "Anna Halprin's Radical Body in Motion" in *Radical Bodies—Anna Halprin, Simone Forti, and Yvonne Rainer in California and New York, 1955-1972* (Ninotchka Bennahum, Wendy Perron and Bruce Robertson, eds.), (Santa Barbara: University of California Press, 2017), 75.

³² Yvonne Rainer, "On Simone Forti", in *Thinking with the Body*, 70.

³³ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, "Rhizome", in *A Thousand Plateaus* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 21-25.

risk turning it into a series of static cultural objects that would lend themselves to historic, quasi-anthropological studies. Tellingly, Forti has also clearly articulated her own awareness of the problematic aspects of the distillation of her life and practice into a linear, sequential narrative. As she comments during an interview in 2014, “I’m an improviser and can’t remember combinations [...] In fact, one trouble I’ve been having with all this attention to my past is that I like to keep my memories subjective. When they get put in order, the particular images of my inner landscape get lost or ‘corrected’”.³⁴

The dedicated maintenance of an interior rhythm that doesn’t follow an objective temporal line, nor a cause-effect logic, also shapes a substantial part of Forti’s work and its reliance on repetition and renewal. Internal mechanisms of rehearsal and reiteration, in which the artist revisits her own gestures, characterise her practice. Most time-based works can be remade perpetually, re-presented, performed anew. A substantial part of Forti’s dancing practice relies on sets of rules that provide the guidelines for movement improvisation. Technically less defined by the coded movements that are associated with classical dance and more inspired by the spontaneous movements and pedestrian choreographies of everyday life, improvisation aims to liberate the dancing body from learned patterns and postures and to open it to a more direct response to needs, feelings and ideas. Improvisation became a more structured practice in the beginning of the 20th century, and played an important role in defining modern dance’s methods and techniques. Improvisation was also important for the development of dance therapy and education throughout the 20th century. It became a tool to teach dance while breaking away from the codified movements of modern dance, its orders and sets of rules which disciplined the body by establishing what was right and wrong.

Forti first became familiar with improvisation as a dance technique when, in 1955, she started attending school and workshops of late pioneer dancer Anna Halprin (1920-2021), “who combined a theatrical aesthetic with improvisational methods for generating movement”.³⁵ Later, she recalled how this technique “was really beginning to pain me. I can remember saying that my inner ear could no longer take those limitless seas. There just seemed to be all this turmoil and

³⁴ “Sabine Breitwieser in Conversation with Simone Forti” in *Thinking with the Body*, 23.

³⁵ Megan Gwen Metcalf, PhD dissertation thesis “In the New Body: Simone Forti’s Dance Constructions (1960-61) and their Acquisition by the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA)” (Los Angeles: University of California, 2018), 66.

turning of image upon image”.³⁶ She then transitioned from Halprin’s California teaching to Merce Cunningham and Martha Graham’s New York approach to modern dance techniques and pedagogy. These relied on “a streamlined ballet-based technique that pushed the body to extremes of speed and extension, which was challenging to learn and reproduce”.³⁷ Despite the contrast, Forti experienced another, yet different discontent: that of “watching my teachers and feeling I couldn’t even perceive what they were doing, let alone do it. A teacher would demonstrate a movement, I’d see only this flashing blur of feet, and I wouldn’t know what had happened. I just couldn’t do it”.³⁸ Over the years, Forti would establish her own methodology, one that accommodated the freedom and simplicity of Halprin’s teaching with the rule-rich methods of Graham, Cunningham and in particular Robert Dunn. Her instruction pieces allowed for playfulness and spontaneous responses to be combined with physical relations to objects in manners that Banes described as: “The simple presymbolic games of children, as well as the activities of animals and plants provide her with movement material that when performed on the adult body makes it a “defamiliarized” object”.³⁹

By borrowing the patterns of children, animals and plants, Forti’s method allows repetition to be a system to start things anew, to inaugurate new versions that re-actualise themselves and become different every time they are presented (after all, every performance, dance, song produced are a new version of themselves but also are new in themselves).

In parallel with improvisation, Forti’s interest in charades, wordplays and games have shaped a substantial part of her work. Making games opened the possibility to break, twist and bend inherited rules. Games provided a form through which to challenge the traditions of western dance and play with its conceptions of beauty, harmony and elegance. Games also offered a way to challenge how dance has been representing humanity and shaping a definition of what is to be human based on notions of verticality, expressivity and difference. Forti widened the definition of dance to allow nature to enter it, turning non-dance movements and poses into as a form of dance in order to include nonhuman rhythm, cadence and sound into a new lexicon of a New Dance. Forti’s use of charades and games was probably inspired by her early references to avant-garde aesthetics and purposes, in particular the marriage of experimental cinema with surrealism,

³⁶ Forti, *Handbook in Motion* (Northampton, MA: Contact Editions, 1974), 32.

³⁷ Metcalf, “In the New Body”, 68.

³⁸ Forti, *Handbook in Motion*, 34.

³⁹ Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers*, 21.

an important reference also for Marker and Jonas:⁴⁰ “when I was in high school, my best friend and I would walk to the Coronet Theater, which showed early Surrealist films”).⁴¹ Her choreographic pieces are based on game structures that propose an in-between solution to the coded tradition of modern dance and the lack of rules of improvisation. As Banes maintains, “Forti’s game structures were antidotes both to the symbol-laden narratives of the traditional modern dance choreographers and to the limitless improvisation of Halprin [...] The fundamental elements of dance [...] are explored in the most direct and economical manner”.⁴²

Forti’s interest in a nonsensical, affective position has parallels in the intellectual and theoretical spirit of the US during the years in which she was structuring her practice. In 1966, Susan Sontag released *Against Interpretation*, which praised sensuous, emotional responses to culture. Sontag defined interpretation in art as a system of transforming something into something else: “The task of interpretation is virtually one of translation”.⁴³ Sontag’s ideas not only praised a visceral response to culture, they also supported those explorations of a freer, unmediated and less codified artistic expressions that Forti and her peers were interested in, while exploring the body’s transcendence from its learned movements and embracing rituals that concerned the process rather than form.

By praising sensorial experiences and criticising a disconnected hermeneutics engaged with content and not form, Sontag was sending out an important message for the development of artistic proposals that bypassed the production of meaning and embraced the notion that “What is important now is to recover our senses. We must learn to see more, to hear more, to *feel* more”.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ On Marker’s relationship to surrealism, see Christine Van Assche, “De l’assemblage surréaliste au dispositif muséal”, in *Chris Marker* (Raymond Bellour, Jean-Michel Frodon and Christine Van Assche, eds.) (Paris: Cinématèque française, 2018), 116-53. On Jonas’ relationship to surrealism, see *Joan Jonas* (Andrea Lissoni and Julienne Lorz, eds.) (Munich: Hirmer Verlag, 2018), 122.

⁴¹ In *Thinking with the Body*, 21. In a recent interview, when asked if she had been influenced by Surrealism, she answers: “Yes. When I was in high school, I would go to this place on Beverly Boulevard with my friend Marylou; it was like a storefront, not really a movie theater, and they showed *Un Chien Andalou*, Georges Méliès, and other art movies. Later, in her living room, Marylou would recite poetry and I would dance to it. I remember even before then, during grade school, dancing to *Danse Macabre*, the piece by Saint-Saëns, and jumping all over the couches. Still earlier (though not surreal) I remember being brought to see the Bolshoi Ballet doing folk dances, and my legs were kicking out all on their own as I sat on the edge of my chair”. In “Simone Forti by Tashi Wada”, *Bomb Magazine* (18.09.2018), <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/simone-forti/> (accessed 12.062020).

⁴² Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers*, 28.

⁴³ Susan Sontag, “Against Interpretation” [1964], in *Against Interpretation* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1966), 3.

⁴⁴ Sontag, “Against Interpretation”, 10.

Considered as a whole, Forti's work constitutes an ensemble whereby the multiple parts, figures and events appear and reappear at different instances and contexts. Her heterogeneous work is enmeshed and entangled.⁴⁵ As the scholar Karen Barad sustains, "questions, choices, movements, equipment and directed observations generate a specific reality (material and theoretic) which the artist and researcher co-produce and participate in—objects, people and animals playing an equal role in determining the whole".⁴⁶ This mutual influence and constitution of artist and researcher, the observation of the manner in which they are attuned by a system of reciprocity, also echoes Vinciane Despret's concept of *becoming-with*, which provides an important touchstone for the development of my methodological and conceptual approach to Forti's work.⁴⁷ The exercise of writing this chapter, therefore, becomes a biunivocal process of transformation: it constructs author and artist, they become together, acquire a new language and sensibility. Past and future are coordinates that displace an archive, with its fluid temporalities and dispersed material occupations, and render it instead into a fixed narrative and logic that is unsuitable for addressing and analysing a body of work without betraying it.

Following Deleuze and Guattari's conceptualisation of the middle not as an average point but as "where things pick up speed",⁴⁸ I'll begin my research at the Giardino Zoologico di Roma, Rome's Zoo, in the late 1960s to then move backward and forward in time, moving away from it and then returning to this space. This will allow me to visit various moments in which Forti observed, studied and noted the behaviour of nature and movement of various bodies of animals and plants, even if primordially those of animals kept in zoological gardens, as she incorporated them into her body of work.

⁴⁵ To adopt two terms that have been widely used in various disciplinary ambits by feminist thinkers such as Stacy Alaimo, Karen Barad, Donna J. Haraway, Isabelle Stengers and Anna L. Tsing to describe the mutually-influencing forces of a system that affect, condition and shape one another, which are considered from a non-binary perspective. See Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007); Isabelle Stengers' public lecture "Cosmopolitics: Learning to Think with Sciences, Peoples and Natures" during Situating Science: SSHRC Knowledge Cluster for the Humanistic and Social Study of Science, St. Marys, Halifax, 5 March, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ASGwo02rh8> (accessed 1 August, 2019); Donna J. Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2008) and Anna L. Tsing, "A History of Weediness" in *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004).

⁴⁶ Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 235-40.

⁴⁷ Despret, "The Body We Care For": 111-34.

⁴⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, "Rhizome", 25.

The Middle—The Zoo

When I was a girl, my father would take me and my sister to the Los Angeles Zoo to draw the animals. We were always especially pleased when our sketches caught a sense of their movement. Later, as a dancer, I picked up again on this practice, using my observations as the basis for my movement studies and building my dancing out of these. I gradually became aware that every time I went to the zoo, at some point during the day, I would catch sight of an animal doing a dance. It wouldn't be the beauty of movement that would make me say that I was watching dancing, but rather the inner attitude of the animal.⁴⁹

By associating her childhood days, when she visited the Los Angeles Zoo in the company of her sister and father (a constant presence in her memoirs, writings and work⁵⁰), with her activity of visiting zoos as an adult, Forti drafts personal, non-linear relationships between memory and time. Facts are woven together not through their chronological arrangement, but through an emotional pattern which assembles and reassembles episodes that happened decades apart. With this association, she seems to suggest that the practice of family zoo trips formed her interest in observing animals and provided the framework for the observational sessions she undertook at the zoo. Forti implies that her childhood practice contributed to shaping her work and played a fundamental role in defining her style, following her formative years.⁵¹ One of the possible reasons for such a strong relationship the artist established with animals and with the zoo may be found in the strong emotional weight of these visits during her upbringing.

She explores this emotional connection in her written recollections of her family time in Switzerland, after escaping from fascism in Italy and on their way to the US. The Fortis were an Italian Jewish family of textile industrialists. They founded the industrial village of La Briglia, in the

⁴⁹ Forti, "FULL MOVES Thoughts on dance behavior" in *Contact Quarterly*, Vol. IX, no. 3 (Fall 1984): 7.

⁵⁰ See, for instance, the principle behind the whole "News Animations" dance series, as well as the descriptions of *News Animations 1-5* in *Oh Tongue* ("On News Animations", 3-6, "News Animations 1" 7-12, ("News Animations 2" 39-40, ("News Animations 3" 41-42, ("News Animations 5" 105); see also the imagined epistolary exchange with her father in "Father, Daughter", in *Oh Tongue*, 13-32; see "Dear Father", in *The Bear in the Mirror* (London and Vleeshal: Koenig Books, 2018), 19-32.

⁵¹ As Banes suggests, "For four years Forti studied and performed with Ann Halprin, learning principles and methods that would influence her own work for the next two decades, although not always explicitly" in *Terpsichore in Sneakers*, 22.

Province of Prato, Tuscany. In 1938, they managed to escape Italy by pretending to go on a ski holiday: “Skis atop the car, we joined the long line of holiday vacationers as if we were simply another family heading for the snow and were easily waved through the checkpoint at the frontiera. Mother was seven months pregnant, gave birth prematurely and got very sick. We stayed in Bern for six months till mother was well enough to travel”.⁵²

While in Bern, “On the way to visiting her mother in the hospital [Forti] remembers going to the zoo and watching the bears. This was the first time of many watching animals in motion became a source of self-soothing”.⁵³ A later first-person recollection of her time in Bern offers a slightly different version of the facts: “We stayed in Bern for six months till mother was well enough to travel. Each day our nurse would take me and my sister Anna through the snow-covered city to watch the bears in the bear pit. Baby Nicoletta lived only for two months and we buried her there”.⁵⁴ It’s unlikely that the journey to the hospital would include the visit to the zoo. Instead, it probably passed by the bear pit, which at the time was in the centre of the city.⁵⁵ The two narratives reveal how Forti’s childhood encounters with animals left a deep impact on her. Throughout her life, she recalls these visits with ambivalent feelings where the fear and anxiety of a child who finds herself away from home, with her mother in hospital, in a foreign country and in a continent that was about to enter the war, finds solace in animals. “We eventually shipped out from Cherbourg on the *New Amsterdam*, arrived in New York in the summer of 1939 in time to see the World’s Fair, drove across the country in a new Buick and settled in Los Angeles”,⁵⁶ Forti recalls. There were more trips to the zoo after the family settled in Los Angeles: “When I was a young girl we lived in Los Angeles and my father used to take me and my sister Anna to the zoo [...] those were very special days and stayed as a good memory”.⁵⁷

In 1968, Forti took a transatlantic cruise with her parents from the United States to Europe (the inverse of their journey from Italy to Los Angeles). Once in Rome, contact with the city’s animals acquired an extreme importance—a form of escapism from personal traumas (the end of the

⁵² Forti, “Preface” *The Bear in The Mirror* (London: Koenig Books, 2018), 13.

⁵³ Wendy Perron, “Simone Forti: bodynatureartmovementbody” in *Radical Bodies*, 90. Based on an oral interview given to Louise Sunshine, May 8, 1994, transcript Dance Division, New York Public Library of the Performing Arts, 1-3.

⁵⁴ Forti, preface to *The Bear in The Mirror*, 13.

⁵⁵ The bear is the symbol of Bern, where there have been different bear pits since the 16th century.

⁵⁶ Forti, *Handbook in Motion*, 13.

⁵⁷ Interview in appendix.

relationship with artist Robert Whitman, and two miscarriages) in which the zoo appeared, again, as a space of refuge and healing:

Now I'm asking myself what was I doing while in Rome in the late 1960s. As I mentioned, I believe I was watching the animals at the zoo. Of course I was aware that those animals were not in their natural environments. I had just lost those two babies and my second husband. My parents said, 'You need to travel. You need to turn the page'. So I was in Rome, heartbroken, and I was visiting the zoo.⁵⁸

By spending time observing the animals, the artist allowed her interest in nature and animals to manifest itself in her work, which triggered a new creative phase. This also led her to investigate the roots of dance—what she later identified as a research on the state of enchantment experienced by dancers, the “dance behaviour” (which will be further expanded later in this chapter).

A Deck in the Woods—Anna Halprin

When we were learning to read, we would go to the school library and it was hard for me. I would get overwhelmed by all those books, as I didn't know what I wanted to check out. But I discovered that there was a place in the library—I remember I had to squat down to see the books in the bottom shelf—which was a section about animals, about how different animals live. And those were the books I would pick up: about the beaver, the raccoon the deer... For a long time, I kind of forgot about this and then it re-emerged with Anna Halprin. It was very natural to look at the movement of the trees and the movement of the animals. Sometimes you would see a deer. You would see how it would stop and turn and then leap away. You would see that as a movement and you would take certain aspects of that movement and try it in your own body.⁵⁹

As I have argued, Forti frequently recalls childhood and youth experiences that concern animals

⁵⁸ “Sabine Breitwieser in Conversation with Simone Forti”, in *Thinking with the Body*, 30.

⁵⁹ Interview, in appendix.

throughout her written work as well as in interviews. She revisits the time, curiosity and concentrated attention spent on observing the bears, seals and deer, discovering the bodies and movement of these animals. She describes how she variously turned these moments of observation into a drawing, an annotation, or a movement; how the animal bodies entered her own body and manifested themselves differently, as a line, a word or a gesture.

This direct correlation between what the eyes see, what the mind perceives and how the body acts is a defining feature of Forti's practice. It is a method she learned, trained and expanded with Anna Halprin. It is not a coincidence that Forti associates her childhood period with the formative moments spent with Halprin, as both shaped the way her artistic practice unfolded. At the same time, through the association with Halprin, Forti aligns herself with genealogy of female dancers and choreographers whom, since the 19th century, have searched to accommodate the influence of the natural world and study of the human anatomic structure within dance.

Active since the 1930s, Halprin shaped important aesthetic and social claims in postmodern dance (a concept she embraced) and was also an important influence on the emergence of the Judson Dance Theater group. She influenced the abandoning of the theatrical set, the blurring of the distinctions between audience and dancers and the smoothing of gendered and racial differentiations. The example she set for how to bring back to the body the experience of dance, and her investment in the deconstruction of the concept of spectacle and in dance's reliance on spontaneity and improvisation were likewise central, contributing to freeing the dancers' bodies from the stigmas of representation, identity and civilisation. Halprin would further accommodate non-western references and a component of social, spiritual and physical healing in her relationship to dance. She saw dance as a mode to improve mental and physical wellbeing.⁶⁰

Halprin had been inspired by dancer Isadora Duncan's (1877-1927) promotion of natural movements than those of classic ballet, which she updated and expanded in her own workshops. Another important reference for Halprin were the human anatomy and composition classes

⁶⁰ In the early 1970s, Halprin was diagnosed with cancer, which led her to develop the *Five Stages of Healing* process, the improvised piece *Darkside Dance* and *Dancing my cancer*, both from 1975. As she declared: "It became very vital to me that we deal with people's feelings, we deal with the differences that we have and that started this whole idea for me of healing. How can dance look square in the eye of itself and some kind of: 'Look at me! Look how clever I am! Look what I can do'—who cares? I couldn't care less". In *Breath Made Visible*, film by Ruedi Gerber, 2010.

Halprin took with educator Margaret H'Doubler in 1938. A promoter of a system of dance in which Duncan's emphasis on sentimental expression and passion for both natural gestures and environments was matched by scientific and anatomic rigour, H'Doubler "searched anatomy, physics, neurophysiology, education, physical education and the arts for a body of fact and theory particularly pertinent to the study of dance".⁶¹

Halprin would pass this combination of an interest in nature and a knowledge of anatomy to Forti, who attended Halprin's workshops for four years, between 1955-60, initially at the Halprin-Lathrop school in San Francisco and after at the Dancers' Workshop, the group Halprin founded in 1955 and which largely operated around her dance studio and open-air deck, the Halprin Mountain Home Studio in Kentfield. The deck had been designed for the Halprins' house beneath Mount Tamalpais in Marin County,⁶² Northern California, by Anna's husband, landscape architect Lawrence Halprin (1916-2009), who had studied with former Bauhaus professors and US emigres Walter Gropius and Marcel Breuer. This structure soon "became the experimental space for artists" from both the West coast and New York.⁶³ As Banes remarks, "the Dancers' Workshop (Halprin's group) also worked together on performance projects, often in collaboration with the other artists who gathered at Halprin's studio in Kentfield, California, including composer La Monte Young, actor John Graham, dancer A.A. Leath, painter Jo Landor, and Halprin's husband".⁶⁴ Literally placed in the redwood forest that surround the house (where Halprin led workshops and seminars until her death in 2021), the platform incorporates some of the forest's trees, including them as active presences, which emerge in the deck from holes in the floor. [Fig. II.4] The deck contributed to the expansion of the sites where western dance was taking place. It also played an important role in bridging cultural production and consumption in a natural setting, being a site for the production and reception of dance in a natural environment.

This open-air space located outside of the conventional pedagogical and theatrical architectures and away from the city, provided "a natural balance between structure and freedom"⁶⁵ that encouraged the development of spontaneous gestures and organic movements fundamental for

⁶¹ Ellen A. Moore, "A Recollection of Margaret H'Doubler's Class Procedure: An Environment for The Learning of Dance" in *Dance Research Journal*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (Autumn, 1975–Winter, 1976): 12.

⁶² Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers*, 22.

⁶³ Bennahum, "Anna Halprin's Radical Body in Motion" in *Radical Bodies*, 76.

⁶⁴ Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers*, 61.

⁶⁵ Ross, *Anna Halprin and Improvisation as Child's Play*, 41.

innovation in improvised dance.

If the deck played an important bridging role in connecting the key figures of the east and west coasts of North American dance and culture, it also became a foundational structure to update and project the legacy of modernist architecture and its wider engagements with nature and science. It became a space that not only delivered the spectacle of dance, which was mostly performed against a setting enclosed within itself, but that also widened the space for dance by establishing a direct, empirical dialogue with nature, thus weaving the relations between the human body and those of other life forms. Offering at once a platform for closed-door rehearsal and public performance, the deck also allowed for an undifferentiated relationship between the two, further suggesting that dance was a “natural” expressive means, shaped by contingency and inherently opened to live change. It offered a concrete example of how dance could take place outside of the theatre and studio, outside of an urban setting, and be reinvented in connection to nature. It was a zone where nature—its visions, sounds, smells, colours, textures and forms—was incorporated in the definition of what a stage could be and where an important part of the audience was not human but the actual wilderness.

It allowed performance to happen in nature, with nature, for nature. It also allowed for movement research to be made directly in nature and inspired by outdoors environment, being incorporated by the performer’s body and gestures. As Forti recalls, “one of the instructions Anna sometimes gave was to spend an hour in the environment, in the woods or the city, observing whatever caught our attention [...] the crinkly bark of a tree might be quite still. But my eyes would have scanned its texture with a rhythm that might now show up in the crinkling and flickering of the surface of my back”.⁶⁶

Halprin’s workshops in Kentfield were important to solidify Forti’s creative relationship to the natural world, structuring her early practice towards the careful observation of the environment, which became a starting point for the conceptualisation of movement in its consideration of anatomy and the improvisational possibilities that emerge from the knowledge of different bodies.

The deck opened up the possibility of dance being made in and with wilderness, with the sounds,

⁶⁶ Forti, “ANIMATE DANCING”: 34.

textures, volumes and movements of the woods adding themselves to new dance forms practiced there. *Branch Dance*, an early choreography by Halprin, presents a remarkable example of this.⁶⁷ The black-and-white film and photographic documentation available of it show a young Forti, barefoot, hair drawn back into a tight bun, ballerina style, wearing classical dance apparel, leotards and tights (an aesthetics she'll soon abandon). [Fig. II.5] Forti, Halprin and Leath, engage with a tree branch. Dry, long and sleek, the bifurcated branch resembles a gigantic antler placed vertically on the floor. Lying down, seating down and standing on the deck, Forti, Halprin and Leath engage with the branch's structure, sometimes with its shape, others slowly moving together or in pairs, responding to their bodies and rhythms. [Fig. II.6]

Halprin's influence on Forti is manifested through a ramification of interests and practices where the natural is interconnected with cosmical and spiritual references and forms of syncretism. Halprin further reinforced the ritualistic possibility of healing through dance by calling to it traditions as disparate as those of science, medicine and art, which she combined with cosmological and shamanistic rites. Perhaps inspired by this therapeutic, holistic approach to dance, Forti's work would also be attentive to dance's healing possibilities. Her animal studies are, to a large extent, exercises of identification of captive animals that resorted to dance to cope with lack of privacy, habitat deprivation and boredom. The research she undertook to define the trance-like transformative condition propitiated by the "dance state" concept she coined (which she also defined as a "state of enchantment") also expresses this interrelation between healing, ritualistic expressions and bodily movement. Years later, Forti developed the improvisational series "News Animations" (1985-ongoing) as a response to her father's passing. "The whole Iraq War happened in relation to the news for me. I became particularly aware of it when my father died because I always felt that he'd know what was going on. He was always reading the newspaper; he would buy three newspapers a day. So, when he died, I thought someone in the family has to continue doing it and I started reading newspapers".⁶⁸ In the series, Forti establishes a physical relationship with newspaper sheets, reading them while performing some of the news: "I've been dancing the news. Talking and dancing, being all the parts of the news".⁶⁹

Forti has also an ongoing interest in non-western performance traditions, in which the artistic and

⁶⁷ Premiered at the Halprin Mountain Home Studio in 1957 and performed by Halprin, Forti and A.A. Leath.

⁶⁸ Interview in appendix.

⁶⁹ Forti, "On News Animations", *Oh, Tongue*, 3.

the ritualistic are embedded into one another. She has often mentioned the influence of the Japanese Gutai group,⁷⁰ which she first discovered through a magazine at Halprin's studio.⁷¹ During the 1970s, following her stay at Woodstock, Forti studied singing with Pradit Pran Nath, a master of the Hindustani school of music Kirana gharana, who had also been La Monte Young's teacher. More recently, Forti has written about the importance of Tai Chi, which she has been practicing since the early 1970s, in her work.⁷²

In getting closer to nonhuman figures and gestures, Forti brought together her interest in animals and nature with a project to extend the reparative care present in Halprin's work towards other life forms. She developed a system to use her own body to physically test, experiment, understand and re-enact the animals' movements and their condition of enclosure. She attempts to experience their own lives, not through repeating their confinement but by testing their efforts to cope with it. This allows her to build a thread across humans and animals. Her body and those of the people who collaborated with her became the test sites where people and animals meet; where the human body learned a different mode of locomotion. Forti's process is about addition and not subtraction. It's not about an effort to unlearn and lose a human condition in order to become closer to a more "primitive" life form, but about gaining an additional perceptive tool that allows humans to identify and give space to the animal within them. This system of emancipation also concerns the emergence of a feminist agenda. As Bennahum and Robertson argue, "Forti embraced most completely a negation of the body-as-objectified-object paradigm. Her transmutation of the human body into a posthuman figure, animalized and desexualized, provides the clearest objection to the trope of the ballerina-girl, caught forever in the heterosexual marriage plot",⁷³ which she refused to follow. The dancer's body isn't objectified, stereotyped, gendered. On the contrary, it acquires a pulsating energy that is learned from looking at nonhuman life forms—trees, plants and particularly animals. By bringing "the natural body into the professional urban space of New York"⁷⁴ during the early 1960s, Forti broke with two

⁷⁰ Hal Foster highlights the Gutai's "emphasis on change and contingency" as well as how they took "advantage of the highly ritualistic nature of Japanese culture in order to transform the artistic act into a transgressive and ludic performance". Hal Foster, "1955—Nonwestern avant-gardes", in *Art Since 1900 Modernism Antimodernism Postmodernism* (Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Yve-Alain Bois and Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, eds.) (London: Thames & Hudson, 2004), 373.

⁷¹ "The Workshop Process", interview with Sabine Breitwieser, *Thinking with the Body*, 25.

⁷² Forti, "Contact Improvisation at World Tai Chi Day", in *Contact Quarterly*, Winter/Spring 2001, Vol. 26, No. 1: 60-62.

⁷³ Bennahum and Robertson, "Introduction", 25.

⁷⁴ Bennahum and Robertson, "Introduction", 36.

traditions at once: that which determined the behaviour, aesthetics and pose of the human body and that which defined the posture, attire and physicality of the ballerina body and the female dancer.

Forti was inspired by those who stood outside these canons of representation of the human and particularly the feminine body. Her observation of the bodies, movement and the “dance state” of nonhumans provided her with the conceptual and formal means to move beyond these traditions. She did so in a manner where research, experimentation and empathy supported and complemented one another. As Banes declared, Forti “empathizes with, rather than imitates, the animals”.⁷⁵ However, as I will further explore, this empathy—this putting herself into the other—may also lead to a form of passive complacency, of experiencing a relation with a suffering being which becomes an end in itself. To do so, I need to move, with Forti, from the woods to the zoological garden.

A Deck in the City — The Zoo of Rome

Being a little lonely in an unfamiliar city, I took to spending a lot of time at the zoo. I found myself falling into a state of passive identification with the animals. [...] Yes, I felt a kinship with those encapsulated beings⁷⁶

In 1968, Forti went back to the zoo. Going to the zoo was easy: the apartment where she lived was at walking distance from the historical Villa Borghese, whose park hosted the Zoo of Rome, and was also a stone’s throw away from Piazza di Spagna, where L’Attico, the gallery where she rehearsed and performed, was located. These moments of animal observation at the zoo were an occasion of study, creativity and personal regeneration. Forti often expressed how spending time in the company of animals helped her cope with the personal problems that had taken her to Europe: “the apartment happened to be near the zoo. So, I was getting over this breakup, living by myself and I started going to the zoo, where I discovered I felt less lonely when watching the animals”.⁷⁷ The frequent animal observations inspired the creation of new phase in her choreographic work, which she had substantially paused during the years spent with Whitman.

⁷⁵ Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers*, 33.

⁷⁶ Forti, *Handbook in Motion*, 91.

⁷⁷ Interview in appendix.

“It was the first time in years that I allowed myself to be led by the feedback from my body sensations”, she wrote.⁷⁸

In Rome, two entities played a central role in fostering the reprise of Forti’s creativity. One were the city’s animals. The other was the gallery L’Attico. If the Giardino Zoologico di Roma was where many of her observations, notes, dances and animal interactions took place, there were also other urban animals, as the colony of stray cats of Largo Argentina in the city centre, which called her attention.⁷⁹ Forti photographed the cats and made a series of colour photographs, some as close-ups and others as bird-eye views, as the archaeological area lies a few meters below the street level and can be observed from a balcony that surrounds its whole perimeter. Those images became the series “Largo Argentina AKA Street Cats” (1968-2019) [Fig. II.7], which in recent years Forti transformed into a homonymous time-based installation in which the original photographs were rendered into a series of 26 digital slides and projected on a large, white cotton canvas with a fan blowing air in front it. [Fig. II.8] The cats, whose movement was arrested in the moment the photograph was taken, are brought back to life through the movement of the cotton sheet, as their projected bodies undulate with the blowing air. A wind chime, also activated by the fan, adds an unpredictable sound effect to the work, further exploring Forti’s interest in chance-based movement and musical effects of non-western inspiration.

The other entity that fostered the reprise of Forti’s creativity was Italian art dealer Fabio Sargentini and the commercial art gallery he ran, L’Attico. Forti met Sargentini in September 1968 through a mutual friend.⁸⁰ Soon after, Forti started using the space of L’Attico as a studio in the mornings, while the gallery was closed to the public.

Founded in 1957, the gallery was initially located in an attic (hence its name) in Piazza di Spagna,

⁷⁸ Forti, *Handbook in Motion*, 91.

⁷⁹ The cats lived in the archaeological site of Largo Argentina since the late 1920s. Following the renovations of Rome initiated by Benito Mussolini during that decade, the excavation of the area led to the discovery, in 1927, of four Republican-era temples and the Theatre of Pompey (where Julius Caesar was assassinated in 44 BC). The public works were halted, the area was cleared and soon the cats arrived and started occupying the ruins, where they still live nowadays.

⁸⁰ In a recent interview, Sargentini mentions how he met with Forti four days after Pino Pascali passed away on a motorcycle accident on the 11th September 1968. See “Arte da Teatro: Fabio Sargentini” in *Flash Art* (346, Oct-Nov, 2019), <https://flash-art.it/article/arte-da-teatro-fabio-sargentini-francesco-stocchi/> (accessed 3 April, 2020). The Italian artist Claudio Cintoli, who had lived in New York from 1965- 68, where he worked as an animator and critic, returned to Italy in 1968, when he introduced Forti to Sargentini, with whom he was collaborating for the art magazine *Cartabianca*, which Sargentini published from 1967 to ’69.

in the historic centre of Rome. Aligned with the political and social transformations in Europe during the mid and late 1960s,⁸¹ Sargentini promoted a new mode of artistic expression—rawer, more visceral. From the mid-1960s onwards, the gallery welcomed a new generation of artists some of whom would become key figures for the Italian and international art of the second half of the 20th century, like Pascali and Jannis Kounellis, whose growing reputation solidified the status of the gallery. They worked with different and often trite materials and experimented with the temporal and spatial features of the exhibitionary apparatus.

Following the encounter with Forti, Sargentini stretched the programme of the gallery to accommodate time-based practices. Meeting Forti inspired him to add a theatrical dimension to his work as a gallerist: “the encounter with two figures who became crucial for me: Pino Pascali and Simone Forti [who] clarified my ideas on the New York scene where there was a constant relationship between visual artists, musicians and dancers”.⁸² This theatrical and performative component of L’Attico unfolded in its new space, a basement-garage in via Cesare Beccaria (in a central yet less patrician area of Rome), which allowed for the gallery to develop a freer and more experimental programme. There, he hosted unorthodox performances and events, many of which featuring animals. Such was the case of Jannis Kounellis’ *Untitled (12 Horses)* (1969), in which the artist tethered 12 living horses to the walls of the gallery, or Gino de Dominicis’ tableau vivant *Segni del Zodiaco* [Zodiac Signs] (1970), a sequence of the 12 figures of the zodiac, including female and male performers and living, dead and stuffed animals. Others featured the live transformation of industrially-made materials, as Robert Smithson’s iconic *Asphalt Rundown* (1969), in which he poured a truckload of hot asphalt down a steep quarry close to Rome.

Forti also described the encounter with Sargentini as instrumental. She remarked how he “accepted my proposal that I do a couple of concerts in his gallery” and allowed her to use L’Attico as a studio during the mornings. “Somehow I no longer accepted my head as a workspace, and I didn’t want to think up any new pieces. Fabio offered that as the gallery was open only in the

⁸¹ As curator Luca Cerizza sustained, “It is not a stretch to claim that Sargentini was one of the first gallerists in Europe to both grasp and understand the consequences of these cultural shifts [...] the quest for a different typology of exhibition space, already sensed as necessary after Pascali’s installation in 1966, was finally fulfilled when Sargentini found a former garage located on the Via Beccaria in Rome”. Luca Cerizza, “The Gallerist: Fabio Sargentini of L’Attico, Rome” in *art-agenda* (2 May 2014), <https://www.art-agenda.com/features/235846/the-gallerist-fabio-sargentini-of-l-attico-rome>. (accessed 3 April 2020)

⁸² My translation from the Italian. In “Arte da Teatro: Fabio Sargentini” in *Flash Art* (346, Oct-Nov 2019), <https://flash---art.it/article/arte-da-teatro-fabio-sargentini-francesco-stocchi/> (accessed 3 April 2020).

afternoons and evenings, I could use it in the mornings as my studio". She subsequently explained how the gallery space informed her work process and how this unfolded. "In the mornings I worked alone on a dance called 'Sleep Walkers' [...] The dance eventually consisted of four movement studies".⁸³ Forti's first public performance of *Sleepwalkers* took place in Rome during a two-day solo event entitled *danze-costruzioni e altri danze pezzi di Simona* [sic] Forti [Dance Constructions and other dance pieces by Simona Forti], presented at the Piazza di Spagna venue of L'Attico on the 30th and 31st October, 1968.⁸⁴

Dance State

The performance of *Sleepwalkers* and the images of the publication of the event became the first public presentation of the results of her visits to the Zoo of Rome. [Fig. II.9] The booklet reproduces six pages from Forti's notebook, which narrate the genealogy of *Sleepwalkers* and describe key moments in her professional development from the 1950s until 1968. *Sleepwalkers* is presented as the outcome of two-decades of training and research in which she looks for her own kinaesthetic sense by incorporating, rejecting and responding to multiple influences.⁸⁵ These references range from Halprin ("I studied with Ann Halprin for some years [...] she gave me the attitude that my body is mine, that I move as I want") to Robert Dunn ("it seemed like any method was ok but that it was important to understand how one worked and had their ideas clear"), La Monte Young ("very rich sounds that lasted for a long time") and Robert Whitman ("I took part in "The American Moon" [...] and at that point I made the dance-constructions").⁸⁶ The text is handwritten in Italian, a language Forti knew well but with whose syntax and spelling she struggled (the notes include many corrections). It begins with a general description of the *Sleepwalkers*, "a work that consists in the development of actions seen by an audience" and concludes with her motivations: "*Sleepwalkers* is a return to a sensibility that I enjoyed while studying with Ann Halprin. An immersion in the kinaesthetic sense. A return to movement as a means of enchantment".⁸⁷ Here, Forti expresses for the first time her quest for the "state of enchantment"

⁸³ All the quotes from this paragraph are from *Handbook in Motion*, 91.

⁸⁴ According to the programme published in the A4 booklet about the event, Forti presented a combination of old pieces from the early 1960s, including some of the "Dance Constructions", with two new works (*Song* and *Sleepwalkers*), one per evening. On the 30th October, Forti performed *Slant Board*, *Hangers*, *Song* and *Huddle*. On the 31st, she performed another Dance Construction, *Accompaniment for La Monte's 2 Sounds and La Monte's 2 Sounds*, together with *sleep walkers* [sic] and *Bottom*.

⁸⁵ On Forti's kinesthetics, See Meredith Morse, "Kinesthetics and Interiority", in *Soft is Fast*, 20-22.

⁸⁶ From Simone Forti, *danze-costruzioni e altri danze pezzi di Simona* [sic] Forti, Galleria L'Attico, October 1968. My translation from the original in Italian.

⁸⁷ Simone Forti, *danze-costruzioni e altri danze pezzi di Simona* [sic] Forti, Galleria L'Attico, October 1968, 1-6.

or “dance behaviour”, an important constituent of her artistic research. The cover of the booklet reproduces a postcard image of the zoo’s sea lion pool,⁸⁸ those animals in which Forti first saw the roots of dance as a state of enchantment. As she declared in *Thoughts on dance behavior*: “I had decided to scan for dance behaviour. The sea-lions were having great fun. They were really doing movement play, which as far as I’m concerned is one of the roots of dance [...] I see the natural ‘fun ride’ as one of the roots of dance”.⁸⁹ As she later wrote, “there were two main things that interested me besides just sharing a visit with those captive spirits. One was their actual movements, their gaits, the functioning in movement of their various body structures [...] The other thing that interested me was what I came to think of as their dance behaviour. To my surprise, I found that there were dancers among the captives in the zoo. Individuals who found ways to enrich their lives with movement games and practices of their own invention”.⁹⁰ Forti has defined dance behaviour or dance state as “a kind of being besonged”⁹¹ or “duende”,⁹² as she also called it, “a certain gear, a certain patterning of the neuro-chemical system among the many patternings of gears in the repertoire of the living being, as are the states of sleeping, or of concentrating on a problem or of sexual arousal”.⁹³

She also revealed how she made the transition between observation and practice. “[In the zoo] I saw many examples of what I took to be the roots of dance [...] And this gave me a new view of what it was that I was doing when I was dancing. I abstracted some of the gaits, some of the movement games, and took them into my own body”.⁹⁴ Identifying the dance state with a form of extreme concentration and pleasure induced from the repetition and variation of patterns of movement, Forti also associated it with a notion of trance, connecting it to the term enchantment, “because of its roots, *chante*, or to sing. To be enchanted, or conditioned by song”.⁹⁵ As she further described it, “I find it interesting to realize that the word “enchant” shares the same root with the word “chant”. I’ve mentioned what I call the dance state. In a way, it’s a state of enchantment”.⁹⁶

⁸⁸ Footage from the Archivio Luce from April 1936 attests that the pool Forti saw in the 1960s was identical to the original one from the early 20th century, which still resembles the present-day’s enclosure.

⁸⁹ Forti, “FULL MOVES”: 7-10.

⁹⁰ Forti, *Oh Tongue*, 134-5.

⁹¹ Forti, “ANIMATE DANCING”: 33.

⁹² Simone Forti in conversation with Centre Georges curator Marcella Lista, *A State of Dance* (Auditorium du Louvre, 23.10.2014). For the whole video documentation of the event, see https://youtu.be/0V8_95Cs2gw (accessed 27.12.2019).

⁹³ Forti, “FULL MOVES”: 8.

⁹⁴ Forti, *Oh, Tongue*, 134–38.

⁹⁵ Forti, *Oh, Tongue*, 134–38. Forti practically explores this relation between chant and enchantment in *Illuminations* (1971), an ongoing performance work she developed with artist Charlemagne Palestine.

⁹⁶ Forti, *Thinking with the Body*, 199.

It was during the moments spent observing the animals in the zoo that she first came across this phenomenon. As she described the polar bear, the first choreographic figure of *Sleepwalkers*, "It seems to me that when a polar bear swings his head, he is in a dance state. He is in a state of establishing measure, and of communion with the forces of which he is part".⁹⁷ Returning to the booklet that accompanied Forti's solo presentation at L'Attico, appearing in the form of a subtle enchantment, the booklet's back cover reproduces the backside of a postcard whose caption reads: "Giardino Zoologico di Rom [sic] Orso bruno (Ursus arctos)". When the booklet is closed, its front and back pages together resemble a large postcard. However, there is a lack of correspondence between the image of the seals in the cover and the caption of the brown bear in the back. [Fig. II.10]

Just as the seals were an important source of inspiration for Forti's investigation on the roots of the dance behaviour, bears are a constant figure the artist has turned to in multiple occasions. The artist's most recent publication, *The Bear in The Mirror* (2018) opens with a reproduction of another postcard with a brown bear, this time the animal clearly visible, standing on its forelegs, facing the photographer. *The Bear in The Mirror* also features two bear tales, "Two Brown Bears" and "The Woman Who Married a Bear". "I keep two postcards on my desk"—Forti said—"One, of a painting by Raphael who was born in the late 1400s around the time the Spanish Inquisition and my family's flight from Spain to Tuscany [...] And next to him, the bear. The postcard of the bear standing erect, looking directly at the lens, surrounded by the green of the field and the trees beyond".⁹⁸ A fragment of "Animate Dancing" (2001) reads: "Brown Bear walk: front limb steps and whole side contracts to pull back limb into place. Boom boo-boom. Boom boo-boom. Boom boo-boom",⁹⁹ an example of how Forti combines the study and description of locomotion with onomatopoeias to find a way of better conveying her perception and description, a strategy she adopts frequently in her poems and essays.

Forti has also described how the observation and drawing of a bear in motion led her to start dancing with the animal: "I once observed the pacing patterns of a brown bear [...] I was especially interested in getting the hang of whether the overhead and underhead turns would determine

⁹⁷ Forti, *Handbook in Motion*, 119.

⁹⁸ Forti, *The Bear in The Mirror*, 17.

⁹⁹ Forti, "ANIMATE DANCING": 35. A previous version of the text was published in the publication of the encounters "Improviser dans la musique et la danse" of the Théâtre d'Alès as "Danse animée, une pratique de l'improvisation en danse" (Le Cratère, Alès, 1999), 14-22.

with which foot forward she would begin the next lap of her course”.¹⁰⁰

Following the hand-written pages, the booklet presents black-and-white photographic documentation of the two days of performances. Forti and Sargentini appear in some of the images, performing with the audience and alone. Dressed as any other member of the audience with a light shirt and trousers, few elements could individuate her as the artist. The booklet closes with the reproduction of four images of the slides of *Bottom*: a chain of mountains, a desert cliff, a waterfall and a buffalo, all postcards from a US national park. The images associate a picturesque imagery of Norther American wilderness and nature with the vocal experimentations and urban sounds of the piece, which consisted consists of four, five-minute blocks of sound, respectively “vacuum cleaner, monotonous loud drumming, three voices holding a chord and me whistling repeatedly a few notes of a popular love song”.¹⁰¹

The Zoo

The Giardino Zoologico di Roma, as the Zoo of Rome was originally called, was the oldest zoo in Italy but the youngest in a succession of zoological gardens that had been founded during the beginning of the 20th century. It was created by a private investment society founded in 1908, which aimed at establishing an entertainment zoo, with no scientific or educational purposes. The late creation of the zoo of Rome was aligned with the incipient and also late Italian imperialist and colonialist rhetoric.¹⁰² Attracted by the audience and commercial success of Carl Hagenbeck’s Tierpark in Stellingen, Hamburg, which had opened in 1907, the Italian company commissioned the German animal merchant to design and supply the Zoo of Rome. The construction works began on the 10th of May, 1909, and the zoo opened on the 5th of January, 1911. Hagenbeck applied similar principles to those that made Stellingen such a popular attraction. Like in Hamburg, the architecture and display of the Zoo of Rome was not dominated by cages and iron bars that accentuated the captivity of the animals. Instead, it relied on a system of bar-free enclosures, canals, ditches and green areas that created scenic views and gave the illusion of the freedom of movement and conviviality for the various animals. By creating “a way of isolating animals from one another and the public through the use of landscape elements such as moats

¹⁰⁰ Forti, “FULL MOVES”: 8.

¹⁰¹ Simone Forti—*Al Di Là*, CD notes, 2018.

¹⁰² The Museo Coloniale di Roma opened in the premises of the Giardino Zoologico di Roma in 1923.

and rock outcroppings”¹⁰³ and providing scenic framings of various animals that were freely roaming in open spaces, Hagenbeck proposed a different zoo concept, an illusionary device rather than an objective display of individual specimens, which he entitled “The Zoological Garden of the Future”. Through advancing this concept, Hagenbeck was not only positioning himself as a visionary, he was also suggesting that the future of the zoo relied on spectacle and illusion, rather than education-oriented displays of living specimens. He seemed to suggest that what was lost in terms of educational and scientific purposes was to be won in terms of visitors’ satisfaction and pleasure, and hence commercial success. Though opinions towards Hagenbeck’s plans were polarised between criticism from the scientific voices of other zoological gardens and endorsements from paying visitors who marvelled at the vision of an immersive garden, it was the latter that influenced the investors of the zoo of Rome.¹⁰⁴

And yet, despite its initial success, the Zoo of Rome quickly entered in a phase of decline that largely mirrored Europe’s political upheaval during the first half of the 20th century.¹⁰⁵ These events accentuated the deterioration conditions of the zoo and prevented the gathering of resources to repair it. After two decades of peace and regeneration for Italy, Ermanno Bronzini, the zoo’s director from 1956-78, attempted to rebuild its credibility and update it to the operativity of other zoological gardens. Bronzini struggled to stimulate the zoo’s scientific activity and improve the animals’ infrastructures. Yet he lacked support and resources. It was a zoo in a clear state of neglect, whose enclosures and visitor areas resulted in a pastiche between Hagenbeck’s original plans and their subsequent adaptations and improvement attempts, which Forti encountered during her frequent excursions between the Autumn and Winter of 1968, and from which *Sleepwalkers* emerged.

Sleepwalking

Sleepwalkers is based on the performance of four distinct figures, done sequentially. Each conveys the movement of a particular life form. The figures are executed by a single performer, originally the artist. *Sleepwalkers* features no accompanying music; the only sound is that of the movement

¹⁰³ Nigel Rothfels, *Savages and Beasts—The Birth of the Modern Zoo* (Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 2002), 147.

¹⁰⁴ On the critical reception of Hagenbeck’s Stellingen Zoo, see Nigel Rothfels, “Paradise”, in *Savages and Beasts*, 143-188.

¹⁰⁵ Namely the three wars that Italy was engaged with: the Italo-Turkish War of 1911-12, the First World War of 1914-18 and the Second World War of 1939-45.

of the performer's body, which is combined with the sounds of the viewers' own bodies. Just as in Cage's three-movement piece *4'33''* (1952), *Sleepwalkers* incorporates the temporality and physicality of viewers within the aural and visual reception of the work. Yet, different to *4'33''* (but like Forti's entire body of work), *Sleepwalkers* is generally presented in a gallery space or another horizontal setting where there is no separation or physical differentiation between performer and audience. "Spectators never had chairs to sit in", she once said of her performances.¹⁰⁶ *Sleepwalkers* has an approximate duration of 10 minutes and the four movements always follow the same order: flamingo, bear, seaweed and water striders. Without any props, costumes, lighting, or specific expressive traits to differentiate the figures, what individuates them is the time the performer takes to occupy a segment of the available dance space and position herself in each movement posture. Every figure occupies a different space in the whole area where the performance is executed and is defined by a distinguishable movement. The figures result from the artist's attention to animals that executed particular movement practices.

Sleepwalkers is distilling the two fundamental questions that triggered Forti's animal research: the investigation of the concept of dance behaviour, and her interest in the equation that sets the relationship between animal locomotion, physiognomy and space (or its deprivation). The work explores Forti's interest in the exceptional and the extraordinary within the mundane, this exceptionality being regarded as a set of gestures or patterns (as in her onomatopoeic description of the movement of the giraffe: "back limb steps, crowds fore limb which steps ahead. Boom-boom. Boom-boom"¹⁰⁷) and as an expression of dance behaviour (as when she documents unusual responses to boredom and confinement: "an elephant who had perfected a walk with which it passed the time of day").¹⁰⁸

The first movement, the flamingo, enhances the verticality of the animal's slender body. Forti has described how "The first [movement] was inspired by the flamingos. I watched them tuck their head under one wing and, standing on one leg, go to sleep. It seemed so fantastic, that complete abandon, that easy, alert equilibrium on one leg. I was trying to go to sleep standing up. And for me, learning backwards seemed to be a more likely way".¹⁰⁹ The dancer is standing up: for most

¹⁰⁶ Forti, "The Workshop Process", in *Thinking with the Body*, 29.

¹⁰⁷ Forti, "Animate Dancing": 35.

¹⁰⁸ Forti, "Full Moves": 11.

¹⁰⁹ Forti, *Handbook in Motion*, 91.

of the duration of the act, both her feet are solidly lying on the ground while the arms are bended forward, perpendicular to the body, at the height of the head, creating a surface upon which her head can rest. She's assuming the position of a sleeping flamingo and only in a brief instance does she raise one of her feet to match the animals' characteristic one-legged pose. [Fig. II.11]

The second movement corresponds to the bear: "Another section was as close an adaptation as I could achieve of how the polar bear swings his head", Forti wrote.¹¹⁰ Standing up, with both feet on the ground, the dancer bends forward, leaning her hands on the ground as though she was on all fours whilst also standing. She swings her head and shoulders in a pendular movement, laterally and continuously from one side to the other. She describes how "I bend over and swing my head from side to side in an arc, with my lower back as the fulcrum, and I make variations on that".¹¹¹ The head appears heavier than the rest of the body, driving its motion with strong, steady jerks. At times the dancer stops, arms lying down, appearing to be guided by the head, and then resumes her swinging pace. Forti explains how "when I do it, it's a kind of stimulation to my lungs and my heart and it makes me feel good",¹¹² bringing together the act of becoming bear with the physical sensation and actual wellbeing that such transformation brings within her own body. [Fig. II.12]

If the first two acts are based on zoo animals, the third and fourth are not. The third movement doesn't relate to an animal but to seaweed that is "caught in the surf"¹¹³ Lying on the floor, arms and legs stretched out, the dancer rolls from one side to the other of the space at a slow but steady rhythm, following a straight line. As with the other moments, there is a tension between pleasure and effort, enjoyment and vulnerability, which is rendered particularly visible here by how the dancer rolls on an uncovered, cold floor. The compulsiveness of the rolling gesture, which may also be associated to childhood play, is disturbed by the contact with the hard surface, which prevents the enjoyment of the action. Forti has repeated and incorporated the movement of seaweed in later works, as in the performance for the camera *Zuma News* (2014),¹¹⁴ in which she assembles, manipulates and rolls upon fragments of newspapers and seaweed by the beach, and

¹¹⁰ Forti, *Handbook in Motion*, 91.

¹¹¹ Patrick Steffen, "Forti on All Fours, a talk with Simone Forti", in *Contact Quarterly* Vol. 37, No. 1 (Winter/Spring 2012): 26.

¹¹² Talk with Kari Conte following the performance of *Sleepwalkers* at ISCP, New York, 20 December 2019.

¹¹³ Bryan-Wilson, "Simone Forti Goes to the Zoo": 39.

¹¹⁴ From *NONFICTIONS - Gorbachev Lives / Zuma News / Questions*, a joint work by Jeremiah Day, Simone Forti and Fred Dewey).

in Simone Forti with *Obstructions by Robert Morris*, the tribute-performance in which she rolled in and with long strips of Morris' coloured felt.¹¹⁵ [Fig. II.13]

Forti's artistic repertoire is rich in interplays between horizontality and verticality, gravity acting upon dance. Either rolling, crawling, lying on the back, or transitioning from one posture to another, Forti's choreographic work is signalled by the relationship between the lying body and the ground or floor. Remaining on the ground but returning to the animal realm, *Sleepwalkers'* fourth movement is the water strider. Forti honours these insects who walk on water by benefiting from its surface tension. Lying on the floor, her hands and feet sustain the rest of the body in a plank and she occasionally hops front or sidewise. This movement wasn't new to her repertoire. While describing her participation in Whitman's *American Moon* (1960),¹¹⁶ Forti recalls how she was requested to perform a moment that "was a little bit like planking—like you get completely straight—but my hands and my toes were keeping me off the ground and I was just sort of—the directions were to 'heap around,' so I was planking and 'heaping' the plank around".¹¹⁷ [Fig. II.14]

Described by Forti as "an immersion in kinaesthetic sense",¹¹⁸ an attempt to "achieve a kind of concentration that I found in some of the animals at the zoo",¹¹⁹ *Sleepwalkers* also explores the relationship between how a body is built and how it moves. This exploration is divided in four episodes, each requiring a radically different posture and relationship of the body with space, gravity, locomotion and time. If *Sleepwalkers* is embedded in a certain amount of anatomic determinism, reinforcing the correlation between shape and motion, it also gives space to singular, individual movements more than to the generalised characterisation of a "species" locomotion. Yet, *Sleepwalkers'* movements aren't extraordinary or exuberant. They are down-to-earth exercises, as with much of her work. Forti executes them with the effortlessness of body that, while attempting an unusual form of locomotion, does not exhibit the pompous elegance and virtuosity of a body trained in classical dance.

¹¹⁵ Castelli Gallery, New York, 9 February, 2018.

¹¹⁶ *American Moon* was presented at the Reuben Gallery, New York, between the 29th November–4th December, 1960.

¹¹⁷ Judy Hussie-Taylor, "Simone Forti: on Robert Whitman's "American Moon" February 15, 2016", *Danspace Project*, <https://danspaceproject.org/2016/02/15/simone-forti-on-robert-whitmans-american-moon/> (accessed 3 May, 2020).

¹¹⁸ Talk with Kari Conte following the performance of *Sleepwalkers* ISCP in New York, 20 December 2019.

¹¹⁹ Forti, *Handbook in Motion*, 91.

While looking at and performing with the animals as a form to renew her movement vocabulary, Forti kept a modest and primary relationship to movement. As Megan Metcalf noted, she had “an interest in full-bodied and relaxed movements, or more precisely the ‘infancy’ of movement before it is carefully modulated and organized—even rationalized—in dance technique and performance”.¹²⁰ Yet these movements ask for precise skills; while they are naturally executed, they require a pliability and strength of someone used to training to sustain the balance required during the sleeping flamingo act, the pendulous head movement of the bear, the floor rolling of the seaweed and the plank jumps for the water striders.

Sleepwalkers reveals the vulnerability of a body that accepts to expose itself to the public exhibition of moving in an unusual, strange manner. This is particularly striking in Forti’s last executions of it, as in December 2016 at New York’s International Studio & Curatorial Program, on the occasion of the exhibition “The Animal Mirror”.¹²¹ For the past years, Forti has been suffering from Parkinson’s disease, which causes her head and hands to tremble.¹²² By accepting to publicly expose herself to a series of non-choreographed, improvised exercises in becoming other and the practice of embracing the movement of another life form, Forti turns the vulnerability that this situation entails into its most compelling, defining feature, in particular because it’s the expressive nature of the trying body that emerges in an otherwise non-expressive performance.

Becoming-with

Forti maintains that in *Sleepwalkers*, it is “not as how a flamingo would sleep—it would put its head under its wing—but it’s how I’d sleep standing up or at least how I tried to”.¹²³ She is not trying to mimic and copy the body and movement of animal but to integrate the animal’s act of sleeping within her own body: “I never copied any of the movements I saw, but rather abstracted

¹²⁰ Metcalf, “In the New Body”, 68.

¹²¹ A video documentation of the performance, is available online: <https://vimeo.com/197227609> (accessed 29.06.2020).

¹²² Forti assumes her condition publicly. Cf, for instance, the interview with Bryony Gillard and Louis Hartnoll “Artists at Work: Simone Forti”, in *Afterall* (6 June, 2016), <https://www.afterall.org/online/artists-at-work-simone-forti#.Xm5Pd5P7QWp> (accessed 15.03.2020): “LH: And what has it been like returning to some of those early moments with Charlemagne [Palestine]? SF: What’s it been like? Well, I’m a lot older and so is Charlemagne. And I have Parkinson’s. So far the work is still there. I was going to say I worry more about it, but I worried about it then too. And I’ll sing a little song that Charlemagne sang to me one time when we were getting ready for a performance: *Simoney, don’t worry. You will dance and sing alright*”.

¹²³ Talk with Kari Conte following the performance of *Sleepwalkers* ISCP, New York, 20 December 2019.

certain structural aspects, working them out in the laboratory of my own body”, she observed.¹²⁴ By trying not to sleep like a flamingo would but to sleep standing up like a human would, Fort bypasses mimicry. She does not try to compensate for the evolutionary and biological differences that distinguish her body from that of a tall wading bird by enhancing gestural similitude. The relationship she establishes is one of possibility: despite not resembling a flamingo and not sharing fundamental physiognomic traits with it, woman and flamingo can still have an experience of sleeping vertically that is kindred. About the seaweed position, Forti says: “I lie down and roll on the floor, and my image then is of being like seaweed on the beach, in the ocean surf, so that I follow the waves across the floor [...] I imagine going very far and then the energy coming back on the wave and picking me up and rolling me back again”.¹²⁵ In both instances, she does not adopt the posture of a dancer trying to imitate a flamingo or seaweed but of someone sleeping in the manner of a flamingo and of someone rolling “in a very relaxed way”; a movement of seaweed-ness, imagining what it feels to be seaweed.

Forti is not imitating a flamingo, bear, seaweed or water strider. She is not aspiring to be like them but rather to be woman as flamingo, bear, seaweed and water strider. Despite their similarities, these two attitudes (imitation and being with) rely on a basic difference. As Deleuze and Guattari maintained, “mimicry is a very bad concept, since it relies on binary logic to describe phenomena of an entirely different nature”.¹²⁶ Forti proposes these new forms of being—born out of the association between her observation, her descriptions and drawings and the experimentation of those studies onto her body—through her becoming woman-with-flamingo/bear/seaweed/water strider.

In the first chapter, I discussed how Marker exists as a private artist and in the guise of the cat Guillaume-en-Egypte; he is both one and the other, the cat allows Marker to express himself without direct exposure. The cat is the artist’s public persona. Jonas, as I will discuss, establishes other alliances with her companion dogs. She is a woman who acts with a dog, in duet, one complementing and “helping” (a term she uses to describe her relationship to animals) the other. Forti, by not making work with companion animals but rather by relying on relationships of

¹²⁴ Forti, “FULL MOVES”: 11.

¹²⁵ Steffen, “Forti on All Fours”: 26.

¹²⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, “1. Introduction: Rhizome”, in *A Thousand Plateaus* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 11.

physical distance and observation, connects with animals first and foremost by exploring what exists beyond the animal-image rendered by the zoo, in terms of the animals' actual anatomy and mobility. Adapting herself, inventing new postures, spending time in finding the best and most comfortable balance and pace, she is affected by them. Hers is a transformed body: a body that moves differently, behaves differently; a body that sleeps while standing up, feels the air while swinging back and forth, is relaxed while being moved by the tide and dances while in a plank.

Vinciane Despret described the experience of symbiosis between Konrad Lorenz (who, as mentioned, has influenced Forti's animal studies) and the birds he studied as a process of becoming-with: "[T]he whole experience is a shared experience, an experience of being 'with'. Rather than saying that Lorenz became a jackdaw, I suggest that Lorenz became a 'jackdaw-with-human' as much as the jackdaw became in some ways a 'human-with-jackdaw'".¹²⁷

The writings of Konrad Lorenz also provided an important complement to Forti's method—as Lorenz's advice that "pure and simple observation provides the basis for all the research"¹²⁸—as to her subjects. Forti acknowledged Lorenz's influence on her own work on several occasions. If Muybridge inspired her interpretation of animal locomotion, her readings of Lorenz led her to experiment with communication using her own communicative and vocal skills and to envisage her work from a cross-disciplinary perspective beyond the arts. As she explained:

In his book, *King Solomon's Ring*, Konrad Lorenz writes about the songs of the jackdaw birds [...] it seemed to me that the jackdaws' song deals with content not through representation but through recognition. I began looking at the different movements that I had made over the years, and remembering the specific thing that I had seen in them [...] in terms of its embodiment of a mode of being, a mode of doing.¹²⁹

Forti was inspired by Lorenz's studies of the social and linguistic behaviour of jackdaws but also by his research on greylag geese's social interactions. [Fig. II.15] She expresses her fascination by "the notion that if they get 'married' they stay married. If one dies, the other goes into mourning. Their facial muscles droop in the same way that ours do when they're sad".¹³⁰

But it was Lorenz's work on jackdaws that left the strongest impact on her, and that was

¹²⁷ Despret, "The Body We Care For": 131.

¹²⁸ Konrad Lorenz, *The Year of the Greylag Goose* (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979), 5-6.

¹²⁹ Forti, "FULL MOVES": 12-13.

¹³⁰ "Sabine Breitwieser in Conversation with Simone Forti", 31.

particularly visible in the 1981 performance *Jackdaw Songs*. Forti explained how she was impressed “especially from his studies of the linguistic behavior of jackdaws [...] He says that in the evening a jackdaw might sit on a branch and string all the sounds together, one after the other. I love that idea. I perform a poem like that, and it reminds me of how we sometimes used language with Anna Halprin”.¹³¹ In the program notes of *Jackdaw Songs*, she remarked how Lorenz’s discoveries of jackdaw’s expressive means led her to revise her work and to merge choreography, performance, writing and theatrical elements:

The title for the piece was suggested by naturalist Konrad [sic] observations of several generations of jackdaw birds. The jackdaw has a language of meaningful calls—a flying-out call, a flying-back call, a call made at a sign of danger. When it sings, it strings all of these together, with their accompanying gestures, a recapitulation of the day’s events in song and dance. I’ve been looking over the movements that I’ve gathered over the years, from the point of view of what they mean to me, of what their content is. I’m putting them together in a new way, moving more towards theatre.¹³²

Formally, *Jackdaw Songs*, as most of Forti’s performance works, follows no narrative: it is organised around different “shifting tableaux” that stage simple relationships of communication—physical, verbal and non—between single individuals and the group of performers as a whole. The work includes seven performers. Pamela Sommers described it as “a dancer in black trousers and shirt (Forti), a dancer in green (Susan Rethorst), a dancer in red (Richmond Johnstone), and a white-clad group of three women (Lynn Balliett, Deborah Day-Orr, Ivy Sky Rutzky) and one man (Rex Shrout). Physically removed, but certainly an integral part of the piece is musician/composer Peter Van Riper, who accompanies or comments upon the movement with a blast from his saxophone, a clacking of two wooden poles, or the sound of a seashell”.¹³³ The performers interact with one another, call and cry to one another, enacting gestures and rituals that declinate from animal postures and locomotion styles, not limited to the jackdaw reference of its title. Forti and the other performers move on all fours, their bodies

¹³¹ Interview in appendix.

¹³² Simone Forti, programme notes for *Jackdaw Songs* (1981), reprinted in Sommers, “Simone Forti's "Jackdaw Songs"": 125.

¹³³ Sommers, “Simone Forti's "Jackdaw Songs"": 125.

“clambering over and under one another”, sinking “lower and lower, the members of this mobile unit grab each other about the thigh, waist, and ankle, and the lights dim on yet another mass shape”. They “play, wrestle, and saunter about stage like monkeys, offsetting the central scene of human behavior with one of animal behavior”. At the end, “the choreographer, primate-like, picks up a stick and wields it like some awkward baton twirler. She places it between her teeth, rolls and frolics, shoves the stick between her toes, then hoists herself onto the bench. Using her new toy as a utensil now, she traces a wide arc on the bench's surface”.¹³⁴

This syncretic combination of animalesque movements and expressive modes reveals the depth of the incorporation of Forti's animal research and how it integrated her artistic vocabulary and language, beyond the specific duration of the late 1960s “animal period” and the years that followed, and beyond the concrete set of “animal-related-works”, namely *Sleepwalkers* and the schemes and drawings that accompanied its research phase.

As the above descriptions of *Jackdaw Songs* reveal, Forti's studies and interpretation of animal expression and locomotion were also important for her creation of harmonious, receptive patterns of collective acts, some of which will be further analysed later in this chapter.

Returning to *Sleepwalkers*, while developing a parallel system of attunement and syntony, Forti becomes this woman-with-flamingo/bear/seaweed/water strider. She develops an experimental system of being-with-another, requesting her body to move and act in coexistence, to be exposed to sharing a space of embodiment at once familiar and not. The concept of becoming-with offers an important reading to *Sleepwalkers*, attesting to how Forti's work is also “not content to proceed by resemblance and for which resemblance, on the contrary, would represent an obstacle or stoppage”.¹³⁵ Instead, “the becoming-animal of the human being is real, even if the animal the human being becomes is not”.¹³⁶

Forti lets herself be moved by her subjects of interest, gives them a chance to be interesting and curious and even to be curious about her, when she “dances at the fence”, when she engenders simple modes of interacting and communicating when them, reverting the subject-object dualism that the exhibitionary system of the zoological garden normalises. She chooses the animals, but

¹³⁴ All quotes from Sommers, “Simone Forti's “Jackdaw Songs””: 124-26.

¹³⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, “1730: Becoming-Intense, Becoming-Animal, Becoming-Imperceptible...”, in *A Thousand Plateaus*, 233.

¹³⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, “1730”, in *A Thousand Plateaus*, 238.

she is also chosen by them. Or not chosen, in some cases, as with the rhinoceroses that Forti observed:

They were the only animals that made towards me gestures of defending their territory, of showing interest in a possible scuffle between us, and of moving strategically to avoid my getting a chance to get a good look at them. Once they did scuffle up close to the partition, strutting sideways with sudden starts and stops. Just then I opened up my notebook and pulled out my pen and they ran away.¹³⁷

In other cases, Forti notices the animals' curiosity and engagement. She recalls observing how a female brown bear "quickly became aware that I was dancing with her and, ending her practice, she came over to me as close as she could, stretching her long neck and sniffing in my direction. And I too found myself with chin stretched forward, nostrils flared, trying to nuzzle across the space of hedge and moat".¹³⁸

She asks different questions to different animals. She is interested in the sleeping of the flamingo, the territory mapping of the bear, the surfing of the water currents of the seaweed and the suspension on the surface of the water of the water strider. Forti is affected by their bodies and she is affecting the animals' bodies and the bodies of the spectators. This mode of engaging with the various constituents of the work—the animals, herself and viewers—makes *Sleepwalkers* such an important work. [Fig. II.16]

With Despret, I'd suggest that "this body that 'makes one make' is primarily articulated by affects". In being articulated by affects, it disrupts the linear convention between affect and affected as a system of cause and effect because the performance generates an emotional interplay between what is embodied and disembodied across the various actors that participate in it, viewers included. Pursuing Despret's thought, I'd suggest that the work calls "for a theory of affected and affecting bodies. That is, a theory of emotions [...] Emotional experience, in other words, is an experience that makes us hesitate".¹³⁹ Yet, Forti studied, conceived and rehearsed this "theory of emotions" in such a space of oppression and confinement as the zoo. Bryan-Wilson remarked how in the zoo of Rome "animals lived within tight enclosures [and] her motion studies were frequently dedicated to understanding gestures of captivity".¹⁴⁰ Forti's observations

¹³⁷ Forti, "FULL MOVES": 8.

¹³⁸ Forti, "FULL MOVES": 8.

¹³⁹ Despret, "The Body We Care For": 125-26.

¹⁴⁰ Bryan-Wilson, "Simone Forti Goes to the Zoo": 27.

partially consider the constraints imposed to animals, largely manifested in how she occupies space during her performances. Moving in a fairly reduced area and repeating the same action within it, Forti transposes the physical limits of the zoo to a different context and shares them with another audience, remaining faithful to her original context of observation.

Ambivalent Expressions of Confinement

Pointing to zoological gardens' failure, John Berger argues that "the zoo cannot but disappoint".¹⁴¹ This tension between illusion and deception, between what is expected and what is delivered, is also explored by Foucault in his theorisation of the heterotopia. For while he argues that "The heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible",¹⁴² he also reveals their ambiguous relationship to illusion: "Everyone can enter into the heterotopic sites, but in fact that is only an illusion—we think we enter where we are, by the very fact that we enter, excluded".¹⁴³ With the cyclical repetition of the same movements and gestures with slight variations, Forti replicates her observations of confinement. Yet, in disappointing by not presenting the wild, the zoo assumes the configuration of a training ground that fits the artist's observational requirements: it delivers the repetition that Forti requires to study. She incorporates and repeats these gestures, positioning herself in a complex balance in relation to the spectacle the zoo provides. On the one hand, she repeats the behaviour that contributes to the disappointment of observing zoo animals: the repetitiveness, the occupation of a non-natural territory and the response to its spatial limitations. On the other hand, she transforms this situation and transposes it to another setting. Where she performs, there are no cages and metal bars—what audiences see is both the presence of the zoo animal and the body of the dancer, the two becoming one in an evocative, compelling manner, which is also grounded on actual observation and concrete in its down-to-earth expressivity. By displacing and re-interpreting the animals' movements, Forti elaborates such disappointment of the zoo into an occasion for discovery in which dance brings together animals and people by simultaneously abstracting and materialising the captive bodies. To a certain extent, however, and despite the absence of bars, the regime of the zoo remains intact: the performance features a living body, a simultaneously real and transposed animal, performing for others, entering a state of enchantment provided by its own movement and subjecting itself to their gaze and conforming

¹⁴¹ John Berger, "Why Look at Animals" (1977) in *About Looking* (London: Writers and Readers, 1980), 6.

¹⁴² Berger, "Why Look at Animals", 6.

¹⁴³ Berger, "Why Look at Animals", 7-8.

itself with a given, limited territory.

In this exercise of exportation and adaptation of the conditions of the zoological garden to the set of contemporary dance and art, Forti manages to surpass the limits of empathy—particularly how it was deployed by liberalism and its political implications, as Elizabeth A. Povinelli argues¹⁴⁴—towards a form of tacit request for a commitment to a reorganisation and distribution of powers and affects. Empathy can also be double-edged. Alfred Gell, in his 1996 essay “Vogel’s Net”,¹⁴⁵ explores “the basis of the distinction commonly made between works of art or art objects and ‘mere’ artefacts, which are useful but not aesthetically interesting or beautiful”.¹⁴⁶ The anthropologist argues that traps, for instance, should be considered artworks because they are complex “time structures” whose forms “embody ideas, convey meanings” and attest to a mutual social relationship between human and animal. By showing that the traps’ form emerges from a detailed knowledge of the prey’s body and behaviour, Gell presents a case-study of human instrumentalization of empathy to kill animals beyond the late liberal context alluded to by Povinelli.¹⁴⁷

In the context of zoo management, a concrete example of this instrumentalization of empathy is the mid-20th century application of managerialism to the zoological garden. Looking at the case-study of Heini Hediger’s biopolitical reforms of zookeeping Chrulew reflects on the correlation between his “long-term, species-specific observation and experimentation” and his “guidelines for the production of healthy, happy animals willing to mate and display natural behaviours”.¹⁴⁸ It is undeniable that Forti also utilises her means of observation of captive animals towards her own artistic ends. It is her empathy with the animals, rather than her mimicry, as Banes suggests, which leads her to become “woman-with-animal”, in the same manner as the trap described by

¹⁴⁴ See Elizabeth A. Povinelli, “The Ancestral Present of Oceanic Illusions: Connected and Differentiated in Late Toxic Liberalism”, in *E-flux Journal* #112 (October 2020), <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/112/352823/the-ancestral-present-of-oceanic-illusions-connected-and-differentiated-in-late-toxic-liberalism/> (accessed 24.08.2021).

¹⁴⁵ Alfred Gell, “Vogel’s Net: Traps as Artworks and Artworks as Traps”, in *Journal of Material Culture* 1 (1996): 15-38.

¹⁴⁶ Gell, “Vogel’s Net”, 15.

¹⁴⁷ “[E]ach [trap] is also a model of its victim. This model may actually reflect the outward form of the victim [...] or the trap may, more subtly and abstractly, represent parameters of the animal’s natural behaviour, which are subverted in order to entrap it. Traps are lethal parodies of the animal’s *Umwelt* [...] In this sense, traps can be regarded as texts on animal behaviour. The trap is therefore both a model of its creator, the hunter, and a model of its victim, the prey animal”. Gell, “Vogel’s Net”, 25.

¹⁴⁸ Chrulew, “Managing Love and Death at the Zoo”.

Gell becomes an “object-with-animal” and not a replica of the actual animal. There is a subsequent step, though, one in which she transposes this process onto another context. She is not reverting this knowledge to manipulate or transform the animals. Instead, in the absence of the animals, she is conveying their experience of confinement to audiences, who have to decide how to respond to it.

Materially, though, compared to the amount of notes, writings, drawings and performances Forti made in response to her visits to the zoo, there are substantially less accounts on the conditions and the context in which these observations took place. [Fig. II.17] She seems to be largely interested in studying locomotion and identifying moments of “dance state” amidst the animals. It is thus not surprising that she barely described the zoo’s infrastructures or how the animals were kept. These appear in the actual performance of *Sleepwalkers*, in the modes in which she uses a limited space to dance, reflecting the conditions of zoological captivity. These acknowledgements also appear in retrospective reflections, matured by a temporal and geographical distance.

Indeed in the mid-1970s, when Forti was visiting the New York Zoo, there were a series of crucial moments in which she acknowledges the conditions in which her observation of zoo animals was taking place, the mode in which the animals were being presented and how this affected her. In 1974, she made a series of drawings entitled “Grizzlies Enclosures” in preparation for the video *Three Grizzlies* (originally entitled *Twirling Bears*), which she presented the same year at the Sonnabend Gallery. The video and drawings focus on the metal grid of the bears’ pit. Forti pays particular attention to the animals’ space of confinement and how it conditions and limits their movements, something important when planning the camera movement during the shooting of the video.

In December that year, *Avalanche* published Forti’s article “Dancing at the Fence”.¹⁴⁹ The title alludes to her activity of dancing close to the animals’ enclosures. In the article, Forti reflects about the animals’ conditions, expressing her conflicting views in relation to the tension between generalisation and individuality that zoological exhibitions trigger: “I’m always concerned with how the way I’m dancing connects with the rest of my life system [...] With the animals in the zoo

¹⁴⁹ Simone Forti, “Dancing at the Fence”, in *Avalanche* (Number 10, December 1974): 20-23.

I have at least the illusion of understanding the limits and nature of the life system in which they find themselves. An animal walking in a cage is a different thing than is an animal walking in the grasslands. And yet it's not".¹⁵⁰ She further explores this awareness of the conflict between individuality and generic characterisations of captive animals as being at the root of the dance behaviour:

It seems that in captivity there comes about a separation of aspects of self. One aspect remains intact. But the aspect of being part of a system is drastically changed. Even the built-in relationship between the animal's nose and feet can no longer play itself out. And this separation of a sense of wholeness from the being as it operates in its life system somehow brings the captive animal's dance behaviour into particular relief. And it's this that seems to shed light on my own dance behavior.¹⁵¹

Later, in 2001, attesting to an evolution of sensibility that is also connected to the transformation of society's relationship to the perception of nonhuman life, Forti retrospectively reveals her distress for the animals exhibited in the zoo: "There was a time when my improvising was anchored in observations of animals, mainly in zoos. And what finally stopped me was the sadness of captivity".¹⁵²

Repeating Confinement

The core event, however, in this expression of consciousness towards confined animal life, is a rarely seen and discussed black-and-white, untitled video from 1974.¹⁵³ The video has a raw quality, is roughly edited, the images are blurred and off-camera conversations between Forti and two camerapersons can often be heard. It starts with footage of a group of monkeys playing in an enclosure in the zoo while a roaring lion can sometimes be heard in the back. The image then abruptly cuts to footage of Forti in a small, windowless room. She is naked and crawls on a dirty floor while singing a melody whose lyrics speak of loss and grief. There are leaves and bits of construction materials on the ground, and next to them a sheepskin jacket lies open wide. The

¹⁵⁰ Forti, "Dancing at the Fence": 20.

¹⁵¹ Both quotes from Forti, "Dancing at the Fence": 20 and 22.

¹⁵² Forti, "Animate Dancing": 35.

¹⁵³ The video, *Untitled* (1974) was presented in the exhibition "Here it Comes" (January–April, 2016) at Vleeshal in Middelburg, Netherlands. It is distributed by the Dutch media art organisation Lima, where they describe it as a "limited edition of 70 signed copies".

scene is abruptly cut again to footage of three brown bears in a zoo pit, followed by footage of a lion pacing back and forth in a narrow enclosure, occasionally roaring. We hear children asking questions about the animal. Forti, speaking in Italian, is also heard, giving instructions to the cameraman and asking him to make a shot that includes the whole den of the lion. The comments of the cameraman are also heard. He says the camera has low battery and other technical remarks. These off-camera exchanges, the video's fragmented and raw edit and the poor image resolution, give the impression that the piece was made more as a study than a final work.

In the meanwhile, the camera, with fixed focus, continues filming the pacing lion. It is a long and acutely distressing scene, because the lion is limited to a very small enclosure— so small it fits within the camera's frame while filming the animal from a fairly short distance—and the animal's repetitive movement and cries reinforce the sense of claustrophobia and confinement generated by the narrow space. The scene then cuts to footage of deer, shot from behind a grid—the visibility of their confinement appearing as an intermediate layer between the camera and the animals, subsequently manifesting itself in the film as a reticular pattern across which the animals can be seen. The group of deer is followed by a long shot of a male deer with large antlers and white chest, standing still and looking around. Another cut to footage of a goose and a flock of ducks swimming in a pond. Forti would later perform a duck posture, lowering her body to a position that replicates the body posture of a standing duck. This study anticipates her interest in this animals' physiognomy. Another cut and we are back to the indoors space where the artist, this time dressed, wearing t-shirt and trousers, stands up in a corner, rocking her body back and forth, trying to find balance while responding to and leaning upon the two corner walls. [Fig. II.18] Sounds of cars and airplanes passing highlight the dense urban environment where she is. The camera, still, sometimes films her from her eye-line and others films her from above, just like the shots of the cats in Rome. Another cut back to the zoo with two short shots of the bears and the lion, followed by more footage of the artist, now rolling on the floor in the same corner where she stood before, dealing with a confined space, measuring her body against it and attempting to understand how space determines movement, action and rhythm. Another cut, this time to a monkey enclosure where the animals are filmed relating and measuring the space they are given, either by adjusting themselves to a small cell or by repeatedly running around the perimeter of their enclosure. The camera is still, the monkeys run in and out of frame, highlighting the repetition of the action. Forti's voice gives indications to the cameraman about what to film and

comments on what the animals are doing. Then the video ends, with one last footage of a bear pacing back and forth in the enclosure while cars pass by in the background.

Forti's naked appearance is exceptional; nudity is rare in her work. More than an aesthetic choice, this decision to perform naked appears to be a deliberate attempt to get closer to the animals' condition, to further replicate the living conditions of the zoo animals she was seeing, drawing and recording. Her naked body is vulnerable, shameless, asexualised. If nakedness often highlights a gendered division, by being naked in association with the various animals, she is in fact less woman and more animal, and her concerns and interests concern existence rather than gender. The oscillation of footage between the zoo and the artist's studio, where she tests and practices movement responses to enclosure, reveals in a particularly vivid manner the impact of these moments of observation in her practice. This is not so, only in terms of the incorporation of the animals' rhythms and gestures but as a system of dealing with the trauma that the zoo caused in her. Here, Forti is not the spirited and often humorous performer and dancer of many of her pieces, who makes audiences smile and laugh with her words and movements. The graveness with which she tries and repeats these moments, at once vulnerable, violent upon herself and almost maniacal, denotes an attempt to force upon herself the experience of these animals' zoo life.

Dance Flight Music

Returning to her time in Rome, still in 1968, Forti performed *Sleepwalkers* once more at L'Attico, in a one-day event held on the 26th of February 1969 under the title *Serata di violoncello ... Sassofono... Batteria ... Voce ... Recita ... Danza ...* [Evening of cello... Saxophone... Drums... Voice... Declamation... Dance...], a collective evening of music, performance and dance that brought together Forti with Claudio Colnaghi, drummer Micheline Pelzer, saxophonist Steve Lacy and violinist Irene Aebi.¹⁵⁴

The cross-disciplinarity of the gallery remained its defining tract until 1976 and Forti continued playing an important role within it, integrating her New York peers. She recalls thinking that "if Fabio Sargentini is interested in my work, he'd also be interested in the work of Yvonne [Rainer], Steve [Paxton], Trisha [Brown], La Monte Young, and all those people I was close to in New York.

¹⁵⁴ Irene Aebi was Steve Lacy's partner at the time.

So then he did the festivals. It was very important”.¹⁵⁵ In April 1969, Forti and Sargentini travelled together to New York, where she performed (as Simone Whitman¹⁵⁶) at the Loeb Student Center of the New York University (May 4, 1969). The result of their trip was the *Danza Volo Musica Dinamite Festival* [Dance Flight Music Dynamite Festival], organised by L’Attico Gallery and held both in its via Beccaria venue and in a lake close to Rome.¹⁵⁷ During the festival, Forti presented *Sleep Walkers* [sic] and *Platforms* (1960), performed *See-Saw* (1960) with Paxton and also performed a new work, *Throat Dance* (or *Throat Dances*, as she also called it, 1969), “a vocal improvisation in four sections”¹⁵⁸ which combined chanting and noise making. Bryan-Wilson describes it as “a sonic, nonlinguistic vocalization based on chanting as well as Dada theatre”.¹⁵⁹ If the imprint of Forti’s animal studies at the Rome Zoo was particularly evident in *Sleepwalkers*, with the guttural, pre-vocal cries and sounds of *Throat Dance*, Forti was investigating non-verbal vocal expression, the guttural sounds returning the body to its animal condition. As experimental music expert Benjamin Piekut remarked, “Forti’s improvisations were firmly rooted in the mechanics of vocal production”.¹⁶⁰ She was also using voice as an another, complementary system of improvisation to that of the moving body.

Throat Dance brings Forti close to the cries and howls of animals and connects her body with her voice, the physical effort of the performance with its sonic expression, her ongoing interest in finding the fulcrum of her body and the sounds it could generate. Yet this wasn’t the first time Forti explored sound as a possible mode of attuning to wilderness, and she wasn’t alone in this interest in the non-verbal expressivity and sound of the human throat—something that was shared by some of her peers working across art and dance. In 1962, Forti had collaborated with choreographer, dancer and Judson Dance Theater co-founder Trisha Brown (1936-2017), who had been influenced by Forti’s interest in improvisation and experimentation.¹⁶¹ Forti made the sound

¹⁵⁵ Interview in appendix.

¹⁵⁶ It’s likely that in Italy, being part of a new community, Forti felt freer to use her family’s surname and to rebuild her identity anew, which might have been helped by the fact that it was an Italian surname; while back in New York, it might have been easier, both in terms of identification and to avoid justifying her personal life, to retain the Whitman surname.

¹⁵⁷ The festival brought to Rome Terry Riley, Paxton, Deborah Hay, La Monte Young, Marian Zazeela, Trisha Brown, Yvonne Rainer and David Bradshaw, together with Forti, between the 9th and the 23rd of June, 1969.

¹⁵⁸ Forti, *Handbook in Motion*, 92.

¹⁵⁹ Bryan-Wilson, “Simone Forti Goes to the Zoo”, 34.

¹⁶⁰ Benjamin Piekut, “On and Off the Grid: Music for and around Judson Dance Theater”, *Judson Dance Theater—The Work is Never Done* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2018), 72.

¹⁶¹ “At Halprin’s Brown met several dancers whom she would join in New York City—Simone Forti, Yvonne Rainer, and June Eckman among them. Forti’s improvisational brilliance on the dance deck formed indelible images for Brown, and she considered Forti her mentor in this form”. On Forti’s influence over Brown’s dance practice see Marianne Goldberg’s article “Trisha Brown, U.S. Dance, and Visual Arts: Composing Structure”, in *Trisha Brown:*

arrangement for the improvisation dance piece *Trillium* (1962), Brown's first public solo performance¹⁶² and her first act at the Judson Theater. In it, Brown related to her childhood memories, narrating how the three-petaled wildflower trillium is "this beautiful creature down in the forest when you're walking through all this dark [...] I tried to transplant it to my mother's garden and it would never take. It would never go into conformity in a garden. It grew wild".¹⁶³ Lasting three minutes, *Trillium's* sound consists of a "composite of all the different sounds that could come out of Forti's throat and mouth, including pitches, screeching, and scraping".¹⁶⁴ Morse observes how "the use of the voice, uttering non-sequiturs or making sounds, would become part of the new dance".¹⁶⁵

New dance also embraced new sonorities, often sounds of the body in movement. Various performers made audible the sounds of physical effort and combined rhythm with the expression of sound. These were expressions of radicality, manners to further cut with previous traditions, as Rainer described in how "the finale of my solo, *Three Seascapes* [1962], with its maniacal screaming and thrashing, [was] the last thing one would have expected of a modern dancer in those decorous times".¹⁶⁶

Forti's interest in comprehending how a body's posture and movement change according to physiognomy and rhythm; how these are also conditioned by space and by the presence of other bodies; and how they can act upon an interplay of rules and improvisation, also led her to explore its relationship to the sound it is capable of generating. Her quest for concrete, physical manners to declare "this is my body, this is how I move",¹⁶⁷ led her to incorporate the sounds the body makes, as if also claiming "this is my body, this is how I sound". Sound became a complementary element of investigation and experimentation, a way to test the possibilities of the voice beyond words and the throat as the body's sound-producing channel, independent from the operations of a ruling, verbal mind. Brown described the sound of *Trillium* as "a composite of all the different sounds that could come out of Forti's throat and mouth, including pitches, screeching, and

Dance and Art in Dialogue, 1961-2001 (Massachusetts: The Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, 2002), 29-44.

¹⁶² Presented on the 24th of March, 1962, at the Maidman Playhouse in New York.

¹⁶³ Interview with Trisha Brown by Hendel Teicher, December 2000. Quoted in *Trisha Brown: Dance and Art in Dialogue*, 283.

¹⁶⁴ From <https://trishabrowncompany.org/repertory/trillium.html> (accessed 28.12.2019).

¹⁶⁵ Morse, *Soft is Fast*, 6.

¹⁶⁶ Yvonne Rainer, *Feelings Are Facts: A Life* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 221.

¹⁶⁷ Forti, *Oh, Tongue*, 138.

scraping”.¹⁶⁸ Nonhuman nature was being conveyed through non-verbal expressivity. In *Tillium*, Forti’s abstract vocalizations supported, in a non-representative manner, Brown’s enactment of the sense of wilderness associated with her recollection of the impossibility of cultivating the trillium plant, to transpose it into a pot. It is not surprising that Forti also investigated the non-verbal roots of human oral expression, using them as a means to rediscover the human body as a being amidst others, an animal as any other. With this, she reclaimed the throat as a body part, not only a site of enunciation but of physicality and animality.

Forti also establishes an animal association when reflecting on *Throat Dance*. In the booklet that accompanies her record *Al Di Là* (2018), which includes the piece, she explains how “During the late 1960s, I was doing some vocalizing which I called “throat dances.” This was in Rome where Fabio Sargentini had welcomed me into his Galleria L’Attico. The title of this particular recording, *Largo Argentina*, comes from the nearby piazza, excavated to a lower level and revealing the ruins of Roman temples. It is inhabited by scores of cats”. The propitious set for her to perform *Throat Dance*, *Largo Argentina* was where Forti made the series of cat photographs. Improvising close to and with the cats, the animals kept Forti company during the process of liberating her voice from its human, verbal constraints. At *Largo Argentina*, one can imagine the cats meowing while Forti made the guttural sounds, becoming “a vertebrate among others”, an animal-with-others, but also an individual that again claims “this is my body, this is how I move”.¹⁶⁹ Critic Jill Johnston described Forti’s use of sound as “speaking of the unspeakable, of signalling through the flames, Simone Morris sounds like that when she sings. Wild, untamed noise from the center of a burning pit, the living gut”.¹⁷⁰ It was this exceptional closeness to animal expressivity that added a different tone to Forti’s experiments with sound. Similar to how she moved dance forward by incorporating nonhuman postures and rhythms, Forti’s explorations of sound were backed by nonhuman oral expressions. In parallel to a similar operation in movement, she was also putting in evidence how the future of creativity relied on the acknowledgement of the outstanding features of animals, humans included.

The *Danza Volo Musica Dinamite Festival* concluded with an event that, retrospectively, appears

¹⁶⁸ Description of *Trillium* in Trisha Brown: *Dance and Art in Dialogue*, 299.

¹⁶⁹ Forti, *Oh, Tongue*, 135.

¹⁷⁰ Simone Morris as she used her husband Robert Morris’ surname. In Jill Johnston, “Boiler Room”, in *Village Voice* (29 March, 1962), reprinted in Morse, “Voice, Dance, Process, and the “Predigital””, 120.

like a traumatic and life-changing omen for the times to come. Its last day was not held in via Beccaria but in a lake close to Rome. There, artist David Bradshaw, who often used guns and dynamite,¹⁷¹ presented a violent performance in which “he had put some dynamite on the bottom of a small lake and had a machine to blow it up. All the fish died and many people ran away”.¹⁷² In *Handbook in Motion*, Forti describes Bradshaw’s theatrical explosions, the distress she experienced during them and how, once more, she found solace in the company of animals:

The fish were coming up dead. I walked over to David Bradshaw and asked him if, in the light of the dying fish, he felt that one explosion had been enough. He said, or so I remember, that the death of the fish was not the intention of the piece, and that he would continue. Right. I squatted beside a tree, my head in my hands. Another jolt [...] I was watching the ants at my feet. They were going crazy [...] My tears fell among them [...] I was there, but I was not in Rome. I was with the ants.¹⁷³

Forti’s description of how she isolated herself from the community of artists and audiences anticipates the following years, when she embraced a different life and explored her interest in spirituality and psychedelic culture. Banes described how, during this period, Forti “stopped thinking of herself as a dancer [...] she travelled, learning “hippie protocol”, staying at communes”.¹⁷⁴ In another testament to Forti’s empathic relationship to animals, she argued that the vision of the killed fish made her realise “how much I had begun to doubt the way that had been my way and that I shared with a lot of artists”.¹⁷⁵ Doubting the logics of art making and its social and institutional context, that Summer Forti returned to the US and went to Woodstock, where she ended up living for one year, coinciding with the festival in August 1969.

¹⁷¹ Deborah Hay, his former partner, once described him as “somebody who hunts and shoots and stuff like that”. In Deborah Hay interviewed by Alessandra Nicifero, transcript of Session #1, East Charleston, Vermont, 29 July, 2014, 1-20. Published online by the Robert Rauschenberg Oral History Project, <https://www.rauschenbergfoundation.org/file/11040/download?token=3EH2dsnw> (accessed 29 June, 2020).

¹⁷² Trisha Brown, interview with Laura Cherubini (my translation from Italian), *FlashArt* (25 April 2017), <https://flash---art.it/article/trisha-brown/> (accessed 29 June, 2020).

¹⁷³ Forti, *Handbook in Motion*, 100.

¹⁷⁴ Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers*, 31.

¹⁷⁵ Forti, *Handbook in Motion*, 106.

Other Zoos

After this period, Forti returned to New York and began studying singing with Pradit Pran Nath, a master of the Hindustani school of music Kirana gharana, who had also been La Monte Young's teacher. In 1970, after moving back to Los Angeles, she started learning Tai Chi, which became a major reference for her work: "there are two things that have very much influenced my movement vocabulary, or my style—watching animals, and Tai Chi. I think you can see me dancing for thirty seconds, and even in just how I use my knees, there's a lot of Tai Chi in there".¹⁷⁶

During that time, Forti occasionally replaced Kaprow in his seminars at the California Institute of the Arts (CalArts), where she initiated *Open Gardenia*, a weekly workshop of informal dance that allowed her to continue researching on her concept of dance state, this time with students. At CalArts, Forti also met artist Charlemagne Palestine. Sharing an interest in the state of enchantment induced by dance and music and by forms of embodied and musical spirituality, Forti and Palestine continue collaborating until the present moment. [Fig. II.19]

In 1974, Forti returned once again to New York. She also returned to the zoo, retaining her two interests, animal locomotion and dance behaviour, as her guiding lines of inquiry in these new zoological investigations. "I used to spend days in the Bronx Zoo making sketches and taking notes [...] There were two main things that interested me in the captive animals [...] one was their actual movements [...] the other was what I came to think of as dance behaviour",¹⁷⁷ she wrote. But Forti was doing more than replicating her earlier visits. During the early 1970s, her practice had gained a new temporal dimension, influenced by her contact with Tai Chi, her learning with Pran Nath as well as her collaboration with Palestine. Her earlier, shorter pieces evolved to longer, durational acts, often with associated sound and music. At the same time, her interest in spirituality and geometry merged her work with gravitational forces and momentum, and led her to combine form, composition and rhythm in new movement expressions. At the zoo, she was also expanding her practice beyond taking notes, drawing and spending time with the animals. She used video to document what she encountered. *Three Grizzlies*, a seminal work from this period, attests to this process.

¹⁷⁶ Simone Forti Interviewed by Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer, *The Third Rail* issue 7, 2004, <http://thirdrailquarterly.org/sarah-lehrer-graiwer-simone-forti/> (accessed 29 June 2020).

¹⁷⁷ Forti, "Animate Dancing": 35.

Three Grizzlies is a black-and-white video of 20 minutes shot from the point of view of a zoo onlooker facing the grizzly bear enclosure at the zoo in New York.¹⁷⁸ It portrays three adult grizzly bears pacing back and forth in a small enclosure limited by a metal grid in the front and a rocky area in the back.¹⁷⁹ [Fig. II.20]. The video focuses on the movement the bears make while turning around in their enclosure when they reach its limit. Their head and body postures, as well as the way they pace back and forth in the space, are at the core of the video. Visual and sonic layers are also fundamental for the work. Two parallel metallic grids separate the viewers from the bears—the first is made of vertical iron bars, the second a reticular net. It would have been impossible to ignore them, as they cover the entire perimeter of the enclosure. The video highlights their presence and the way they stand in between the people and the animals, showing the impossibility for visitors to be in clean, direct visual contact with them and for the animals to have a clear view of what happens outside their enclave.

Three drawings of the same period further attest to Forti's attention to the metallic bars of the bear's enclosure. One is a sketch of the corner of the cage where the bears turn. It portrays the grid and a ramp but no animals; the other is a schematic rendering of the three bears inside the enclosure, two of them in a walking position and the largest of the three, more detailed, stands on its rear legs, head jerked backwards, in the posture that Forti was particularly interested in: a posture of adaptation to a limit and a creative response to it. The third drawing also focuses on the corner of the cage and the bear it features displays the same head position. Bryan-Wilson notes the substantial difference of this sketch, as it "stands in contrast to some of her earlier animal studies, such as the breathing ox, in which she placed the figure against a blank background, isolated from its surroundings. Instead of floating in undifferentiated white space, the grizzlies are pinned down by a schema of crossed lines".¹⁸⁰

Considering how many of the animal drawings Forti made were related to zoo contexts, the dominant presence of the cages in these three cases appears in fact to rely on the drawings' relationship to the video. [Fig. II.21] This also justifies the inclusion of both the animals and the

¹⁷⁸ Even though Forti makes reference to the Bronx Zoo during her New York Zoo visits, Bryan-Wilson mentions the video was shot at the Central Park Zoo. See Bryan Wilson, "Animate Matter: Simone Forti in Rome", 56.

¹⁷⁹ The video was shot by Elaine Hartnett, then Palestine's partner. Forti recalled how "I happened to go to the zoo with my friend Elaine Hartnett, the girlfriend of Charlemagne Palestine, who had a camera: she was the one who shot that video, not me. It wouldn't have occurred to me to shoot a video". Interview in appendix.

¹⁸⁰ Bryan-Wilson, "Simone Forti Goes to the Zoo", 47.

space in which they are in—its physical limits and the way it conditions the bears' behaviour and movement. If Forti's other drawings and her performances abstract the settings of the zoo, *Three Grizzlies* depicts the imposing presence of the grids. It shows that by defining a safe space of confinement and exhibition for visitors, the grids also make it impossible for them to ignore that this is a space of artificiality and constraint. The bears are brought close by being kept separate; they are given a stage while being marginalised.

In order to look at the animals, viewers need to accommodate themselves to the visibility conditions offered by the metal frames. As for the animals, they are subjected to being exposed and confined to a reduced space but also prevented from fully accessing, even visually, what surrounds them. They sense their exposure, they hear the sounds, smell and perceive those who watch them—but they cannot fully see them, since the grid operates in both ways. For the video, the two grids constitute the image, both as a pattern that disturbs and prevents a linear visual interaction with the animals, and as a limit, setting the frame that asserts that there are no off-frame bears. Camera and cage are aligned in creating a space that both contains and exhibits the animals.

What the drawings cannot reveal is the other imposing layer of the video work: its sound. The video was shot at the same time as a group of school children (some boys in school uniform appear in the final shot) and other visitors were also visiting the bears. The children talk, cry and roar. Their sounds reveal how the bears are permanently exposed to an additional interference of human noise upon their lives, which, just like the viewers of the video, they hear but barely see. Bryan-Wilson argues that this “diegetic soundtrack” of the children highlights the “relentless, graphic depiction of confinement and the derangement it generates”.¹⁸¹ Indeed, *Three Grizzlies* lacks the spirit of serenity, amusement and softness of most of Forti's work, also because it is visually concrete, materially rooted and less abstract than the drawings of animals “floating in undifferentiated white space”, or of *Sleepwalkers*, where the artist is transposed to a space that bears no resemblance to that of the zoo. Between the visually disturbing grids; the oblivious children's high-pitched cries and the adults' comments on the bears' condition; the repetitive, compulsive, frantic movement of the animals; and the fast movement of the camera that continuously tries to follow them pacing back and forth, *Three Grizzlies* is a distressing and violent

¹⁸¹ Bryan-Wilson, “Simone Forti Goes to the Zoo”, 47.

work and its 20-minute duration is challenging to watch. The grids and sound portray the cruelty of showing wild animals in confined spaces and they induce a sense of anguish and distress, which is accentuated at every new passage of the bears in front of the camera. No words are needed, the camera movement, the visitors' sounds and the repetitive gesture of the animals say it all.

Writer Jonathan Burt notes how “when thinking of some of the most significant encounters in the history of animals on film [...] one is drawn to the films rather than the animals”.¹⁸² The history of the film is more memorable than the histories of the animals depicted by film, even if, as Burt acknowledges, “animals, by default, are [...] objects of interest and fascination”.¹⁸³ *Three Grizzlies* breaks this dichotomy between film and animals because neither video nor animals are appealing, as the video is unpleasant to watch and the animals can barely be seen. In moving, the three grizzlies move the camera and move the viewers, even if they are barely more than dark shadows pacing behind a thick chequer pattern and their own sounds are obscured by those of visitors. At a certain point, the camera focuses on one of the bear's claws grabbing the metallic fence and coming out of it. It's particularly disturbing moment that recalls the cats at the end of Marker's *Zoo Piece*, when the animals' body reaches beyond the limit it is allowed to, reaching its outside while being blocked by a hard, controlling material and shape of confinement. Rather than being drawn to the film or the animals, viewers may be drawn to the context and conditions: those that constrain the animals and those that constrain the viewers. By focusing on that paradox between the exhibition of a movement and the prevention of its visual access, and by representing that dynamic with a medium that is not a human body, *Three Grizzlies*, in its absurdity and violence, alongside the above- described untitled zoo and performance video (also from 1974), reveal Forti's most direct engagement with the reality of the zoo.

Transforming Bodies

During this period, Forti was also interested in investigating the evolution of the animal body, conceived as a whole, in a Darwinian sense of correlation between living beings. She made regular visits to New York's Natural History Museum to study the evolution of the bone structure of animals. She was particularly interested in the joint that connects the thigh bone and pelvis of

¹⁸² Jonathan Burt, “The Art and Science of Marine Life: Jean Painlevé's THE SEAHORSE”, in *Animals in the Cinema* (Sabine Nessel, Winfried Pauleit, Christine Ruffert, Karl-Heinz Schmid and Alfred Tews, eds.) (Berlin: Bertz + Fischer GbR, 2012), 49.

¹⁸³ Burt, “The Art and Science of Marine Life”, 29.

amphibians and reptiles and in understanding how a fin mutated into an arm or leg and, more generally, how life anatomically evolved from swimming to crawling to walking, or, recalling her 1977 choreographic piece *Striding Crawling*. She describes the time spent “looking at the bone structure of that transition and testing it on my own body, transitioning from swimming to crawling, like crawling like a turtle with my limbs under me”.¹⁸⁴ [Fig. II.22]

These studies manifested themselves in Forti’s subsequent exploration of the rhythmic possibilities of a circular, ongoing progression from striding to crawling to walking and back to striding and crawling. By being conceived as a loop, attesting a sense of circularity in which crawling is not the start and walking is not the end point, these movements bypass the sense of linear and vertical evolution of life that conceives the human at the top of the evolutionary chain composed of families and species of linear descent. Forti’s postures transition on a loop from being close to the ground to crawling, moving on all fours and walking vertically, without there being a definite, linear beginning or end. With this circularity of time, space and movement, Forti further dilutes the human in the animal, identifying a zone of indistinction in which the human was animal amidst others, beyond taxonomic divisions.

Attesting to this exploration is *Crawling*, which she presented in September 1974 in a set of “Performances of New and Early Works”¹⁸⁵ with a strong animal identity at an exhibition at Sonnabend Gallery.¹⁸⁶ On this occasion she also performed *Solo No. 1* (1974) (of which there is a short black-and-white video that has circulated in museums and galleries) for the first time, which also incorporates anatomic and animal movement studies.

Solo No.1 and *Crawling* both rely on a circular structure, but while *Solo No. 1* is more movement-

¹⁸⁴ Interview in appendix.

¹⁸⁵ Banes mentions that Forti presented *The Zero* and *Crawling*. However, *The Zero* is a 1975 work, which appears to have been first performed on the 8th of June by Pooh Kaye and Terry O’Reilly at the Institute for Art and Urban Resources, Idea Warehouse in New York, two days after also performing *Illuminations* with Palestine, on the 6th of June.

¹⁸⁶ Ileana Sonnabend’s historical gallery first opened in New York in 1970 and continues running up to the present date. That same year, in April 1974, Robert Morris had presented his solo exhibition “The Complication of Exhaustion”. The exhibition’s title makes a distinction between Forti’s “new” works of the 1970s and the “old” ones of the ‘60s. There, she performed *Censor* (1961), *Numbers* (1974), *Crawling* (1972) and *Demon* (1960). Banes, however, mentions that Forti presented *The Zero* and *Crawling*. However, *The Zero* is a 1975 work, which appears to have been first performed on the 8th of June by Pooh Kaye and Terry O’Reilly at the Institute for Art and Urban Resources, Idea Warehouse in New York, two days after also performing *Illuminations* with Palestine, on the 6th of June.

based, *Crawling* is a complex exploration of various animal movements and narratives. In it, she “combines the crawling explorations with specific kinds of animal creeping and other animal movements [...] Forti’s voice tells stories about a bee and fly confronting each other, the rabbit’s method of locomotion, the wrestling of brown bears, the actions of a crow, an elephant, a snake. And she crawls. The crawling is the base of the dance, out of which the other activities arise and back to which they always return”.¹⁸⁷ The exhibition also featured *Twirling Bears* (as the video *Three Grizzlies* was first called) and the photographic series “Largo Argentina AKA Stray Cats” (1968).

In 1978, Forti had another exhibition at the gallery, “Simone Forti: Movement Holograms”. In 1976, Peter Van Riper (by then Forti’s partner), had introduced Forti to physicist Lloyd Cross, who was running the San Francisco Holography School. Together, Forti and Cross made several integral holograms,¹⁸⁸ presented in a cylindrical form with a laser light source coming from underneath, echoing pre-cinema devices. The series Forti presented at Sonnabend featured some of the single movements she was working on at the name, crystalizing and displaying them in a permanent loop.

In the holograms, Forti homages Muybridge’s “Animal Locomotion” series (1883-87) (one of the works is entitled *Homage to Muybridge* [1975]), by relying on a circular apparatus that creates the illusion of movement of an image while highlighting the importance of circularity and rotation within her own movement research:

One thing that interested me about the animals is that they have no intention of moving in a certain style. So I could see their movement without distraction. I love the photographs of Eadweard Muybridge and how they so directly show how different bodies move, including humans. And when I adapted different animals’ movement into my own body I was fascinated with how can you go from walking upright, to crawling on your hands and knees and all the way to going along flat on the ground like a turtle in a smooth succession, without breaking the rhythm of

¹⁸⁷ Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers*, 33.

¹⁸⁸ Also called multiplex holograms, these use cinematography to produce a three-dimensional image that appears to move.

contralateral use of your limbs.¹⁸⁹

The hologram *Striding Crawling*¹⁹⁰ crystallises the transition between standing and crawling, depicting Forti moving between being vertical to crawling horizontally in a hypothetical floor in a continuous, never-ending loop and round form, captured inside a multiplex form. As writer Solveig Nelson remarked, “What stands out about Forti’s holograms [...] is how they relate intrinsically to her dance practice: She embraced the multiplex process to make subtle works that, in many senses, pushed against the narrative aspects of the technology itself”.¹⁹¹ [Fig. II.23]

In the holograms, though, Forti has no body. She becomes a spectre, lacking bodily matter and appearing in a mini version of herself in iridescent tones of green, blue, yellow and red. She becomes figure, spirit, *Angel* (as one of the works is entitled), insect: a different creature altogether, locked inside a limited space, at once a system of confinement and display. Resembling those animals that she spent so much time observing, reduced to a sample of herself, performing her own choreographies, Forti’s hologrammatic double is at once eerie, fascinating, controllable and unreachable. Not bringing the gallery to the zoo, she brought the exhibitionary logic of the zoo to the gallery and turned herself into one of its figures.

Drawing

Forti was also practicing with other systems of capture. Drawing—an activity she aligned with dancing, performing and making videos—is a central node that articulates the transition of her work between observation, expression and embodiment. Forti alludes to it often when describing how she made sketches to catch a sense of movement.¹⁹² This capture becomes a system to absorb an alien physiology with her body, as though through the hand that depicts and traces a movement, a living being is not only observed but also seized and appropriated. This tension is parallel to that of filming, where, as noted by Friedrich Kittler, “The history of the movie camera

¹⁸⁹ From “A live performance is like a ripe peach that you pick from the tree, sweet and warm in the summer sun. Simone Forti in Conversation with Ines Goldbach”, curator of the exhibition at Kunsthau Baselland, Summer 2019: https://kunsthaubaselland.ch/dokumente/Interview_Simone-Forti_EN.pdf, 2 (accessed 16.08.2021).ig.

¹⁹⁰ *Striding/Crawling* is now in the collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art.

¹⁹¹ Solveig Nelson, “Phantom Limbs”, in *Artforum*, Vol. 57, No. 1 (September 2018): 266-67.

¹⁹² Which she recently described during our interview, using the following words: “When I was a little girl living in Los Angeles my father used to take me and my sister to the zoo and we would sketch the animals and look at each other's sketches and say ‘Oh you really caught the movement!’”. In interview in appendix.

[...] coincides with the history of automatic weapons”,¹⁹³ the meaning of the verb to shoot simultaneously standing for the recording of images with a camera and the killing with a bullet or an arrow. Observation and drawing are modes of rendering animals, from the fleeting and unstable forms their bodies assume to fixed, reproducible, *revisitable* shapes that remain forever inscribed on paper. Understanding is mediated through the hand’s expression, through a method in which, by drawing another body, the artist comprehends its physiognomy, pliability, possibility, its muscular tension, skeletal disposition and the agency that exists beyond biological, pre-determined conditionings. Forti adds a poetic dimension to this: “I used to spend days in the Bronx zoo making sketches and taking notes. I sometimes thought of these notes as brief poems [...] Watching them move helped me understand my own movement in a very basic way, clear of historical or stylistic values”.¹⁹⁴

There is more to Forti’s desire to observe and understand animal movement. A series of “Tree” drawings accompanied by the sentence “I Stand Where a Bear Stood Recently Clawing This Tree” (made around 2009-10), are defined by long, strong, vertical lines of graphite on paper. The lines are irregularly parallel to one another, bearing the traces of an uncertain hand. Together, they resemble the shape and the texture of a tree’s bark, both by reproducing its textures’ interplay between uniformity and irregularity and by alluding to a section of the width and length of a trunk. To the left of the lines, partially superimposing them, there is the above-mentioned handwritten sentence.¹⁹⁵ [Fig. II.24] The statement, which could have been only expressed in the work’s title,

¹⁹³ Friedrich Kittler, *Film, Gramophone, Typewriter*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 124. As Mitchell Akiyama remarks, “Donna Haraway’s work on turn-of-the-century naturalist Carl Akeley reveals a similar connection between media and warfare. Akeley developed an eponymous camera for shooting in the field, an instrument that would be added to the arsenal of the Army Signal Corps during World War I. Donna J. Haraway, *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science* (Routledge: New York, 1989), 43.” Mitchell Akiyama, “Unbecoming Animal”, in *intercalations 2: Land & Animal & Nonanimal* (Berlin: K Verlag/Haus der Kulturen der Welt, 2015), 114-15.

¹⁹⁴ Forti, “Animate Dancing”: 35.

¹⁹⁵ In a reproduction of a drawing in *The Bear in the Mirror* (p. 64), the title of the work is *I Stand Where A Bear* (2009), in *Thinking with the Body*, is *I Stand Where a Bear Stood Recently Clawing This Tree* (2009) and “Animalesque”, a group show I curated at the Bildmuseet Umeå (Sweden, Summer 2019) and BALTIC (Gateshead, Winter 2019/20), the title of a similar work is *Tree Drawing: I Stand Where a Bear Stood Recently Clawing This Tree* (2010), suggesting that the drawings have been considered as a part of a series “Tree Drawing” and have been made across 2009-10. As curator Martha Joseph analyses in *Dance Theater—The Work is Never Done* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2018), when writing about Dance Constructions, Forti has changed, revised and regrouped her works throughout her career, which lends to certain changes in names and bodies of work overtime. A similar case happens in *Sleepwalkers*, originally entitled *Sleep Walkers*, which Forti later renamed *Zoo Mantras*. During the interview I conducted with her, Forti described her naming system as a circumstantial affair: “Well, I find titles these titles.... They refer to ideas that have changed so much from when I was doing things many years ago to now. Now people want to know titles and they want to know dates. By then, they just

is written on the paper. It transposes a gesture of human signing on nature—a mark of one’s presence through an inscribed symbol, a graffiti, initials or a sentence on a tree trunk—to the paper. Instead of writing on the tree, she transposed this signing event to the paper, itself a tree, processed. Bringing together body movement and drawing, this drawing series attest to fundamental characteristics of Forti’s relationship to representation, proximity and embodiment by allowing the tension between what is abstracted and what is reified to complement each another in an evocative manner. By serially tracing the long, spontaneous, vertical lines, she uses her arm and hand to repeat a gesture akin to that of a bear clawing a tree, a large paw vertically scratching the bark’s surface. Forti leaves an imprint that is not made with animal claws but with a human-made pencil, whose shape and potential to leave a trace can be poetically associated with a claw. Besides the physical repetition of the bear’s movement, Forti also claims proximity to the bear, placing herself exactly where the animal was, occupying the same space where the bear stood: “here I stand next to where a bear recently was”, she says, almost as if she could still feel the presence of the animal’s body, her odour, heat and imposing presence.

This exercise of correspondences concerns woman and bear, the space they occupy—the woods where the drawing was made become the space of the museum or gallery where the work is exhibited—and the materials that hold the tracing gestures. Vegetal derivatives, paper and graphite, stand for the tree while the artist becomes bear by reproducing and reinventing the scratching gesture through an interplay of difference and repetition. “Everyone has an identity. Or there is no identity”, writes Paul B. Preciado.¹⁹⁶ As Deleuze argues in the preface of *Difference and Repetition*, “we tend to subordinate difference to identity in order to think it [...]. We also have a tendency to subordinate it to resemblance [...], to opposition [...], and to analogy” while repetition is treated as “difference without concept: two things repeat one another when they are different even while they have exactly the same concept”.¹⁹⁷ Forti attests through her work that “repetition is a necessary and justified conduct only in relation to that which cannot be replaced. Repetition as a conduct and as a point of view concerns non-exchangeable and non-substitutable singularities”.¹⁹⁸ These traces and lines Forti makes are not a mere system of

asked: “Can you give us a title for the evening?” So I’d throw out a title like that [...] You want a title. Here’s a title”.

¹⁹⁶ Paul B. Preciado, *Can This Monster Speak?* (London: Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2021), 32.

¹⁹⁷ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (London: Continuum, 2001), XV.

¹⁹⁸ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 1.

repeating, of imitating the bear. Instead, they allow her to comprehend the bear from within her body and through her own movement. She extends her own way of being and moving, her mind and body are open to the bear, they are willing to assimilate it and, in doing so, metamorphose themselves in bear, to become woman-with-bear.

Forti establishes a communality between her and the bear with this gesture of tracing, of leaving a sign, of making lines as a manner of declaring “I exist, I am here” in a temporality that extends itself beyond the moment of its making. Forti and bear are united by the same gesture and place, in a rare, fleeting and vulnerable closeness. Forti writes “I”, not “we”. If she declares a willingness to stand close to the bear, with a parallel code of inscription, this declaration of individuality also seems to reveal how she acknowledges the impossibility of this co-presence being a shared and simultaneous activity. It is the fact that she initiated this gesture that allows her to subsequently become ‘we’ with the animal, to establish a zone of commonality and suppress the physical, spatial and temporal differences between them. Forti decides to occupy the bear’s space and to remake the bear’s gestures, establishing an intersectionality that builds an alliance between the two.

Animal Continuities

During the 1970s, Forti’s animal studies continued expanding, incorporating other animal movements and her anatomy studies. Forti’s interest in understanding, documenting and enacting how and why bodies move has therefore led her to develop a complex research in which still and moving images, performing bodies and auditive components propose and give evidence to how the human body is one amid others. If this interest often concerns dance, it also extrapolates the professional realm and reveals her profound curiosity towards the shared aspects of various life forms and her personal engagement in the exploration of herself and her body as belonging to a natural sphere.

Forti developed a series of collective acts throughout the late 1970s and ‘80s, incorporating her animal observation studies on them, namely the performance *Jackdaw Songs* previously described. Writing about *Big Room* (1975), which Forti developed and performed together with Van Riper, Banes sees in it a manifestation of Forti’s interest in the attunement between the bodies, expressions and emotions of two individuals, as well as a continuation of the studies of

couple dynamics inspired by Korenz's work with the graylag geese. She notes how the work "creates a sense of mutual play between the two, a sense of trust and shared exploration, relying on preferences of the moment while paying attention to the present needs of the partner". *Big Room* (also called *Home Base*) was the first work Forti and Van Riper made together. They toured it internationally from 1975 to 1980. Lasting slightly less than one hour, it consisted of Van Riper improvising with various instruments, namely the flute and the saxophone, and Forti experimenting with postures, movements and manipulating objects (bowls and sticks) in a continuous flow between vertical and horizontal positions, which is such a defining characteristic of her work, one that attends to gravity as a creative strength (literally and figuratively) and that also shapes her exploration of her body-with-animal locomotion modalities. Circling and rolling, two fundamental keys of her dance language, were particularly visible in *Big Room* as they often provided the transitional forms for Forti to change from one posture to another. Some central gestures and movements derive from her animal studies, in particular circular variations of the transition between standing and crawling (which, as mentioned, were also at the base of *Crawling* and *Solo No. 1*) while others seem inspired by her interest in Tai Chi.

During the time Forti and Van Riper were performing *Big Room*, Forti also created the large group piece *Planet*, a major synthesis of several of her works, which are brought together and performed by a troupe of dancers. [Fig. II.25] *Planet* was first performed at the P.S.1. in New York in 1976.¹⁹⁹ Banes comments on how the work "begins with about forty performers crawling, sitting, taking the crawl up to a walk and going back into the crawl. The several performers did animal movements—including a bird (Pooh Kaye), a lion (Forti), an elephant (Sally Banes), a monkey (David Appel), three young bears (Anne Hammel, David Appel, Pool Kaye), and lizards (Terry O'Reilly, David Taylor)".²⁰⁰ In the description Forti wrote of the work for an edition made in 1976, a bilingual text written simultaneously in Italian and English, she makes a direct reference to the anatomic studies that have occupied her during her visits to the New York Natural History Museum upon her return from Italy in 1969.

I walked through the halls of the Natural History Museum, studying the evolution of

¹⁹⁹ It was part of the exhibition "The Institute for Art and Urban Resources presents Group Works by Simone Forti at P.S.1." (29-31 October, 1976).

²⁰⁰ Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers*, 36.

the reptilian thigh bone. The foot. I wondered how a tadpole's movement developed from a lateral undulation for swimming into the symmetrical hop of a frog. I tried it. I was delighted to read that young frogs often fall over; it made sense in my body. My dances were studies, explorations wherein I ran the various possibilities through my body.²⁰¹

Accordingly, in relation to *Planet*, she writes: "It seems that vertebrate animals transitioned from ocean to dry land; their first and second adaptations were respiratory and ambulatory. It appears that the development of the respiratory organs and members to keep the body off the ground were simultaneous and of maximum integration; the limbs were laterally oriented. Ah backbone!"²⁰²

During "The Institute for Art and Urban Resources presents Group Works by Simone Forti at P.S.1.", Forti also presented the quartet *Green Green and Fan Dance* (1976), which Banes considers the work that "shows most clearly in theatrical terms Forti's sense of awe and closeness with the world of nature, with its mysteries and shadows."²⁰³ A few years later, on the 25-27 April 1979, Forti presented *Estuary: A Nature Fantasy*, a complex, 12-part show at the Cunningham Studio in New York, comprising a set sculpture by Harried Feigenbaum and sound by Van Riper and Terry Fox²⁰⁴ and bringing together several older and more recent works.

During the 1980s, Forti continued working with the movement and expressivity of animals, especially birds, and pursuing her interest in Lorenz's studies. Besides *Jackdaw Songs* and the homonymous poem and drawings, this is also visible in the drawings and dance *Bird Bath* (1981), a remarkable exercise of balance between abstraction and figuration. Stylistically, they have formal and compositive affinities with Zen Japanese ink monochrome paintings, a few black dots and strokes made on the centre of an otherwise white and empty paper sheet. Their brief descriptions reveal what they represent: "sparrow bathes", reads a caption that accompanies a

²⁰¹ Forti, *Oh, Tongue*, 134–38.

²⁰² From the edition of *Planet*, Edizioni Pari & Dispari, Cavriago, Reggio Emilia, 1976.

²⁰³ Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers*, 36-37.

²⁰⁴ The work consisted of twelve parts performed without interruption: *Garden* performed by Forti; *Hopping dance*, performed by Forti, Kay, and Nudel; *Spring dance*, performed by Nudel; *Fan solo*, performed by Fridley; *Crawling*, performed by O'Reilly; *With herding*, performed by the group; *3 simultaneous studies*, performed by Forti, Kaye, O'Reilly, and Taylor; *Stream*, performed by the group; *Fan solo*, performed by Taylor; *Fan duet*, performed by Taylor and Fridley; *Sleep Walkers*, performed by Forti and Fridley; and *Crest climb*, performed by Nudel and group.

dot and two radial strokes; “tail in air” describes a drawing made of five concentric, upward vertical strokes; “ass feathers of bathing pigeon” is the caption for a scheme of a line and ten symmetric dots on each side. These drawings make clear the exercise of abstraction that Forti describes when referring to the how she translated the animal movements she observed into the language and expressive means of her own body and hand. Despite commenting on her lack of accuracy or method (“There’s no system in my observations [...] I don’t have a comprehensive knowledge of the life habits of the animals, either in captivity or as they would be in their natural state [...] from the point of view of a naturalist, my observations have been so fragmented and lacking in circumstantial information as to be of no use at all”),²⁰⁵ what these drawings reveal, in correlation with her dancing activity, is a consistent exercise of attention and comprehension of movement. Forti’s schemes concentrate the essence of the animals’ twists and jerks, revealing how she turned a posture into a pose, inserted a gait into the domain of dance, a daily activity into a concert.²⁰⁶

In 1983, Mario Forti died in Los Angeles. Forti recalls how her father’s passing triggered the beginning of the improvisational series “News Animations” (1985-ongoing), in which Forti establishes a physical relationship with newspaper sheets, reading them while performing and reading some of their sentences, rolling on the floor or on a slightly different version of the series, entitled *Zuma News* (2014), performing on the sand on them. “I’ve been dancing the news. Talking and dancing, being all the parts of the news”, she said.²⁰⁷ [Fig. II.26]

The “News Animations” series constitute the first consistent artistic project in which there is a straightforward engagement with ethical and political agendas. Despite this openness of her work to an embodiment of politics, it doesn’t imply a radical detachment from her animal movement interest or for her explorations of the correlation between enunciation and movement. On the contrary, it appears as an extension of the artists’ research on the concept of dance state, this time beyond the joyful pleasure experienced by a body’s own exploration of movement but also applied to her own experience of mourning and embodiment of her father’s newspaper-reading activity, politics, intimacy and affects brought together through a series of exercises of

²⁰⁵ Forti, “FULL MOVES”, 11.

²⁰⁶ In the context of postmodern dance, the term concert is often used to define a dance performance. See Preston-Dunlop, *Dance Words*, 7.

²⁰⁷ Forti, “On News Animations”, in *Oh, Tongue*, 3.

improvisation that address her own views and concerns. Reading the news, performing them with gestures and movement, Forti echoes Haraway's declaration that "I find words and language more closely related to flesh than to ideas".²⁰⁸ With "News Animations", Forti used this body-voice combination to pursue with a poetic engagement with collective and individual pain and sufferance through improvisation. This mode of addressing violence is parallel to the one manifested by the zoo animals and incorporated in works as the video *Untitled* and in the latent expression of territorial deprivation in *Sleepwalkers*. Here is her expression of not only animal violence, but violence as a field or meshwork of relations that emerges. This might have been partially influenced by Halprin's interest in using dance as a mode to reflect and speculate on violence.²⁰⁹ [Fig. II.27]

Forti also seems to have pursued Halprin's interest in devising a new expressive mode to cope and respond to distress. As Halprin described, "I was trying to get at subconscious areas, so things would happen in an unpredictable way. I was trying to eliminate stereotyped ways of reacting. Improvisation was used to release things that were blocked off because we were traditional modern dancers".²¹⁰ Reading the news and responding to them with movement, at times literal and demonstrative, others evocative and abstract, Forti is persons, airplanes, stories, landscapes, feelings. This is her way to pay attention to the news and therefore to pursue her father's mission of being alert to what happened in the world. Her body receives, translates and renders information into movement and a sphere of senses that is both abstract and extremely concrete, individual and collective, urgent and atemporal.

During the following decade, Forti consistently revisited her animal zoo experiences through performances, drawings and writing. She classified her animal related works—which are heterogeneous and chronologically dispersed and extend themselves beyond the central events and performances of the late 1960s to continuously reappear until recent years—under the

²⁰⁸ Donna J. Haraway and Thyrza Goodeve, "More Than Metaphor", in *How Like a Leaf* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 85.

²⁰⁹ Visible in works such as *Elegy, or Hymn to Dead Soldiers*—a solo piece made in September 1939 as a response to the start of the Second World War—or *Song of Youth or Refugees* [also from 1939] and other war-inspired works as *War Hysteria and Dedication* [1940], *Protest* [1941], *Prayer* [1942], *The Lonely Ones* [1943], *Bitter Herbs* [1945], *Entombment* [1947] and *The Prophetess* [1948].

²¹⁰ "Yvonne Rainer Interviews Ann Halprin", in *Happenings and Other Acts* (Mariellen Sandford, ed.) (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 113.

generic title of “animal studies”. “The animal studies”, she argued, “were coherent, and movement wise I took it to the poetic”.²¹¹ They were also coherent across her entire oeuvre. In the video *Northeast Kingdom* (1988/2015), which documents a conversation between Forti, Ed Verge and Steve Paxton, the presence and relationship to natural elements is constant. The video, shot by Lisa Nelson in East Charleston, Vermont, revolves around the stories told by Verge, an Abenaki Indian of the region, about nature and human coexistence in Vermont. The three of them discuss trivia related to the region—animals, landscapes, episodes—while preparing a meal, with the noise of food being chopped and objects being moved around in a domestic space, which becomes host and stage for this gathering where nature is discussed, lived and consumed. This event coincided with Forti’s move to north-eastern Vermont in 1988. She purchased a cabin at Mad Brook Farm, where an alternative community of dancers, artists and artisans lived, and where Paxton has been living since 1970. She became closer to nature: “when I moved to rural Vermont, my impressions of the news began to mix together with impressions of the Milky Way and of bear tracks along the brook. The richly physical activity of gardening encourages daydream speculations and I was fascinated with the strategies of certain plants, especially the herbs, to take over their neighbors' territories.”²¹²

Incorporating her experience of nature and rurality, Forti made a series of works inspired by the natural and rural environment of Vermont. She started dancing a “Gardening Journal, drawing on the intimate experience that gardening is [...] How to explain what I learn from the snow, from the compost bin, from the stars? [...] On reaching into the dirt for the potatoes, my self [sic] dives into my fingers and I am the dry crumbly ground”.²¹³ While pursuing her movement research and

²¹¹ Simone Forti, “FATHER, DAUGHTER”, in *Oh, Tongue*, 29. Recently, curator Sabine Breitwieser established a set entitled “Animal Movement Works”. The grouping includes *Sleepwalkers*; the photographic series “Largo Argentina (aka Rome Cats)” (1968); a series of Animal Study drawings, including the graphite on paper drawings *Sea Lions Slow Sinuous Play* (1968), *Crocodile Very Still* (1968), *Grizzly Turning Corner* (1974), *Grizzlies Enclosure* (1974), *Three Grizzlies* (1974), *Crow Open Mouth Position* (1982), *Bear Studies* (1982), *Ox Breathing* (1982), *Ox Breathing Chewing* (1982), *Turkey Cooling Off* (1982) and *Ostrich Wobble Knees* (1982); and the ink on paper works *Sea Lions Sunning Fullness of Throat Sensuous Quality* (1968), *Dancers in Front of a Projection of The Three Grizzlies Video* (1981), *Polar Bear Reaching Nose in Wind* (1982), *Gibbon Avoids Being Seen* (1982), *Elephant Delicate Sensing With Trunk* (1982) and *Grizzly Turning* (1982). It also includes the text and drawing series “Great Thanks Thoreau Drawings, Empty Words” (1981) and two drawn poems from a more recent date, *Two White Wolves* (2000) and *I Stand Where a Bear Stood Recently Clawing This Tree* (2009). The set also incorporates other time-based media: the improvisational piece *Throat Dance* (1969), the video *Three Grizzlies* (1974), two 1974 choreographic pieces: *Crawling* and *Solo No. 1*. It also includes Forti’s holograms *Striding Crawling* (1977) and *Angel* (1976), as well as the performance with *Angel* hologram, presented at *3 Evenings on a Revolving Stage* at Judson Church, NY (January 8-10, 1976) and the group performances *Planet* (1976) and *Jackdaw Songs* (1981).

²¹² Jeremiah Day and Simone Forti, *Jeremiah Day/Simone Forti*, (Dublin: Project Press, 2009), 92–93.

²¹³ Forti, “Animate Dancing”: 37.

improvisation, Forti continues giving workshops national and internationally, collaborating with Palestine and the Troupe throughout the whole decade and into the 1990s. Forti lived at Mad Brook Farm up to 1998, when she returned to Los Angeles to look after her mother, Milka Forti, who would die in 2003. She now lives in her mother's former house, mostly writing and reading.²¹⁴

Dancing Nature

In *Thinking Through Animals*, Matthew Calarco considers three major threads that define current modes of engagement with animals: identity (animals and humans share “certain ethically relevant traits, such as sentience, subjectivity, and intentionality” that make them similar); difference (a system of relations that “respects the singularity of animals”, hence promoting respect through the acknowledgement of their dissimilarities); and indistinction (surpassing the logics of identity and difference and presenting humans as animals). Calarco considers indistinction capable of shrinking “the influence of the institutional and economic practices that limit animal potentiality and to create other ways of life that allow for both human beings and animals to flourish”.²¹⁵ With her observant, creative and poetic responses to the anatomy, physiognomy and behaviour of animals, Forti adheres to Calarco's indistinction thread as a system of learning from and as animals. This learning isn't univocal and self-invested: if the learning experience allows Forti to behave more like a human, it also expands the modality of the human to an existence closer to those of others. Forti thus adds a fourth thread by proposing a form of empathic embodiment that, beyond any intellectual and analytic proposals, expands Calarco's indistinction theory towards a post-anthropocentric core, where humans are one among others, all different, all similar, some living, some not.

Indeed, with Halprin, Forti started developing a relationship to dance not merely based on education and learning but on a system of rediscovering and gaining new possession over her body: “as a base, we had the understanding that dance is not a form which we learn. The attitude that it gave me is that my body is mine”.²¹⁶ When applied to studying and enacting animal bodies, such an understanding of dance as a method of ownership of one's body becomes a system to

²¹⁴ On the subject, see final part of interview in appendix.

²¹⁵ All quotes from Matthew Calarco, “Introduction”, in *Thinking Through Animals* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 1–5.

²¹⁶ Simone Forti, “Danze Costruzioni”, in *Simone Forti, Galleria L'Attico* (Rome: L'Attico, 1968), as translated by Bryan-Wilson in “Simone Forti Goes to the Zoo”, 28.

reclaim the animality of the human body and give back to the animals the acknowledgement of the possession of their own bodies, which despite being confined and exposed to a system of permanent exhibition, objectified and deprived of their right to intimacy and privacy, remain theirs.

Forti's dance allows at once for a given and constructed use of the body, a natural expression of rhythm and a series of operations of coordinated movement. Dance is at once natural and cultural, normal and artificial, human and nonhuman. By dancing the movements of the nature she observed, Forti allowed her body to be inhabited and traversed by nonhuman life, placing these movements within a threshold where the cultural and the natural cannot be undone.

In this, we recognise a spirit of animism, also alluded to in Marker's work, which will also be observed in Jonas' affective, performative relationship to objects. On the one hand, this permanence of an animistic propensity can be rooted in Forti's interest and closeness to childhood,²¹⁷ as well as through the vivid presence of her memories as a child and also through the tenuous differentiation between her own imaginary and the outside world. On the other hand, this spirit seems to establish a system of horizontal, non-hierarchical relationships in a world in which, with Henri Michaux, she also seems to declare "I was all things".²¹⁸

Indeed, as I have argued, Forti has often revealed a propensity to establish horizontal, equal relationships between different beings and forms. As Martha Joseph describes when reflecting about *Dance Constructions*, all except *Huddle* "frame a relationship between the sculptural object and the body in motion that prefigures many concerns of Minimalist sculpture in the 1960s by implying that objects and bodies have similar properties: both are material with mass, volume, and weight, and carry a spatial relationship to objects and bodies around them".²¹⁹ This comprehension of the similar properties between objects and bodies in *Dance Constructions* once more attests to Forti's conception of the fluid boundaries between what constitutes a person, an animal, a living form and an object. This is more than mere poetic, fictional freedom, for it reveals

²¹⁷ Forti trained and worked as a pedagogue during several periods during the 1960s, both in San Francisco and in New York.

²¹⁸ Henri Michaux, "Encore des changements" (1929), first published in *La Nuit remue* (Paris: Gallimard, 1935); trans. "Still More Changes", in *Animism*, vol. 1 (Anselm Franke, ed.) (Berlin and New York: Sternberg Press, 2010) 113–14.

²¹⁹ Martha Joseph, *Judson Dance Theater—The Work is Never Done* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2018), 137.

Forti's resistance to the naturalised divisions established during modernity between the living and the inanimate and to taxonomic impositions and classifications that differentiate human from the animal, vegetal and mineral. Bypassing these distinctions, Forti explores the intertwined relationships of the life she meets, proposing a meaningfulness that is at once clear and opaque, accessible and unreachable, meaningful and beyond meaning, united and fragmented.

Ruptures but first and foremost continuations will shape the transition to Chapter Three, where I discuss Jonas' engagement with domesticated and confined animals. Her transdisciplinary practice that resists interpretation and relies on oblique narratives and complex rituals and imageries, pursues the investigation of Forti's relationship with zoological matters and revisits Marker's closeness to domestication and deep interest in lens-based media. Gradually moving from the zoological garden to the aquarium, where Jonas recently made an important body of work that expresses like few others her environmental concerns, in this chapter I will pursue my investigation of artistic responses to the confinement and domestication of animals in the context of present-day environmental awareness.



Joan Jonas, Wolf-Dog-Animal-Like

It is possible to see what is happening and yet not know what is forward.

In myths and fairy tales, animals get the human characters through difficult situations.

—Joan Jonas¹

A black-and-white photograph from 1972 portrays artist Joan Jonas sitting in her studio. It is a stunning image: she faces the camera as shadows and interplays of white and dark tones modulate her figure and the surrounding space in complex chiaroscuro patterns. Behind her, layers of out-of-focus artworks and images. In front of her, sitting on her lap, her dog Sappho also faces the camera, posing with semi-closed eyes, wide open, large pointy ears and a foxy muzzle. Jonas holds the dog in her arms, in a hug that expresses affection and pride in a being that is dear to her. A viewer of the portrait of this duo who is aware of western art historical traditions may see in this image a twist on the classical depiction of the Madonna with Child transposed to a feminist, post-humanist context of a maternal embrace between a female human and a female dog. Behind them, another artistic reference: a reproduction of Al-Buraq, the winged chimera that carried the prophet Muhammad across the seven heavens from Mecca to Jerusalem. In this image, Al-Buraq has a winged horse body, a crowned woman's head and a peacock tail: a woman-animal ensemble whose historical and symbolic weight matches that of the Madonna with Child, and whose iconographic representation of hybridity Jonas' work follows.

To their right, a large drawing of a dog's head. It also depicts Sappho, the dog named after the Greek lyric poetess whose writings express affection and love for women. "Sappho had one blue eye and one brown", wrote Jonas, "She was named after the poet Sappho, but now I don't think of the poet, only of the dog".² Sappho (the dog) was also "a saint", Jonas once said,³ "an instinct

¹ First quote from Joan Jonas, from the work *I Want to Live in the Country (and Other Romances)*, 1976. Second quote from Joan Jonas, email interview with Katya García-Anton, "Between Text and Action. Animal Helpers in the Work of Joan Jonas", in *Joan Jonas, Timelines: Transparencies in a Dark Room* (Barcelona / Geneva: Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA) / Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève, 2007), 47.

² Joan Jonas, "Dog", in *In the Shadow a Shadow: The Work of Joan Jonas* (New York: Gregory Miller and Co, Hatje Cantz, HangarBicocca and Malmö Konsthall, 2015), 153.

³ Joan Jonas, interview in appendix.

that leads”,⁴ a declaration that, in relation to this image, complement a feminine trinity of mother, child and holy spirit.

Jonas’ drawing retains Sappho’s blue and brown eyes, but she is also figured with two pairs of eyes, vertically aligned. The artist has often used systems of superimposition. Here, it echoes another art historical reference, Man Ray’s black-and-white and slightly out-of-focus portrait of Luisa Casati, a muse and patron of the European avant-garde whose wild gaze was immortalised by that photograph from 1922. [Fig. III.2 and Fig. III.3] Embedded in multiple artistic references, Sappho, the companion/saint/leader dog faces the camera with her two-folded, bi-coloured gaze that participates in the experimentations with doubling and duality that Jonas began exploring in the period during which this photo was taken and pursued throughout her career, in the company of herself, other women and the dogs she kept.

Above the image of Al-Buraq hangs the mask Jonas wore during what would become one of her most well-known works, “Organic Honey”, a project with variations that she started developing in 1972.⁵ [Fig. III.4] It consisted of a multi-media ritual of hybrid figuration in which Jonas, disguised as a sensual alter-ego named Organic Honey, performed a series of ritualised gestures for a camera and an audience. With this work, she introduced some of the essential components, formal elements and research threads and methodologies that would define her practice. One of them concerned the manipulation of lens-based media to test and twist the plasticity of video, “fouling the stability of the projected image by de-synchronizing the frequencies of the signals on camera and monitor”, as described by critic Rosalind E. Krauss.⁶ This operation of de-synchronization of the scrolling images, which appear vertically split and misaligned, is referenced by the dog’s double gaze, which resembles the effect of the video work. As Jonas explained, “I also drew in relation to the vertical roll; I drew the outline of a dog’s head that only came together on the monitor in the vertical roll. It was split on the paper”.⁷

With the “Organic Honey” series, Jonas also expressed her interest in twisting dominant tropes of femininity by making up a sexualised, womanly persona, “opposite” and “stranger” to her. She

⁴ Joan Jonas, “August 1974 Fawn Grove, PA”, in *Art-Rite* No. 7 (Autumn 1974): 4.

⁵ Organic Honey was both the name of Jonas’ alter-ego and artistic project. *Organic Honey’s Visual Telepathy* is Jonas’ first video performance, which featured a slightly older performance, *Visual Telepathy*. *Organic Honey’s Vertical Roll* is a performance that also featured a slightly older performance *Vertical Roll* and the video *Vertical Roll*. They all date from 1972.

⁶ Rosalind Krauss, “Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism”, in *October*, Vol. 1 (Spring, 1976): 60.

⁷ *In the Shadow a Shadow*, 153.

also engaged with other-than-human entities, objects and animals in particular. At the end of *Organic Honey Vertical Roll*, for instance, Jonas chooses to howl rather than sing. Bringing her work close to her biographical details, she explained how “The piece evolved with the discarding of the masked persona and the emergence of the instinctual she-wolf. This transformation parallels my life”.⁸ Indeed, this difficulty in locating her intriguing work and its inseparability from herself bears striking parallels with her description of the emergence of a hybrid being. With this project, she also experimented with doubled representations, combining mirrors with other reflective and iridescent matters and live and tape-recorded actions in which she doubled or tripled herself or others. Years later, in 1980, there would be *Double Lunar Dogs*, a performance of mysterious dance rituals that transformed the space of Berkeley’s University Art Museum into a spaceship, based on “Universe”, a 1941 sci-fi short story by Robert Heinlin.

Later, in 1984, they would be turned into a homonymous video in which Jonas would experiment with special effects for the first time. [Fig. III.5]

This black-and-white portrait of Jonas and Sappho contributes to the discussion on the influential role of animals, in particular companion dogs in her work and imaginary. Following Sappho there would be Rose (who didn’t perform); Zina, also a white dog, with pink markings, who had been “named after a Russian Buddhist nun, suggested by Helen Tworkov”,⁹ and currently Ozu, a white miniature poodle. As I will later discuss, the dogs that kept Jonas company were an important source of inspiration; they were work companions, animals she represented, reproduced, resonated, mimicked, doubled and redoubled.¹⁰ They were also helpers, thanks to “their power of instinct”¹¹ and association with women. As she explained in relation to *Organic Honey*:

In *Organic Honey*, for instance, I was exploring from the very beginning the function of myth. So one idea is the concept of the animal helper that women have. An animal helper can be a cat or a horse. The force that drives you, the animal force, energy. So, in *Organic Honey*, I justify the idea of having a dog as being the animal helper, a driving

⁸ Joan Simon, “Migration, Translation, Reanimation”, in *In the Shadow a Shadow*, 97.

⁹ Jonas, “Dog”, in *In the Shadow a Shadow*, 153.

¹⁰ Jonas hung Sappho’s drawing on a wall during *Organic Honey* and she was redrawing it and filming her own redrawing.

¹¹ Jonas, “Closing Statement”, in *Joan Jonas: Scripts and Descriptions 1968–1982* (Douglas Crimp, ed.) (Berkeley: University Art Museum; in association with Eindhoven, the Netherlands: Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum, 1983), 139.

force... and then I become a dog and I howl. I was slightly influenced by Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood* (1936), where Nora, one of the female characters, howls like a dog.¹²

In this photograph, the posthuman trinity also celebrates Jonas' multiplication of personae: Jonas the woman, artist, dog-person and dog-making person, as well as Jonas the self-proclaimed "electronic sorceress" with her erotic alter-ego, made present by Organic Honey's mask. With its inclusion of the representation of a non-western hybrid woman-animal figure such as the Al-Buraq, this photo also epitomises Jonas' commitment to the investigation of eclectic artistic traditions, the relationship between transmediality and nature and the possibilities of mythizing the self, the other and their surroundings.

It is from this perspective that such a multi-layered portrait of the artist holding her dog is presented as the opening image to this chapter, and subsequently leads to a reading of Jonas' work that attends to the ways in which animals have participated in it as well as to how Jonas engaged with the conditions in which these animals were accessed, made available and exhibited. Parts of some of Jonas' more recent works were made in the context of animal exhibition sites, zoos and aquaria, which, as previously discussed, justify their existence by enhancing their functions of entertainment, education and conservation while disguising, through complex spatial and rhetoric mechanisms, their logic of incarceration that turns visitors into active participants in the surveillance of the animals. My research on Jonas' work is particularly focused on these works, as they allow me to discuss the evolution of the artist's engagement with animals throughout her career and her considerations of the aquarium, considered an expanded zoological apparatus. In doing so, I aim to discuss a contemporary artistic approach to public zoological collections and the manners in which they may be influenced by a growing environmental and ethical sensibility towards animals. At the same time, these works will also allow me to continue assessing the kind of observational and relational modes that these exhibition spaces propitiate and induce, as well as their benefits and limitations. The analysis of Jonas' work, therefore, contributes to this thesis' aim to interrogate and verify the importance of artistic expressions that question naturalised systems of human-made observation of nature as means to support transformational change in how humans conceive and interact with nature.

¹² Jonas, "Dog", in *In the Shadow a Shadow*, 152.

Despite attempting to establish forms of artistic contact with animals throughout her life, a more systematic work with animals kept in zoological parks begins fairly late in Jonas' career, during a time that corresponds to the writing of this thesis. Most of her previous interactions with animals take place with her own companion dogs, or in relation to other animals she more-or-less casually encountered during her trips. This is one of the major differences of this chapter and analysis of her work in comparison to that of Chris Marker and Simone Forti, whose engagement with the apparatus of the zoological park took place earlier, from the late 1960s onwards. The fact that Jonas' interest for working with zoological exhibits coincides with a rise of "ecosensibility" makes her work particularly apt for investigating the impact of present-day environmental and ecological sensibilities. It also allows for an inquiry into the influence of the rise of awareness of animal consciousness and rights on the artist's sensibility and ethos and her art's relationship to nature and wilderness.

Animals have always been a major figure in visual cultures (comprising art, film and performance, three disciplinary pillars of this research) and have been framed (alienated and also de- and re-contextualised) in manners that, beyond the ideologies and messages they carry, revealed the human power exerted through and upon them. As performance expert Louise Steinman wrote in 1986, "to re-establish contact with animals, and to investigate our own "animalness" is a theme that echoes from the earliest days of dance and theatre into the present. It manifests in many, many different forms".¹³ Yet, the current awareness of wildlife's decimation due to anthropogenic causes and the consequential rise of consciousness to the need to promote more humane modes of treating and even caring for animals have also shaped the debates on how nature is kept and managed. Jonas' latest works, as I will discuss, offer an important opportunity to continue doing so while observing both the impact this sensibility had on her work, and how her work managed to respond to it in a meaningful manner.

Accompanying a parallel wave of interest and orientation of sensibilities towards hydric resources and aquatic life that dominates both specialised and mainstream information and debates, from 2010 onwards, some of Jonas' workshops, artworks and exhibitions have revealed her concerns

¹³ Louise Steinman, "Looking at, Talking To, Being Animals", in *The Knowing Body* (1986) (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 1995), 5.

for maritime and oceanic matters. This contemporary focus on maritime life adds a crucial facet of investigation to this thesis, which is debated alongside the discussion of Jonas' own relationship to performance, its incorporation of language and its intrinsic participation in the institutional apparatus of art (compared to Marker and Forti, Jonas works almost exclusively for and in museums and other contemporary art venues). The actuality of these topics, alongside the straightforward manner in which she declares her investment in and concerns for wild and particular maritime life, call for a specific set of expectations and requirements concerning the ethical grounds of her work, which also gives this chapter a particular tone. These manifest themselves through the analysis of the correlation between the systems of display of wildlife in the animal parks visited by Jonas and her own interest in creating a complex exhibitionary apparatus for the presentation of her performances, video installations and objects. I am particularly interested in discussing how Jonas related to the material supports and structures that hold and present marine animals and how she incorporated them in her own body of work, taking into account how they signal a material divide that accentuates the ontological separation between animal and human, maritime and terrestrial, subject and object, exhibited and visitor and, ultimately, nature and culture.

Memory Erased

For over five decades, Jonas has demonstrated a disciplinary elasticity rare in contemporary art, expressed through her performances (often involving her own presence, alone or in the company of others), drawings (many of animals), sculptures (often with abstract, geometric references), environments and video installations (which comprise all the above, as well as objects, props and complex display systems).

Born Joan Amerman Edwards in Manhattan on the 13th of July 1936, Jonas grew up in the New York state, where she moved house frequently, attended cultural and artistic events and was encouraged, from an early stage, to develop her artistic expression both in the urban contexts where she lived and in the New Hampshire countryside, where she spent her summers at her maternal grandmother's house. Her close and extended family had an eclectic and intense relationship with art and culture that were formative for the young artist. Jonas studied art history and literature at the Mount Holyoke College in Massachusetts (1954-58) and at the school of the Museum of Fine Arts of Boston (1958- 61). In 1959, she moved to New York when she married

writer Gerry Jonas. After separating from him, she enrolled in an MFA programme in Sculpture at Columbia University in New York, from where she graduated in 1965. Despite acknowledging the importance of her studies, Jonas has often said that “it was at Richard Bellamy’s Green Gallery, where she worked for six months shortly before it closed in 1965, that she really got educated”.¹⁴ She has also revealed the impact of the discovery of the work of modern art practitioners in the early 1960s: “I was not really satisfied with my work in sculpture and drawing. At the time I saw performances or happenings by artists such as Claes Oldenburg, Robert Whitman, and Robert Rauschenberg as they collaborated with dancers such as Yvonne Rainer, Simone Forti, Trisha Brown, and Lucinda Childs. I was immediately attracted by the possibility of a form in which I could employ or layer all the disciplines”.¹⁵

Inspired by other traditions, namely the music of La Monte Young (an important reference for Forti too), Jonas starts travelling as a mode of research (first Greece, then India), as she recalls: “I stepped from sculpture into the real space of performance”.¹⁶ Simon observes the variety of the spatiotemporal locations of Jonas’ early performances as a defining characteristic of her work and references, in which ritualised actions, “naturecultural” crossings and cross-disciplinary approaches are enacted. “Since 1968 Jonas’s cumulative gestures, repeated and changed over time, have been presented in locales pastoral and urban [...] grassy fields, or windy beaches, in city lots, gymnasiums and lofts. She has performed for an audience of one or an assembly of many. Her works have also been presented in more traditional forms”.¹⁷

Jonas’ work is rich in literary references, which range from novels to scientific manuals, poetry and essays. Committed to instinctively exploring ways of seeing, the rhythms of rituals and the authority of objects and gestures, her elliptical, fluid and non-narrative time-based pieces—performances, lecture performances, films and videos—propose a non-linear use of time and suggest that there are many ways to tell a story and that space may be constantly altered.

¹⁴ Joan Simon, “Migration, Translation, Reanimation”, in *In the Shadow a Shadow*, 85.

¹⁵ Interview with Joan Jonas in the occasion of the Icon Award, Whitechapel Gallery (25.02.2016), <https://www.whitechapelgallery.org/about/blog/5-questions-for-joan-jonas/> (accessed 16.07.2021).

¹⁶ Jonas, “Imagist: Joan Jonas in Conversation with Joan Simon”, in *Art in America* 98 No. 10 (November 2010): 160.

¹⁷ Joan Simon, “Scenes and Variations: An Interview with Joan Jonas”, in *Joan Jonas Performance Video Installation 1968-2000* (Johann-Karl Schmidt, ed.) (Stuttgart: Galerie der Stadt and Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2001), 25.

In 2007, Jonas was defined a “national treasure”.¹⁸ In recent decades, the awareness of how fundamental she has been to the development of key contemporary genres such as performance and video, conceptual art and theatre has been widely acknowledged. It took almost 40 years for her work to be widely recognised by major museums, specialised press, commercial galleries and audiences alike. Yet during those four decades, Jonas was consistently active as an artist, producing an outstanding oeuvre and being equally committed as arts educator.¹⁹ Until recently, Jonas’ status was to a large extent that of an artists’ artist: she was an acknowledged reference for the specialised circuit of contemporary art—her peers, students and alumni—while remaining less available to wider audiences.

It may seem like a paradox to classify as a latecomer an artist who participated in major international exhibitions such as Kassel’s Documenta, for instance, for which Jonas was present in editions 5 (1972), 6 (1977), 7 (1982), 8 (1987), 11 (2002) and 13 (2012). [Fig.III.6] Yet, when comparing her exhibition history with that of other North American artists of her generation whose status is now matched by hers, it becomes evident that she lacked major monographic exhibitions in museums and galleries as well as the commercial and critical success of some of her peers—until recent years.²⁰

For Jonas, a change with regards to her legacy came into effect over the past decade, during which her work has received an exponential visibility. This is attested by a series of important

¹⁸ Roberta Smith, “Space Redefined in Chelsea”, in *New York Times* (April 13, 2007).

¹⁹ “I began teaching full time comparatively late in life, in the early 1990s, in the New Genres department at UCLA, then at the Art Academy in Stuttgart, Germany, and at the same time the Rijksakademie in Amsterdam, and most recently at MIT [Jonas has taught at MIT since 1998 and is currently Professor Emerita in the MIT Program in Art, Culture, and Technology within the School of Architecture and Planning]. I’ve enjoyed much of this experience, particularly meeting students, discussing their projects, and watching their work develop”. In *Artspace* (23 March 2015), https://www.artspace.com/magazine/news_events/book_report/joan-jonas-akademie-x-52700 (accessed 29.07.2021).

²⁰ Born in 1936, Jonas belongs to the same generation of artists such as Jasper Johns (b. 1930), John Baldessari (b. 1931), Robert Morris (b. 1931), Nam June Paik (b. 1932), Yoko Ono (b. 1933), Christo (b. 1934), Eva Hesse (b. 1936), Richard Serra (b. 1938), and the slightly younger Bruce Nauman (b. 1941), and Marina Abramović (b. 1946), all of which received major institutional, commercial and critical praise and attention. This fact should also be contextualised in relation to the impact of some fundamental changes in the institutional and commercial apparatuses of contemporary art, namely the growth of the market during the 1980s and ‘90s and how it boosted a return to neo-figurative movements in painting. Jonas has reflected on the impact that the neo-figuration movements of the 1980s, supported by the growth of a more traditional art market, had on her work. As she mentions in an interview with artist R.H. Quaytman, “It was suddenly about money in the ‘80s. And my work kind of disappeared. It’s true. Suddenly there was an interest in painting and sculpting and not so much in what I was doing [...] It was very sudden at the beginning of the ‘80s, and then in the ‘90s, I really had to fight hard to feel visible again”. In R. H. Quaytman, “Joan Jonas”, in *Interview* (December 2014/January 2015), interviewmagazine.com/art/joan-jonas (accessed 15.06.2021).

monographic institutional exhibitions in Europe, namely “Light Time Tales” (2014) at HangarBicocca, Milan, Jonas’ first retrospective in Italy, which itself in many ways anticipated “They Come to Us without a Word” (2015), her large-scale project for the United States Pavilion at the 56th Venice Biennale.²¹ Jonas’ exhibitions, commissions and critical reception have continued to grow ever since. In 2017, the exhibition “what is found in the windowless house is true”, hosted by Gavin Brown’s Enterprise,²² was her first solo show in her hometown since the retrospective “Five Works” at the Queens Museum, held in Winter 2003/4.²³ Between 2018 and 2019, two European institutions organised a touring retrospective of her work: London’s Tate Modern and the Haus der Kunst in Munich; the exhibition was also presented at the Serralves Foundation in Oporto.²⁴ Subsequently, Jonas had a major solo exhibition of newly-commissioned works at TBA-21–Academy’s Ocean Space in Venice, “Moving Off the Land II” (to coincide with the 58th Venice Biennale, held in 2019).

Such synchronicity of events and crescendo of the artists’ international esteem led me to inquire into the circumstances that led Jonas to such a prominent position during these recent years. In the first instance, I wondered whether there were major transformations in her work that might have stimulated this growth of attention. Her long, solid and consistent career negated this possibility. Despite the internal variations, the coherence with which Jonas worked throughout

²¹ *They Come to Us without a Word* evolves from *Reanimation*, a 2010 collaborative project with the American jazz pianist and musician Jason Moran. *Reanimation* was first presented as a performance at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 2010. In the performance, Jonas occupied a set equipped with a large projection screen, a drawing board and a workbench with a camera suspended over it, moving around it, handling and manipulating different objects and tools, often on top of the drawing board, so that the actions of her hands could be projected via live feed onto the central screen, often creating ghostly superimposition effects. *Reanimation* was later included in Documenta 13 (2012) as an installative space comprising video, sound, drawing and sculpture, and was also performed at Kassel. *Reanimation* was inspired by the novel *Under the Glacier* (1968). Joan Jonas describes *Reanimation* as “partly an homage to spiritual aspects of nature . . . , but as glaciers are now melting, the work . . . reflects the present-day situation”. *They Come to Us without a Word* further weaves Laxness’ tale with the folk culture of the fishermen community in the Cape Breton Island, in New Scotia, Canada—where the artist spends part of her time—and in particular with their ghost stories.

²² Gavin Brown’s Enterprise was Jonas’ gallery in New York from 2015 to 2020, when it was incorporated by Gladstone Gallery, following a wave of closure or merging of commercial art galleries during the second decade of the 21st century.

²³ Curated by Valerie Smith, Queens Museum of Art Director of Exhibitions, “Five Works” was presented between 14.12.2003–28.03.2004. It was Jonas’ first major exhibition in a New York museum and it included a selection of the artist’s works in installation and video, drawings, photographs and sketchbooks. It also brought together five key works: *Organic Honey’s Visual Telepathy*, *Organic Honey: Vertical Roll* (1972-1994), *The Juniper Tree* (1976-1978), *Volcano Saga* (1985-1994), *Revolted by the Thought of Known Places...* (1992-2003) and *Lines in the Sand* (2002). Also included were the “My New Theater” series (1997-1999), drawings and sketches.

²⁴ The Haus der Kunst exhibition was cancelled by the interim director due to the financial situation of the institution and will be restaged in September 2022.

her life is incompatible with a hypothesis that investigates whether the maturity of her work matches the maturity of her life. The manner in which Jonas continuously reinvented her practice while dwelling on the same obsessions that define it, constantly pushing them further ahead, underline the ongoing solidity of her career at its different phases.

Jonas' permanent re-elaboration of her work, often accompanied by the adoption of new technologies of vision (moving over time from film to video to digital video and to cell phone recording, for instance), and the adaptation of her plastic language to them, may justify the modest and late recognition she received by the mainstream apparatus of contemporary art. This also challenges the concept of "pioneer artist" recently associated to her. Art historian Pamela M. Lee has argued that the definition of Jonas as a "pioneer" is "more hyperbolic encomium than rigorous characterization [as] it fails to capture the many ways in which she deploys her materials and narratives, repurposing and recycling them without conforming to the means-ends imperatives of communications media".²⁵

In fact, Jonas' resistance and engaged experimentalism, manifested through her videos and video installations, performance pieces, drawings and sculptures, have also played a fundamental role in defining important characteristics of present-day's contemporary art practices such as transmediality, formal hybridity and disciplinary elasticity. This also means that her own artistic identity has existed in a constant process of transformation and adaptation, reshaped different times over her long career, which made her artistic contribution hard to be grasped and defined. Jonas' interest in updating, transforming, rethinking and re-elaborating her own language, technical means and aesthetics certainly posed a challenge to the consolidation of her work and legacy. By displacing her practice, language and media, she also shifted, challenged and altered her own position in art and art history's narratives. When those who were tracing and writing history (art critics, art historians, curators) looked backwards to pinpoint genealogies and innovations, Jonas had already moved elsewhere: she was no longer in the same place to be mapped, as her work kept her moving on and on.

²⁵ Lee, "Double Takes". The recent waves of "discovery" or "rediscovery" of certain women artists at later moments in their career is often a limited and illogical mechanism. Limited because it holds a certain kind of colonial gesture of discovering a "hidden treasure" quality to the pursuit of uncovering their practice, in which a person's work is reappraised for having the very same qualities that previously caused it to be overlooked/censored (as women, women of colour, lesbian) and illogical because the fact that someone is lauded as a "pioneer" feeds into the same patriarchal system of value that this gesture is meant to counter with the belated attention to the work itself. I thank Katrina Black for illuminating these ideas.

As mentioned, this flexibility provided an extraordinary contribution to the present-day transdisciplinary vocation of art. Through her performances, environments and installations, Jonas has blurred the distinction between a video and a drawing, a gesture and a dance, a song and a myth. As she puts it, “I didn’t see a major difference between a poem, a sculpture, a film, or a dance. A gesture has for me the same weight as a drawing: draw, erase, draw, erase—memory erased”.²⁶ The way her work has incorporated heterogenous references—from folk tales to scientific and philosophical sources, from poetry to contemporary literature or from reggae to classical music—also fostered the entanglement of art’s discourses with other histories and narrative traditions, some of them derived from the written word while others connected to oral and visual modes of storytelling. “The first time I really understood why people made up stories about gods was when I went to the Southwest and saw the landscape there. It was so overwhelming in an unexplainable way that I understood why it had to be explained by myths and stories”, she declared.²⁷

The relationship that Jonas’ works establish with time is also of utmost interest for contemporary art’s hybrid ramifications towards cinema, video, dance, theatre and performance and has played an important role in the recent consolidation of performance and time-based media in institutional art contexts.²⁸ Jonas’ performances rely on fluid, non-linear and non-narrative approaches to time that propose new dynamic and ritualised relationships between spaces and bodies. They establish moments in which images and matter permanently mutate. In relation to this consideration, it is also important to take into account Jonas’ relationship to a time organised according to a crucial constituent of her ritualised operativity: a time processed and quantified by technological differentiations of sound and light, frequencies and waves; a time inhabited by cries and sounds but largely deprived of human language; a time that does not follow a logic of historical and linear progress but that unfolds in an extended present, in which changes manifest themselves visually, physically and rhythmically.

Variations and Themes

As mentioned, the growth of Jonas’ exhibitions, critical essays, catalogues and awards hasn’t been

²⁶ Jonas, “Closing Statement”, in Joan Jonas Scripts and Descriptions, 137.

²⁷ Jonas, “Nature”, in *In the Shadow a Shadow*, 40.

²⁸ On the subject, see Catherine Wood, *Performance in Contemporary Art* (London: Tate Publishing, 2018).

accompanied by a radical transformation of the scale or style of her production, which further asserts the lack of correspondence between the artist's late recognition and eventual changes in her more recent production. Rather than relying on a logic of temporal evolution, her work is defined by the accumulation of experiments in which different motifs and patterns remerge. Together, these trace a cartography of the artist's creativity in which variations are frequent, but major thematic or stylistic changes are blurred across Jonas' earlier and later works. In fact, some of the concerns, ideas, figures, gestures, sounds and forms featured in Jonas' current work are also noticeable in her early works.

This cartography is therefore shaped by her ongoing interests in the reverberating possibilities of materials, manifested in reflections, projections, doublings, screams, echoes, intervals and narratives; by her curiosity for outlandish narratives in which the fantastic, archaic and mundane are summoned in an imaginary populated by supernatural planetary creatures, chimeras, goddesses, animal-human hybrids, ghosts and spirits; and by her engagement in observing the modes in which places, devices and figures constitute, challenge and affect one another so that landscapes, machines, animate and inanimate bodies and the sounds, gestures and traces they make constitute original and previously unseen relationships.

This chapter departs from broader considerations about the reception and constitution of Jonas' work over time, investigating her position within the institutional apparatus of contemporary art and inquiring upon the factors that may have led to a late recognition of her relevance as an artist. I address the internal and external factors that may have determined such late recognition and situate them within wider environmental events and concerns that Jonas has been consistently addressing over the years. I argue that these issues have gained importance over the past decade, aligned with the significant rise in and acceleration of discourse on ecological sensibilities. I highlight threads of ecological and naturalist sensibility across her practice and discuss how these have been addressed over time. In discussing Jonas' ecological vocation, I look at the ways in which animals are implicated in her work—both those she encountered and looked for and those she kept as companion animals, and how she engaged with the material (bars, vitrines, glasses) and immaterial (captivity, domestication) conditions and structures that made animals accessible to her.

My investigation gradually evolves from the identification and characterisation of key motifs that shape Jonas' artistic vocabulary, understood as the assemblage of forms, interests and interconnected gestures that consistently appear and give identity to her work. I start by observing Jonas' position in relation to the archival and memorialisation of her work and how it stands in an interplay between consistency and novelty, to subsequently observe the balance between variations and patterns in her practice. Within recurrent forms, I discuss the role played by certain objects and forms whose function varies from prop to tool, identifying cones, hats, mirrors, her own body, nature and landscape as core figures of reference, each of them approached in this chapter. I then move to discuss Jonas' relationship to ecology, identifying its early manifestations. From here, I discuss Jonas work's engagement with nature, wildlife and animals. I pay particular attention to her ecological stance in the performance *Moving Off the Land II* and exhibition "Moving Off the Land" and to the manners in which it incorporates images of animals exhibited in marine parks, thus expanding my reflection on the zoological apparatus to incorporate other sites with parallel functions.

I argue that *Moving Off the Land*, as a project, reveals in an unprecedented and direct way Jonas' ecological concerns, and attests to her participation in debates concerning the state of our planetary environmental crisis, while also denoting the limitations and constraints induced by the systems of captivity and exhibition of living animals in which many of the encounters with animals featured in the project took place. This focus in a single, recent artwork is one of the major differences of this chapter in relation to the previous two, in which I discussed how the work of Marker and Forti reflected and engaged with the exhibitionary systems of animals. Despite focusing on specific aspects of their practices that reflect the interests of this thesis, the mode in which this third chapter culminates in the discussion of a single artwork is unique within this research—an approach which is justified by the scale and actuality of the project. I argue that *Moving Off the Land* is not only the most recent (at the time of writing) large-scale exhibition and performance project presented by Jonas, but also a work in which the artist's environmental concerns are addressed in a more straightforward manner.

In *Moving Off the Land*, Jonas engages with animals in zoological parks, more precisely with animals in the various aquaria she visited, filmed and researched in (as she acknowledges in the opening of the performance). This work's direct engagement with environmental decay, the

“troubled world” described by Haraway, and its incorporation of recent scientific material concerning the cognition, sentience and agency of some of the animals featured (in particular cetaceans and octopuses), makes it particularly apt for a detailed analysis of her work’s relationship to systems of display and conceptualisation of animal life.

If the relationship between each artists’ context of art making and their singular poetics and aesthetics is discussed across each of the three chapters, Jonas’ context of making art in an anthropogenic moment is particularly important. It allows this research to consider the impact of such awareness in an artistic practice that pre-existed the widespread consciousness of environmental peril currently lived, and to discuss how it has been affected by it. Yet an artwork is never an isolated event, merely illustrating and responding to external circumstances. As fundamental as it is for the present time, Jonas’ capacity to influence and affect viewers, to make them aware of the uniqueness and importance of the life forms she discovers and engages with, pre-dates the current context. This research, therefore, looks at the structural manners in which Jonas’ work has persistently departed from the real, transformed it and revealed another, less visible layer of reality, while considering how this practice has been actualised and gained a new relevance when facing the awareness of climate emergency. The conclusion is that Jonas’ fundamental practice and poetics become even more urgent and necessary in the present, due to their capacity to make the invisible visible. I also conclude that while extremely important, this new body of work reveals contradictory positions where her declarations contrast with the poetic and concrete figures that address them. As previously mentioned, by discussing Jonas’ work, I am also surveying contemporary culture’s contribution to the edification of a new mode of humanity’s being in the world. It provides an important case-study of a body of work made in a context of growing environmental consciousness, which further contributes to the above-mentioned investigation. This growing environmental consciousness that is manifested through her recent work—and the above-mentioned ongoing collaboration with her companion dogs—have cemented her position as a fundamental voice coming from the arts in our present times of ecological unrest.

The Shape of the Cone

Merging methodology with form, my analysis of Jonas’ work will evolve following the shape of the cone, a recurrent archetypal figure in Jonas’ symbolic, physical and spatial vocabulary, which

she has adopted copiously in installations and performances. Cones abound in Jonas' work as props, accessories and tools. As will be further discussed, they are also the hats the artist wears in many of the rituals of transformation and disguise she undergoes in her performances and videos, which are also sometimes worn by other performers in her work. When displayed vertically these cones also become thin, volcano and pyramid-like forms. Its form also resembles a huge beak. As a beak, the cone is also a system of propagation of Jonas' voice and words to describe her work, ideas and conceptual and formal processes. Jonas also used cones to project sound: "The cone was an instrument to channel sound to the audience. I could whisper in their ears, look through it, listen to it, yell through it, sing—always directing sound to a place".²⁹

The first time Jonas used a cone was in the 1974 black-and-white video and performance for the camera *Merlo*, in which the artist pursued her exploration of the relationship between visual and aural elements which she had initiated a few years earlier with works such as *Wind* (1970). Recorded in various outdoor locations, the video documents the artist wearing a chadri that covers her entire body.³⁰ She sings, hums, speaks, howls and calls "merlo" (Italian for blackbird) through a large white paper cone that functions as a megaphone that also supports her metamorphosis into animalesque expressive modes and positions her persona between an animal and a human. The video performance's conclusive birdlike movements further enhance this crossing towards the animal realm.³¹ In the same year, Jonas made the performance *Funnel*, in which she sang through a three-foot long paper cone (giving the work its title) in a closed-circuit video recording- transmission. [Fig. III.7] On some occasions, cones became observation devices too, resembling the form and function of binoculars. In *Mirage*, first performed at New York's Anthology Film Archive in 1976, Jonas used metallic cones "to funnel sound in various ways, to look through, and simply as sculptural objects to move, to rearrange".³² Jonas describes how "*Mirage* was inspired by a 1975 trip to India, where I stayed for three months. While up until that point I had explored ideas of female imagery and gender, *Mirage* was another kind of abstraction and was instead about opposites of light and dark and energies: cones and volcanoes,

²⁹ Jonas, "Closing Statement", in *Joan Jonas Scripts and Descriptions*, 137.

³⁰ India would continue to be a source of aesthetics and inspiration for the artist, who in 1975 spent three-months practicing "yoga and meditational techniques in an *ashram*", as mentioned by Robin Kathleen Williams in "A Mode of Translation: Joan Jonas's Performance Installations", in *Stedelijk Studies* No. 3 (Fall 2015), 8.

³¹ There are other early works in which the artist experiments with sound to become an animal, namely in *Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy* (1972), in which she plays herself and her masked double, sometimes howling like a wolf/dog.

³² Jonas, "Mirage", in *In the Shadow a Shadow*, 216.

correspondences between things and weather, signs and numbers”.³³ One year later, Jonas included six tall metal cones in the installation *Stage Sets*, presented at the Institute of Contemporary Art of the University of Pennsylvania.

Reconfigured as yet another possibility of viewing and speaking devices, cones also inspired the shape of the “My New Theater” series: miniaturised, portable video theatres initiated in 1997 with *My New Theater I: Tap Dancing* and recently unfolding in the five mini-cinemas that are the *My New Theaters* made for the “Moving Off the Land II” exhibition at TBA-21’s Ocean Space in Venice. As Jonas explained, the “My New Theater” mini-cinemas’ “shape is reminiscent of the paper cones of *Funnel* and the tin cones of *Mirage*. The cone was an instrument to channel and direct sound to the audience. I whispered, sang, yelled in both ends. I looked through it and listened to it”.³⁴

As later discussed, cones also appear in other recent works, namely the performance *Reading Dante* (2007/08), premiered at the 16th Sydney Biennale in 2008. Cones are appropriated to shape the form of this discussion of Jonas’ work and make it move through a gradual process of funnelling. Aligning this research with this shape and tool of projection of Jonas’ utterances, gaze and support of the metamorphosis of herself and of the exhibitionary spaces she creates and occupies with her work, the cone is here also conceived of as a grounding methodological feature. It configures the discussion of Jonas’ work from a wider introduction and analysis that is gradually directed towards a single, recent artwork, *Moving Off the Land II*, which, as I discuss, is particularly suited for the observation of Jonas’ implication in environmental and ecological debates and is also central for my discussion of her engagement with animals in zoological displays.

³³ Jonas, “Imagist: Joan Jonas in Conversation with Joan Simon”, in *Art in America* 98, No. 10 (November 2010): 160.

³⁴ Jonas, “My New Theater I: Tap Dancing”, in *Joan Jonas* (Milan: Charta/Fondazione Antonio Ratti, 2007), reprinted in *Joan Jonas* (Andrea Lissoni and Julienne Lorz, eds.) (Munich: Hirmer Verlag, 2018), 20. The shape of the “My New Theatres” series has also been associated to the cages that Alberto Giacometti developed in the 1930s and to *Il palazzo alle quattro del mattino* (1932-33), a metallic box- like perspective structure which resembles a miniaturised theatre set. See <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/85900> (accessed 08/05/2021). Indeed, Jonas has often acknowledged the influence of Giacometti to her early work: “I wasn’t happy with my objects, my sculpture [...] They were very influenced by Giacometti. I ended up destroying them all. They were not relevant. I wanted to explore new forms that were related to sculpture, and that included drawing, sound, and movement in space. Performance for that generation of artists seemed to open things up”. In Quaytman, “Joan Jonas” in *Interview* (December 2014/January 2015), interviewmagazine.com/art/joan-jonas (accessed 08/05/2021).

Hats

Cones are also hats, playing an important role in Jonas' exercises of transformation. In 2015, Jonas narrated how "not long ago I started developing hats, using them as another kind of mask. The hats are a disguise, and I make them very simply by wrinkling, twisting, and wrapping Japanese paper". Hats are not an entirely new addition to her performance props. Organic Honey "dons a pink feathered headdress [which she] sashays about", as Jonas describes in the script of the 1972 video performance. From the early 2000s onwards, hats, in particular paper ones, are frequent props used by her performance and video personae. "I use Japanese rice paper—it crunches and makes a good sound—to make the hats, I twist it and mash it into layers. I get the right shape. Sometimes I attach the paper to a straw-hat frame, so I can add rope or wire, so it can stand up", she described. An early example can be seen in the video that accompanies the performance and installation version of *Lines in the Sand* (2002), in which Jonas wears a blue head scarf with some metal, orientalisising motives (*Lines in the Sand* is largely connected to the imaginary of Egypt).

One of the first 2000s works in which Jonas wears a paper hat is the single-channel video *Waltz* (2003), a performance for the camera that unfolds from her participation in Robert Ashley's experimental opera *Celestial Excursions*, premiered earlier that year and in which she also wears a large paper hat. [Fig. III.8] As in other works, *Waltz* is set in the woods near her house in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. Jonas is dressed in a colourful crafted costume that makes her look like a bizarre sorceress while performing a series of actions accompanied by the Australian cattle dog Zina. A couple of years later, in 2005, Jonas made *Mirror Improvisation*, one of the three videos projected as a backdrop to *The Shape, the Scent, the Feel of Things*. She explains how the video was "shot entirely in a convex mirror like a fisheye lens, it reflects two women in pink tutus and tall green paper hats, moving about on a sloping field by the woods". Once more, Jonas uses extraordinary disguises to induce a slight but meaningful transformation of herself and the environment around her. "A hat transforms you. It's like a mask, but more subtle. I often use masks—my alter ego, Organic Honey, wore a mask—to alter my persona. Now, I also wear hats to cover my hair, so I am not myself in performances".

A few years later, during some moments of the performance *Reading Dante* (2007-10), commissioned by the 2008 Sydney Biennale, Jonas also wore a white paper hat. In *Reanimation* (2012), which follows *The Shape, the Scent, the Feel of Things*, Jonas wears a round hat-mask that

covers her entire face and head. Made of white paper, with two holes for the eyes, it has a humanoid face drawn in blue, which makes the artist look like another creature, a cartoonish version of herself, of a head more than a face. In the 2012 version of the performance presented at the HangarBicocca, Jonas wore a blue paper hat matching her white paper tunic and further transforming her into a drawing persona and revealing her humour.

Despite bearing a sense of atemporality (the tunics and hats Jonas often used have an ancient, eternal allure, as if they belonged to primeval societies and cultures), there is also something queer and risible about them. Jonas seems to be aware of this dual nature of these paper props and of how the interplay between strangeness and humour resolves the often dramatic tension that emerges from her performances' stories. As she explains, "humor has always been an aspect of my work; it is important". If masks and costumes complemented Jonas' early and mid-career work, hats often seem to add a humouristic, mysterious distortion of her, who appears as the ultimate draftsman, crowned with the matter that her drawings are made of and literally folding, twisting and crunching her own figure with an accessory that reinforces the ritualistic aspect of her work.

Mirrors

To better comprehend how Jonas' work has evolved through the transformation of plastic and technical means which induced variations to permanent forms and motifs, it is important to analyse the changes that some of them underwent over time. Being a distinctive feature of Jonas' work, mirrors are a good starting point for this analysis. Mirrors are also a Foucauldian feature, objects that offer "a placeless place" that corresponds to his definition of utopia, complemented by his theorisation of the heterotopia. "In the mirror", Foucault argues, "I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface; I am over there, there where I am not, a sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself, that enables me to see myself there where I am absent".³⁵

Like Jonas, Marker also plays with the camera function of the mirror, which reflects what it records, both as a system of portraiture (considering the image that opens his chapter) and as a mode of multiplying the self and the other, as with the representations of Guillaume-en-Egypte.

³⁵ Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias" (Jay Miskowicz, trans.), 4.

The title of Forti's most recent book, *The Bear in the Mirror*, refers to a postcard of a brown bear she has in a mirror in her house. Daily, Forti encounters the bear while encountering herself, their bodies and temporalities (one changing, one remaining the same) corresponding and contrasting one another in an intimate sphere.

As we will discuss, this correlation that the object and the figure of the mirror establish between projection and body, perception and absence, is also crucial for Jonas' ritualistic exploration of herself and other places and individuals, both human and nonhuman. For the young Jonas, reflecting objects and mirrors in general were conceived of as sculptural surfaces that absorbed and projected images, which, when being manipulated, altered and captured perception. Such is the case of the early group performances *Mirror Check* (1969), *Mirror Piece I and II*, *Wind* and *Jones Beach Piece* (all 1970). Over time, Jonas started using mirrors as complex spatiotemporal components. If the performances she made during the 1960s and '70s often included herself and others holding and manipulating mirrors (as in the cases, for example, of *Mirror Check* and *Mirror Piece I and II*), later mirrors were spatial elements that were often detached from any direct contact, while remaining fundamental for creating permanently alterable perceptions of the work. For instance, for the 2010 performance and related installation *Reanimation* (formerly titled *Under the Glacier and Natural Phenomena*), Jonas presented a large, free-standing sculpture of 80 crystals that refracted the images and light from the accompanying video projections while casting shadows and reflecting themselves onto the screens, modelling space and altering the temporal experience of the moving images. [Fig. III.9] Later, in 2015, Jonas reused this sculptural and modulating apparatus in the multi-media installation and performance *They Come to Us Without a Word*, which featured a mirror room at the centre of which there is an installation of crystals whose iridescent responses to light, movement and shade turn it into an intimate space where pre-cinematic traditions of the shadow theatre meet the mesmerizing powers of light-reflecting matters used in magic shows in a context of contemporary art.

Body

The presence of Jonas' body, predominant in early works, and often their subject and matter, was gradually transformed over time. In early works, Jonas used her body as an important tool for self-reflexivity and interaction with audiences. An important example of this is the above-mentioned work *Mirror Check* (1970), first performed as part of *Mirror Piece* (1970) at the 14th Street YMHA in New York and later incorporated as an opening element of other performance

works.³⁶ Jonas described how “standing naked, she inspects all parts of her body with a small, round hand mirror [...] the spectators cannot see the mirror image but rather Jonas’s movements in relation to her own seeing of the image”.³⁷ [Fig. III.10] Being one of the rare instances in which she performed naked, *Mirror Check* denoted the young artist’s interest in investigating the image-character of her naked body—a body that is inserted in the long-standing pictorial traditions of female nude representation in art and also a body that, by being exhibited, was also exposed to being mapped, scanned, transformed, but also duplicated, transposed and rendered bi-dimensional—which she would further develop in subsequent works. In doing so, she was also touching upon the debates of the time surrounding self-representation,³⁸ while also addressing female representation and self-representation.³⁹

Jonas’ use of her body as an image and image-creating device has gradually changed over time. From being sculptural-performative-imagistic matter per se, Jonas’ body became an active agent of activation of performance dynamics. While remaining extremely present—Jonas’ works strongly rely on her own participation—from the 1970s onwards, Jonas activated, transformed, interacted and engaged with complex media-technological, stage and setting possibilities and elements. In parallel, over time her body also became the support of other figurations, importantly the drawings that, blindly, she makes on the paper clothes she wears in performances, as in the case of *Reanimation* and *Ocean Sketches and Notes*, a process she defines as “drawing without looking”.⁴⁰ This method turns the artist, dressed up for the performance, into both the container and displayer of other images and figures, drawn onto the clothes and masks that cover her body and face. In these cases, Jonas is both flesh and painterly body: a body as drawing and a body in drawing. [Fig. III.11]

³⁶ For a complete performance history of *Mirror Check*, see Simon, “Mirror Check”, 54-55.

³⁷ Simon, “Mirror Check”, 54.

³⁸ On this subject, see Krauss, “Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism”: 50-64.

³⁹ As Joan Simon notes, “When she has been asked for permission for the piece to be performed by a young man, she has denied the request given the importance of the initial context—as she says “a time of feminist questioning the female body and gaze””. Simon, “Mirror Check”, 55.

⁴⁰ Describing the process of drawing while looking at the recording of the gesture and not at the drawing itself, Jonas has explained how “Another way of making a drawing in relation to the monitor. I would look at a monitor and only look at the drawing I was making on a monitor. I called it drawing without looking. And what interests me about drawing in performance is that the results are surprising. Something else comes out”. In “Joan Jonas—interview with Liam Gillick”, in *Art Review* (March 2018): <https://artreview.com/march-2018-feature-joan-jonas/> (accessed 05.01.2021).

Natural Elements

Landscape and the natural elements have also been a constant yet mutable presence across Jonas' work, revealing an incipient posthumanist sensibility that attends to how nature, the body and technology are capable of shaping and transforming one another in original and unexpected interconnections. The contrast between her performance pieces of the early 1970s⁴¹ and later works testifies to their transformation. The first were set in urban, rural and wild areas and often relied on a substantial separation between viewers and actions. As Simon argues, these events "concealed as much as they revealed",⁴² a gesture similar to *Mirror Check*. For instance, Jonas' first public performance, *Oad Lau* (1968), is set in a snow-covered beach, Jones Beach, in New York. Jonas described how in it the Atlantic Ocean could be seen at a distance—an early sign of her relationship with the sea. In it, a man (artist Keith Hollingworth) and a woman (Jonas) wear costumes with many mirrors glued to them. They reflect the surrounding landscape and incorporate it within their bodies. A strong wind is blowing; they walk against it in straight, geometric lines. Nearby, five other performers build a structure of string that is then blown away by the wind, leading the performance to its end.⁴³

"We walked very stiffly with our arms at our sides as in a ritual", Jonas recalls⁴⁴ in a statement that reveals how often in her work the relationship between individuals and nature is negotiated through rituals, which are performed for a camera and an audience. *Wind* is another early work from the same year that bears similar aesthetics and themes. [Fig. III.12] It is a black-and-white 16mm silent film that documents a performance for the camera (this time no audience was present). It was shot by artist Peter Campus on a snowy and windy beach in Long Island.⁴⁵ *Wind* also features Jonas and Hollingworth, seen from afar wearing the same mirror costumes and making indiscernible gestures. They move amidst other performers, never fully interacting or getting close to them. Jonas has described how she allowed "the gale to dictate the quality of the performers' movements [...] battling gusts of wind as they do so".⁴⁶ The strong wind determines

⁴¹ Namely *Jones Beach Piece*, Long Island, New York, 1970; *Night Piece* (variation of *Jones Beach Piece*), University of California, Irvine, 1971; *Nova Scotia Beach Dance*, Nova Scotia, 1971; *Delay Delay*, Lower West Side, New York, 1972; *Crepusculo*, Florence, 1974.

⁴² Simon, "Migration, Translation, Reanimation", 93.

⁴³ Jonas, Berkeley, 1983. Cited by Joan Simon in "Oad Lau", in *In the Shadow a Shadow*, 36.

⁴⁴ Jonas, in Simon, "Scenes and Variations": 72.

⁴⁵ Peter Campus also shot the film for Jonas' project during her workshop with Trisha Brown 1967, first real piece for workshop (which also featured Hollingworth). *Wind* was also a component of the multi-media installation *Mirror Pieces* and *Outdoor Pieces* (1968/1994).

⁴⁶ Jonas, in Simon, "Wind", in *In the Shadow a Shadow*, 38.

the movements and forms that arise from this event. In it, Jonas establishes a direct relationship between the camera (for which the event is being staged) and the wind (which is the driving force that is moving objects and people alike) in a kind of early posthumanist sensibility. She expands notions of worldmaking, interconnectivity and entanglement from a human-centred ground (as Haraway defines it, embedded in “Kantian globalizing cosmopolitics and grumpy human-exceptionalist Heideggerian worlding”⁴⁷), to a complex ensemble of meteorological entities, organic and inorganic figures, matters and technologies. Yet, it would be premature to locate in this work an incipient version of Jonas’ later consciousness of living and acting in an environmentally troubled world. Nonetheless, *Wind*, alongside other works with a similar sensibility and interests, anticipates Jonas’ alignment with a tradition of using moving-image based media to engage with physical manifestations of the natural environment.

For the 1971 outdoor performance *Nova Scotia Beach Dance*, Jonas pursued her investigation of the relationship between the perception of events, distance and landscape. She imposed a substantial distance between audiences and actions as spectators stood on a cliff overlooking a beach lying 100 feet below them, where a small group of performers moved within a stone circle. Later (but still relatively early) works such as the performance *Delay Delay* (1972), the film *Songdelay* (1973), the videos *Barking* (1973), *Three Returns* (1973), *Disturbances* (1974) and *Merlo* (1974) further accentuate the relationship between performativity, landscape, space, distance and sound by incorporating elements of de-synchrony that play with the aural-visual perceptive means of spectators.⁴⁸ Some of these works, in particular *Delay Delay*, *Barking* and *Merlo*, denote a profound posthuman sensibility, visible in the manner in which Jonas uses the sounds and the perceptive and expressive systems of plants and animals (wood in *Delay Delay*, a dog in *Barking* and blackbirds in *Merlo*) as fundamental components of the works.

Pursuing the transformation of her relationship to landscape, Jonas later included her outdoor actions in her installations, as early as *Three Tales* (1976-77), presented at Kassel’s Documenta 6. The work consisted of the spatialisation of three previously made videos (*The Frog Prince*, *The Joshua Tree* and *Cape North*), each playing on two monitors. According to Jonas’ description, “each is a little story with performers or friends, improvisations with movement, landscape,

⁴⁷ Haraway, “Staying with the Trouble”, 11.

⁴⁸ On the topic, see Douglas Crimp, “Synchronies of “De-synchronization”, in *In the Shadow a Shadow*, 138-9.

materials, costumes, set in fantastic settings in different locations”.⁴⁹ The video *Volcano Saga* (1985-89) also incorporates a series of actions, performed by the artist and others, which establish a particularly immersive relationship to landscape.

More recent pieces not only continue incorporating natural elements and naturalscapes but also explore the possibilities of distorting and rediscovering it through different perspectives, sometimes made in collaboration with one or more animals. *Beautiful Dog* (2014), also included in *They Come to Us without a Word*, is a good example. [Fig. III.13] It consists of a single-channel video edited from three complementary cameras. One of them is a GoPro pending from Ozu’s collar while the dog is walking on the beach in Cape Breton. As the camera is flipped upside down, the fish-eye video shows a disorienting landscape in which an upturned sky and ground oscillate from one side to the other at the rhythm of the dog’s quick trotting on the sand, waves ebbing at the top of the screen and a steady, pale blue sky as its bottom. Ozu walks, runs and digs holes along the shoreline. What viewers see does not simply correspond to the dog’s, the machine’s, or the artist’s point of view. *Beautiful Dog* triangulates the three, presenting a vision of dog-with-human-and-machine, a new vision where the familiar and the strange complete one another, also considering how Jonas wears a large purple paper hat and coat that give her a bizarre, funny appearance. By mirroring the sea and the sky, Jonas revisits, in a very characteristic way, both funny and odd, some of the tropes of her work: the beach, the sea, the dog, the mirror, the hats, humour and the elements.

Variations and Revisitations

The fact that Jonas used a Go-Pro to shoot parts of *Beautiful Dog* attests to another important aspect of her work: the way in which it is developed in a permanent balance between consistency of themes and interests and actualisation, in the sense of her constant curiosity and engagement with new media. It also attests to the role that the artist’s curiosity for technological development plays in the striking of this balance, pushing her to cyclically update her technical supports and the topics of her work. As I have been discussing, themes, gestures and figures reappear in different formulations and contexts; these are updated with new impressions, readings and information as media and supports also evolve.

⁴⁹ Jonas, “Three Tales”, in *In the Shadow a Shadow*, 256.

Themes, places and figures are also revisited over time, forming expanded bodies of work which, while not being necessary cycles, attest to where Jonas' attention was focused during a certain period. It is worth observing, for instance, how her work related over the years to Icelandic literature, landscape and culture. In 1982, Jonas made a performance and a subsequent video entitled *He Saw Her Burning*, which incorporated fragments from the Laxdaela saga, an Icelandic 13th century epic in which female characters have an important presence. It was also in the early 1980s that Jonas travelled to the country with Iceland-born, US-based artist Steina Vasulka, at the time already based in Santa Fe, New Mexico, where she still lives. Jonas traversed the country filming the environments that became the starting point to the complex *Volcano Saga* project, which began with a performance in 1985 and was developed into a video piece in 1989.⁵⁰ [Fig. III.14] The video's narrative is one of the most straightforward stories of Jonas' work. She explains how: "I was really finding my way into making a narrative work. I was trying to make a script in advance for a more complex approach to my work".⁵¹ Featuring professional actors Tilda Swinton and Ron Vawter in the role of the saga's two main characters, respectively Guðrún Ósvífursdóttir and Gest Oddleifsson, the video evolves at the pace of the female character's story-telling of four dreams and their interpretation. These are intercut with images of landscapes, animals, Jonas' own drawings and others. Jonas describes how:

Gudrun [Swinton] tells her dreams to Gest [Vawter] as they sit together in the hot springs—a beautiful blue lagoon with wind, mist, and black volcano rock. Sitting in the steamy blue made the relationship of the characters in the story erotic. I liked this added level of closeness in relation to our own ideas about how and when we tell our dreams to others, and how they are interpreted.⁵²

This reference to the Laxdaela Saga was a prelude to other works based on Icelandic literature, both ancient and recent. It also reinforced the presence of natural elements and landscapes—telluric and meteorological entities and forces, maritime and aquatic settings—that had already been introduced by pieces such as *Wind* and *Jones Beach Piece*. Pursuing such topics, the work *Reanimation* is rooted in the interpretation of Icelandic nobel laureate Halldór Laxness' 1968

⁵⁰ *Volcano Saga* was produced by Jonas and Alan Kleinberg; coproduced by Continental Video, Antwerp; and later also produced in association with New Television Workshop at WGBH/WNET, Boston.

⁵¹ Jonas, "Volcano Saga", in *In the Shadow a Shadow*, 305.

⁵² Jonas, quoted by Simon, in "Migration, Translation, Reanimation", 105.

novel *Under the Glacier*, which tells the story of a young emissary sent by the Bishop of Iceland to investigate paranormal activity surrounding a glacier.⁵³ Conceived while Jonas was doing a residency in Japan at the CCA Kitakyushu, *Reanimation* expresses Jonas' environmental concerns as well as her interest in depicting fish in aquaria and in making series of fish drawings. She explained her references and process:

One of the first thoughts that comes is that glaciers are melting which leads one to imagine a watery world. I then went to Norway to record the landscape in the Lofoten Islands inside the Arctic Circle and there in an aquarium recorded some very strange prehistoric looking fish which I included in the video narrative of *Reanimation*. In the performance version of this work I drew fish in blue ink. The ink spilled down the page. I became interested in repeating these drawings.⁵⁴

Reanimation was a collaborative project with American jazz musician Jason Moran. [Fig. III.15] It was first presented as a performance at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 2010. In the performance, the artist occupied a set equipped with a large projection screen, a drawing board and a workbench with a camera suspended over it, moving around it, handling and manipulating various objects and tools, often standing on top of the drawing board, the actions of her hands projected via a live feed onto the central screen, creating ghostly superimposition effects. *Reanimation* was also presented during Documenta 13, both as a performance and installation retitled *Reanimation (In a Meadow)*. Exhibited in a prefabricated house in Kassel's Karlsaue Park (one of the main exhibition areas of Documenta 13), it comprised five video components (including three "My New Theatre" works, mostly showing footage, shot in Norway, of landscape and animals, as well as drawings of animal heads painted in the snow with black ink), sound (yoik from Sami singer Ánde Somby), props and sculptural elements (including a steel-frame construction of a hundred suspended crystal balls refracting light, similar to the one Jonas will later show in the mirrors room of *They Come to Us without a Word*, the US Pavilion at the Venice Biennale). Describing *Reanimation*, Jonas emphasises its ecological underpinning: "partly an homage to spiritual aspects of nature [. . .] but as glaciers are now melting, the work [. . .] reflects

⁵³ Susan Sontag wrote an introduction to a new edition of the novel (the last essay Sontag wrote before her death in 2004), translated by Magnus Magnusson and published in New York by Vintage International in 2004.

⁵⁴ See http://cca-kitakyushu.org/gallery/20130128_jonas/?lang=en (accessed 15.07.2021).

the present-day situation”.⁵⁵

The complex multimedia installation *They Come to Us without a Word* further weaves Laxness’ tale with the folk culture of the fishermen community in Cape Breton, in particular with their ghost stories, which are brought into a contemporary scenario of environmental decay, thereby becoming the ghosts of an anthropogenic future. [Fig. III.16] Described by Simon as a work “about the fragile, rapidly changing world we inhabit with other creatures”,⁵⁶ *They Come to Us without a Word* reveals an accentuated ecological sensibility and agenda at the same time as it pursues Jonas’ interests in landscape, the elements, animals and folklore. Arranged into five environments, *Bees*, *Fish*, *Wind*, *Homeroom* and *Mirrors*, the work interweaves two parallel stories, one concerning the project’s title and the other a Nova Scotia ghost tale. For the most part, the stories are interpreted by a group of children wearing props and clothes similar to those worn by Jonas when performing (wide white tunics and hats). The children often appear as a kind of layer between projected images and the screen. A wide array of objects—colourful paper kites, bee, star and fish drawings, sticks, stones, masks, chalk drawings, toys, found objects, mirrors, postcards, notes—create another layer to the work, sometimes giving the impression of it being a modern Wunderkammer that reveals the private universe of Jonas’ own collectible items, her relationship with the aesthetic and mesmerizing traditions of magic shows and its fluid position across the nature-culture divide. Jonas has also conveyed this private universe of hers, in which the domestic and the artistic are undissociated, in the poem “Some Animals” (2016), in which she described a series of objects, many of the animal figures, part of her personal collection:

Coyote
on the shelf
looking out window

Lion by the window
wood colors covered with writing

large Fox head
papier mache
red mouth
top shelf
*looking at Coyote*⁵⁷

Tiger mask
orange with
black markings

⁵⁵ See <http://act.mit.edu/projects-and-events/lectures-series/fall-2013/dec-9-joan-jonas/> (accessed 18.09.2020).

⁵⁶ *In the Shadow a Shadow: The Work of Joan Jonas*, 512.

⁵⁷ Joan Jonas, “Some Animals”, in *Animals* (Filipa Ramos, ed.) (London: MIT Press and Whitechapel Gallery, 2016), 24-27.

A New Sensibility

If *They Come to Us without a Word* is aligned with earlier investigations of landscape and nature, it also signals the beginning of a new, stronger sensibility towards ecological matters, which will manifest itself fully in later works, including *Moving Off the Land*.

To a certain degree, this significant change also concerns a wider transformation in the interests and agendas of contemporary art, both in relation to the ongoing dialogue it has been having with extended creative expressions (namely performance, dance and theatre) as well as with a growing interest in engaging with ecology and environmental matters. I maintain that these two factors—the growth of attention towards time-based practices and towards climate urgency—contributed to making art professionals and institutions particularly aware of the complexity, richness and urgency of Jonas' work. To a certain extent, it seems like the relevance of Jonas' engagement with ecological, as well as ecofeminist stances, was only fully understood through the lens of a planetary ecological crisis and the transformation of identity paradigms.⁵⁸

As I will further discuss, with her work Jonas contributes to the deconstruction of modern nature-culture dualisms (self and other, subject and object, nature and culture, natural and synthetic) in parallel to how recent projects address the world's present-day state of environmental stress. From her artistic stance, Jonas has been observing (and inviting others to observe) the relationship that various cultures and individuals establish among and between themselves. By attesting to and calling for the participation and involvement of nonhuman forces (animal and others) in her work, she contributes to the dissolution of the cultural and the natural. With her projects, she has been telling tales of survival and destruction, love and hate, distance and proximity, all having characteristic positive formulations. Her work has often reflected the tensions, struggles, but also the links and bonds that are established across the living and non-living, whilst also taking in consideration how each action has a consequence, how each gesture

⁵⁸ At the same time, this wider recognition may also justify the growth of institutional, curatorial and commercial interests in her work, as it allowed museums and galleries to emerge as those who brought to light a significant artist who didn't undergo a previous process of large-scale exposure. Aligned with this agenda of rediscovery, the current infatuation of contemporary art with time-based media (comprising film, video, dance, theatre or sound) has allowed institutions to create peaks of intensity within their programmes when hosting unique, unrepeatable events which attract audiences within the otherwise more stable format of exhibitions. But, as has been discussed, Jonas' artistic approach resists these two tendencies. On the one hand her work remains extremely engaged with the present and is constantly being updated by recent technologies, thus refraining from being nostalgically revisited. On the other hand, its complexity fails to fulfil the desire for facile choreographic moves within museums and galleries.

leaves a trace and how every organism is intrinsically connected to others.

Given the current awareness of human-led environmental destruction, of re-evaluation of the relationship between the human, cultural and natural and of widespread reaction to global capitalism and to how globalisation has homogenised and flattened local cultures, Jonas' practice and its closeness to nature, particularly animal life, and to traditional forms of knowledge, I argue, gain a vitally important relevance. Contextually speaking, it is also imperative to acknowledge how economic pressure led areas traditionally associated with research, investigation and creativity (science, for instance, but also other fields concerned with the appliances of technology, as architecture or design) to focus on what anthropologist Tim Ingold defined as the "goals of modelling, prediction and control".⁵⁹ A general discontent with the western, white, market-dominated context of liberal arts is generating important attempts to re-integrate grassroots and Indigenous forms of knowledge and female stances that have been marginalised from academic discourses and from most western histories and narratives of art and science. The awareness of such exclusion often comes with the dissatisfaction with the methods and aims of disciplinary fields traditionally dedicated to the study of cultural diversity and with the desire to find alternative methodologies.

Both through her work as an artist—testing, twisting and inventing interconnections between creatures, lands and habits—and through her long-lasting engagement as an educator, Jonas has been contributing to the re-evaluation of the above-mentioned disciplinary ambits and positions, in particular those related to both anthropological research⁶⁰ and feminist stances. Like other women artists of her generation, Jonas was aligned with feminist struggles, which she said, in a video interview, had "a huge influence on my life" despite never making work exclusively about being a woman and the female condition. This is often manifested in more subtle manners: for instance the artist chose video as her primordial mode of expression given the fact that its novelty made it, for her, one of the few mediums that was not yet dominated by men. She has also described how her early work *Vertical Roll* reveals "a poetic approach to...expressing my relationship to feminism, [involving] a search for whether or not there could be something such

⁵⁹ Tim Ingold, "From science to art and back again: The pendulum of an anthropologist", in *ANUAC* 5.1 (June 2016): 5.

⁶⁰ On the relation between anthropology and contemporary visual arts see Ingold, "From science to art and back again": 5-23.

as female art, female imagery”.⁶¹

Companionships

Jonas’ work often depicts unique relationships between humans and other animals while reinforcing the role of art in inventing new modes of engagement with nature. Animal presences traverse almost the entirety of Jonas’ work, accompanying the artist from her early performances and videos to recent projects. As mentioned, Jonas creates meaningful encounters with her various companion dogs and other creatures, such as the birds, coyotes, fish, horses, jellyfish, rabbits, snakes, turtles and wolves that are figured as drawings, props, objects, projected images and personifications by the artist and other human performers. These encounters are a meaningful part of her work. Only a speculative assessment allows for the comprehension of the relevance of these encounters for the real, living beings that are featured in Jonas’ work. However, its importance for artist, context and viewers alike is a meaningful step forward towards a new human sensibility and ethos.

The relationship installed between Jonas and some of the animals she collaborates with, in particular her dogs, and with the cameras she uses to record their interactions, echo Donna J. Haraway’s description of companionship: “the category ‘companion species’ is [...] a pointer to an ongoing ‘becoming with’. [...] Companion comes from the Latin *cumpanis*, ‘with bread’ [...] As a verb, to companion is ‘to consort, to keep company’”.⁶²

Together, Jonas and her animal and technological companions inaugurate relationships of becoming-with that are often manifested through the media used to portray and document such interactions. The animals’ availability and willingness to collaborate with Jonas are fundamental. In several instances, their availability creates the event of the work, which incorporates these moments of interaction and transformation which take place when animal and human perform together for, and with, a camera. By reflecting on the outcomes of such relationships of availability from a pragmatic point of view, focusing on what it does (rather than what it is), Vinciane Despret comments on the affective possibilities of domestication, which she describes as “practices that create and transform through the miracle of attunement”.⁶³

⁶¹ “Joan Jonas on Feminism”, <https://www.moma.org/multimedia/video/89/508> (accessed 18.06.2021).

⁶² Donna J. Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 17.

⁶³ Vinciane Despret, “The Body We Care For: Figures of Anthro-zoo-genesis”, in *Body & Society*, Vol. 10 (2-3) (London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2004): 125.

As such, the becoming-with of artist-animal-machine is also an experience of mediality that contributes to reinventing what performance and video are and can do. Through this reinvention, the act of becoming-with is shared and transmitted to viewers through a continuation of the same “miracle of attunement” described by Despret. Their engagement with the work expands its significance and opens up the potential for the becoming-with of audiences too through an affective sharing of “what a body makes (us) (others) do”, as Despret writes.⁶⁴

The video presented in *My New Theater IV: Dog Hoop* (2004) documents the dog Zina jumping through a hoop, a gesture and object transformed into a reflection about the inner nature of video as a medium. [Fig. III.17] By being edited at various speeds and played uninterruptedly, on a loop (a process the hoop’s round form alludes to), the work aligns the woman-hoop-dog-camera relationship with the technical possibilities of the video and explores the video’s mediality as a mode of representing the real, with its circular forms and repetitive gestures.⁶⁵ This again refers to Jonas’ use of the camera, as it dissolves and informs boundaries and distinctions between life forms—there being not just a fluid use of the medium (something common to Marker and Forti) but also acknowledging its potential for transforming the relationships she depicts and installs with the camera.⁶⁶ The video is part of Jonas’ “My New Theater” and like the other works of the series, *Dog Hoop* is displayed inside a portable video theatre with a cone-like shape lying on four wooden sawhorse legs.⁶⁷ Jonas describes the action of the dog-with-camera in the following manner: “My dog Zina is a work dog. She is a performer. When I position the camera and tripod and move into camera range she follows and somehow makes the right moves with no coaching from me. She likes to play with balls in particular, but also with people. I taught her one trick—to jump through a hoop. She would do this continuously, especially if a cookie were offered”.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Despret, “The Body We Care For”: 125.

⁶⁵ Footage of Zina jumping across a hoop also appear in the videos of the performance piece, commissioned by Documenta 11, *Lines in the Sand* (2002-5).

⁶⁶ I thank Katrina Black for the discussion on this point.

⁶⁷ The shape of the “My New Theatres” series has also been associated to the cages that Alberto Giacometti developed in the 1930s and to *Il palazzo alle quattro del mattino* (1932-33), a metallic box-like perspective structure which resembles a miniaturised theatre set. See <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/85900> (accessed 08/05/2021). Indeed, Jonas has often acknowledged the influence of Giacometti to her early work: “I wasn’t happy with my objects, my sculpture [...] They were very influenced by Giacometti. I ended up destroying them all. They were not relevant. I wanted to explore new forms that were related to sculpture, and that included drawing, sound, and movement in space. Performance for that generation of artists seemed to open things up”. In R. H. Quaytman, “Joan Jonas”, in *Interview*.

⁶⁸ Jonas, “My New Theatre IV: Dog Hoop”, in *In the Shadow a Shadow*, 367.

Wolf-Dog-Like

Other works from various periods also attest to how Jonas uses the camera to depict and engage with animals in original, personal ways. Chronologically close to *Merlo*, and also using a video camera to test the perceptive relation between image and sound, *Barking* (1973) (used as a component in the 1974 video performance *Funnel*) emerges of the collaboration between the dog Sappho, Forti, who is Jonas' friend, and a hand-held video camera. [Fig. III.18] Forti would also perform in the collaborative version of Jonas' *The Juniper Tree*, presented at St. Mark's Church, New York, in 1977. Her characteristic voice can also be heard in the sound recording of *Juniper Tree's* installation version.

Set in a rural driveway in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, this short, black-and-white video features Forti, who for the most part turns her back towards the camera, following Sappho, who barks, into the woods. Both are filmed by Jonas, standing behind them. Occupying a central position in the screen is a car, which introduces a strong human/machine presence in a setting of woods and fields. The presence of the car gives the impression of the scene being shot a remote area, away from human settlement and only reachable through driving. It seems like the two artists and the dog reached the place by car, got out of it and Jonas started filming what happened, in a fairly spontaneous way, particularly as there are no props or acting involved. The action takes place as much in- as off-screen, something that puts in evidence how the archival function of the camera is divided into what is retained and what is excluded: not everything that is happening is visually captured by the camera. Actually, most of what happens is left off-frame. In the triangular relationship articulated by the video, the dog, camera and artists mutually expand each other's senses and perceptive realms, as well as those of their viewers: by barking, the dog alerts the humans (artists and audiences) to the presence of something that only she senses (and probably smells rather than sees), allowing the humans to be closer to their own animality, as they may imagine and feel what could be that she is paying attention to. Through its recording activity, the camera becomes both witness and additional sensorial device, scanning the landscape, indexing and archiving it (rendering it into magnetic vibrations) and further extending the human biological limits of seeing and hearing. In this sense, nature, machine and people (artist and later audience) relate to the world through a triangular relationship of co-dependency. As Jonas mentioned: "I am intrigued by the heightened senses and the fact that they [animals] experience all sensations

[...] I depend on my dog in the country to warn me [...] and as a companion in the shadow”.⁶⁹

Returning to the discussion of sound in Jonas’ work and how it often signals important events and reveals her attention to language and to the agency of materials, sound also plays an essential part in this video. Sappho’s barking indicates to something that cannot be seen. As Simon argues, Forti’s comment—“She’s still barking”—stands on two simultaneous registers. One alludes to the actual event of the dog barking despite not being seen (highlighting the importance on the animal’s sound in the video). The other may be a reference to Jonas’ own barking throughout her work, “humorously recalling, for some viewers, Jonas’s own howls in both live performances and recorded videos”⁷⁰ [Fig. III.19] such as *Organic Honey* or *Duet* (also from 1972 and used in both *Organic Honey* performances). In them, Jonas howls to her own image on a monitor, doubling, mirroring and howling constituting one another as variations on the theme of selfhood.⁷¹ I will later further explore this through the discussion of her voice’s participation in her work.

Barking as a manner of performing is also present in other projects Jonas took part in. Shot in 1975 in the Margaree islet of Cape Breton, Robert Frank and Rudy Wurlitzer’s film *Keep Busy* features Jonas amidst an array of local inhabitants who also perform in it. The diary of Frank’s production assistant DeeDee Halleck describes Jonas’ animalesque performance:

Joan paces around the shack like a restless wolf. It is completely ransacked. Only about a quarter of the roof is still there. But the hole in the roof provides an eerie beam of light that pierces the center of the shack. The floor is full of smashed lobster traps, rotten nets, and buoys. The beams hang low. Joan practices swinging on them. “OK”, she says. Robert starts rolling. Joan lunges wildly, swinging from the rafters. She climbs into a large lobster trap and rocks back and forth with her hands on the edge. Sort of like a mad baby in a playpen. “Take one”, syncs Robert. The second take is done with a low shot of Joan, who is crouched on the floor. She is huddled on a pile of ropes. She howls wolf-dog-like. The sun has reappeared and is streaming

⁶⁹ García-Antón, “Between Text and Action. Animal Helpers in the Work of Joan Jonas”, in *Joan Jonas Timelines: Transparencies in a Dark Room* (Geneva and Barcelona: Centre d’art contemporain and Museu d’Art Contemporani de Barcelona, 2007), 49.

⁷⁰ Simon, “Migration, Translation, Reanimation”, 87.

⁷¹ Jonas has often performed with vocal animal sounds. The performance notes of *Juniper Tree* include the following references: “she looks toward sound of dog”, “she goes to the mirror and dances, monkey-like, with her own image” or “groaning, imitating zebra cries, she seems to retch”.

through the roofless ceiling. When she tilts her head back, her eyes catch the beam of light and glow like a cat caught in a headlight. She has become an animal. The last take is even more intense, and when Robert stops shooting, we all look at Joan in silence, deeply moved.⁷²

It is worth noticing how Jonas rarely assumes such explicit animal representative modalities in her own work. As mentioned, there are several pieces, made at different stages, in which she howls and sings as a dog and with dogs (namely *Organic Honey*, *Duet*, *The Juniper Tree*, *Waltz*). There are others in which other characters assume doggish features. The performance *The Shape, the Scent, the Feel of Things* (2004-06), inspired by Aby Warburg's "Serpent's Ritual" lecture,⁷³ features three short videos, *Mirror Improvisations*, *Melancholia* and *Wolf Lights* (all 2004-05) that include interactions with a dog. In two of them (*Mirror Improvisations* and *Melancholia*), these are rather spontaneous encounters, which are characterised, as is argued by curator Katya García-Antón, "by a domestic sense of intimacy" visible in the way the dog spontaneously jumps through a hoop and runs around in an unscripted manner.⁷⁴ As Jonas described, "my dog is a very talented comedian. I just set up the camera and she joins the activity. Somehow she senses the mood. We don't give her any directions".⁷⁵

Wolf Lights instead, presents what Jonas describes as "a white-skirted female figure [performer Ragani Haas], from Dürer's *Melencolia I* [also the key iconographic reference for her video *Melancholia*], now wearing a papier-mâché wolf mask [...] moves like an animal on all fours" in front of strong neon lights that give the scene both an abstract and an urban nocturnal appearance.⁷⁶ In this case, the artist is suggesting a stronger sense of metamorphosis of her female character. Half-woman and half-wolf, she dwells in a zone of hybridity in which the limits

⁷² DeeDee Halleck, "Keeping Busy on Cape Breton Island: Journal of a Production Assistant to Robert Frank, August 1975/October 1997", in *Hand-held Visions: The Impossible Possibilities of Community Media* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 35.

⁷³ Presented on the 21st of April 1923, Aby Warburg's lecture on the "Serpent Ritual" stressed the kinship of religious thinking in Ancient Greece and Oraibi and was made almost 30 years after his journey to the American Southwest (1895-96). Warburg presented his lecture to the doctors and nurses of the Sanatorium of Bellevue in Kreuzlingen, Switzerland (where he was being treated for depression and possibly schizophrenia), as a way of proving his mental sanity.

⁷⁴ García-Antón, "Between Text and Action", 49.

⁷⁵ Joan Jonas in an email interview with García-Antón, New York/Geneva, May 2007, as quoted by Katya García-Antón, "Between Text and Action", 48.

⁷⁶ Simon, "Wolf Lights", in *In the Shadow a Shadow*, 442.

of person and wolf are difficult to trace.

Her movements and appearance gain a therianthrope allure that transpose the investigation of animal-human sensorial thresholds and a documentation of the shared orientation experiences such as that which appears in, for instance, *Barking*, into a field of ritualised, mythological metamorphosis associated to the representation of a feminine mode of being in and out of this world. It expresses gestures and traces that reveal otherwise unseen relationships and dynamics of companionship and mutual influence.

Jonas described the shooting of *Barking* as a process of investigation in co-dependency and companionship: “I am intrigued by the heightened senses and the fact that they [animals] experience all sensations. I wonder what it must be like [...] I depend on my dog in the country to warn me... and as a companion in the shadows”.⁷⁷ By being together in nature, woman and animal complement each other’s senses and constitute each other’s experience. In the case of *Wolf Lights*, this becoming-with gives way to a symbolic reverie that extrapolates the real to an eccentric dimension of exploration of a new state of being.

Moving Off the Land

Operating across these complementary planes—the concrete and the figurative, the everyday and the mythical—and often intersecting one another, Jonas’ work has revealed a unique capacity to both highlight animal-human co-dependencies and to raise awareness to how animal life is vulnerable to human action. Here, I would like to introduce a key work to this investigation of Jonas’ engagement and interest in animal life by describing its inception and the subsequent phases it went through.

Kochi Oceans—sketches and notes, presented during TBA21—Academy’s the Current Convening #2 in Kochi, in December 2016, took place in a public square by the beach in Fort Kochi, next to the Chinese Fishing Nets, traditional shore-operated lift nets to catch fish and squid, a concrete and symbolic core of human’s relation to the extraction of resources from the sea. Jonas, assisted by Vietnamese artist Thao-Nguyen Phan, took the audience through a narrative of past and

⁷⁷ Email interview with García-Antón, New York/Geneva, May 2007, as quoted by García-Antón in “Between Text and Action”, 50.

present wonders and troubles of the oceans. [Fig. III.20] In her usual manner of combining sources and references, the work combined readings of Herman Melville's novel *Moby Dick* (1851) and Italo Calvino's story *The Aquatic Uncle* (1963–64) with the live drawing of fishes—painted in blue tones, similar to those presented in the installation version of *They come to us without a word* at CCA Kitakyushu Project Gallery in Japan in 2013.

In the background, a large video projection combined fragments of Jean Painlevé's aquatic films with found footage and original recordings filmed in aquaria by the artist of marine life: fish, jellyfish, seals and starfish. The artist wore delicate white clothes and, at moments, a paper mask covering her face, thus obstructing her vision. As she often does, Jonas found her space between the projector and the screen, placing herself close to the audience. Her tiny, slender body moved with uncertain, uneven paces on the stage, followed by her own shadow, projected onto the screen and doubling her theatrical persona, a small bell dangling from each hand. At certain moments she used the sheets of paper in which she was drawing as traps, placing them in-between the projector and the screen and therefore framing the projected animals on them, capturing their images, disclosing their condition of being prey. At the same time, Jonas appeared very vulnerable on stage. Older, she exposed the fragility of her body, this time scrutinised not by a mirror but by her own audience. Her body absorbed the beings that were being projected, who entered her body-made-screen and who moved across her and formed animal-images with her: their endangered condition, the uncertainty of their lives, their being "a being on the lookout, in constant alert" (the ultimate nature of being an animal, as suggested by Deleuze⁷⁸), their use of a language beyond verbal expression, were made visible by and through the artist. She becomes the ocean, the words, fables and narratives that shaped its imaginary; the projections and realities that constituted it; the problems, disasters and hopes that informed multiple attempts of ecological struggle.

The artist and these animals meet in a site of fluidity, experimentation, loss of control, of mutual inspiration and influence. They co-exist across land and sea, real and magical, fables and stories of present-day challenges. Their joint presence disrupts the conventional structure of narrative (diluting beginning and end) and alters the sense of the passing of time. Together, they take viewers into a hypnagogic state and hypnotic mode in which minutes and hours make little or no

⁷⁸ Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, "A comme Animal", in *L'abécédaire de Gilles Deleuze*, 1988-1989. Broadcasted on Arte between November 1994 and Spring 1995. Translated from the French by Dominique Hurth.

sense.

This layering of images and the gesture of Jonas using her body as a site to host these spectral projections is also a distinctive feature of her collaboration with children, whose bodies are also sites of projections while being projected. This layering is central to her work and the discussions in this chapter, as it also connects to her ritual practices, which are materially-rooted and have a practical, haptic engagement with materials.⁷⁹ This layering, as I will later further discuss, is also an important feature of her work with animals in zoological displays, particularly taking into account how in itself, the glass of an aquarium (a site Jonas frequently engaged with in recent works) is already a layer that mediates between two environments. This glass layer then becomes image, projection and site of performativity.

School of Fish

Evolving from *Kochi Oceans—sketches and notes* and likely one of the most deputed and linear of Jonas' theatrical performances to date, *Moving Off the Land II* is the artist's response to a commission from TBA21–Academy, an interdisciplinary organisation dedicated to fostering environmental sensibility through contemporary art. Invited to engage with the Academy's interest in promoting culture as a means to raise awareness towards ocean preservation, Jonas conceived a multi-layered project which was presented at various stages in different public events. A recent version of the work was showed and performed during the homonymous exhibition, "Moving Off the Land II", held during Spring/Summer 2019 at Ocean Space, TBA21–Academy's exhibition site at the Chiesa di San Lorenzo in Venice, on occasion of the 58th Venice Biennale. [Fig. III.21]

The exhibition of *Moving Off the Land II*, presented in the monumental space of the late 16th century church, consisted of five short video works whose arrangement echoed the thematic clusters of the performance—mermaid, mirror pool, octopus, whale, Jamaican fishermen.⁸⁰ Each video was projected inside a large white wooden box whose form expands Jonas' "My New Theaters" series into an actual viewing room, a sort of a mini-cinema that visitors can enter and sit on the lateral benches that are part of the installation. Two of them are closely related to the

⁷⁹ In a less mediated manner, the interest in the creation of material rituals is also observable in Forti's work, as discussed in Chapter Two.

⁸⁰ The respective duration of the videos is: *Mermaid* 11'27", *Mirror Pool* 13'04", *Octopus* 13'27", *Whale* 07'09", *Jamaican Fishermen* 04'06".

previous “My New Theaters” and their tradition of merging the realms of sculpture and cinema through the creation of small wooden peeping boxes, while “three large-scale installations can be entered like portals as if transporting viewers into the projected videos themselves”.⁸¹ The space was also occupied by a series of enlarged reproductions of Jonas’ drawings of fish and other marine animals, which are hanging from the ceiling in a highly theatrical manner. The exhibition was presented at the Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum and the performance was presented, in February 2020, at the Prado Museum, both in Madrid.⁸²

Moving Off the Land II, the performance, evolved during a three-year research period in which Jonas gathered literary, folk and scientific texts about the oceans; visited, filmed and interacted with specialist staff in aquariums in the US and Japan; collected historical, scientific and amateur footage of maritime and underwater scenes, which she combined with her own filmed materials; and travelled to TBA21’s affiliated organisation, Alligator Head Foundation—dedicated to the preservation of local maritime fauna—in Port Antonio, Jamaica, to interview local fishermen and film short performances for the camera that were incorporated in the work. The performance was first entitled *Ocean-Sketches and Notes* and it was under this title that it was presented at the 2016 Kochi-Muziris Biennale in Kochi, India, at the event “ephemeropteræ 2017/#4” in Vienna (2017) and at the Sequences Art Festival in Reykjavík (2017). The performance was then renamed *Moving Off the Land II* and was first presented at the Tate Modern in 2018 and then at the Ocean Space (2019) and at the Prado Museum in Madrid (2020).⁸³

As Jonas acknowledges in the speech that opens the performance in Madrid,⁸⁴ the first time her

⁸¹ From the booklet of the exhibition Joan Jonas Moving off the land II, Mar 24-Sep 29.2019, Ocean Space, Chiesa di San Lorenzo, Venezia (TBA-21 Academy), 5.

⁸² The exhibition “Moving Off the Land II” was held at the Ocean Space from the 24th of March to the 29th of September, 2019. “Moving Off the Land II” then travelled to the Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum in Madrid, which hosts the collection of Hans Heinrich Thyssen-Bornemisza, the father of Francesca Thyssen, the founder of the TBA-21 Foundation and Academy. The show was originally meant to run from the 25th of February to the 13th of September, 2020, but was interrupted due to the COVID-19 lockdown.

⁸³ *Ocean-Sketches and Notes* was first presented on the 13th of December, 2016 during the Kochi-Muziris Biennale and held in open air, at the Vasco da Gama Square by the waterside in the historical centre of Kochi. *Ocean-Sketches and Notes* was subsequently presented at the Augarten, the former exhibition space of the TBA21 Foundation in Vienna on the 23rd of June 2017, and at the Sequences Art Festival in Reykjavík on the 8th of October 2017. Jonas then presented the performance under its current title, *Moving Off the Land II*, at Tate Modern, London, on the 31st of May 2018; at the Ocean Space, Venice, on the 7th of March 2019, to coincide with the opening of the 58. Venice Biennale; and at the Prado Museum in Madrid on the 27th of February 2020.

⁸⁴ See the recording of the performance at the Prado Museum, <https://youtu.be/fRI7vw76xZ4> (accessed 19.09.2020).

work publicly and widely incorporated her concerns for the endangered state of ocean was in the exhibition “Joan Jonas: They come to us without a word”, held at the Centre for Contemporary Art Kitakyushu in Fukuoka, Western Japan, in 2013.⁸⁵ On that occasion, she made a series of more than 100 fish drawings inspired by Toshiji Kamohara’s book *Coloured Illustrations of the Fishes in Japan*, which she had found in a second-hand shop.⁸⁶ [Fig. III.22]

The process of this exhibition attests to the close relationship between her research, pedagogical and artistic activities and to the manners in which these activities complement and support one another. As she recalled in 2013, “A few years ago, inspired by a book I saw about beautiful and strange forms living in the deepest parts of the sea, I called my performance class at MIT ‘Action: Archeology of the Deep Sea’”.⁸⁷ The workshop included a series of activities which ranged from watching Jean Painlevé’s films⁸⁸ to exercises that take modern poetry and film as examples of how to structure a work in relation to the subject of the deep sea and tasks involving filming and recording sound, as well as learning through visits to museums. This complex instruction-based workshop description provides a valuable access to Jonas’ pedagogical skills. It also discloses the artist’s research sources and work process, as it reveals some of the methods, practices and sources she engenders and explores during her creative process.

In her introduction to the CCA exhibition, Jonas acknowledged another major source for her drawings: “I also found a Japanese dictionary of fish in a second-hand store in San Diego. I carried it around with me and copied the very detailed colour renditions of all the different fish”. These fish, Jonas argues, also stood for the excessive consumption of fish in Japan and the world. This series of drawings that were central to the exhibition in Japan would later appear in *Reanimation*, which Jonas was developing during the same years, and in the exhibition for the US Pavilion of the Venice Biennale, whose title derives from the Kitakyushu show.

⁸⁵ “Joan Jonas: They came to us without a word” was held at CCA Kitakyushu (28 January – 22 February 2013). It was preceded by “Joan Jonas: ‘My New Theater’ Series” (28 March – 1 May 2009), “Double Lunar Rabbits” (1 February – 5 March 2010) and followed by “Joan Jonas: It blew right in my ear like the wind” (3 February – 15 March 2014), also at CCA Kitakyushu. Jonas also stayed at as the CCA Kitakyushu as Professor of Research Program from 7-27 January 2013.

⁸⁶ Toshiji Kamohara, *Coloured Illustrations of the Fishes in Japan* (Osaka: Hoikusha, 1955).

⁸⁷ Declarations during the exhibition “they come to us without a word”, Center for Contemporary Art Kitakyushu, 28 January – 22 February 2013.

⁸⁸ As indicated by Jonas in the workshop description films included Jean Painlevé’s 1934 *L’Hippocampe* [The Seahorse], *Les Danseuses de la mer* [Sea Ballerinas] from 1960, *Les Amours de la pieuvre* [The Love Life of the Octopus], 1967, and others.

The installation of fish drawings at the CCA Kitakyushu expressed Jonas' concerns regarding overfishing and the decrease in fish populations. Such worries are visible in how Jonas created each fish to be an individual, with unique features, in itself also a testimony to her outstanding mode of drawing and painting animals. The fragility and mobility of the paper sheets in which each fish is painted further expresses not only their individuality but also their vulnerability. Presented as a large bi-dimensional school of fish composed of parallel rows of many fish drawings—sequences of single fish painted in cobalt blue ink on white sheets of paper, all facing the same direction and roughly arranged in pairs, attached to a suspending strip with metallic binder clips—the assemblage gave a sense of a poetic prosperity that mourned and grieved the depletion of the seas. Jonas described the work in the following manner:

In the performance version of this work I drew fish in blue ink. The ink spilled down the page. I became interested in repeating these drawings. As I often do, I wanted to continue to develop certain actions or ideas. In this case, in Kitakyushu, while still referring to the Japanese fish dictionary, I draw the various fish over and over in blue ink, curious about how the form will change. I am drawing about one hundred of these large performance drawings, thinking how, such a group, hanging on lines strung across the room, would appear. I am also interested in how a title might suggest another reality, or thoughts about fish.⁸⁹

Standing at the Edge of the Sea

The footage featured in *Moving Off the Land II* was shot at the Lofoten Islands in Norway, the New England Aquarium in Boston, the New York Aquarium, the National Aquarium in Baltimore, the Aquarium in Genoa, the Mystic Aquarium in Connecticut and in various aquariums in Tokyo. The performance also includes footage from Jean Painlevé's 1928 film *La Pieuvre* [The Octopus] (also featured in the "Archeology of the Deep Sea" workshop) while footage from bioluminescent animals was provided by marine biologist David Grubber, a long-term collaborator of the TBA21–Academy. Several short sequences of the videos of the performance are also part of previous projects, as it happens in other works of Jonas, who often remixes previously used audio and visual sources. The textual references of *Moving Off the Land II* include western, historic and present-day authors from science and literature, namely Rachel Carson, Emily Dickinson, T.S. Eliot,

⁸⁹ Joan Jonas, conference during the exhibition at CCA Kitakyushu, transcription available at: http://cca-kitakyushu.org/gallery/20130128_jonas/?lang=en (accessed 03.07.2021)

Peter Godfrey-Smith, Herman Melville, Sy Montgomery, Neil Shubin and other sources from newspapers, radio and the Internet.

Also during the performance's opening speech, Jonas dedicated the work to Rachel Carson, whose writing features extensively within it. She starts by reading an extract from the American ecologist's book *The Edge of the Sea* (1955), which describes the symbiotic lives of shrimp and other sea creatures with sponges, an underwater provider of life, food and shelter. The performance then continues with Jonas reading another fragment from Carson's book, a first-person account of an observation of underwater life inside a cave, visible through its crystal-clear waters.

While reading, Jonas stands in darkness to the right of a large projection screen, the major visual element of the stage's arrangement. The images on the screen transition from installation shots of the Japanese fish drawings to underwater footage of pristine shallow waters in which small fish swim around coral reef. On the floor in front of the screen there are large rolls of white paper and cloths. Also to the right, close to where the artist stands, there is a large green sofa whose shape resembles that of the yellow sofa that appears in *Lines in the Sand* and the white sofa of *The Shape, the Scent, the Feel of Things*. Simon described the sofa as a "fabricated couch based on the "kitchen couch" of Cape Breton: an elongated armless and backless couch of wood, raised at the head—a kitchen furnishing on which men would rest on returning from work. Her abstracted couch is based on a kitchen couch that she has in her Cape Breton home".⁹⁰ [Fig. III.23]

With this inclusion Jonas is therefore disclosing a fragment of her own domesticity, while also paying tribute to Cape Breton's material culture. Beyond these stage elements, the setting of *Moving Off the Land II* is more rarefied, emptier, than those of other performances of Jonas, which may include a wide array of objects, props and interactive devices namely overhead projectors, musical instruments, toys and figures.

Music and other sound elements can be heard throughout the event. At the beginning of the reading, subtle sounds of chimes create an immersive environment, reinforced by the absence of any light source besides the projection screen, which leaves the artist, her collaborators and the surrounding objects in quasi-darkness. The dream-like, slightly unreal atmosphere induced by the

⁹⁰ Simon, "Migration, Translation, Reanimation", 111.

sound of the chimes and by the dim light is matched by a video sequence of the artist's shadow walking towards the water while wearing a wig of algae, immersing herself in the sea. "The mind evolved in the sea. Water made it possible [...] When animals crawled onto dry land, they took the sea with them", Jonas reads, quoting from philosopher of science Peter Godfrey-Smith's book *Other Minds: The Octopus, the Sea, and the Deep Origins of Consciousness* (2016).

The two Jonases on stage—the recorded one, swimming amidst the algae with a red polka dot dress, and the physical one, facing the audience wearing a white overall on top of a white blouse, trousers and shoes (which make her look like a scientist or a doctor), reading with her glasses on—contrast and complement one another. [Fig. III.24] They clash because of the different materiality of their bodies—one electric, ghostly,⁹¹ one made of flesh—but also because they accentuate a division between spaces (the land and the sea), times (the past and the present), modes of existing (flesh and image) and epistemologies (direct experience and read discourse). In this dualistic spectacle, there are two performing entities: the spectral Jonas who is swimming elsewhere and the Jonas physically and materially present in the theatre, where she reads and makes things happen. But in this division the two also complement one another in their performing duties, one for the gaze of a camera, the other for an audience of people; they coexist in complementary layers of temporal and spatial depth, a key characteristic of Jonas' use of media in performance.

A third version of the artist, assumed by her disembodied voice reading sections of the text while the video and stage personae pursue with their activities, adds an additional mode of interaction and temporality to the show, further multiplying the possible modes of expression she assumes while reinforcing her ghostly allure.⁹² "The phantoms in Joan Jonas's art meet death in the future not as single human victims but as moves in the rich and intricate fabric of the larger world and its fragile wonders", notes art critic Marina Warner.⁹³ This is not a novelty but the continuation of a long-standing process in which Jonas plays herself and with her various selves through a complementarity between her flesh and electric (image or audio) bodies. As Jonas described it in

⁹¹On the relationship of Joan Jonas' work with ghosts, see Marina Warner, "Joan Jonas—The Taste of the Clouds", in *Joan Jonas They Come to Us Without a Word*, (New York: MIT List Visual Arts Center and Gregory R. Miller & Co., 2015), 30-39.

⁹² On the importance of mythological imagery in Jonas' work, see also Johanna Burton, "The Strings of the Human Spirit: Joan Jonas's Asymmetrical Symbolic", in *The Shadow of a Shadow*, 172-79.

⁹³ Warner, in *Joan Jonas They Come to Us Without a Word*, 30.

a recent interview:

[I]n *The Shape, the Scent, the Feel of Things*, there is a voiceover of me speaking the words of the art historian Aby Warburg. I play his part in my identity within: I always merge with the subject I'm trying to understand and represent. Then, I'm playing the part of the nurse in the hospital—Dia:Beacon could be thought of as the sanatorium. And I'm also a distant character in this hospital. So yes, I'm playing multiple parts. It has to do with the medium I chose; it fragments the body but also reproduces it, repeats it.⁹⁴

Since her early time-based works, Jonas made precise scripts and descriptions of each of her performances, which are generally divided in four complementary sections, signed by different columns on a page: Text, Action, Video, Light and Sound, each indicating the various features of the performances.⁹⁵ Here, the presence of the three Jonases—the physical, the video and the audio one—bring these elements together in a way that requires no additional set of collaborators and actors on or off stage. While one Jonas is reading a script, the other is swimming and dancing; when one is an image on a video, the other is materially present, lying down on the sofa, facing the audience; when one is hidden in darkness, the other is documented while making drawings on a sunny forest; when one moves and draws, the other tells about the lives and feats of marine creatures; when one is a human, the other is a mermaid; when one becomes a fish, the other becomes a fisher trying to capture her. It is in the generation and maintenance of tension between the three Jonases that they come together as one. But it is also in this complementary tension that the borders between the ghostly and the bodily are diluted and questioned, for their temporalities are also entangled—with the future, present and past making little sense within the permanent actualisation of a work that speaks about extinction and regeneration as complementary phenomena.

The performance features a series of short sequences that are also part of previous installations

⁹⁴ "Joan Jonas by Karin Schneider", in *Bomb Magazine* 112 (1 July, 2010), <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/joan-jonas/> (accessed 01.10.2020).

⁹⁵ Edited by Douglas Crimp, *Joan Jonas Scripts and Descriptions 1968-1982* provides the earliest reproduction of Jonas' work structure, including the scripts and descriptions of her major works from 1968 up to 1982. This method is later reproduced in other books, as in *The Shape, the Scent, the Feel of Things* book that accompanied the performance at the Dia Art Center in 2006 (New York: Dia Foundation and Yvon Lambert Gallery, 2006) and in *In the Shadow a Shadow*.

and performances, a process Jonas frequently adopts, as observed in other work descriptions. For instance, images of a man and a young girl riding a horse, framed by the cut-out of a large fish, also appear in *They Come to Us Without a Word*, as well as footage of a younger Jonas, standing on a rock by the sea with Zina, her previous dog. These footages and fragments are accompanied by a melody by Sami yoik singer Ánde Somby, whose spatial and temporal continuity unifies the different visual sources. This song first appeared in *Reanimation*, when the two collaborated and Jonas also reused it in the installation of the U.S. Pavilion and in accompanying performance, arranged by pianist Jason Moran. Jonas' charismatic, low-pitched voice, a fundamental feature of her work, can be heard at times, narrating stories that add different meanings to the images.

What the Whale Sees

Jonas defines the structure of the performance of *Moving Off the Land II* in its opening statement by gradually introducing the various figures that punctuate its rhythm— whales, mermaids, octopuses, fishers. Despite the general fluidity of the figurations that the artist assumes in her characteristic role-play mode, in which concrete visual and textual references are combined with other, unrelated allusions, there are moments in which the performance assumes a strong pedagogical tone.⁹⁶ One such moment happens when Jonas explains the similarity of fish and human semi-circular hearing canals relying on information she is reading and on scientific imagery of hearing structures of fish. She does so while also informing audiences on some of the unique characteristics of whales. Unique, she argues, because they resemble human features: “The eye of the whale is like ours, a camera eye. Whales came on to the land, they developed feet, they walked on the land and then they went back to the sea”, Jonas reads, while scientific schemes and images are projected; the overall scene resembling a biology seminar. This sequence, which lasts a few minutes, gives way to images of a beluga whale interacting with a child in an aquarium. This moment of animal and child encounter recalls Forti's *Three Grizzlies* video. Shot in the zoo, it shows footage of the bears accompanied by the voices and commentaries of a group of children watching them. Made in another epoch and with more advanced image-capturing technology, Jonas films the scene close to the whale; in the large projection, the whale's body is almost realized. The footage of the whale is at once amusing and disturbing, familiar and uncanny. There is a tension between what the artist says, her awareness for the unique characteristics of marine

⁹⁶ This tone is then broken by moments of lightness and humour, which prevent a heavily didactic approach and assure that Jonas is more sharing than imposing knowledge.

mammals and inclusion of footage of a marine animal inside a theme park. In making viewers aware of the cognitive and behavioural characteristics of marine mammals, Jonas is also creating the conditions for some of them to find this moment challenging or problematic. [Fig. III.25]

I would like to spend some time with this scene, which I consider fundamental to my reading of Jonas' environmental positions. This scene is crucial for the whole performance and for the discussion of Jonas' actual engagement with ecological matters, because it exposes some of the contradictions and complexities that are inherent to an exhibitionary logic that brings the display of living being and artworks together. Jonas is cognizant of these complexities, as she actively creates and utilises them. While Jonas attempts to make an artwork that reveals her preoccupations with ocean life, with her camera and projection, she also replicates the system of the zoological exhibit, which captures and objectifies sentient beings. At the same time, this system also distracts viewers from its own apparatus, that of the aquarium and that of the zoo. Thanks to a combination of pedagogical and entertainment framings (discourse, display, setting), the zoo attempts to suppress its commercial and penitentiary logics, to distract visitors from those aspects and turn their focus on the wonders of a rare encounter with an othered, fantastic yet real and living body. Through its theoretical framing and physical spatialisations, the zoo largely determines the manners in which visitors understand the place in which animals live. As Randy Malamud highlights, in *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault demonstrates how the vision of the subject equates to power over the subject".⁹⁷ While resting the operativity on this equation of dominance between visibility and surveillance, zoos disguise and blur these relationships of power in a system in which the confinement is naturalised while its visibility is minimised for the sake of entertainment, learning and conservation purposes. The zoo, as Michael Lawrence and Karen Lury propose, produces "an eroticised space in which private desires, thoughts and emotions are projected, confused and heightened by its apparent and sometimes precarious status as a safe place".⁹⁸ What this brief scene shows is how efficient at mesmerising and disguising the zoological apparatus is, so that an artist committed to animal life and environmental causes is still, to a certain extent, unable to avoid the seduction of the encounter with the animal, whose presence and body speak louder, even if for mere instants, than her situation. The wonders of the beluga

⁹⁷ Randy Malamud, "Introduction: Framed Animals", in *An Introduction to Animals in Visual Culture* (London: Palgrave, 2012), 7.

⁹⁸ Laura McMahon and Michael Lawrence, "Introduction", in *The Animal Life & the Moving Image* (London: British Film Institute and Palgrave, 2015), xi.

whale become as (if not more) important for the work, leading to the oblivion of the carceral regime in which she is forced to live.

The glass walls of the whale's tank reflect the environment surrounding her. The tank's materiality—at once transparent, translucent and reflective (“designed so that everyone can see”, like Graeme Davidson's description of the “reversed panoptical principle” of the crystal palace)—determines that the encounter with this animal, either directly in the aquarium or indirectly in the projection of the video shot at the aquarium, bears the reminder of its artificiality, which is inscribed in the same support that makes that moment possible. While containing and exhibiting the whale, the glass is also reflecting and mirroring the viewers (Jonas comprised) so that seeing the whale is seeing oneself on her and seeing her through one's ghostly shadow. Visitors are materially and spectrally inscribed onto the space that detains the animal. The whale is a shadow of herself, a ghostly representation of what she once was. Warner argues that “much of Jonas' imagery [...] takes up the question of future ghosts”, observing how generally the “creatures that flock and gather in multitudes have evoked ghosts in previous performances and installations by Joan Jonas, yet their appearance promises something besides death, as birds and bees are species that cooperate and reciprocate”.⁹⁹ Here, it is not a collective, swarming animal that is summoned by Jonas but an individual on her own, despite the gregarious characteristics of her kind.¹⁰⁰ This solitude contrasts with the artist's tendency to represent pack animals while it highlights even more the violence she is exposed to.

To observe this and other captive animals (in particular those behind reflective surfaces such as glass tanks and aquariums) is to accept to see (but also ignore) the human shadow cast upon them and perceive this shadow not as a mere reflection but also as a perceptive constraint. This touches upon Jonas' use of mirrors and reflective surfaces, as these aquarium glasses also function as mirrors. As philosopher Slavoj Žižek has argued when thinking about perception: “I myself am included in the picture constituted by me—it is this reflexive short circuit, this necessary redoubling of myself as standing both outside and inside my picture, that bears witness to my

⁹⁹ Warner, *Joan Jonas They Come to Us Without a Word*, 31.

¹⁰⁰ Greg O'Corry-Crowe, “Beluga Whale *Delphinapterus leucas*”, in *Encyclopedia of Marine Mammals* (William F. Perrin, Bernd Würsig and J.G.M. Thewissen, eds.) (Amsterdam; Boston, MA: Elsevier/Academic Press, 2009), 94–99.

“material existence””.¹⁰¹ This material existence, I argue, extends itself beyond the self of the perceptive subject, to the actual material constituent of the glass container. It takes some effort (an effort animal displays attempt to minimise or distract from) to look at such an animal in captivity without acknowledging the conditions that materially and immaterially inscribe themselves upon her and upon viewers. The materials configure the spaces but also determine the dynamics of power that are inherent to this situation. Media theorist Giuliana Bruno argues that “materiality is not a question of materials but rather concerns the substance of material relations”,¹⁰² a consideration that supports this reflection on how the material support that allows for the perception of these animals is the same that gives visibility to the ghosts that haunt them.

Writing about Jean Painlevé’s above-mentioned film *The Octopus*, James Leo Cahill notes how it “makes uncommonly explicit its use of aquariums as a medium of visibility and an epistemic object that brings together nature and culture [...] the clarity of the strange images shots in aquariums [...] emphasizes the artificial, experimental milieu that provided the conditions of possibility for the events captured in the film”.¹⁰³ By absorbing the surrounding space and visitors, the glass wall of the tank also attests to where the artist and her camera stand: they too are spectators, looking at the whale from the double frame that aquarium and camera create, two spatial impositions that limit the animal’s spatial range and make it permanently available and accessible. A third frame is later created when the images captured by Jonas (a captured, detained animal is permanently subjected to being captured by image-recording devices) are projected during the performance, as the screen becomes a second container, yet another space of transparency and exposure, onto which the first is contained, alongside visitors, artist and camera.

In terms of the correlation between materials and cultural conceptions, the glass that keeps and exhibits the whale is at once a protection and a display case as well as a material division that accentuates natureculture separate.¹⁰⁴ As in other cases discussed previously, by exhibiting and

¹⁰¹ Slavoj Žižek, “The Ticking Object”, in *The Parallax View* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 17.

¹⁰² Giuliana Bruno, “Introduction”, *Surface Encounters—Matters of Aesthetics, Materiality and Media* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 2.

¹⁰³ James Leo Cahill, “Neozoological Dramas”, in *Zoological Surrealism—The Nonhuman Cinema of Jean Painlevé* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press), 61.

¹⁰⁴ I am here adhering to Haraway’s definition of natureculture a concept that interrogates the social sciences and humanities’ dualistic groundings and that instead relies on inseparability of nature and culture for the definition of ecological relationships that are both biophysically and socially formed. On the subject, see Donna J. Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness*. Vol. 1 (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003).

making accessible while separating, the material supports of display reinforce the perception of a division that determines who stands where in the nature-culture divide. They attest to the important role of museums and other exhibitionary environments (such as zoological exhibits) in enforcing but also in naturalising such division.

In parallel, the projection canvas acts as another membrane that separates whale and visitors and establishes a distinction between an active and a passive engagement with the animal and with the apparatus that makes her accessible. The projection reinforces the distinction between the act of being close to the animal and the act of watching the animal as mediated by a video, entities which are not only materially but also temporally separated.

In all of this, the beluga whale, despite providing the subject and matter of the footage, has no agency. Besides being locked inside an aquarium, the animal is obliged to perform herself for spectators and camera and to be unknowingly transposed as a ghost to another kind of stage and environment, that of the theatre and the exhibition, where images of herself are projected as yet another version of the exhibitionary and theatrical event she has to fulfil with her own existence. In this sense, it is not simply the violence of captivity and forceful entertainment that Jonas is bringing to light but also the violence inherent to the illicit transposition of an animal: with her artistic gesture, the artist replicates the aquarium's capture, a framing and displacement of the animal that reinforces her captivity and her gradual death by exposure.

Yet, when addressing the ways in which exhibits act upon perception, Žižek proposes that “the difference between subject and object can also be expressed as the difference between two corresponding verbs, to subject (submit) oneself and to object (protest, oppose, create an obstacle). The subject's elementary, founding gesture is to subject itself [...] at its most radical the object is that which objects, that which disturbs the smooth running of things”.¹⁰⁵ This view offers a liberatory potential to the situation of the zoo, in which subjects that have been objectified still detain the potential to object, resist, disturb—less a material freedom than a phenomenal resistance. There will always be a blind spot, a reflexive interference.

Images of Captivity

¹⁰⁵ Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View*, 17.

Given the similar context of cinema's engagement with an individual, captive animal and how the ethics that revolve around this gesture are embedded in the mode in which this animal is portrayed, I would like to compare this scene of Jonas' performance with filmmaker Nicolas Philibert's documentary *Nénette* (2010), shot in the Parisian Ménagerie du Jardin des Plantes. Philibert's 70-minute film portrays Nénette, an orangutan who was taken to the French zoo in 1972 after being captured in the wilderness in Borneo when she was three years old. She has lived there ever since, the longest period known for an orangutan to remain in captivity. Philibert shot the film in front of Nénette's glass enclosure, often bringing the camera very close to her, offering close-ups of her body, eyes and lips. Some of his and Jonas' images depict similar gestures of observation and interaction of the animals, as when they look across the glass, touch it or when they press up their mouth against it. This use of a video camera to establish contact with an animal lying on the other side of a glass surface shared by Philibert and Jonas is worthy of further consideration for their common and diverging features.

Authors Laura McMahon and Michael Lawrence argue that in Philibert's film "*Nénette* is held captive—by the zoo, by the cinema and by the gaze".¹⁰⁶ Similarly, the beluga whale in Jonas' video is also held captive in these three instances, while also being exhibited performing her dual condition of being whale and being captive. In both cases, the orangutan and the whale are used to provide the illusion of the access, through their bodies, to their "natural, wild, original" selves and settings—respectively the Borneo jungle and the Arctic Ocean—through the zoological settings.

But while Philibert's film spends time with Nénette and presents viewers with long shots of the orangutan—documenting her gestures, expressions, movements but also offering a glimpse of the rhythm at which her life in the zoo unfolds—Jonas presents just a brief scene of the encounter; she barely stays with the whale. And while Philibert's film reproduces the sounds heard around Nénette's enclosure, including exchanges between visitors about the animal, Jonas overlays the scene with a different audio, which adds an alienating layer to the audiences' perception of the animal.

During the fleeting instant for which that the scene lasts, Jonas depicts a moment in which the

¹⁰⁶ McMahon and Lawrence, *The Animal Life*, 2.

whale is interacting with the glass (her mouth coming into contact with its surface, bent by the encounter with its hardness) and with a child who, on the other side the divide, looks at her and tries to touch her through the glass (the child's handprint becoming another ghost that will remain temporarily imprinted on the tank). Jonas documents this moment in which animal and child attempt to cross the surface that divides them and access a haptic experience that can never be fulfilled—for the material that allows them to encounter one another and to imagine they are sharing the same space is also the very thing that prevents them from concretely touching each other.

When the scene is over in Jonas' performance, the electric body of the large mammal is replaced by those of other marine creatures—fish, a manatee, seals, seahorses. This brief duration accentuates the relationship of spectacle and entertainment that is established between animal park visitors and the animals they visit. Randy Malamud questions the hypothetical didactic legitimacy of zoos by quoting a study published in Garry Marvin and Bob Mullan's 1987 book *Zoo Culture*, which reveals how zoo visitors "spend on average forty four seconds at each cage" to wonder "how much education can be going on in that time?".¹⁰⁷ In a similar manner, the brief appearance of the beluga in Jonas' performance also deserved to be questioned.

Sound and Voice

Contrary to how Warner identifies a flock pattern in Jonas' representative predilections (previously quoted), many of the animals featured in *Moving Off the Land II* are single individuals, despite the fact that many marine creatures are indeed gregarious. At the same time, the beluga whale is not alone: in *Moving Off the Land II* most animal scenes, both when filmed in aquariums and not, are short, fragmented and often overlaid with other images or actions projected and reflected upon them. As I have mentioned, the sounds of the environments in which they are observed cannot be heard; Jonas replaced them with a different audio—generally her own voice, reading a text or singing a song—but also with composer Ikue Mori's live sound work across the whole performance.¹⁰⁸

Having worked with significant male musicians (John Gibson, Ánde Somby, Florian Hecker or Jason

¹⁰⁷ Randy Malamud, *An Introduction to Animals in Visual Culture*, 122.

¹⁰⁸ Ikue Mori, (b. 1953), also known as Ikue Iie, is a drummer, electronic musician, composer and graphic designer who co-founded the No Wave band DNA together with musicians Arto Lindsay and Tim Wright.

Moran), this collaboration with a female composer in a work addressing environmental fragility in a direct way is particularly important. Mori's melodies, sometimes combined with field recordings of sea sounds (waves in particular) and sometimes performed on their own, establish a sense of rhythm and set the mood of the actions performed by Jonas, both on screen and on stage. A well-resolved moment is when Jonas, on stage, dressed in white, wearing a large yellow and black striped hat, interacts with the Jonas performing in nature in Cape Breton, where the beach, the woods and her own terrace can be seen. The sounds accompanying this moving scene of the artist spectrally haunting her other self (and the dog Ozu) are melodic and joyful, oscillating in a light tempo combined with light wave sounds.

This should not diminish the importance of discourse and narrative in Jonas' work and the role that her own voice plays in it, appearing either when she speaks and reads or when she sings and howls. Her voice—its rough, grave and steady tone, its “measured and flat” form, as Joan Simon describes it,¹⁰⁹ and its accent and cadence—is a central, characteristic feature of her work and an essential medium through which she conveys ideas, stories, songs and personae. Jonas' voice grounds her work; it makes it hers and assures that the various figures, stories and tones she evokes are hosted within her body. Jonas may be physically present during her performances or electrically captured during her videos, but it is through her voice that she reaches, touches and bewitches audiences, behaving like an electronic sorceress, as she has defined herself on various occasions.¹¹⁰

Even when assuming other characters, it is Jonas who speaks. She described the process when talking about how she gave voice to art historian Aby Warburg in *The Shape, the Scent, the Feel of Things*: “I never became Aby Warburg. But I did speak his text. [...] So while I represent Warburg,

¹⁰⁹ Simon, “Migration, Translation, Reanimation”, 89.

¹¹⁰ “I definitely believe in telepathy. I was always interested in people doing experiments like reading minds and so on, and I have always been interested in the idea of magic shows and fortune tellers. I always thought of myself as an electronic sorceress” in a 2003 interview with Hans Ulrich Obrist published in *Hans Ulrich Obrist Interviews: Volume 1* (Charles-Arsène-Henry, Shumon Basar, and Karen Marta, eds.) (Milan: Charta Books, 2010), 395–96. In the script of *Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy*, Jonas often refers to the “sorceress”, who “howls a duet with tape of Jonas howling like a dog while she checks herself out in the mirror”, clearly a doppelganger of the artist, as also attested by how the transformation takes place in front of the screen: “Organic Honey, changing identity, dresses in blue satin robe, black-and-white scarf/turban, mask of different personal. Electronic sorcery [...] High priestess laughs hysterically at her image for two minutes”. Performance script for *Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy*, in Douglas Crimp, *Joan Jonas Scripts and Descriptions*, 44-52.

I'm not playing Warburg at all".¹¹¹ With this position of hybridity and of gendered transformation, Jonas overcomes gendered and temporal bipolarization. She stands as both woman and man, present and past, body and imaginary. The unpredictability of such operation is reinforced by the fact that it happens live, as an event that allows for an ongoing reconstitution of herself as an assemblage of persons. Her gesture echoes Deleuze and Guattari's definition of becoming. "A becoming is not a correspondence between relations. But neither is it a resemblance, an imitation, or, at the limit, an identification. [...] We fall into a false alternative if we say that you either imitate or you are. What is real is the becoming itself, the block of becoming".¹¹² The real becoming of Jonas-Warburg, as she argues, is not a transformation of the artist into the art historian, but a system of allowing the art historian to act, appear and, first and foremost, speak through herself. As Jonas declared, through her voice she is never performing others but performing herself as another.¹¹³ Even when the voice appears in a disembodied form, as it is often the case throughout the performance (and clearly the case in the installation version of this and all the other works in which she speaks in absence), as well as with previous performances, this separation only highlights the unique character of her speech, for it is also recognisable when it is not being temporally and physically attached to her body.

When writing about *Mirror Piece II*, Simon argued that this separation recalls "the conventions of a ventriloquist, or of a medium or spiritualist calling up voices from another time and place".¹¹⁴ However, in a work with such a high degree of correspondence and dialogue between human and animal life, the separation of Jonas' body and voice creates a dualistic relationship between an "animal" and a "cultural" persona. The "animal" body of the artist interacts with the bodies of other animals projected on the large screen; it is voiceless because it lacks human language, exactly because she puts herself in the position of the animals, who do not speak like humans do.

¹¹¹ Interview in appendix.

¹¹² Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaux—Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Brian Massumi, trans.) (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 238.

¹¹³ "I know how important the voice is. When I first started speaking I didn't like my voice, so I practiced a lot. I would listen to it on tape, and would read a text over and over again until I got it right. When I performed *Lines in the Sand* at documenta 11, I intended to have a reader. But Astrid Klein, who managed the technical aspect of the performance, told me I had to read it. [...] in thinking of myself in relation to this material, I asked, how can I be the performer? I'm not H. D., but another woman in another time. I thought of myself as representing that kind of character. I wasn't playing either Helen or H. D.; I was playing myself as this particular female poet". Joan Jonas in "An Exchange between Joan Jonas, Susan Howe and Jeanne Heuving", http://www.asu.edu/pipercenter/how2journal/archive/online_archive/v2_3_2005/current/workbook/joans/exchange.htm (accessed 29.07.2021).

¹¹⁴ Simon, "Migration, Translation, Reanimation", 91.

The “cultural” voice speaks and shares textual references and ideas that the various sea creatures would not enounce. So here, rather than being the magical, ghostly figure described by Simon, the vehicle for Jonas’ transformation into a bird (as in *Merlo*) or the medium that allows her to make a howling duet with her dog (as in *Waltz*), is Jonas’ disembodied voice. Temporally and spatially detached from her own body, her voice is the human presence of Jonas on stage: a human that speaks through and behalf many other humans, sometimes (as when she goes to the pulpit to read) in the guise of a scientist, other times (as when the voice comes as a recording) in the guise of a haunting presence whose knowledge recognises, mourns and describes the effects of human action on ocean life.

But this voice can also weave an undifferentiated mode of being as multiple. Recalling Deleuze and Guattari’s conceptualisation of becoming as a process of reconfiguration through affects (being affected by as well as affecting others) rather than form, the voice of the artist may well become the voice of other figurations she summons through her performances. Neither woman nor animal, in the same manner as she is neither Jonas nor Warburg in *The Shape, the Scent, the Feel of Things*, Jonas’ voice is also transposed to another sort of existence, being projected and hence confronting the artist with the outside, an outside of her own body but also an outside of her human body. Barking, after all, has been a strategy of becoming animal that she adopted throughout her life. “She is still barking”, says Forti in the video work *Barking*. Becoming an aural, oral, auditive phenomenon.

At the same time, the complex aural dimension of the work further alienates the animals from the context in which they were filmed, incorporating them in a different register in which it is not their captivity but their participation in a sort of dream-like, poetic reading that is suggested. Despite this similarity of appearance with other animals that were filmed in marine parks (as mentioned, Jonas begins the performance by acknowledging all the aquariums in which she shot), the fact that she highlights the exceptionality of whales—how they are highly sentient beings and how they resemble humans—makes this quick scene even more worthy of attention.

Returning to the relationship between this scene and *Nénette*, its montage is also in striking contrast to Philibert’s film, despite it also being the depiction of an enclosed animal in a zoological garden from a close viewpoint. In spending time with *Nénette*, Philibert makes a portrait that

refuses “spectatorial mobility, mastery and consumption [opening] a different mode of relation, one marked by attention and consideration”.¹¹⁵ By contrast, the brevity of Jonas’ whale scene mirrors the speed at which many leisured encounters with zoo animals take place, as mentioned by Malamud. It may intend to challenge the supposedly scientific, educational and entertainment purpose of animal parks through the replication of the duration and viewpoint of such an encounter.

From a perspective that does not mimic the zoo context and instead looks at the present situation of environmental crisis, this scene may also allude to how whales are disappearing from the oceans and therefore to how inaccessible they are becoming to humans. Paradoxically, the advances of the observation of underwater life are, for the time being, inadvertently proportional to the available biodiversity, as the sea life population is decreasing due to anthropogenic factors. “Human hunting has reduced the world’s great-whale biomass by as much as eighty per cent”, observes author Amia Srinivasan.¹¹⁶ Aligned with the awareness of the responsibility for such a dramatic reduction, with these images Jonas may be suggesting that humans are not entitled to minimal or even any contact with this majestic animal. After all, as Srinivasan argues, “to be close to a whale, in the wild, not in a boat but in the water itself, is to encounter an embodied agency that exists, across every dimension, on a scale that swallows our own”.¹¹⁷ So what could be qualified as a humiliating condition, in which this animal is exposed to in an aquarium, should be diminished if not abolished. In this sense, Jonas is adopting the opposite strategy of Philibert: instead of closely looking at and staying with an animal to explore how they ought to be granted a better life, Jonas pictures the context of exhibition of captive animals, exposing (by exhibiting) the violence the exhibitionary apparatus exerts upon them. The fact that viewers should no longer be allowed to see a whale nor participate in this exercise of public denigration of a highly sentient mammal may subtly emerge and be registered by the audiences within the context of exposure to the work through this combination of factors.

When analysing her involvement with the interlinking feminist discourse of the 1970s, Jonas explained how “All of my work from maybe 1970 on referred to the feminist movement, but indirectly [...] I wasn’t interested in making political art, but from the very beginning I’ve always

¹¹⁵ McMahon and Lawrence, *The Animal Life & the Moving Image*, 8.

¹¹⁶ Amia Srinivasan, “Belly of the Beast”, in *The New Yorker* (August 24, 2020): 66.

¹¹⁷ Srinivasan, “Belly of the Beast”: 64.

been interested in how my work relates to the present situation”.¹¹⁸ In 2019, when invited to speak about her more recent body of work and its implication in ecology, Jonas declared: “Nature has always played an important part in my work. In recent years, the environmental situation has become more and more important to me and visible in my work, due to the increasing threats to our livelihoods and that of numerous other species”.¹¹⁹ Establishing a parallelism between Jonas’ oblique but important engagement with feminism during the 1960-70s and her commitment to ecology during the 2010-20s—two pressing struggles that characterise each moment respectively—helps to position and elucidate Jonas’ position in *Moving Off the Land II*. Pursuing a similar investigation of the role women played as symbolic, spiritual, mystical figures in history and culture, which Jonas expresses plastically through her work, Jonas sets out to search for “the role the ocean has played for cultures throughout history as a totemic, spiritual, and ecological touchstone”.¹²⁰ The figuration and representation of ocean life, biodiversity and the ocean’s threatened ecology is set under a veil of poetic and artistic subjectivity.

At the same time, it is moved by a form of curiosity for the characteristics of animal life. Speaking about her collaboration with marine biologist David Gruber, Jonas explained how his “research is fascinating, and I got particularly interested in it because of his focus on fish perception. [...] So when I read that David is concerned with how fish perceive, and how he is developing ways for us to experience the phenomenon of biofluorescence in the deep sea, I was immediately drawn to his work”.¹²¹ In a series of performances and videos from the 1970s, Jonas explored the tropes of female representation and imaginary. She played the roles of women, either interpreting or inventing characters (Hilda Doolittle, Helen of Troy, Organic Honey) or being herself (*Mirror Piece*), which she created wearing masks and costumes. These female personae both confirmed and contradicted the expectations assigned to their imagery and to notions of femininity at large. As she declared:

Organic Honey is a character that I created with masks and costumes—a female persona that was androgynous also, and I shifted back and forth in the piece in these disguises. And from that time on and until recently, I really focused on playing roles of women. In *Lines in the Sand* I was interested in the

¹¹⁸ Quoted from <http://www.artnet.com/artists/joan-jonas/> (accessed 12.07.2021).

¹¹⁹ Jonas, “The Process Behind Joan Jonas’ New Oceanic Work”, 2019.

¹²⁰ Stefanie Hessler, “Joan Jonas: *Moving Off the Land II*”, in *Joan Jonas Moving Off the Land II* (Madrid, Thyssen-Bornemisza, 2020), 5.

¹²¹ Jonas, “The Process Behind Joan Jonas’ New Oceanic Work”, 2019.

poet H. D., Hilda Doolittle, who wrote *Helen in Egypt*, a version of the Trojan War with Helen of Troy as its main character. I didn't want to play H. D. or Helen, but their personas and their presence inspired the subject matter of the work. While I didn't directly represent them, there were many references. So it's always about disguises and role-play. When I begin to work on a performance, I always try to imagine who or what I represent, and I often just find a costume—a dress, a hat—to give me an identity.¹²²

Aligned with these modalities of transformation and metamorphosis of the self, Jonas now seems to be interested in a similar exercise of role-playing various figures that constitute the maritime, oceanic imaginary, disguising and role-playing herself as lobster, fisher or mermaid. With these gestures, she puts herself in the place of the other—that which, similarly to the role women had in society in the 1970s, is marginalised and calls for emancipation. These ritualistic transpositions combine homage with sensibilisation, education with awe, dreamscapes with empirical observations, ritual with reality. The audience is then capable to grab and take these elsewhere, to a place where poetry, lyricism and activism join efforts in a possible transformation of gestures and attitudes.

Complex of Exhibition

Yet, the whale remains a mesmerizing prisoner. The fleeting images of the beluga interacting with the child may cause both pain and pleasure, grief and excitement, contempt and attraction. The tension between the whale's enclosed condition and her fascinating body—white, soft, bendable and with an incredible torpedo-like shape—and face (yes, face, contrary to Levinas' anthropocentric reduction of the face to humankind)—at once expressive and expressionless, funny and bizarre, familiar and uncanny—is difficult to resolve. This difficulty largely emanates from a spatial conundrum, impossible to resolve because relying on a principle of contradiction: to exhibit is to detain.

¹²² Interview in appendix. H.D. was also a film critic for a time she wrote the book. Often described as an epic poem, *Lines in the Sand's* structure resembles that of a film, borrowing tropes from films, with intertitles framing each scene as it moves through. This relationship between writing/poetry and film/performance might have also attracted Jonas to the book.

I thank Katrina Black for pointing out this fact.

On this topic, it is worth consider cultural theorist Tony Bennett's conceptualisation of the "Exhibitionary Complex", which, he argues, consists in the exhibitionary apparatus' incorporation of the principles of the panopticon "together with those of the panorama, forming a technology of vision which served not to atomize and disperse the crowd but to regulate it".¹²³ I would propose its expansion to encompass the description of a set of drives that are aligned with the descriptions of patterns of emotions, perceptions and desires arranged around a common propensity. Therefore here, the Exhibitionary Complex is used to describe the tension of intentions and infrastructures at the core of the exhibitionary paradox of the zoological display. The Exhibitionary Complex serves at once to maximise the access to an extraordinary animal, to minimise the awareness of the carceral device it relies upon and to normalise both. This triangulation of intentions, well exposed during this moment of Jonas' performance, reverberates with the discussion in the introduction to the thesis concerning Foucault's taxonomy of modern institutions of confinement and control. In this regard, both art historian Douglas Crimp and Bennett provide important contributions to expand Foucault's field of research towards the exhibitionary apparatus. Crimp argues that "there is another institution of confinement ripe for analysis in Foucault's terms—the museum—and another discipline—art history".¹²⁴

Adding to this reflection on the exhibitionary apparatus' participation in the construction of the modern technologies of surveillance and vision, the zoological display (zoos and aquaria) takes Foucault's concepts beyond their anthropocentric realm. Indeed, the zoo is a site where the exhibitionary, the penitentiary and the authoritarian regime meet. It accumulates Foucault's interest in the confinement of those society deemed threatening with the display of the rare, the precious, the fragile and the perilous in virtue of stability and order. Continuing to think with the beluga whale, close to her glass tank, it is interesting to establish a parallel with Graeme Davidson's conceptualisation of the crystal palace, and how it "reversed the panoptical principle by fixing the eyes of the multitude upon an assemblage of glamorous commodities. The Panopticon was designed so that everyone could be seen; the Crystal Palace was designed so that everyone could see".¹²⁵ By focusing her (and the viewers' gaze) upon this whale in an aquarium

¹²³ Tony Bennett, "The Exhibitionary Complex", in *new formations* (No. 4, Spring 1988), 73-102. Quote from page 81.

¹²⁴ Douglas Crimp, "On the museum's ruins", in Hal Foster (ed.), *The Anti-Aesthetic; Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Washington: Bay Press, 1985), 45.

¹²⁵ Graeme Davidson, "Exhibitions", in *Australian Cultural History* no. 2 (1982/3), Canberra: Australian Academy of the Humanities and the History of Ideas Unit, A.N.U., 7.

(whose logic of transparency and exhibition echoes that of Davidson's description of the crystal palace) and subsequently transposing such experiences of observation onto an exhibition and theatrical space, Jonas is not merely illustrating this situation. She is also complementing and complexifying these reflections on the genealogies, legitimisations and traditions of the dualisms between the visibility and invisibility, submission and order, death and life of confinement and spectacle.

Previously, Jonas had asked viewers to take the whale seriously, to acknowledge the biological kinship between whales and humans; how the whale, like them, is a mammal. If followed, this request of attunement, recalling Despret's use of the term, with the whale makes her carceral condition particularly visible and troubling, as it leads the way for viewers to consider the double-sided function of the aquarium, which tries to enhance a bond while obliterating an architectonic and exhibitionary apparatus of captivity. By capturing the whale inside an aquarium and representing it through a projection, the whale becomes a double captive, once in the aquarium and twice in the screen. With such an operation, Jonas highlights this condition and exposes some of the characteristics of the device of captivity in which the whale finds herself. She does so by reinforcing the aquarium's one-way optics and transposing it into a video projection in which it is obvious that the spectators are seeing without being seen and are granted permanent access to the whale, who is always exhibited, exposed and visible, a commodity, a prop, a décor and a performer, all at once.

Boxed Sea

As mentioned above, this fragment reveals how the modes of exhibition of the aquarium not only expand the carceral apparatus but also magnify and distort it. The aquarium offers the illusion of access to the sea while it actually presents the opposite of the sea, which is not transparent, accessible nor penetrable. While pretending to organise a sample of the sea—fragmented but diversified, partial but rich, participatory but alienating—the aquarium builds a fiction that informs a pictorial imaginary of the sea, confirming and reinforcing visual expectations and common places informed by long-standing traditions of representation and display of underwater life. The animals the aquarium exhibits, reify and decorate such composition in ways that make it more and less real; more real because they attest, with their own existence and movement, to the truth and liveability of this aquatic mise-en-scene; less real because they fail to

correspond to a spontaneous density and composition of underwater life, especially in the present times, where the seas have been emptied out of life.

But unlike the carceral apparatus—which is opaque, inaccessible, invisible to the outside—this other Foucauldian spectacle of incarceration, pain and forced labour, that is the aquarium also drastically restricts the animals' movements in space, engendering “biopolitical techniques to render their bodies more productive and at the same time more docile”¹²⁶ by relying on transparency, accessibility and visibility. It also follows the three features of the instances of confinement identified by Foucault—intervention in the spatial distribution of individuals, intervention in their individual conduct and reinforcement of a vertical apparatus of power¹²⁷—now applied to animals instead of individuals.

But in addition to this condition of visible public confinement and of biopolitical subjugation of the confined-exhibited individuals, the aquarium's mode of detainment is not temporal and contingent, but permanent. It is not aimed at merely displacing the detained subjects in the context from which they were extracted but at assuring their longevity and eventually reproduction within a panoptic model of life where they are subjected to a permanent and repetitive accessibility. The zoo, like other instances of confinement, transforms animals, but not as a form of regeneration; on the contrary, it transforms animals to the point of rendering them incapable of returning to and surviving in their original habitats.¹²⁸

If Foucault analysed the transition in human organisation, between the 18th century up to the 1970s, from a culture of punitive spectacle to the carceral society, zoological gardens and other systems of exhibition of imprisoned wildlife widen the penitentiary culture towards an organisation of incarcerated spectacle that is devoid of regenerative aims: just as the prison is a way of creating a different kind of policing, so the zoo also creates the illusion of being a place of conservation, hence rehabilitation, that will heal natural society. Its logics rely on a mechanism of normalisation, not of nature itself but of access to nature, facilitated by a combination of science, spectacle, entertainment and consumption through a quantitative accumulation of

¹²⁶ Alex Mackintosh, “Foucault's Menagerie: Cock Fighting, Bear Baiting, and the Genealogy of Human- Animal Power”, in *Foucault and Animals* (Matthew Chrulew, ed.) (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2017), 180.

¹²⁷ Michel Foucault, “The Punitive Society”, in *Ethics Subjectivity and Truth—Essential Works of Foucault 1954-84 Volume One* (Paul Rabinow, ed.) (London: Penguin Books, 2000), 30-31.

¹²⁸ As in the human penal apparatuses studied by Foucault, the regenerative capacity is often a legitimising framework that doesn't necessarily fulfils the logic it purports to enforce.

“experiences”.

This spectacle of capture and incarceration is also observed during the moments in which Jonas appears on stage holding large paper circles with which she chases, frames and captures the images of the fish within them, giving the illusion of containing the fish within her own, rudimentary and temporary image-capture devices. [Fig. III.26] And while no harm is done to these fish-images, the harm that fishing does to fish stocks potentially emerges through the observation of this gesture of ambiguous fragility (an old artist and old fisher with rudimentary, traditional fishing methods) and desire (captured as film and captured twice as performance). The question that remains unanswered is not which and how fish were harmed while shooting those scenes (taking also into account how the fish were made accessible by the exhibitionary apparatuses) but which and how many present and future fish may be saved through this artistic gesture of preoccupation with marine life.

Projections and Reflections

The fact that throughout the performance Jonas refers to the peculiar characteristics of whales and to their similarities with humans reinforces the possibility of audiences projecting themselves into the actual animals. Taking the work’s reception into account, Jonas’ performance and exhibition may lead visitors to experience a sense of unease, conveyed by this awareness of a parallelism between humans and whales, beings at once familiar and alien. An important yet ambivalent awareness.

Dialoguing with the writings of Konrad Lorenz (which, as discussed earlier was an important reference for Forti), philosopher Mary Midgley problematises anthropomorphism when considered as the mere “projection” of the feelings and motives of one species onto the other. Yet anthropomorphism need not only be an optical relation. John Ó Maoilearca describes anthropomorphism as a process involving the “transformation of animals and inanimate objects into an image of the human”.¹²⁹ In both cases, the terms “projection” and “image” pertain to the realm of the visual and perceptive. Yet, when complemented by what Midgley defines as “a full, detailed and unsentimental knowledge of the species’ behaviour”, anthropomorphism bears an important potential for sympathy for all life forms beyond mere projection. This sympathy may

¹²⁹ John Ó Maoilearca, *All Thoughts are Equal* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 31.

still encounter some barriers, which, she argues, are similar to those between different human individuals (young and old, male and female, rich and poor, for instance). Yet these should not “possibly mean that any attempt to reach out beyond the familiar lit circle of our own lives is doomed, delusive, or sentimental”.¹³⁰ This sense of familiarity, therefore, may allow audiences to imagine (a term that, while being close to projection and image, opens up a speculative, active and creative disposition) what it means to be a whale or another animal in a zoological exhibit, and to imagine how it must be to live an incarcerated life.

However, to large extent, a whale will always remain a stranger. Whales live in water, an environment humans left behind in evolution and to which they can only return through artificial or definitive means (breathing apparatuses for the former, death for the latter) that operate a radical separation from the environment where humans can live. In that sense, the whale is the other: that which the human can never fully reach and coexist with. At the same time, in their being alien, a familiarity principle prevails over strangeness. Having speculated about the distance between humans and marine creatures, Vilém Flusser argues that “Disgust recapitulates phylogenesis [...] the more disgusting something is, the further removed it is from humans on the phylogenetic tree”.¹³¹ A whale may rarely cause disgust, even if its situation does, when fully acknowledged. This situation reveals a set of contradictions that outline the complex positioning of the zoo between exhibition and disguise, vision and oblivion, acknowledgement and suppression. The whale can be seen because it is confined. If one considers the fact that this animal has been separated and deprived of the environment it is part of, such confinement may cause distress and disgust.

Yet, while exhibiting the whale, the zoo’s logic of exhibition induces viewers to willingly forget and ignore that they are imprisoned animals. What the zoo presents is not a captive animal but a “normal” animal: a representative that fits the norm of what such an individual should look like if it were in its original environment. And while the zoo guarantees safety—“a safe place in which many dangerous, “wild” animals may be encountered without physical risk”¹³²—it is also a space

¹³⁰ Mary Midgley, *Beast and Man* [1978] (London: Routledge, 1995), 336-38.

¹³¹ Vilém Flusser and Louis Bec, *Vampyrotheuthis Infernalis* [1987] (London and Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 11.

¹³² Michael Lawrence and Karen Lury, “Introduction: Images of Exhibition and Encounter”, in *The Zoo and Screen Media*, xi.

that “allows for the active fantasy of impossible relationships and for the playing of messy desires and hybrid identities”¹³³ for the “perverse spectatorial benefit that people accrue when animals are separated from their worlds”.¹³⁴ The attempts to propitiate this enjoyment and benefit have changed over history. As Randy Malamud argues, “as people expressed feelings of guilt about seeing animals in prison, zoos began to prettify the enclosures, largely to alleviate the spectator’s discomfort—not the prisoner’s”.¹³⁵ I would also argue that this embellishment made to alleviate discomfort is achieved by inducing oblivion. It does this through forgetting that the animals are held captive and alienated from their environments and so that visitors interested in having a non-sadistic experience of pleasure may engage with them. By inserting the whale in a regime of spectacle and scientific legitimisation where her condition is authorised and normalised, the zoological display allows minimises the perception of the confinement of the whale, it allows it to be ignored. The zoological display allows viewers to abstract themselves from the context in which the viewing is taking place and ignore the suffering the animals are being exposed to—be it in virtual of the capture and confinement as such and/or their exhibition itself. Distraction is induced through the semi-active reinforcement of a zoological carceral culture. In the beluga whale scene, Jonas destabilises this system. The animal’s condition has the potential to become one of strangeness and discomfort, calling for the revision of the exhibitionary paradigm of animal-human relationship.

In its ambivalence, this sequence of beluga (and, to a large extent, also the whale) is there to accompany Jonas’ words, gestures and sounds. It offers an alluring and hypnotic surface of light, colour and movement. The whale—now no longer a “real” whale in an aquarium but an image of a whale projected on a screen in a museum—becomes little more than a surface decoration, a flat figure in motion, a fragment of a performance. “The play on surface, which characterizes the history of ornament, is an expression of modern visuality, and surface luminosity can be said to lie at the very aesthetic roots of modernity. In our times, several projections of past and present materialize on this surface-screen”, argues Bruno.¹³⁶ This description is well-fitted to reveal what happens in the interplay between allure, surface and duration as well between past and present, or memory and history—all of which are at stake in the short scene featuring the beluga whale.

¹³³ Lawrence and Lury, *The Zoo and Screen Media*, xi.

¹³⁴ Malamud, *An Introduction to Animals in Visual Culture*, 122.

¹³⁵ Malamud, *An Introduction to Animals in Visual Culture*, 121.

¹³⁶ Bruno, *Surface Encounters*, 6.

The ghost of this electric whale is diluted onto the many other creatures that appear throughout the duration of the performance. The ghost haunts and moves because it is at once surreal and too concrete. They affect and inform. "Performance is a path toward knowledge and knowledge is shared with an audience".¹³⁷

Correspondences

Signalling her move to transition to another topic, when the whale footage is interrupted, Jonas traverses the stage and makes a large ink drawing of a manta ray on a white sheet of paper turned towards the audience. Later, other drawings will follow: fish drawn live while footage shows the video of Jonas drawing more fish on a long scroll by the beach, and a large fish drawing projected onto a group of four children who, dressed in white, are walking. At the same time, Jonas reads a ritualistic litany of 72 marine animals, as if calling them to the stage. These include lungfish, shark, manta ray, shrimp, turtle, coral, mackerel, starfish, moon jelly or manatee.

Simultaneously, the artist's disembodied voice can be heard. It speaks about manta rays and other fish: how certain marine animals respond to mirror tests, how they think and feel, use tools, react to fear; how groupers like to be petted, moray eels to cuddle with divers and sharks belly-rubbed by those they trust. The paradox between how the artist documents a whale kept in an aquarium for entertainment purposes (and the way she makes no reference to the violence inherent to this situation) and the enumeration of scientific anecdotes that attest marine animals' sense of self and emotional connection to humans is striking. The clash happens between the images presented and the words spoken and triggers a sense of ambivalence. At the same time, it makes evident how the apparatus of the zoo flattens critical responses to it, even those of an artist truly interested and influenced by animals as Jonas. The framing offered by these spaces legitimate the concordance of the presentation of a whale locked in an aquarium and the highlighting of the unique characteristics of animals, as if by being on display, this whale no longer participated in such a group of sentient beings.

Jonas often pairs herself, through her posture and movement, with the creatures she portrays in video or describes in words. Sometimes the frontier between performing with and performing as is hard to establish or clarify, the two being blurred in sequences in which the artist is performing

¹³⁷ Steinman, "The Knowing Body", vii.

both with and as the animal that is projected. Following the beluga whale scene, the first animal Jonas performs with and as is a blue lobster. [Fig. III.27] While the artist's recorded voice narrates various episodes of animal sentience and cognition, her slender and aged body, turned towards the screen, follows the movement of the lobster, her arms open wide in correspondence with the lobster's many legs. Jonas follows the crustacean's movement on screen, generating a correspondence between the two bodies by superimposing her body onto that of the animal, camouflaging herself through this interplay of opacity and transparency. The lobster's images are projected onto Jonas' body and the narrow space that is created in their closeness is where the shade of the artist emerges, this time projected onto the lobster's body and becoming a sort of in-between entity, human-shaped but belonging to the domain of the projected, and materially closer to the bodies of the animals projected on the screen. The whole performance relies on a sequence of short snippets and, like most other moments in the work, the lobster scene only lasts a couple of minutes. At the end, Jonas stands still, facing the audience. She creates a moment of suspension in which the lobster she still incarnates is also the artist as a human, who faces (the face of the animal, again) at the public and introduces for the first time her environmental concerns, this time not by speaking but through a recorded version of her voice, as if her real body was still in the realm of the lobster and was therefore incapable of talking. "We have driven many charismatic mammalian species to a point where they are in peril of extinction. And so it is with many magnificent fish species like cod, swordfish, the Atlantic halibut and the scalloped hammerhead shark [...] I'm hopeful that perceptions will change and we'll show them more mercy. The simplest way to help fishes is to reduce our consumption of them".¹³⁸ Jonas makes hers the words of marine biologist Jonathan Balcombe in a declaration reinforced by how she is also incarnating a "charismatic species".

Moving Off the Land II is traversed by moments in which Jonas establishes a parallelism between humans and other animals, which are expressed by words (as in the above-mentioned description of certain animal features that humans recognise as a manifestation of intelligence, affect or beauty, what Balcombe calls "charisma") and gestures (as when the artist uses her body to double the animals' movement). The tension between the two systems of figuration and relationality is important to understand Jonas' engagement with nature and, in this case, with ocean life. In order

¹³⁸ Jonathan Balcombe, "Fishes Have Feelings, Too", in *The New York Times* (14 May, 2016), https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/15/opinion/fishes-have-feelings-too.html?_r=0 (accessed 29.09.2020).

to do so, I will return to the question of anthropomorphism.

But anthropomorphism can easily become a demonstration of anthropocentrism (which Tim Ingold defines as “an attitude which values all things non-human—all inanimate and animate components of the environment barring other people—solely as instrumental means to the realisation of exclusively human ends”¹³⁹) that validates a presumed superiority of humans over other life forms. Lorraine Daston describes this correlation by explaining how “anthropomorphism became fatally linked to anthropocentrism, although there is no necessary link between the two: both were indicted as evidence of a narrow-minded, self-centred assumption that one’s own perspective was in some way privileged”.¹⁴⁰ An effect of such an assumption is, according to Jonathan Burt, the transformation of the history of animals into what he calls the “history of the disappearance” of animals (in the sense of extinction and what he calls “effacement”, their limitation to a human framework). Burt’s words bring to mind the beluga whale footage as well as how Jonas covers the bodies of animals with her own body, ambiguously appropriating and (literally) incorporating their images. As Burt argues, “the history of animal representation is limited to a human framework or where the animals are depicted as if they were quasi-human [...] In such instances, the animal is overlaid with metaphors of human characteristics or becomes the bearer of purely human concerns”.¹⁴¹

It is worth considering how Jonas’ attempt to find a system of poetic embodiment and figuration extrapolates this logic. Anthropomorphism is also a necessary system of relations, a frail and deceiving one for sure, but also a propensity that comes out of a necessity. John Berger historically situated this position by observing that “until the nineteenth century, however, anthropomorphism was integral to the relation between man and animal and was an expression of their proximity”,¹⁴² this despite, as Daston argued, anthropomorphism also being “a theological sin [when used to compare humans not with animals but with divinities] long before it became a

¹³⁹ Tim Ingold, “Dwelling”, in *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 218.

¹⁴⁰ Lorraine Daston, “Intelligences—Angelic, Animal, Human”, in *Thinking with Animals: New Perspectives on Anthropomorphism* (Lorraine Daston and Gregg Mitman, eds.) (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 52-53.

¹⁴¹ Jonathan Burt, “The Illumination of the Animal Kingdom: The Role of Light and Electricity in Animal Representation”, in *Society & Animals* 9:3 (2001) © Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden, 2001: 204.

¹⁴² John Berger, “Why Look at Animals” (1977), in *About Looking* (London: Writers and Readers, 1980); reprinted as John Berger, *Why Look at Animals?* (London: Penguin Books, 2009) 11.

scientific one”.¹⁴³ Anthropomorphism therefore lies in a complex intersection between being a danger, a demonstration of human arrogance and a necessary attempt to get closer to other life forms and to “understand what it would be like to be nonhuman”.¹⁴⁴ Anthropomorphism may well be a vice, a sin, a univocal road to anthropocentrism. Yet it may also offer a possibility of bypassing a schismatic logic of species divide. By attempting to understand, feel and project oneself into an other, I may learn to respect and care for the other. I may be able to speak and stand on behalf of them, in an intersectional manner, beyond a logic of privilege, and to build alliances, successfully bypassing the phenomenon Sigmund Freud called the murderous “narcissism of minor differences” (the assumption that minor differences between individuals otherwise alike provide the ground for strangeness and hostility).¹⁴⁵

Specular Fabulation

Jonas’ work, in its fragility and courage, stands in this position of ambiguity and conflict. Fragility because in certain instances it reinforces anthropocentrism, while attempting to highlight the exceptionality of other animals (as when the artist borrows textual references that effectively compare animal and human features, justifying the former’s qualities by their similarity with the latter). Courage because it forces such comparative, verbal logic to co-exist with a different approach, one that both relies on and advances art as an equally valid tool for knowledge, experience and awareness and proposes a system of “specular fabulation”, in which the artist gives voice, body and expression to animal life, thus generating an archive, memory and presence of those that have not been entitled to it.

The concept of “specular fabulation” proposed here to describe Jonas’ practice is inspired by Saidiya Hartman’s method of critical fabulation. Hartman borrows Mieke Bal’s conceptualisation of the fabula as “a series of logically and chronologically related events that are caused and experienced by actors. An event is a transition from one state to another. Actors are agents that perform actions. (They are not necessarily human.) To act is to cause or experience an event”.¹⁴⁶ She uses this idea to advocate for the possibility of shifting the sequences and points of view of

¹⁴³ Daston, “Intelligences”, 39.

¹⁴⁴ Daston, “Intelligences”, 38.

¹⁴⁵ Sigmund Freud, (1918a) “The taboo of virginity—Contributions to the Psychology of Love III”, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* Vol. XI, (James Strachey trans.) (London: the Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1958), 199.

¹⁴⁶ Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 7.

the agents that constitute history (especially those whose experiences were not allowed to belong to history) and challenge authorised versions to propose alternative narratives and outcomes. As Hartman explains, “by throwing into crisis ‘what happened when’ and by exploiting the ‘transparency of sources’ as fictions of history, I wanted to make visible the production of disposable lives”.¹⁴⁷ Hartman’s research concerns the archives and history of Black people (in particular those engaged in the Atlantic slave trade). A parallel narrative and imagination of nonhuman lives finds legitimacy in how the exploitation of people arose (to a different degree and kind) from an exploitative and dominant relationship to animals. As Bénédicte Boisseron argues, “the black-animal subtext is deeply ingrained in the cultural genetics of the global north, an inherited condition informed by a shared history of slavery and colonization”.¹⁴⁸ Echoing Hartman’s efforts to recreate and imagine the lives of the invisible, dispossessed and subaltern, Jonas’ operations of speculative fabulation can be read also as a giving back to the marginalised beings she inhabits and depicts their “autonomous and beautiful lives, allowing them to escape the new forms of servitude awaiting them, and to live as if they were free”.¹⁴⁹

It would be inadequate to expect Jonas to directly address the consequences of centuries of an anthropogenic relationship to nature and the western historical traditions (comprising those cultural and artistic traditions) that legitimised the othering of nature and of those whose life was considered “too” close to nature. Jonas’ art is as equally implicated in philosophical and scientific accuracy as it is in fantasy and creativity, and her expressive modes are often oblique, non-linear and allegorical. It is precisely because her work often explores the depth of imagination, being located in a genealogy that also revisits the methodologies, interests and narrative traditions of Surrealism, that she has engendered important investigations and expressions of the rational, emotional and aesthetic possibilities of other minds and bodies.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ Saidiya Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts”, in *Small Axe*, Number 26 (Volume 12, Number 2, June 2008): 11.

¹⁴⁸ Bénédicte Boisseron, *Afro-dog: Blackness and the Animal Question* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), ix.

¹⁴⁹ Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* (London: Serpent’s Tail, 2019), xiii.

¹⁵⁰ See, for instance, Jonas’ declaration on the influence of surrealism in her work: “Surrealism—the idea of putting two different things together—is a big influence. John Cage liberated all of us to take chance—and chances—to connect things. I began using collage and montage, the way experimental film, and early film in general, cut images together to juxtapose them. I started out with very simple things; the mirror pieces were minimal. Then when I later brought in other elements like video, the technology provided a different space in time—one of simultaneity, where more than one idea would be going on at once. The work got even more complex when I started using text, which was another learning process, and not altogether successful every time. Occasionally, it got too complex, too fragmented, too cluttered. But now, after many years of working with video, then installation- performances, I can take more chances putting things together. [...] It takes a long time to get

Jonas' method of speculative fabulation becomes a system through which she activates her curiosity and engagement in dialogue with others. Others as other animals but also as other realms beyond art. By merging knowledge traditions and viewpoints that rarely meet, she triggers new exchanges and makes them visible. Jonas' speculative fabulation therefore accommodates the viewpoints and opinions of science, for which she finds space within this work, while leading them to be reshaped according to her own artistic practice, which inform her gestures of learning and participating in the world.

In a similar manner to how there are two or three Jonases whose actions complement and conflict with one another (that tension between complementarity and conflict being an essential feature of her practice since some of her very early works), the various layers in which the work exists (which she clearly defines in her performance scripts as separate yet complementary entities) provide parallel but also contradictory ways of making sense (or not making sense) of what is being presented. Another tension that emerges is that between Jonas' ethics and aesthetics: between the evocative strength of her unique poetics and the expressed desire to relate to the ocean from a standpoint that conceives of it as more than a mere figure of spiritual and aesthetic awe. If the texts Jonas reads during the performance denote a preponderance of anthropomorphic perspectives (in which animal and human features are compared and animal features are highlighted due to their remarkable likeness to human ones), the gestures, sounds and other expressive means adopted by the artist often follow a different logic and operate according to a different kind of register. With her body and gestures, Jonas' moves off the more straightforward anthropomorphic reasonings that she reads, borrowing from texts that blur the divisions between "harder" scientific approaches focused on psychobiological groundings and more interpretative methods inherited from the humanities (and their focus on human history and culture). Her deeper engagement with marine life emerges exactly beyond the words that feature in the performance. It is also beyond words that Jonas convincingly advocates for an awareness of other animals that does not consider empathy or sympathy as preconditions for environmental and moral duty (since they limit action to a small group of "charismatic" animals) and instead is curious about the manners in which these beings might manifest themselves beyond what science and the humanities know.

a performance to the point where I think it works, and often it doesn't work quite the way I thought. So I'm always taking a chance". In *Joan Jonas* (2018), 122.

It is through these non-textual features that Jonas' curiosity for nature and interest in ocean ecology are expressed in *Moving Of the Land II*. In complementarity with her voice and through her body, she explores what Lorraine Daston has defined as "the limits of one's own intellect, emotions, and experience".¹⁵¹ Imagination becomes a tool to grasp other existences and intellects and to express how sentient life may exist beyond a human understanding of it.

"Us" Fish

In terms of content, in *Moving Off the Land II*, what Jonas voice says is both descriptive ("Under water that was clear as glass the pool was carpeted with green sponge. Gray patches of sea squirts glistened on the ceiling and colonies of soft coral were a pale apricot colour") and prescriptive ("As the oceanographer Sylvia Earle, who, like me, no longer eats fish, says: "The ocean has given us so much for so long; it's time for us to return the favor"). In this oscillation, Jonas expresses a more straightforward environmentalist agenda than in other previous works of hers.

Returning to the podium, Jonas also returns to Rachel Carson's *The Edge of the Sea*. This is contrasted by Jonas' transformation, echoing the words that describe a community of beings traversed by a sea water-like substance. She reads: "Fish, amphibian, and reptile, warm-blooded bird and mammal—each of us carries in our veins a salty stream in which the elements sodium, potassium, and calcium are combined in almost the same proportions as in sea water". The screen shows footage of the artist swimming in shallow waters wearing a red polka-dot dress. On stage, an assistant hands her a hat-wig made of an enmeshment of tiny yellow lights, which she wears, a gesture that begins a process of transformation that happens in front of the audience, which Jonas often adopts. [Fig. III.28] Simon describes Jonas' method of openly sharing with her audience the transformation she is going through, in which the interplay between what is seen and what is hidden is upturned "one that reveals rather than conceals the making of her illusions".¹⁵² Stretching the possibilities of her being sorceress, Jonas turns around the basic logic of the procedure of magic, in which the trick is hidden from the audience, to instead incorporate it into the performance, as though conceptually reflecting upon the nature of magic-making while showing that even through this disclosure, the magic is still there. This décor of wearable head

¹⁵¹ Daston, "Intelligences", 52.

¹⁵² Simon, "Underneath", in *In the Shadow a Shadow*, 63.

lights is a novelty that further enriches Jonas' vast repertoire of props and costumes, further showing how, over time, the relationship to her own body and theatrical persona has changed: her investigations have gradually been less about her own physicality than about the many animal-human-mythical selves she may assume.

Jonas' above-mentioned declaration of ambiguous biological affinity (who is this "us"? Us humans? Us the enumerated animals? Us living creatures?) echoes Astrida Neimanis' conceptualisation of *Bodies of Water* in which she dwells on the ambivalent significance of a "we" as both a unifier and divisive term in which anthropocentrism may be reinforced or diluted. Neimanis acknowledges this limit while dialoguing with other feminist authors. "The problem was that we did not know whom we meant when we said 'we'", she writes, quoting Adrienne Rich.¹⁵³ Assuming a position that challenges an anthropocentric worldview and includes the human (body) as one of multiple possible sites of experience and embodiment, Neimanis argues that "For us humans, the flow and flush of waters sustain our own bodies, but also connect them to other bodies, to other worlds beyond our human selves. [...] Referring to the always hybrid assemblage of matters that constitutes watery embodiment, we might say that we have never been (only) human".¹⁵⁴

From this perspective, Jonas' *Moving Off the Land II* may be considered an experimentation with the dilution of the "we" that, while being rooted in a lifetime of artistic engagement with the doubling and projection of the self, assumes a particular relevance here, given how she combines science and art to feel, comprehend and make visible the endangered oceanic life. She complements and complexifies genealogies, legitimitisations and traditions in which the visible and the invisible, confinement and spectacle, human and animal life, submission and classification appear deeply enmeshed in culture.

Jonas performs as and engages with multiple beings (animals, but also mermaids and fishers) in a closeness, intimacy and consistency that were only seen before in relation to her companion dogs. This "Us" assumes therefore a dimension of collectivity that exceeds the becoming coyote-wolf-

¹⁵³ Adrienne Rich, "Notes towards a Politics of Location", in *Blood, Bread and Poetry* (New York: Norton, 1986), 217.

¹⁵⁴ Astrida Neimanis, "Introduction: Figuring Bodies of Water", in *Bodies of Water Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology* (London, New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 1-2.

dog of the artist to reveal a holistic sense of existence in a mode of entanglement with the world she and “us” are part of, a true figure of entanglement, as described by Karen Barad.¹⁵⁵ It is therefore not surprising that this work carries a particularly affective charge, with the contradictions and ambivalences inherent to it. The above-mentioned fragment with the beluga whale is a good example of such unresolved ambiguity of an encounter that is highly problematic because it relies on the production of affects that are grounded on a carceral system of control for profit.

Another moment of extreme intensity, this time largely conveyed by the artist, happens towards the end of the performance. Wearing a white paper mask that covers her entire face, with no openings for eyes or mouth; Jonas then faces the audience, incapable of looking at those who look at her. [Fig. III.29] She gives her back to the screen, holding a small bell on each hand, long white stripes of canvas falling from her hands as if they were long and soft arm extensions. The projection shows footage of different starfish and then jellyfish filmed underwater and in aquaria. Close to her, off-screen, an assistant tells Jonas to move right and left so as to remain centred in relation to the images of the animals. For each new starfish that is projected behind and atop her, Jonas is instructed where to go, so that her body and that of the starfish are spatially aligned. She plays the bells incessantly, moving her arms and hands up and down in a ritualistic mode that recalls Forti’s description of the dance state. This moment of correspondence between the aged, fragile, muted and blinded artist facing the audience without a face and the large, soft, radial bodies of these bizarre animals whose bodies and life are so distant from our human one, is one of the performance’s most intense and moving moments. The relationship of scale, the abandoning of the self to blindly perform to an audience, the willingness to figuratively position herself in an aquarium and accept its politics of visibility, reveal Jonas’ unique creation of a new framework of perception for her audience. Performing her vulnerability, Jonas remains herself but she is also something else, elsewhere else.

It is nonetheless important to take into account how the production of affects is part of what the expanded zoological apparatus does in terms of the experience they promise to offer. Lauren Berlant observes how “societies of control see the overproduction of affect as a good fuel for

¹⁵⁵ See Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007).

private capital growth and the exhaustion of the subject, who is reduced to the dramatics of getting by while thinking of affect as an inalienable resource”.¹⁵⁶ This interdependency of performativity, affect stimulation and exhaustion should be taken into account when reflecting on the reliance of zoological parks on the induction of affects and the role that animals play (are forced to play) within it. This may be ambiguously transmitted by those artists who engage with the space and its exhibitionary logics, and those living within such zoological displays. Jonas’ engagement with marine life—in parallel to the other cases discussed in this thesis—participates in such a complex entanglement both formally, expressed in how she relates with these lifeforms, and linguistically, as when she refers to “Us” (also in previous works, as in *They Came to Us Without a Word*, which relies on a differentiation between “Us” and “Them”). In being assembled, rendered, layered and performed, these animal-images of animal-affects are turned into figurations. They expand their affect-production towards a myriad of other possibilities. As Berlant argues, affects are contextual, uncontrollable and never intrinsically good or bad. Could they, in their artistic mediation, liberate themselves from the biopolitical violence they emerge from and draft lines of flight towards the growth of animal welfare awareness?

With such moments of alternate compelling beauty and uncanny horror in the starfish scene, Jonas seems to attempt to sensitise spectators, deepening their sensitivity across embodied sensorial registers and asking them to responsibly carry these archives of spectral stories of extinction and confinement with them and make something out of them: Wake up, sweetheart. I don’t blame you. I won’t say a word. So much to do. If I could remember, it would be simple things. A mirror. I won’t stay.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁶ Libe García Zarranz and Evelyne Ledoux-Beaugrand, “Affective Assemblages: Entanglement and Ruptures—An Interview with Lauren Berlant”, in *Affecting Feminist Literary & Cultural Production & WHOOPS I AM A LADY ON THE INTERNET: Digital Feminist Counter-Publics*, Atlantis, vol. 38 No. 2 (2017): 13.

¹⁵⁷ Jonas, from *My New Theater III: In the Shadow a Shadow*, 1999.

Conclusion—From Zoo to Zao

In this research I have identified three contemporary artists whose time-based media artistic practices (film, video, dance, performance) engage with both domesticated animals and animals publicly exhibited in aquaria and zoological gardens.

Taking into consideration the confluence between time-based media and the contingent experience of the zoological garden, I structured this thesis to discuss and consider moments of animal observation that took place in zoos and other spaces and conditions of animal encounter (aquaria and wildlife parks and also the condition of keeping animals as domestic companions). I commented on how these encounters were mediated by the means of artistic expression and argued that time-based practices such as film and video, dance and performance are particularly relevant to a discussion on the kinds of experiences that can occur during encounters with animals that were willingly brought close to human access for purposes of entertainment, learning and company. I also commented on the possibilities and limitations of these contexts, attempting to situate the artists I looked at as exceptional but not faultless agents in addressing the zoo as an exhibitionary apparatus, and in commenting on captivity (both in the sense of confinement and of captivation) as a gesture that defines an important form of human contact and relationship to animals.

I contextualised the work of Chris Marker, Simone Forti and Joan Jonas and discussed how animals matter to the three artists while arguing that, contrary to what has been sometimes suggested by different analyses of their practice, they do not merely appear in a specific moment or period of their career. Instead, I have attested to how animals are a constant presence, which manifests itself consistently throughout their imaginary and shapes their artistic identity in a decisive manner. The meaningfulness of their work cannot be fully grasped if those animals that traverse their lives and creations are not acknowledged and discussed as a defining aspect of their artistic identities.

I then identified their most pertinent artworks for this research and analysed these works at length. I adopted a transdisciplinary approach and a different methodology for each artist,

choosing to remain close to the nature of their own creative operativity, adhering to their core tropes and characteristics as a mode of investigating them. Following Marker's interest in collage and assemblage, I established permanent associations between different periods and projects, proposing that there is less difference than complementarity and a shared interest for the animal that characterises them. Considering Forti's closeness to her own family history and the non-linear, non-narrative nature of her choreographies, drawings and writings, I have integrated several aspects of her biography into the discussion of her work. This discussion attempted to be less interpretative, preferring only to accompany the work, thus remaining aligned with her work's disengagement from meaning. Attending to the recent growth of a declared environmental sensibility in Jonas' work, I followed its previous traces and echoes, highlighting the constant presence of animal and natural references, which complement other important tropes that define her artistic identity. For the three artists, I considered how they interacted with space, exposing the architectures and displays of confinement that are inherent to the zoological garden.

My aim was to present a new response to these artists and their works that is relevant to the study of their oeuvre while also attesting to their importance to discussions concerning the critique of sites of exhibition and display of living animals. In doing so, I also aimed to further confirm the importance of the participation of the histories of art, artists' cinema studies, dance and performance studies in critical animal studies and their engagement in intersectionality, environmental and social justice politics.

The work made by Marker, Forti and Jonas, I argue, contributes in a meaningful manner to the complex and heterogeneous basin of critical animal studies. The artists provide outstanding examples of the kind of approaches—cogent yet outside the academic realm, precise yet experimental, original yet well-grounded on epistemological and material traditions, specific yet far-reaching—that are relevant for critical animal studies' dedication to thinking as acting upon the improvement of human-nonhuman ethics and politics. My research focuses on a dimension of intersectionality concerning the representation of living animals and the way their bodies have been historically treated and continue to be objectified by the structures that have been set to render them into exhibits. The disciplinary complementarity of exhibition histories and critical animal studies is fundamental to evaluate the operativity of the architecture and “power of

display” (to quote Mary Anne Staniszewski’s important study of the ideological aspects of the cultural, administrative and aesthetic presentation of art¹) and to nature-culture divisions that contribute to the forms of separation, objectification and othering of bodies that have been discussed throughout this research.

By turning actual animals into “animal-images” and “animal-displays”, zoological gardens continue to erase the fact that they present beings with individual characteristics, needs and rights (individuals, that is), objectifying and “imaginifying” them. It is undeniable that by relying on the representation, capture and rendering of animal bodies, art often has reinforced such objectification and “imagification” of animals.²

Media Cultural Animal Studies expert Sabine Nessel maintains that zoo animals are “not simply ‘the animal’ [...] but always part of an order that organizes the presentation and viewing to the same degree”.³ Throughout this thesis I argued, through the discussion of Marker, Forti and Jonas’ work, that when animals are exhibited in the context of art, so the cage, the aquarium, the vivarium, the tank and other enclosures, frame and insert animals within a system of capture and display in which the triangulation between “exploitation-education-contextualization”⁴ merges ethnographic, scientific and pornographic gazes within a leisure and pedagogical activity.⁵ As mentioned in Chapter Two, it is not a coincidence that the verb “shooting” stands for the double assertion of hunting and filming. Pursuing with Friedrich Kittler’s analysis of the confluence of filmmaking and hunting,

The transport of pictures only repeats the transport of bullets. In order to focus on and fix objects moving through space, such as people, there are two procedures: to shoot and to film. In the principle of cinema resides mechanized death as it was invented in

¹ Mary Anne Staniszewski, *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1998).

² My neologisms. Similarly to how “objectification” means the action of degrading an individual to the status of an object, I am proposing the term “imagification” to describe the action of rendering someone to the status of an image.

³ Sabine Nessel, “The Media Animal: On the Mise-en-scène of Animals in the Zoo and Cinema”, ed. Sabine Nessel et al., *Animals and the Cinema: Classifications, Cinephiliacs, Philosophies* (Berlin: Bertz and Fisher), 46.

⁴ Catherine Russell, “Zoology, Pornography, Ethnography”, *Experimental Ethnography: The Work of Film in the Age of Video* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 141.

⁵ On this subject, see the introduction to Michael Lawrence and Laura McMahon (eds.), *Animal Life and the Moving Image* (London: Palgrave and BFI, 2015), 1–22, and Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the “Frenzy of the Visible”* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989).

the nineteenth century: the death no longer of one's immediate opponent but of serial nonhumans.⁶

In line with Nessel's definition of the condition of zoo animals, but aside from the technological mediality she proposes, historian of science Keekok Lee conceptualises zoo animals not as tokens of wild species (as sustained by Berger's previously mentioned essay in "Why Look at Animals?") nor as domesticated creatures, but as beings who exist in relation to their artefactual condition and who are subjected to a human-driven transformative process. This is something that has been documented and rendered visible in artistic means by Marker, Forti and Jonas. Given the fact that their bodies belong to a public collection and are an object of display, these animals are exposed to an apparatus of power that wants to deprive them from their own bodies. Not in a punitive manner, as analysed by Foucault (unless we want to consider the fact that they are being punished for being, in human terms, wild, alluring and vulnerable), but in an exhibitionary manner, Foucault's concept of heterotopia being expanded to comprise that other Foucauldian space for excellence that is the carceral institution.

Most zoo animals are exposed to a process of exoticisation in which they are permanently decontextualized and recontextualized. Situating the zoo animal as being neither domesticated nor wild, Lee's proposal is slightly embedded in a romantic conception of what a "wild" animal is, in particular when considering the implications of Paul Crutzen's definition of the Anthropocene era, which puts in evidence how, since the Industrial Revolution, and in particular since the "great acceleration" of the second half of the 20th century, humans have been conditioning and leaving an imprint of what the natural is. While I believe that we can still speak of the wild, even in relation to a "new natural" environment—the wild being the self-generated and self-sufficient animal—Lee's distinction between the "natural" and "artefactual" ontology of the zoo animal isn't that black-and-white.

These artists belong to creative traditions that have been interested in responding to circumstances in individual and unexpected manners and generating different positions and visions, which give visibility to the agency of people, animals and matter. I trust their work provides important case-studies from which to extrapolate conclusions and further questions that

⁶ Friedrich Kittler, *Film, Gramophone, Typewriter*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 124.

feed into the wider intersectional environmental humanities and its ramifications. By being invested in its own critique, advancement and revision, while also being interested in proposing original expressive and exhibitionary modes, Marker, Forti and Jonas stand in a privileged position of being embedded in a series of canons and traditions that they are also capable of transforming. Especially considering the porosity of their practices. Marker was part of a generation of artists who transitioned from the movie theatre to the space of the art gallery; Forti gave an outstanding contribution to the invention of New Dance; Jonas is a pioneer of video and performance. Those largely concern spaces (namely architectures of exhibition and display), times (of encounter, observation and relation) and the relational, perceptive and cognitive modalities they trigger.

When Species Don't Meet

As it has been discussed throughout the various chapters, the responses to the circumstances of exhibition and confinement of many of the animals that Marker, Forti and Jonas willingly and casually encountered throughout their work has been varied, uneven and in some cases even troubled, from the point of view of animal welfare. The episodes in which animal captivity and sufferance seems to have been ignored are also important to attest to both how a space such as the zoological garden conditions and dictates the kinds of encounters that can take place within it and to the individual artists' capacity and agency to address such limitations. Some episodes—namely the manner in which Marker depicts but does not address the solitude of a zoo elephant in *Slon Tango*, the reproduction of the environmental distress experienced by caged bears in Forti's *Three Grizzlies* video and Jonas' close portrait of the beluga whale—led me to question and try to find answers to why these three artists, who in different occasions revealed a deep investment and affective interest in animal life, could demonstrate such lack of consideration for the creatures in front of them.

One of the possible explanations I found for their inattentiveness followed Donna J. Haraway's critique of major philosophical investigations that concern animals, from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's concept of "becoming animal"⁷ to Jacques Derrida's naked encounter with Logos, his Siamese cat, described in his book *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (1997). Despite recognizing how "'Becoming-Intense, Becoming-Animal, Becoming-Imperceptible' [...] works so hard to get

⁷ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, "1730: Becoming-Intense, Becoming-Animal, Becoming-Imperceptible...", in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Brian Massumi, trans.) (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press and Continuum International Publishing Group, 1987).

beyond the Great Divide between humans and other critters to find the rich multiplicities and topologies of a heterogeneously and nonteleologically connected world,” Haraway expresses how in Deleuze and Guattari’s text she found:

[L]ittle but the two writers’ scorn for all that is mundane and ordinary and the profound absence of curiosity about or respect for and with actual animals, even as innumerable references to diverse animals are invoked to figure the authors’ anti-Oedipal and anticapitalist project. Derrida’s actual little cat is decidedly not invited into this encounter.⁸

In parallel, Haraway maintains that Derrida “was sidetracked by his textual canon of Western philosophy and literature and by his own linked worries about being naked in front of his cat”, even if, “unlike Emmanuel Lévinas, Derrida, to his credit, recognized in his small cat ‘the absolute alterity of the neighbor’”. Nonetheless, he failed the opportunity to “delv[e] into the developing knowledges of both cat-cat and cat-human behavioural semiotics when species meet”. Instead of being open to learning about the animal, Derrida “concentrated on his shame of being naked before the cat [and] incurious, [...] missed a possible invitation, a possible introduction to other-worldling”.⁹ Holding a parallel posture to the ones mentioned above, there are some cases in which the three artists, each in their own context and expressive means, seem interested in the animals for what they can teach them, for the knowledge, experience and imagery they may extract from them. While the elephant, bears, beluga whale and other animals allow Marker, Forti and Jonas to pursue their artistic means, providing valuable research and artistic matter, there are indeed some instances in which the three artists’ modes of observation and engagement contribute little to the animals’ lives and to a wider acknowledgement of their abilities and more generally to counterbalance the speciesism that allowed for these animals to be publicly exhibited in a zoo.¹⁰ In this sense, we could argue, with Haraway, that as Derrida’s naked eye contact with Logos, there are opportunities for a deeper animal-human relationality and co-development of

⁸ Donna J. Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 27.

⁹ Both quotes from Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 20-23.

¹⁰ A similar process to these artistic abstractions can be observed, for instance, in Brian Massumi’s text “What Animals Teach Us about Politics”, in *What Animals Teach Us about Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 1–54. Massumi focuses on Gregory Bateson’s “A Theory of Play and Fantasy” to propose a reflection on the importance of instinct, play and cooperation as alternatives to competition while entirely disregarding the specific animals he is writing about. For a developed critique of Massumi’s book, see John Ó Maoilearca, “Ludic handwaving – Book Review of *What Animals Teach Us about Politics* by Brian Massumi”, in *New Formations*, no. 86, (2015): 128–31.

knowledges and means of support that are missed in some of the contacts that take place between the artists and the animals at the zoo.

It is important to take Marker, Forti and Jonas' ambivalent curiosity and lack of attention towards some of the animals they observed into account—something that I also did for each chapter—because it presents a paradigmatic example of the limit to the sort of gazes and encounters the exhibitionary apparatus of the zoological garden provides. These moments of inattention therefore led me to further investigate how, by inducing a mode of apperception that exists in an unstable balance between entertainment and education, spectacle and display, concentrated focus and dispersed attention, the zoo aligns itself with other modern sites of distraction such as the cinema, the museum and the theatre.¹¹ It also led me to investigate the manner in which time-based artistic expressions have dialogued with that space of distraction, alienation and suspension that is the zoo.

Zoo Encounters

The driving questions that traversed my research and discussion of the three artists' work concerned the configurations, possibilities and limits of contemporary, time-based artistic approaches to launch new perspectives and approaches to old relationships with animals, particularly those concerning the modes of exhibiting living animals in zoos. Identifying a selection of artworks that engage with animals exhibited in zoological gardens and aquaria—contemporary locations for privileged and otherwise impossible encounters with animals that do not fit the “pet or pest” category—I analysed their aesthetic and technological contexts, investigating the material and immaterial conditions that allowed these animals to be rendered into artworks by these artists and presented in art exhibitions, performances and other cultural manifestations. I also discussed the result of these renderings, questioning how they reflect, but also affect and transform, the meaning of these spaces of display and conditions of proximity that made them possible.

This combination of approaches produced original readings of these artists' works, which contributes to a revision of the apparatus of the zoological garden and its exhibitionary

¹¹ See Peter Osborne, “Distracted reception: time, art, and technology”, in *Time Zones: Recent Film and Video* (Jessica Morgan and Gregor Muir, eds.) (London: Tate Publishing, 2004) and Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999).

declinations of exhibition of the living by bringing relevant artistic perspectives upon it. The limits of these approaches were also therefore taken into account. In parallel to how the museum and art gallery turn what they present into art (and how in being spaces of validation, they also validate themselves), I considered how the zoo turns into exhibits the living beings they present (thereby also validating itself through this activity) and discussed how this actual process of rendering life into images and tropes was assimilated, questioned and/or replicated by the artists I studied.

My analysis of individual artworks discusses how the exhibitionary apparatus of the zoo dictates its own modalities of apperception, conditioning the modes in which animals are observed, conceptualised and depicted. The discussion of these limits, imposed and naturalised by the zoo and sometimes incorporated and replicated by Marker, Forti and Jonas, also contributes to a critical evaluation of the modalities in which present-day zoos produce “not full, flourishing lives but a wounded life, robbed of vital connectivities and expressions”, as argued by Matthew Chrulew,¹² and continue to transform living beings into exhibits, individuals into items, concrete lives into abstract representations.

The trajectory of the three artists—alongside a growth in society’s sensibility towards environmental matters and a rising awareness concerning the rights of nonhuman life— may be an auspice that an as-yet stronger form of this sensibility, and articulation of such a sensibility, will arise through artistic means in times to come. While capturing the gazes, postures, bodies and individual lives of the animals the artists have engaged with, there is a visible evolution in the modes in which Marker during the second half of the 20th century, Forti from the late 1960s onwards and Jonas in the late 2010s, comprehend and address animal life and wider environmental concerns. This transformation is unquestionably expressed by their individual stances and by how I structured the thesis, arranged in a chronological order that reflects a growing environmental care, aligned with wider societal transformations. Yet—and taking into account their shared interest and attention towards nonhuman life—Marker, Forti and Jonas are almost contemporaries. Their chronologies are aligned. Marker (b. 1921) is only 15 years older than Jonas (b. 1936) and 14 than Forti (b. 1935). Also, within each chapter, particularly in the case

¹² Matthew Chrulew, “Managing Love and Death at the Zoo: The Biopolitics of Endangered Species Preservation”, in *Australian Humanities Review*, Issue 50 (May 2011).

of Marker and Forti, I attempted to break with a linear chronological narrative of progression to express how instead environmental engagements emerged as forms of intensity at different moments.

Active during a large part of each other's careers, I illuminated how they also share an interest in addressing, representing and celebrating difference and identity in multicultural, hybrid and syncretic expressions that accompany their representations of animal subjects. This syncretism is observable, for instance, in Marker's television series *The Owl's Legacy* and its quest of the diffused conceptions (and misconceptions) of Greek Antiquity; in Forti's *Planet* choreographic piece that combines temporal and linguistic disjunctions ("Oh memories passate and future!", she exclaims¹³), her animal locomotion studies and human infrastructural soundscapes¹⁴; and in Jonas' video *Merlo*, in which she wears an Afghan chadri while humming a song, howling and crying "merlo" through a large cone/beak.

Individual-Animal

The manners in which these artists interacted, collaborated, embodied and observed the animals that then participated in their artworks were both private and public. I addressed this delicate balance between what was personally experienced and expressed and what was publicly shared and fabricated. For before becoming photographs, films and videos, performances, writings and drawings, these were encounters that took place outside of the studio, cinema, gallery or museum. These were creatures whose existence, appearance, behaviour and living conditions appealed to the artists, attracted and moved them. Preceding an animal in art there was a living animal that inspired it. I have also focused on how these calls, encounters and acts of fabrication unfold and on the environments that propitiated and framed them: on the relationship between Marker's domestic cat and its public transmutation; on Jonas' disclosure of the animal objects that inhabit her studio in the shape of a poem; on Forti's move to rural Vermont and how it shaped her artistic expression, namely the "Tree Drawings" series.

¹³ "Oh memories passate and future!" is the concluding line of a bilingual text that features in Forti's *Planet*, a 1976 edition published by Edizioni Pari & Dispari, Reggio Emilia, in collaboration with Archivio Francesco Conz, Berlin. It is a silkscreen on paper that includes four black-and-white images by Peter Moore of the performance of the choreography *Planet* and a short, hand-written text.

¹⁴ The performance was conceived with Peter Van Riper's accompaniment with *Plumbing Music*, a recording of the heating pipes in the last Maciunas Fluxhouse cooperative.

By analysing certain works of the three artists, I observed that the general assumption of what an animal is—what a cat, bear, dog is—is not generally taken for granted. Marker, Forti and Jonas’ artistic expression appears at instances freed from belief, knowledge and experience, embracing perceptive and affective modes that are located beyond mere speciesist difference. The animals are often considered as individuals, to different degrees for the three artists. In that sense, and aligned with Paul B. Preciado’s investigations of “who should be considered human and under what conditions”,¹⁵ they assume that the human is, first and foremost, a category of privilege, hence they leave open the question of what defines human exclusivity. As with Preciado, some of their works seem to suggest that “[e]ither everyone has an identity. Or there is no identity”.¹⁶ Examples of this are the cat Guillaume-en-Egypte sleeping on top of a synthesiser on Marker’s video *Cat Listening to Music*, or Ganga the elephant dancing on her own at the zoo during *Slon Tango*; an onion slowly moving on top of a bottle at the rhythm of its sprouting in Forti’s *Onion Walk* and a young monkey inventing a form of dance behaviour in her enclosure; Zina howling and barking in duet with Jonas during *Walz* and the octopus touching and interacting with Jonas’ fingers in a fragment of *Moving Off the Land II*. In these cases, the artists acknowledge the animals’ individuality and even personality, considering their intentionality and decision-making skills, “a mind at work beyond purely instinctive or inbuilt reactions”.¹⁷

By contrast, zoos tend to reduce to data, abstract, normalise and generalise animals. “Insofar as zoological thinking does not recognise animals’ forms of life, but only their visible forms—the mere life of their observable anatomical species traits—their isolation in captivity, away from their relational bios amid habitat and kin, produces a weakened, sickly, bare life. Zoo-logic injures the living”, argues Chrulew.¹⁸ An elephant in a zoo is both a trope of an elephant and just another elephant. Ganga in Marker’s *Slon* is not so much remarkable because she can dance but because she attests to the exceptional things all elephants are capable of. The beluga whale portrayed in Jonas’ *Moving Off the Land II* exposes the architectonic apparatus of transparency, reflection and opacity that, while detaining her and making her visible, also projects and incorporates viewers within it. Works like these indicate that it is possible to resist and counteract the regime of flatness and univocal discourse of the zoo’s biopolitics.

¹⁵ Paul B. Preciado, *Can the Monster Speak?* (London: Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2021), 45.

¹⁶ Preciado, *Can the Monster Speak?*, 32.

¹⁷ Adam Nicolson, *The Sea is Not Made of Water—Life Between Tides* (London: William Collins Books, 2021), 51.

¹⁸ Chrulew, “Managing Love and Death at the Zoo”.

These are important epistemological changes that are brought about by aesthetic, technological and material changes. Conversely, these works also introduce important aesthetic, technological and material changes that result from epistemological changes. By producing new visions and creating new languages, these artists also stimulate new theories of knowledge and justified belief that stimulate new forms of making art.

With their art, Marker, Forti and Jonas reveal how animal-human proximity can bypass mimicry and other forms of dualist imitation that rely on a logic of either/or: being this or that, person or animal, human or bird, bird or vegetal. In *An Owl is an Owl is an Owl*, Marker uses distortion, poetry and repetition to make a video aligned with the condition of the birds he filmed. With a dance piece like *Sleepwalkers*, Forti proposes that it is possible to dance as woman-with-flamingo, to search for attunement in comfort and balance; in *Merlo*, Jonas sings with a paper beak that becomes a temporary vegetal body of this new bird that is summoned by a techno-ritualistic ceremony: performed for the camera, gestures turned into signals, colours into declinations of grey. Elizabeth Grosz suggests that feminist theory allows us “to surround ourselves with the possibilities for being otherwise”.¹⁹ Jonas and Forti take feminist theory into intersectional practice and experiment with this possibility for being otherwise in their work.

Animal Subjects

Michel Foucault’s writings on modernity’s production of power to supervise, administer, manage and arrest life—what he defines as the “history of relations between political power and bodies”²⁰—were a guiding theoretical reference in this study, particularly those concerning confinement, prison and alienation, the conceptualisation of the tempo-spatial notion of Heterotopia, and what Jane Bennett called his “concern with bodies and pleasures”.²¹ They were crucial for me to reflect upon the manners in which the three artists have engaged with the biopolitics of the zoological garden.

¹⁹ Elizabeth Grosz, “The Future of Feminist Theory: Dreams for New Knowledges?”, in (H. Gunkel, C. Nigianni, and F. Soderback, eds.), *Undutiful Daughters: New Directions in Feminist Thought and Practice* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012): 14.

²⁰ Michel Foucault, “The Punitive Society”, in *The Essential Works of Foucault, 1954–1984, volume 1— Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth* (Paul Rabinow, ed.) (1997) (London: Penguin Books, 2000), 35.

²¹ Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter, a Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), xvi.

Inspired by Foucault's proposal that "you cannot know without transforming",²² Chrulew argued that "Foucault's thought offers indispensable tools for the analysis not only of the natural and biological sciences, but for human-animal relations more broadly [...] an exercise in the production of knowledge about animal subjects, knowledge that relies upon and in turn helps produce and refine technologies of power over those animals".²³

Throughout the thesis I took into account the possibility of attending to animal subjectivity through Foucault's optics to understand how the artists I discussed, and the works they made, launched alternative modes of looking, feeling and understanding domestic and exhibition animals and the anthropogenic environments they inhabit— modes that are at once poetic and incisive, precise and evocative. My aim has also been that of understanding if these new gazes could trigger a compassionate awareness of the practices and environments created by the zoo's biopolitics while proposing the recognition of the animals' subjectivity and individuality.

This is why the works that were more extensively discussed were made—entirely or partially—at the zoo: Marker's video haikus, Forti's *Sleepwalkers* and the videos *Three Grizzlies* and *Untitled*, Jonas' performance and installation *Moving Off the Land II*. They address that system of utilitarian subjectification of animals that Chrulew describes as "a form of productive and subjectifying ethopower that operates upon nonhuman animals as experiencing subjects and resisting agents in its task of nurturing their life, health and welfare".²⁴ And they indeed present incisive portraits of zoos that bypass the realm of the artistic and touch upon the troubled ethics of the zoo's biopower. By reaching these conclusions, I not only revealed Marker, Forti and Jonas' potential to look critically at the zoo's biopolitics, I also inserted these artists and their works within a zoopolitical agenda that acknowledges the space of the zoo as a site where human-animal relationships unfold in manners that are largely controlled and determined by human action— but whose effects have the potential to subvert those exact systems of sovereign control humans operate in their relationship to zoo animals.

²² Pronounced during a 1965 interview with Alain Badiou. In Michel Foucault, "Philosophy and Psychology", *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, volume 2*, d. James Faubion (London: Penguin Books, 2000), 255.

²³ Matthew Chrulew, "Animals as Biopolitical Subjects", in *Foucault and Animals* (Matthew Chrulew and Dinesh Joseph Wadiwel, eds.) (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2017), 222-38.

²⁴ Chrulew, "Animals as Biopolitical Subjects", 235.

Since the emergence of the earliest nature films, most of them taking the incipient form of the documentary, the technologies involved in filming animals have always been at the forefront of expanding the optical within wider fields. Similarly, what I observed during this research is that, in their investment for technological, aesthetic, linguistic and perceptive change, Marker, Forti and Jonas also facilitated epistemological change, and that this change opened way for the material, discursive and affective changes towards animal life, in complementary and mutually dependent manners. This change happens in the present and will continue doing so in the future, thanks to art's capacity to actualise itself and remain relevant through time.

In shifting from the movie theatre to the museum and the space of television, Marker created a new gaze towards animal domesticity and captivity, one that opens up an important recognition of agency and individuality. Forti's efforts to transition from Modern Dance to New Dance led her to create a mode of embodying animality and enhancing the animal-body-self of the human. Jonas' desire to convey the anthropogenic-affected oceans of the present led her to portray sea creatures with an awareness of the tension between the cruelty of captivity and the desire towards visual and haptic contact with animals.

The revelation of the traditions of othering animals led to changes in technologies, language and perspectives. These artists do not offer passive portraits of domestication and captivity, but illustrate the tensions between care and cruelty that arise from these and other forms of animal objectification and subjugation. Their art transformed the means to address the human othering of animals in its pains and pleasures. These changes led by certain works of Marker, Forti and Jonas, even when subtle, can be taken as invitations to the reconsideration of life in a mode of bio-receptivity that is different, attuned, with, and "companied" by animals. They reveal who we are and can be and the choices we face with a compelling, troubling beauty.

Diluting Bodies

There were indeed oracles of new modes of engaging with zoo animals that I encountered and highlighted throughout this thesis. I would like, finally, to revisit a particularly poignant one which, anchored in the past, leaves hope for a future in which the space, function and operativity of zoological parks are rethought to attend, at last, to E.E. Cumming's zao they emerge from.

Inspired by her visits to the NY Zoo, where she “found that there were dancers among the captives in the zoo [...] individuals who found ways to enrich their lives with movement games and practices of their own invention” and where she “saw many examples of what I took to be the roots of dance”, Forti conceives of dance as a process through which individuals are able to regain their own bodies. As discussed in the second chapter, in her notebooks Forti describes wanting to “see myself as one vertebrate among others. Watching them move helped me understand my own movement in a very basic way, clear of historical or stylistic values”. As a mode of saying “this is my body, this is how I move”. To her surprise, she even found that “there were dancers among the captives in the zoo. Individuals who found ways to enrich their lives with movement games and practices of their own invention.” She continues describing her experience:

I saw a chimp who stuck his finger in a hole in the ground and ran in circles, leaning out from that tiny point of support [...] three brown bears running back and forth up a ramp and turning by rising up onto their hind limbs, rising and spiraling their noses skyward to drop again, facing a new direction. I saw what I took to be functional ritual, the biggest male of a herd of deer doing a terrifying leap straight at but just short of a newborn fawn. I saw many examples of what I took to be the roots of dance. Cubs sparring. Even the big cats’ compulsive pacing at the fence, which seemed to provide a modicum of relief. And this gave me a new view of what it was that I was doing when I was dancing. I abstracted some of the gaits, some of the movement games, and took them into my own body [...] I wondered how a tadpole’s movement developed from a lateral undulation for swimming into the symmetrical hop of a frog. I tried it. I was delighted to read that young frogs often fall over; it made sense in my body. My dances were studies, explorations.²⁵

Even on its permanent stage, the body that play-fights, as in the body that executes a paced, rhythmic movement to fill her time, as with Marker’s videotaped elephant, remains a body that, as Forti remarks, looks at itself, after itself, through itself. Filtered by the membrane of the screen or by the glass of the vivarium, this mediated body still has the capacity to eventually meet and extend the gaze and perception of those looking at it, despite being inserted within a complex

²⁵ Simone Forti, fragments from *Oh, Tongue* (Los Angeles, CA: Beyond Baroque, 2003), 134–38.

system which acts as a preserver of the detached, insensitive zoological gaze. Sensitive artistic approaches to zoo animals have a particular capacity to counteract this well-installed system of vision, to make viewers aware of their implication in a system of problematic exposure and generate special forms of empathy that bring humans not only physically closer to animals but also closer to their own sense of participation in the animal world. Thus to trigger the understanding of what it means to be an enclosed animal and to initiate a desire for the transformation of such a condition.

On a ubiquitous stage, the body that performs a discreet choreography, as in Marker's videotaped footage of the elephant Ganga; the body that discovers the roots of dance, as in Forti's description of the chimpanzee's playtime; or even the body that is curious about a small individual on the other side of its enclosure, as with the beluga whale in Jonas' video footage—it is still a body that looks at herself, after herself, through herself. Filtered by the membrane of the screen, by the gap of the cage, or the glass of the aquarium, this moving, mediated body reveals herself as more than an image: she meets and eventually overlaps the viewers' own gaze and body. Hopefully, such overlapping will contribute to reinstall zoo into a zoo that is, with E.E. Cummings, "not a collection of animals but a number of ways of being alive".

Chris Marker—Photographic documentation

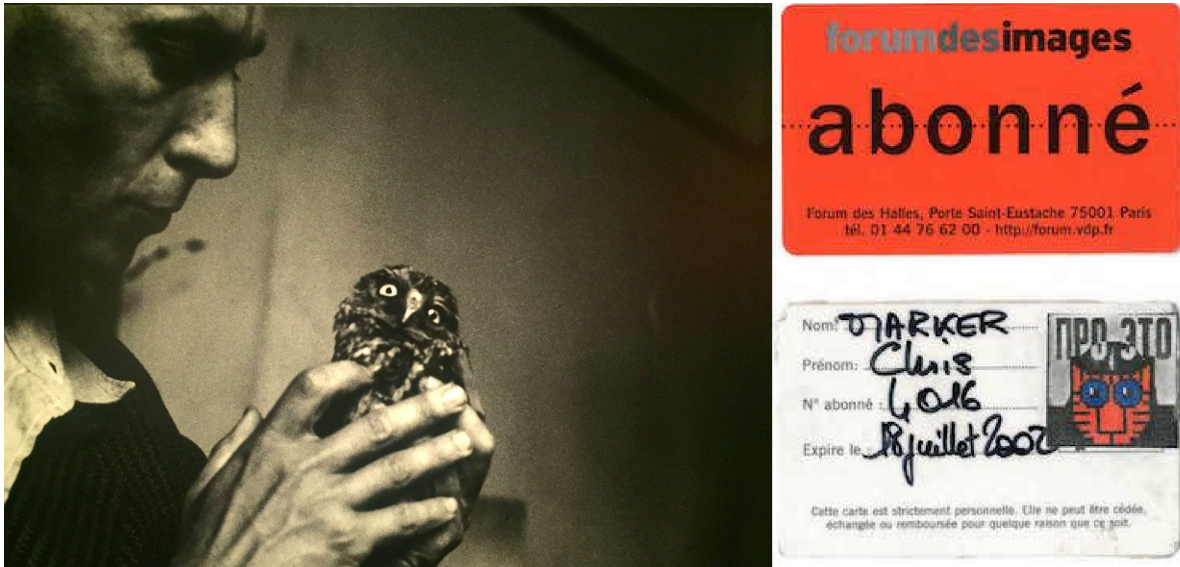


Fig. I.2 Chris Marker with owl Anabase during the shooting of the film *Les Astronautes*, circa 1959

Fig. I.3 Chris Marker's members card from Forum des Images cinema



Fig. I.4 Still from Walerian Borowczyk and Chris Marker's short film *Les Astronautes*, 1959. Film (b/w, sound), 14:00 min.



Fig. I.5 Still from *Description of a Struggle*, 1960. 16 mm film transferred to 35 mm (colour, sound), 57:00 min.

Fig. I.6 Still from *A Grin Without a Cat*, 1977-96. 16 mm film transferred to 35 mm (colour, sound), 240 min. (1977) 179 min. (1996)



Fig. I.7 Still from *La Jetée*, 1962. 35 mm film (black-and-white, sound), 28:00 min.



Fig. I.8 Still from *Sans Soleil*, 1982. 16 mm film (colour, sound), 100 min.

Fig. I.9 Still from *Description of a Struggle*, 1960. 16 mm film transferred to 35 mm (colour, sound) 57:00 min.



Fig. I.10 Installation view of Otolith Group's "Inner Time of Television" display of Chris Marker's *The Owl's Legacy*, 1st Athens Biennale, "Destroy Athens", 2007

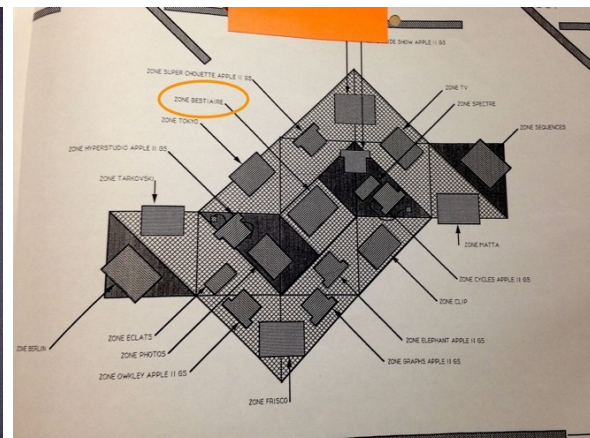
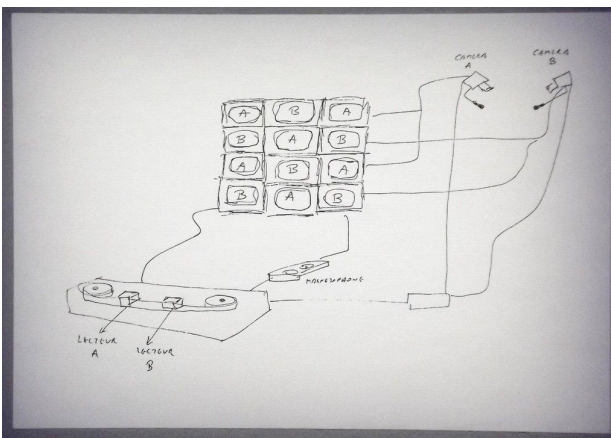


Fig. I.11 Chris Marker's diagram for the multimedia installation *Quand le siècle a pris formes*, 1978, for the exhibition "Paris-Berlin, 1900-1933: rapports et contrastes France Allemagne", Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, 12 July – 6 November 1978

Fig. I.12 Chris Marker's diagram with "Zone Bestiaire" at the centre for the multimedia installation *Zapping*

Zone: *Proposals for an Imaginary Television* (1990-1994) during the exhibition "Passages de l'image" at Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, 19 September 1990 – 13 January 1991



Fig. I.13 Installation shot of multimedia installation *Zapping Zone: Proposals for an Imaginary Television* (1990-1994) during the exhibition "Passages de l'image" at Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, 19 September 1990 – 13 January 1991



Fig. I.14 Opening image for the series *The Owl's Legacy*, 1989



Fig. I.15 Still from *Letter from Siberia*, 1958. 16 mm film transferred to 35 mm (colour, sound) 62:00 min.



Fig. I.16 Cornelius Castoriadis in *The Owl's Legacy Episode 3. Democracy or the City of Dreams*. 26:00 min. Still from video (colour, sound).

Fig. I.17 Christiane Bron in *The Owl's Legacy Episode 13. Philosophy or the Triumph of the Owl*. 26:00 min. Still from video (colour, sound).



Fig. I.18 Owl collage used in *The Owl's Legacy* to accompany the footage of Baltasar Lopes



Fig. I.19 Angélique Ionatos in *The Owl's Legacy Episode 8. Music —or Inner Space*. 24:00 min. Still from video (colour, sound)

Fig. I.20 Manuela Smith in *The Owl's Legacy Episode 11. Misogyny or the Snares of Desire*. 26:00 min. Still from video (colour, sound)

Fig. I.21 Elia Kazan in *The Owl's Legacy Episode 5 Amnesia—or History on the March*. 26:00 min. Still from video (colour, sound)



Fig. I.22 and Fig. I.23 Still from *An Owl is An Owl is An Owl*, 1990. Video (colour, sound), 03:18 min.



Fig. I.24 and Fig. I.25 Still from *Theory of Sets*, 1991. Video (sound, colour), 13:00 min.



Fig. I.26 Still from *Zoo Piece*, 1990. Video (colour, sound), 02:42 min.



Fig. I.27 Decoupage from *Cat Listening to Music*, 1990. Video (colour, sound), 02:47 min.



Fig. I.28. Still from *Slon Tango*, 1990. Video (colour, sound), 04:00 min.

Fig. I.29 Still from *Bullfight / Okinawa*, 1994. Video (colour, sound), 04:00 min.

Simone Forti — Photographic documentation



Fig. II.2 Performance of *Huddle*, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 1982



Fig. II.3 *Onion Walk*, 1961/2014, installation view at Museum der Moderne, Salzburg, Summer/Autumn 2014



Fig. II.4 Anna Halprin's deck in the Mountain Home Studio, Kentfield California.
From left to right: Merce Cunningham, Ruth Beckford and Anna Halprin, 1957



Fig II.5 Simone Forti (credited Simone Morris) in *The Branch Dance* choreographed by Anna Halprin and premiered at the Halprin Mountain Home Studio, Kentfield, CA in 1957



Fig II.6 Anna Halprin, A.A. Leath, and Simone Forti (credited Simone Morris) performing Halprin's *The Branch Dance*, premiered at the Halprin Mountain Home Studio, Kentfield, CA, in 1957

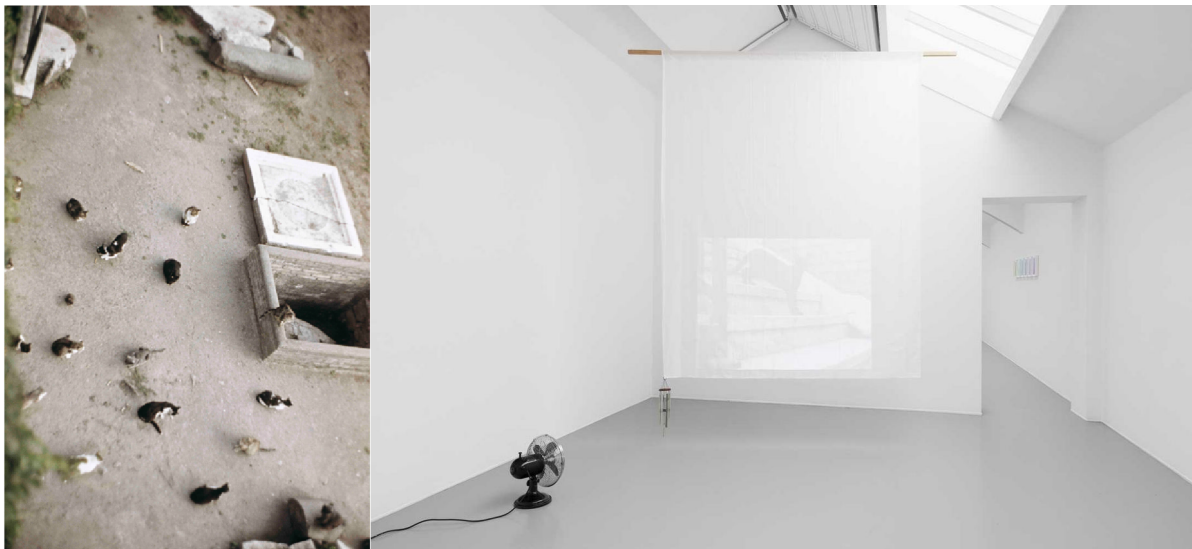


Fig. II.7 *Largo Argentina (AKA Rome Cats)*, 1968/2012. C-Print, 14 x 20 1/2 inches

Fig II.8 Installation view of *Largo Argentina (AKA Rome Cats)*, 1968/2012 during the exhibition "Here It Comes", De Vleeshal Art Centre, Middleburg, Spring 2016



Fig. II.9 Simone Forti performing *Sleepwalkers* during the *Dance, Music and Dynamite Festival*, L'Attico Gallery, Rome, June 1969



Fig. II.10 Cover of Simone Forti's catalogue of performances at Galleria L'Attico, Rome, 30-31 October 1968



Fig. II.11 Claire Filmon performing the Flamingo pose in *Zoo Mantras (aka Sleep Walkers) / The Reconstruction* (1968/2017) at Sophiensaele Berlin, Festsaal, 29-30 September 2017



Fig. II.12 Simone Forti performing the Bear pose in *Sleepwalkers* (1968/2010) at Artist's Residence, Los Angeles, 2010



Fig. II.13 Simone Forti performing the Seaweed pose in *Sleepwalkers* (1968/2010) at Artist's Residence, Los Angeles, 2010



Fig. II.14 Simone Forti performing the Water Strider pose in *Sleepwalkers* (1968/2010) at Artist's Residence, Los Angeles, 2010



Fig. II.15 Bears, undated. Ink on paper, 9 1/2 x 13 inches

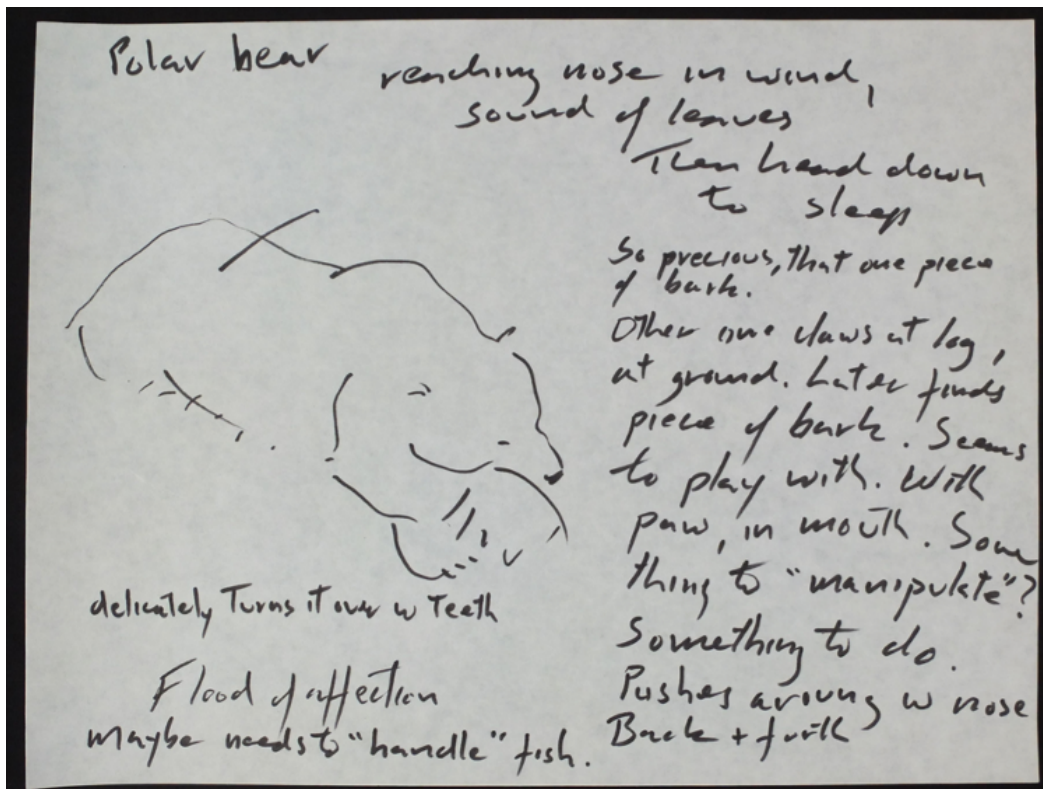


Fig. II. 16 Polar Bear, undated. Ink on paper, 9 x 12 inches



Fig. II.17 Still from *Untitled*, 1973. Video (black and white, sound), 29:00 min.



Fig. II.18 Simone Forti with Steve Lacy at “Serata di violoncello . . .,” Galleria L’Attico di via Beccaria. February, 1969

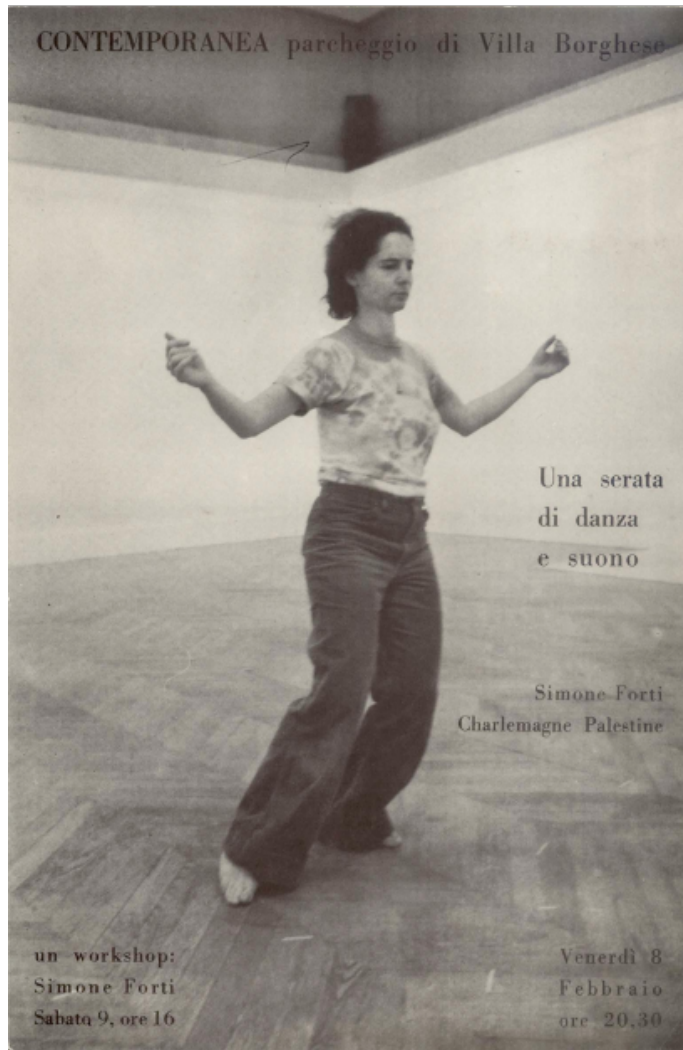


Fig. II.19 Poster of Simone Forti and Charlemagne Palestine's "Una serata di danza e suono" [An evening of dance and sound], "Contemporanea", Villa Borghese, Rome. 8-9 February 1974



Fig. II.20 Still from *Three Grizzlies*, 1974. Video (black-and-white, sound), 17:00 min.

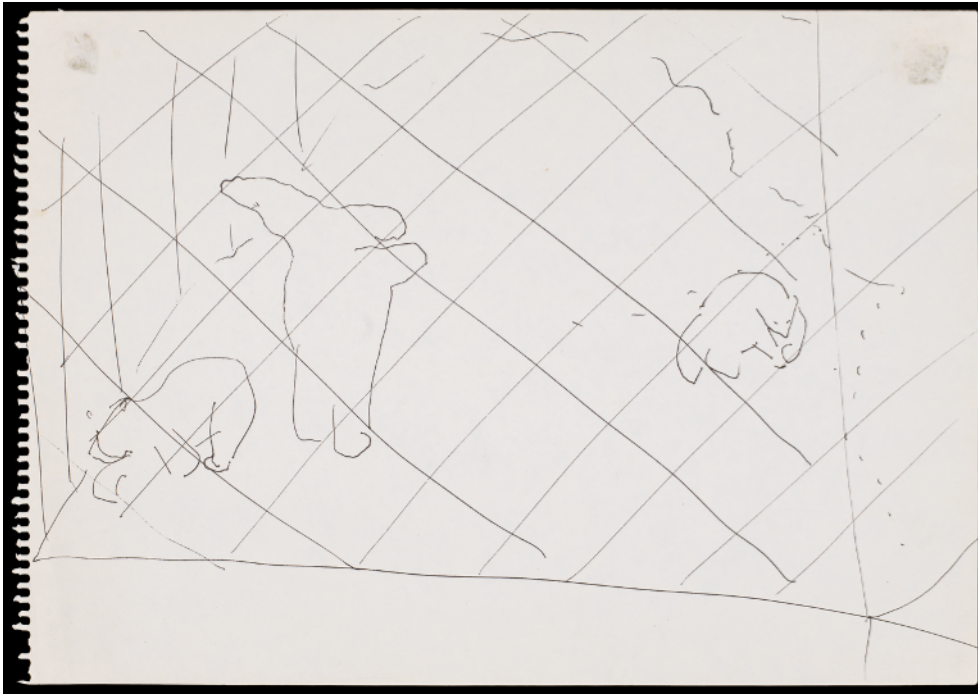


Fig. II.21 *Three Grizzlies*, 1974. Ink on paper, 11 7/8 x 15 7/8 x 1 1/2 inches

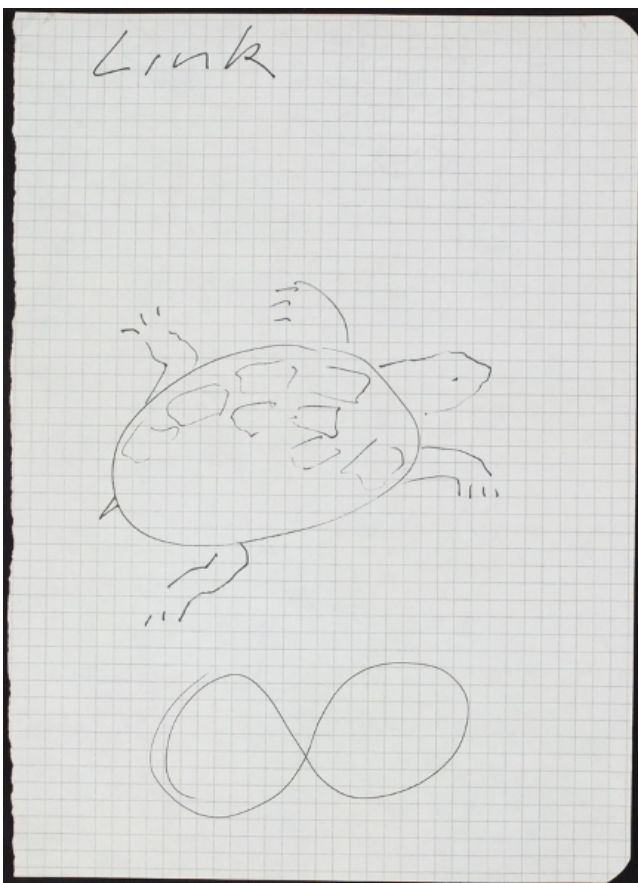


Fig. II.22 *Turtle*, undated. Ink on paper, 8 x 5 1/2 inches



Fig. II.23 *Striding Crawling*, ca. 1976. Holographic film, Mylar, Plexiglas, halogen lightbulb, wood, steel tubing, electric power cord, 56 3/4 x 20 x 13 inches

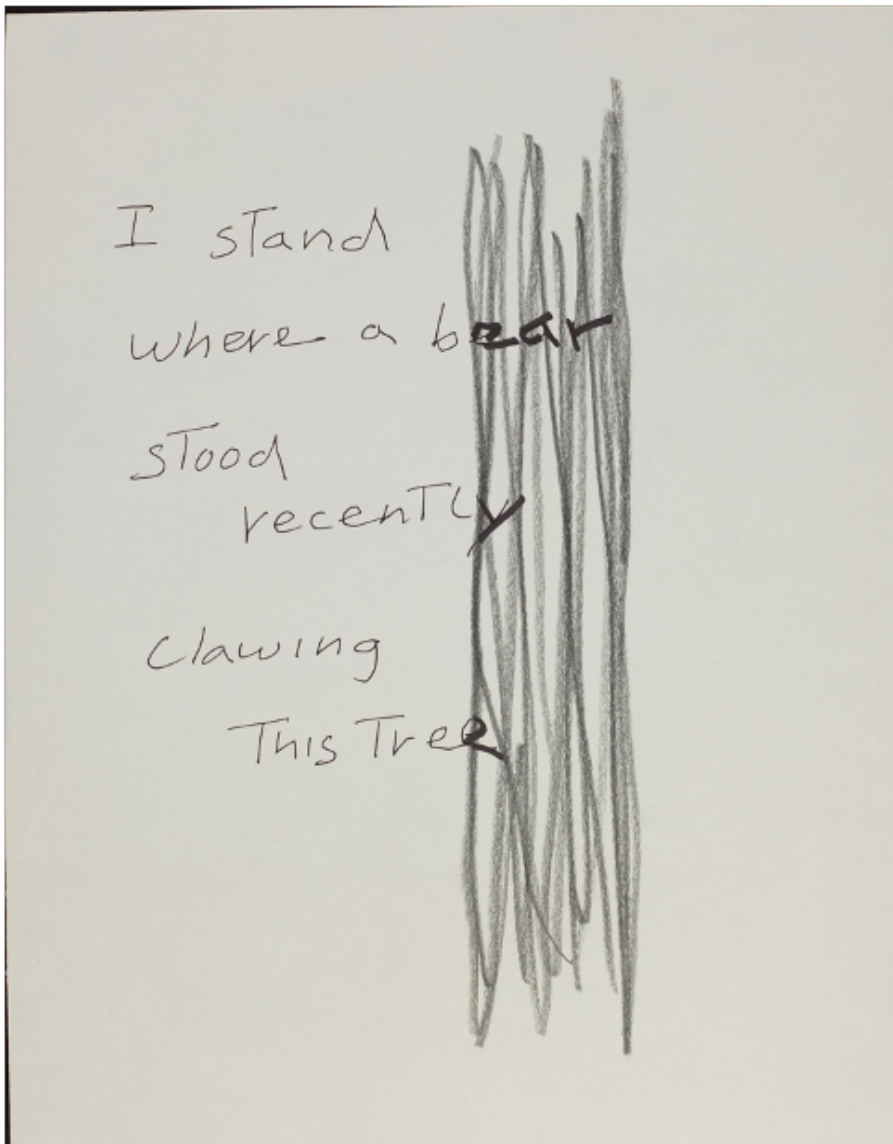


Fig. II. 24 *Tree Drawing: I Stand Where a Bear Stood Recently Clawing This Tree*, 2010. Pen, pencil, marker on paper, 14 x 11 inches



Fig. II.25 Simone Forti performing *Duck*, *Beyond Baroque*, Los Angeles, 29 October 2005

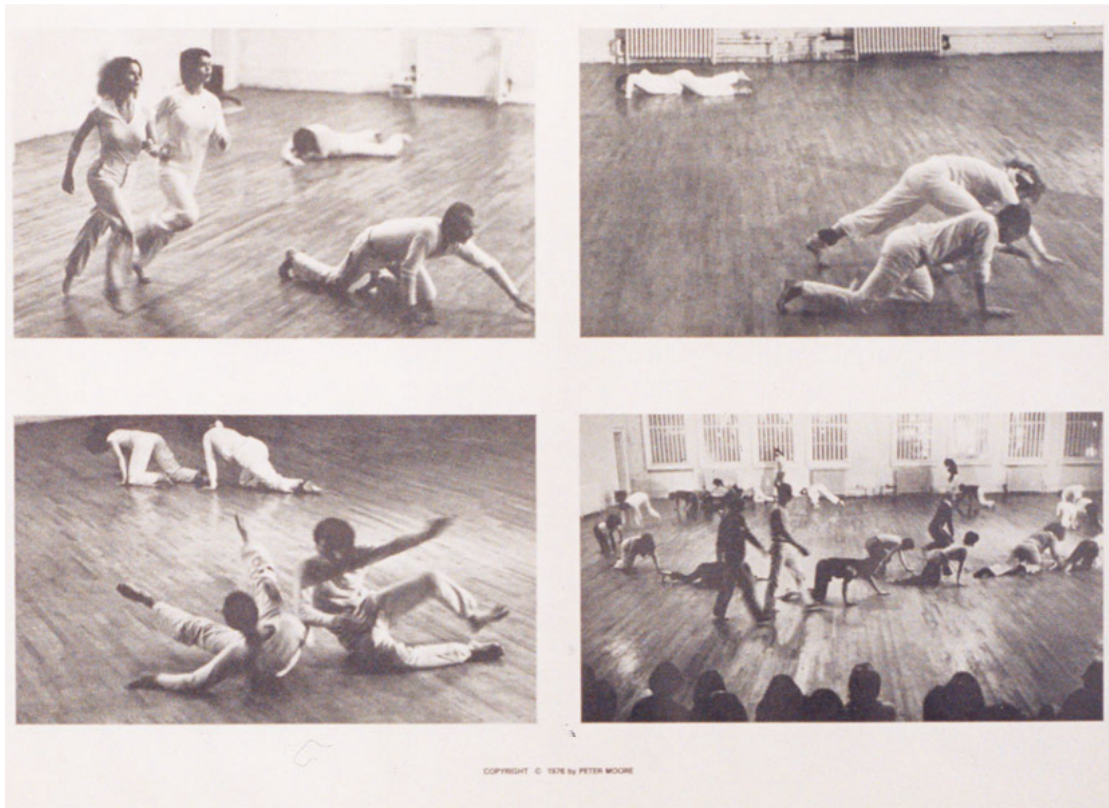


Fig. II.26 Poster for *Planet*, 1976, Silkscreen on paper, 19.7 × 27.6 inches



Fig. II.27 Simone Forti performing *Zuma News*, 2013



Fig. II. 28 Simone Forti performing *News Animations*, Women's Performance Fest., New York, c. 1980

Joan Jonas—Photographic documentation



Fig. III.2 Man Ray, Portrait of Luisa Casati, 1922. Silver bromide gelatin, 24x18 cm

Fig. III.3 Joan Jonas, *Untitled*, 2008. Ink and pencil on paper 30 x 21.5 cm



Fig. III.4 Joan Jonas performing, with Linda Patton, *Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy* (1972) at Festival di musica e danza. Galleria L'Attico, Rome, 1972

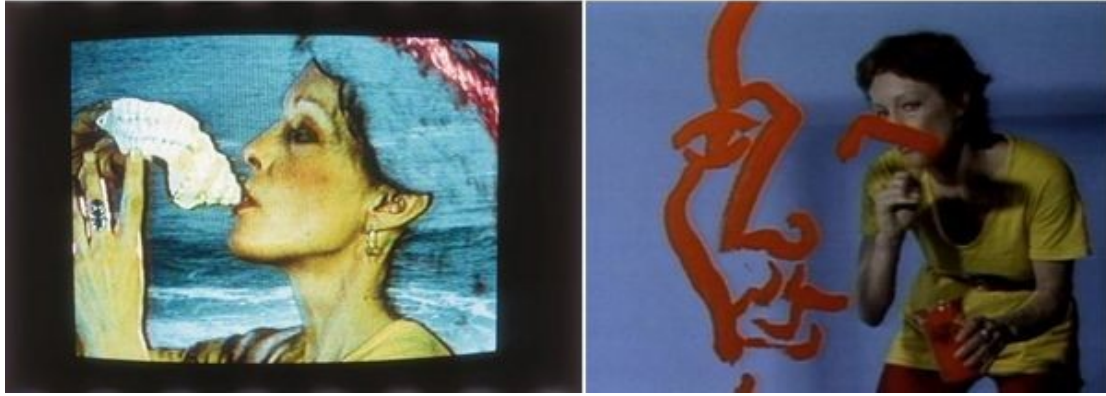


Fig. III.5 Stills from *Double Lunar Dogs*, 1984. Video (colour, sound), 24:00 min.



Fig. III.6 Exterior of *Reanimation (In a Meadow)*, 2012. Documenta 13, Kassel, 2012



Fig. III.7 Joan Jonas performing *Funnel* (1974). Galleria L'Attico, Rome, 1974



Fig. III.8 Joan Jonas performing in Robert Ashley's *Celestial Excursions* at the Hebbel-Theater / Maerz-Music (Berlin) premiere production, 22–25 March 2003



Fig. III.9 Crystal Sculpture from the installation *Reanimation*, 2010-13



Fig. III.10 Performance of *Mirror Check* (1970). Galleria L'Attico, Rome, 1974

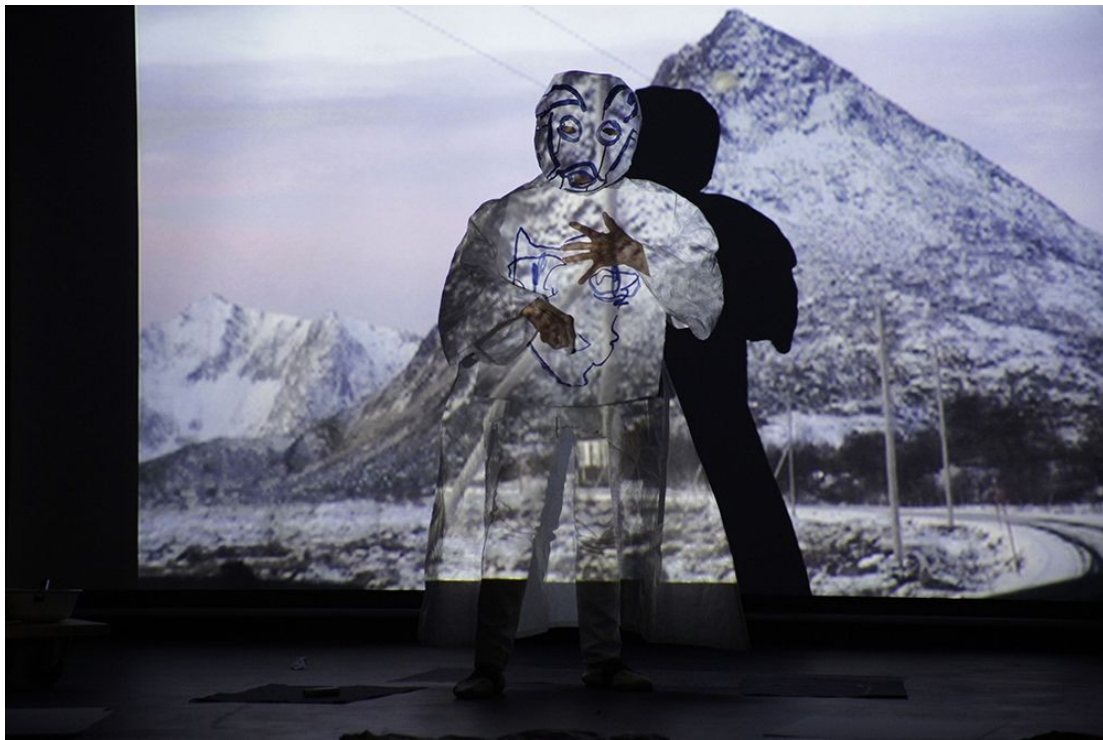


Fig. III.11 Performance of *Reanimation* (2012). HangarBicocca, Milan, 2014



Fig. III.12 Still from *Wind*, 1968. 16 mm film (black-and-white, silent), 05:37 min.



Fig. III.13 Still from *Beautiful Dog*, 2014. Video (colour, sound), 21:40 min.



Fig. III.14 Still from *Volcano Saga*, 1989. Video (colour, sound), 28:05 min.



Fig. III.15 Performance of *Reanimation* (2012). HangarBicocca, Milan, 2014



Fig. III.16 Installation view of "They Come to Us Without a Word", US Pavillion at the 56th Venice Biennale, 2015



Fig. III.17 *My New Theater IV, Dog Hoop*, 2004. Wooden box, wooden trestles, video on DVD (colour, sound), DVD player, LCD monitor, speakers, mixed media miniature props. 163 x 63.5 x 166 cm, 02:34 min., looped



Fig. III.18 Still from *Barking* (featuring Simone Forti), 1973. Video (black-and-white, sound), 02:22 min.



Fig. III.19 Joan Jonas howling during a performance of *Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy* (1972). LoGiudice Gallery, New York, 12–13 and 19–20 February 1972



Fig. III.20 Joan Jonas performing *Ocean Sketches and Notes* during the TBA-21 Convening #2 at the 2016 Kochi-Muziris Biennale. Kochi, January 2016



Fig. III.21 View of exhibition "Joan Jonas, Moving Off the Land II". Ocean Space, Chiesa di San Lorenzo, Venice, 2019

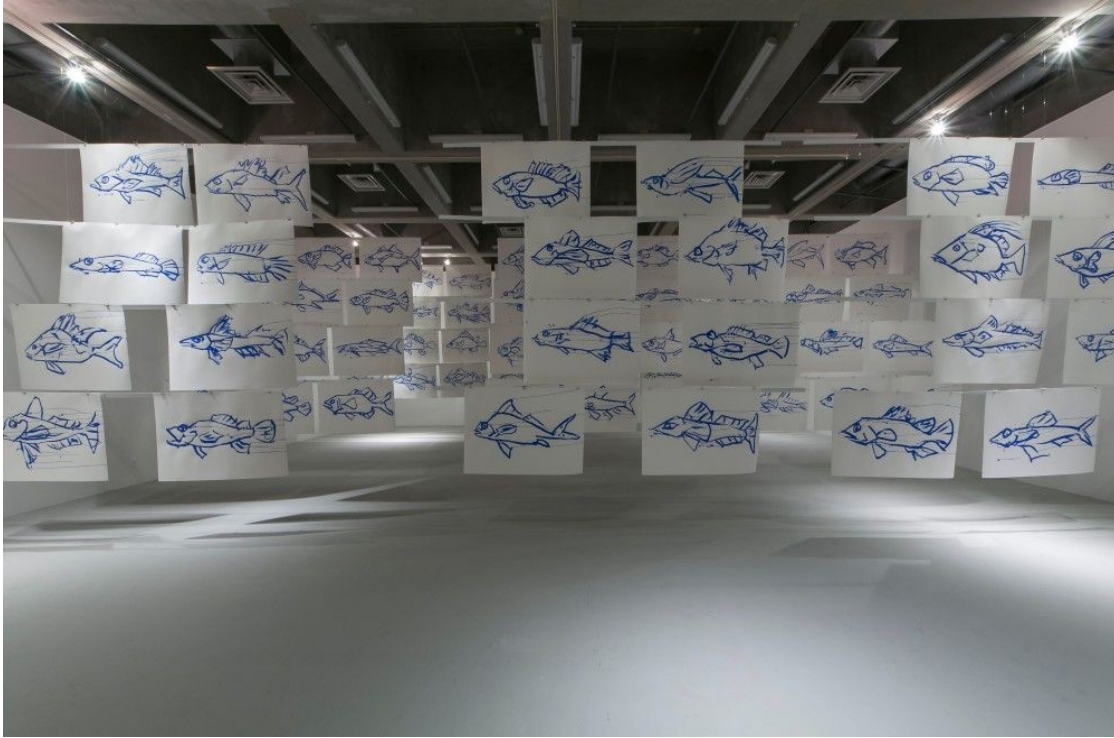


Fig. III.22 View of exhibition “they come to us without a word”. CCA Kitakyushu Project Gallery, Kitakyushu, 2013



Fig. III.23 Joan Jonas' sofa in Cape Breton



Fig. III.24 *Moving Off the Land II*, 2019. Performance at Ocean Space, Chiesa di San Lorenzo, Venice, with Ikue Mori and Francesco Migliaccio



Fig. III.25 *Moving Off the Land II*, 2019. Performance at Ocean Space, Chiesa di San Lorenzo, Venice, with Ikue Mori and Francesco Migliaccio



Fig. III.26 *Moving Off the Land II*, 2019. Performance at Ocean Space, Chiesa di San Lorenzo, Venice, with Ikue Mori and Francesco Migliaccio

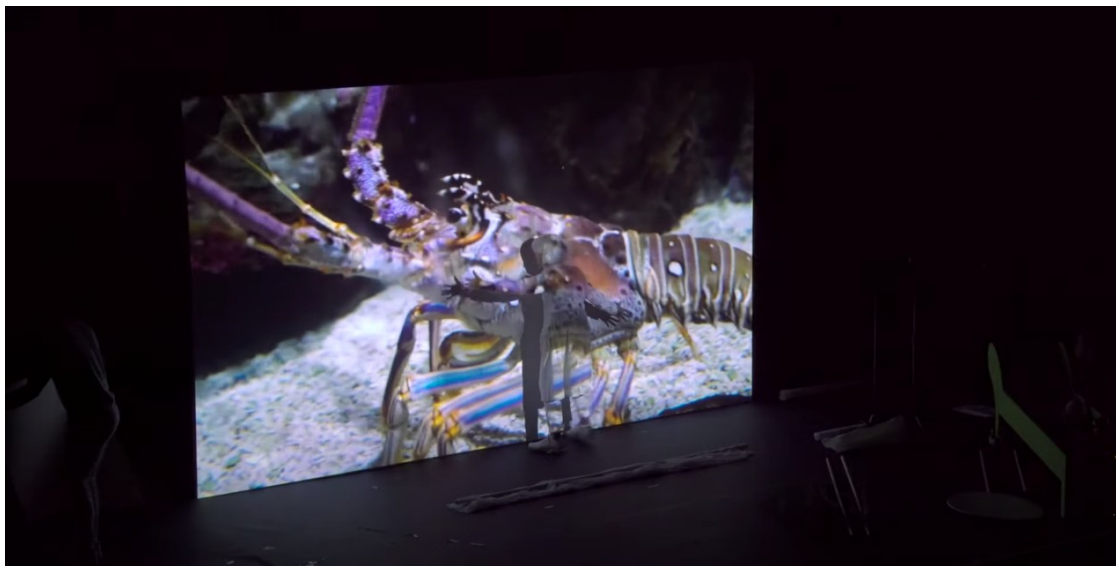


Fig. III.27 *Moving Off the Land II*, 2019. Performance at Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid, 26 February 2020



Fig. III.28 *Moving Off the Land II*, 2019. Performance at Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid, 26 February 2020



Fig. III.29 *Moving Off the Land II*, 2019. Performance at Ocean Space, Chiesa di San Lorenzo, Venice, with Ikuo Mori and Francesco Migliaccio

APPENDIX A

Interview with Simone Forti, Part I and Part II

The first part of this conversation was held in February 2019 at Forti's family house in Los Angeles, city where she grew up after her family left fascist Italy in 1938 for California. Retrospectively, that encounter seems to belong to another era, where chats about bodies meeting and touching each other were not tainted by apprehension. We had to find a different form in which to talk for the second part of the conversation, which took place in March 2020. We met online, our faces rendered into pixels and our movements occasionally frozen by connectivity glitches. The intensity of Forti's gaze, the crystal-clear articulation of her ideas and the strength of her enthusiasm transgressed all temporal and digital constraints.

Part I, Los Angeles, 13-14 February 2019



Filipa Ramos: Tell us about this house, where we are now and where you've been living for some years, since you moved back to Los Angeles, the city for where you grew up. Simone Forti:

I grew up in L.A., this was my mother's house. About 15 years ago, I moved back here from Vermont, where I was living before. When my mother turned 90, I thought, "now she needs me". I had the idea I'd be here for a year or two and then I'd go back to Vermont, but she made it to six months short of 100! By then I was teaching at the UCLA, I had friends, and I decided to stay. The family owns the building and we have other people living here as well. I'm responsible for it; now for instance the plumbing has gotten really bad and we have to redo it, so I'm taking care of those sort of things. Care happens and I'm the family's secretary. This is a nice house and it's been really good for me. My gallery [The Box] has also been very good for me.

FR: Thinking about family legacies and continuities in your life, I wonder if you could tell me about your interest in animals. I have the impression they've been a constant present across your choreographic work, your drawings, writings...

SF: When I was a young girl we lived in Los Angeles and my father used to take me and my sister Anna to the zoo. We would sketch the animals and look at each other's sketches and say "Oh, you really caught the movement!" There was that in the background, the time spent with my sister and father; those were very special days and stayed as a good memory. Now that I think of it, I always had a hard time reading and haven't been a very good reader. I read slowly. When we first came to America, I was in kindergarten and when I started to learn to read, we would go to the school library and it was hard for me. I would get overwhelmed by all those books, as I wouldn't know what I wanted to check out. But I discovered that there was a place in the library—I remember I had to squat down to see the books on the bottom shelf—which was a section about animals, about how different animals live. Those were the books I would pick up: the books about the beaver, the raccoon, the deer... This interest re-emerged with Anna Halprin [Forti practiced with Anna Halprin between the late 1950s and early 1960s]. It was very natural to look at the movement of the trees and of the animals. Sometimes you would see a deer: you would see how it would stop, turn and then leap away. You would see that as a movement, and you would take certain aspects of that movement and try it in your own body. Like the sudden stillness and then the move of the head to look in a different direction... This prepared my interest in the movements of the animals.

Later on, I found myself in Rome by chance. I'd just been through a very bad breakup and I really needed to turn the page. My parents used to go to Italy from time to time on an ocean liner and they invited me to go with them. They sent me 500 dollars to buy myself a wardrobe to wear on the ship because they knew I was always wearing jeans. I travelled with them for a while and then set out on my own. The minute I got out of the train in Rome, I looked around and when I saw the light and the colour of the buildings, I decided I was going to stay for a while, and I started looking for a place. I found an apartment right outside Piazza del Popolo, which was for sale, and while it didn't get sold the owners let me rent it with the agreement that they could show it to people—but they weren't able to sell it for a long time. The apartment happened to be near the zoo. So, I was getting over this breakup, living by myself and I started going to the zoo, where I discovered I felt less lonely when watching the animals. Then I met gallerist Fabio Sargentini through a common American friend [the artist Claudio Colnaghi, who at the time lived in New York], who let me use his gallery [L'Attico] as a studio in the mornings, when it was closed. I told him about the work I was doing in New York and he gave me a show. A performance

["Simone Forti e Altri. Danze Costruzioni", 30–31 October 1968]. There was an audience in Rome and there were lots of things happening there, there was a real scene around him, and I was very much part of it. So, then I thought, if Fabio Sargentini is interested in my work, he'd also be interested in the work of Yvonne [Rainer], Steve [Paxton], Trisha [Brown], La Monte Young, and all those people I was close to in New York. And he did the festivals. It was very important.

I'd say it was partly convenience, partly being ready and partly feeling lost and quite blue myself: identifying with the animals from a different and difficult position. We were all in a difficult position. I ended up staying in Rome for a couple of years.

FR: There is this curious picture of you in the zoo with a lion cub. How did it happen?

SF: In the zoo there was this photographer with a lion cub and you paid him to get you picture taken with the lion. I don't know how many lire he got for it. Maybe he was a friend.

FR: It's curious that during that period, at L'Attico, other people started working with animals too. Jannis Kounellis had shown his domestic parrot as part of show in November 1967, Pino Pascali had presented his bristle worms ["Bachi da Setola", March–April, 1968], Jannis Kounellis the horses [*Untitled (Twelve Horses)*, 14 January 1969], Gino de Dominicis the zodiac ["Lo Zodiaco", 4–8 April 1970]... Did you feel connected to those artists at the time?

SF: Pino Pascali also made the shark fins [*Pinne di Pescecane*, 1966], swimming through the gallery but I only saw the through photographs because we never met [Pascali passed away in September 1968]. I was not as connected as I wish I had been; I wish I had taken advantage of the chance to get to know them better. I was at the zoo. I made friends with Anna Papparatti, Fabio's partner at the time, and I had some other friends. But not so much those artists.

FR: You got to Rome in 1968. Do you recall the political situation there?

SF: I don't. It happened so often to me that a whole political movement is happening, a crisis is happening, and I'm not aware of it... Now things have changed. The whole Iraq War happened in relation to the news for me. I became particularly aware of it when my father died because I always felt that he'd know what was going on. He was always reading the newspaper, he would buy three newspapers a day. So when he died I thought someone in the family has to continue doing it and I started reading newspapers. Being born a Jewish in a Fascist country, involvement with the political means knowing when to run and where to run to. It's not about taking a position or fighting for climate change legislation, for instance. Now it could be, but we can't run to Mars, there's only one planet we can live in. It's very difficult. That's what I've been thinking about during this whole climate change crisis.

FR: Later when you were in New York, you were also going to the Bronx Zoo, right?

SF: When I got back in New York, I was working on a movement vocabulary that I would improvise with. I continued going to the zoo and I also spent time at the Natural History Museum. One of the things that interested me was the thigh bone and the pelvis, and how it evolved from being a fin to a limb. Like on reptiles, the thigh moves out to the side and then under... I was looking at the bone structure of that transition and testing it on my own body, transitioning from swimming to crawling, like crawling like a turtle with my limbs under me. I also remember going to the Egyptian Museum of Turin and seeing a

small statue of an Egyptian god that's a bird standing still, there's one also at the Louvre. Somewhere else I saw a hippopotamus god that's like this [enacts a steady position, laughs] Also, in Egyptian statues of men and women, he's generally walking and she's standing. Those postures became part of my vocabulary. Like go to the diagonal, take some steps, go like this, jump like a frog. Mixing information from the Natural History Museum, the Egyptian Museum and the zoo.

FR: Your work challenges the verticality of the standing body and engages with the horizontal body. Humans tend to define their humanness by being upright so I was wondering if you had been interested in looking at creatures that are closer to the floor and that don't move through walking?

SF: Going back to the emotional part, there's something about when the chest is resting and the arms are taking weight, there's something that your chest feels, your heart feels more supported somehow. This is the place where you feel emotions, and when you're crawling, it gets some good pressure to it. Crawling is good. It's good to feel that weight on your upper body.

FR: It's also about becoming something else. The transformation into something else. Do you ever think about what the audience is experiencing?

SF: When I was doing this movement, the audience was seeing me and I had to be aware of what they saw. But also the audience would identify me and feel what I'm feeling. And I had to let that be very transparent. Not that I had to emote in any way, but I had to just feel what I'm feeling and that they could feel it through me. One time, in Switzerland, I forget which city, I performed with musician Peter Van Riper, who was mainly playing saxophone but also other instruments. And we performed and a woman was there in the audience, who we had made friends with because she was a very interesting person. She had a clubfoot and after the performance she said it was the first time that she really felt her body was normal.

FR: Continuing on the emotional thread, there's something very sad about zoos. You were heartbroken and you were going to a place that is also sad. Did the animals' condition affect you?

SF: I think so. There were some animals that I would usually visit when I'd go to the zoo and I don't know if it's true, but I had the feeling that some of them kind of got to know me a bit and noticed I had been sitting there, looking at them for 20 minutes. In a way, I was fantasising that we were kind of hanging out together during that time. But I was aware I could leave and they couldn't. If anything, I felt I was bringing a bit of interest to them.

FR: Later, you made a video of grizzly bears in the New York Zoo [*Three Grizzlies*, 1974]...

SF: Because of what they did. It was an amazing move. They were running back and forth to the back of their enclosure, which was on a hill, and then back again to the front to the fence. Every time they turned, especially one of them, they would push up onto their back feet, swing their head all the way to look up, sending the nose directly upwards, swinging the head around in a circle so that they would drop back on their front legs facing a new direction and run off that way. That bear would go back and forth like that, circling the weight of the upper body to drop back. It was quite an athletic move and this bear did it extremely well, with a lot of bravura! At a certain point, they would stop; one would jump in the pool and the other would lie down to sleep... it wasn't a compulsive, neurotic

behaviour, it was a game. Konrad Lorenz said that if you don't anthropomorphise you make more mistakes than if you do so yes, it was a game.

I happened to go to the zoo with my friend Elaine Hartnett, the girlfriend of Charlemagne Palestine, and she had a camera, she was the one who shot that video, not me. It wouldn't have occurred to me to shoot a video.

FR: What happens between observing the animals and turning them into a work? How do the looking and notation become movement?

SF: When giving workshops I would get everyone to move in a circular path, transitioning from walking to running to getting down on all fours and touching the belly on the floor, like a turtle or a crocodile. When you are aware of those transitions you can get them very smoothly, they become organically clear. A frog is a tadpole before being a frog, and it swims with an undulating motion. Then, when it becomes a frog, it starts jumping symmetrically... how does that transition happen? I remember reading that young frogs tend to fall over all the time [laughs], it makes sense, it's not a smooth transition.

FR: Something interesting about your studies of animal movement is the fact that you are not imitating. There's a relation of your work to naturalness, to natural movements. The animal movement studies are not about mimicking but imagining...You're not going to become a bear but you are embodying the experience of the bear's locomotion.

SF: It's how you would move if you needed to get from here to there, but without a sense of style. It's trying to approximate the animals' movement through my structure. I'm not made to move like that, but to some extent I can move like that. I can take it into my body, I can try to move my body more as if I was built like that.

FR: Does it give pleasure?

SF: Yes, it's fun.

FR: Similarly, but in terms of sound, I'm interested by how you use your voice in your work. Sometimes you speak in words whole other times you are enouncing non-verbal sounds. I find it is interesting because it's an abstract, animalesque sound that comes from the body...

SF: Well I've done a little bit with sound, but not very much. I did something that I called a Throat Dance, which you could call vocalisation. That was abstract sounds, but I haven't done much of that.

FR: Tell me if it's me projecting, but still thinking of becoming other, of transforming oneself into another life form, I see Huddle like an organism.

SF: Yes, and when you do it, you really feel that you're an organism together and the reflexive adjustment to hold the weight passes through the group of people. It almost becomes like one mind or one body that makes adjustments.

FR: Yes, these people are learning how to engage with one another and do something together, but together they are more than people. They are a creature that evolves, struggles and has points of tension.

SF: And the weight can fall through maybe my shoulder on to my neighbour's back and my neighbour maybe has a hand on a knee across an elbow to the other side of the huddle and so the weight passes through us... It happens not in a conscious, designed way. It's

just we feel the need and we work together.

FR: What is the duration? Is there a moment in which you say it's enough?

SF: Well, originally someone wore a watch and after 10 minutes they would say "It's been 10 minutes" and everybody would just walk away. Other times, like in a workshop, I'd say "Let's do it until everyone has had a turn of climbing over the top and down the other side and becoming part of the support huddle again". So yes, it's like a creature. And again, it's important how it's placed in space as it affects the way people observe it from the outside. Because it is also a sculpture and it has a form. I hope and I think they do feel it like that. They might be feeling it when someone is working hard to climb over the top, I know I feel like that as I watch them.

FR: How much of it is about trust? It's interesting to see how you need to trust one another and learn how to distribute the various forces.

SF: When *Huddle* begins, people are often afraid to climb over in case their weight will hurt the people underneath. And it takes a while to realise that the weight is really spread out and even a quite heavy person can go over and it's fine.

FR: *Huddle* for me is a circular forum, it's not so much dealing with horizontality as with circularity. You've made several works in a circle now. Is the circular form something that interested you?

SF: Now that you say that, yes, it interests me. I hadn't thought of it. It's a round shape and then the activity goes around the top.

FR: Thinking about framing and vision and points of view, something I was curious about your visits to the zoo was how a cage creates a frame, a spatial definition in which everything is contained. Why weren't you going to nature to look at animals?

SF: When I moved to Vermont, I thought now I'm going to see bears and deer and moose and foxes. But it's not so easy to see them. They don't show themselves. So I got interested in worms and bugs and spiders, because I was doing a kitchen garden. I was growing vegetables and there's so much life going on in the earth, especially at the end of winter when you break up the earth and clean it to plant seeds and sprouts. You're breaking up a whole environment of life. And you see how they run. I've seen a worm go down a hole and then come back out, and a spider come out after [Laughs]. The worm will stretch its front and then bring its back. Stretch its front, bring its back...

FR: Can you imagine what it is to be a worm?

SF: Yes!

FR: I wanted to ask you about repetition, which relates to the movements of animals, but it's something that is a defining feature of your work, it's circularity and reiteration...

SF: I don't know. I haven't thought about it. I'm naturally aware of how my thoughts move, like in a stream of consciousness. And I think there's a lot of repetition in that. During the day, if you could see a film of your thoughts, I think many thoughts return and return. Whereas if you write an article, you know you're going to maybe set out the premise and then write the thing that's necessary to hear before you will understand the next and then say, now we could go in two directions, I'm going to go on to go on this direction and it's planned in a certain logical way. But when your mind is just going, you'll say, "Oh, I have to get some more apples." I was interested in this movement. "Oh, and when I get the apples

are better also..."

FR: It's true. I was thinking about the relation between improvisation and repetition. You can only improvise if you've repeated it many times...

SF: Yes. You don't improvise out of a void. Bringing it to the personal again, I was building this vocabulary of movements that I would improvise with, and one thing I learned from Anna Halprin, because we were really building how we could work with improvisation, has a point of reference. It was always an exploration of something, even when working with momentum or with negative space, which the space between you and me, for instance, or the space between this part [of the room] and this space. If I was Picasso I would get very interested in this space. It's called negative because it's empty. It's the empty space.

FR: Bruce Nauman works a lot with that. He works with his body a lot. He fills the empty spaces of a chair with concrete. So the vital space is also a negative space?

SF: Yes. When I do an exercise, we're very interested in designing the space between us.

FR: Does it put you in a certain mental state when you're repeating and repeating?

SF: If I knew how to structure something so that every move was different, I wouldn't have the skill to improvise it. I could choreograph it, like in Yvonne [Rainer's] *Trio A* [1978] in which every move is different. Maybe she could have improvised that, I couldn't. For that you have to be able to step away from and say, "Now I'm going to make this move. Now I'll make this move." Like with jazz, which is basically an improvisational form. I'm sure a musician might be working with certain tonality or rhythmic structures. There's a lot of repetition in jazz and it would be really hard to improvise without a lot of repetition. But repetition isn't linear, it's more like a landscape: you can come back to different parts of a landscape.

FR: Yes, there's plenty of repetition in nature too...

SF: The elephants do a dance. They're pacing but they're bobbing their upper body or they're bobbing up and down and swinging their head from side to side. And then they'll do a kick to resolve the momentum somehow. And sometimes they take more steps or fewer steps. They're kind of doing a dance. It's based on repetition and breaking away from that repetition. Establishing a theme and playing with variations.

FR: Scientists are currently doing research on animal dance. I mean all animals make movement but some animals do what is generally accepted as dance, moving in space and according to a sense of rhythm. And these animals are seals, elephants and parrots, animals with vocal cords.

SF: I just read something about that, maybe in your book? That's very interesting. I remember seeing these monkeys. I don't know what kind of monkeys they were, but they had a cage that wasn't very big, but it wasn't really small either. And it had many places to hold on. They were shouting, and the shouts were like "Hoo hoo hoo hoo!" They were percussive. And without much repetition. These numbers of percussive sounds and jumping all over from place to place in the cage. They were performing with beautiful movement and percussion and people would hear it and they would come running. They were percussionists.

FR: Something else that is interesting in the zoo is that the space of rehearsal and the space of performance are the same. Your existence is to perform yourself, but you're

[always] exposed. I was wondering if this was one of the reasons that led you to explore animal movement there?

SF: Partly it was coincidence that I lived near the zoo. I went there because I felt better when I was there. It was fun. It was interesting. It was outside, with the trees. And I started to look at how the animals move their body, thinking of my body and their body, but I think even before that, some of them would move my heart. I'd feel sorry for them or I would just like it that we looked at each other. So there was first a personal connection and then, because I'm a dancer and I had the opportunity to do something at the gallery I thought, "OK, I'm going to look at the movement and I'm going to find something that I want to work with." At that kind of distance, looking at how they move and trying it myself. And then I would find one or two dancers. I would see something that looked to me like they were developing a game to pass the time, which seems to me like the roots of dance.

FR: I was thinking about the relation with space of the gallery. Does it make a difference for you to dance in a gallery or in the theatre?

SF: I'm much more comfortable in a gallery. I don't like to just be frontal. I like to be three dimensional. It just feels different. It feels more like life. A stage is so frontal it might as well be a photograph. I like it when we're all in the same space so viewers can identify with what they see, they don't just look at something outside of themselves.

FR: Recently you made a tribute performance to Robert Morris at Castelli Gallery in New York [*Simone Forti with Obstructions by Robert Morris*, 8 February 2018], in which you were lying around Morris' think felt cut-outs. You looked so vulnerable lying on the floor. I wish the audience was all seated on the floor but there were people on chairs, looking at you from above. It was very beautiful and again it was about your movement being more about being more horizontal than vertical. And I was thinking, how did it feel to have like that people around you?

SF: Yes, that was frontal. But we were in the same space, more than if it had been a stage.

FR: I'd like to ask you something about work titles, because *Three Grizzlies* was first entitled *Twirling Bears* and *Sleepwalkers* has also been named *Sleep Walkers* and *Zoo Mantras*. How do you relate to the titles of your work?

SF: With Van Riper we had a beautiful studio and so we called *Big Room* to everything we did that came from there. We called it *Big Room* but then we also called it something else, *Home Base*...—You want a title? Here's a title—That's the way it was, we weren't really thinking about titles. I guess titles are a way to archive. I was reading an article by a student of Allen Ginsberg talking about Allen. He said: "Allen Ginsberg told us students to always date our poems because it would make things much easier for any scholar. If we became a big poet, the scholars would want to know when we wrote which poem".

FR: You also achieve that identification through your writing.

SF: True. I used the writing. I'm writing more now. I've gotten interested in writing and I'm reading the Beats. I have somehow started reading the Beats and I feel like this is my generation. While I was dancing they were writing and we're not so different. They're much wilder. But I'm feel very close to the generation before them too, to William Carlos Williams, to the phenomenon of Black Mountain College, for instance.

Part II, online interview, May 2020



FR: In an interview with curator Sabine Breitwieser, you've described your life in San Francisco in the late 1950s: "I was working on some jobs, doing a little painting, and once a week I went to a dance class at a school Anna Halprin and Welland Lathrop ran together [...] It wasn't the right thing for me it was fun". I wonder, how did your relationship to dance start?

SF: When I was in high school, we had a choice of whether to take gym or modern dance. I took modern dance and there was a wonderful teacher and she was having us improvise and she was having us bring in the music that we wanted to work with and to make our own projects, so it was something I knew I liked to do. We also had a wonderful biology teacher. On Fridays, the biology teacher would put the textbook aside and ask each of us what we most wondered about. She would end the class at something we had brought up that she also found interesting. When I went off to college, I thought I was going to be a biology major because of that wonderful biology teacher. At Reed, I must have taken dance classes too [between 1953-55, Simone Forti took her undergraduate studies in Liberal Arts at Reed College in Portland, Oregon, studying psychology and sociology]. I remember making a dance and showing it during a student showing time, so I had some experience with dance classes. Also when I was a kid, my mom used to take me to a dance class in Hollywood and we did ballet, oriental and Mexican [laughs]. So I knew I liked dance classes, but I it hadn't occurred to me until I met Anna [Halprin] that dance was going to be my main focus.

FR: Did you learn about Anna [Halprin] when you came to San Francisco?

SF: No, I think I just saw that there was a dance school a couple blocks away.

FR: Why did you think that "it wasn't the right thing for me but it was fun"?

SF: Because it was technique oriented, it was Graham technique. I didn't like to hold my stomach in, I didn't have a turn out, I couldn't remember the combinations... But I had some grace and I liked the exercise...

FR: I was reading something about a work you might ages ago in New York and there

was a piece that was called *Facebook* and I think it was a typo and they meant *Face tunes* but they called it *Facebook* and it was just strange, you have not made a work made named *Facebook*, right?

SF: No but somebody might have asked me for a title for something that didn't have a title and I might have said well *Facebook* yeah of course I mean back then I didn't take titles that seriously I used the same title for different things or I use different titles for the same thing.

FR: Do do you think you think more about titles now?

SF: Probably yes, they help you remember the different pieces being different.

FR: How do you relate to drawing in relation to your dance activity? Do you see a relationship between your dancing and drawing? I'm not referring so much to the drawings that you make as schemes and notes for your choreographic and dance works, but more to the drawings you make as drawings...

SF: Well, I don't know that I make drawings other than in relation to my dancing. Oh well, there were the emotional ones, like the watercolours, but even those...

FR: I'm thinking for instance, of the large charcoal drawing *I Stand Where a Bear Stood Recently Clawing This Tree*, where you repeat the bear's clawing movement to make the drawing...

SF: True, but I think I've only made one like that and it's close to a poem too. I'm trying to write these days and I'm kind of learning, I feel like a beginner, I'm trying to write poetry and I'm realising the difference between saying something and looking at what I see in my mind's eye, of tensions and movement... Like these days now, they are so bland... I have to remember to go to kinaesthetic—whether it's the drawings or the writing, I have to look to see what I feel in my body and what kinds of movements and pressures do I project in my mind's eye.

FR: And how they do you feel when you're writing that you're improvising as well?

SF: I don't know what I'm doing when I'm writing, sometimes it's just coming. There are different parts of it, sometimes it's just coming. I wrote this last night and I thought the first two lines were good, I didn't know, I tried all kinds of things to continue and then I thought, well maybe it's like it's like a Japanese meal, that you got lot of rice and a little bit of something tasty on top of it, and good lines can be that and then I have to find something that's like rice, so here's what I wrote:

*The curtain once reflecting images of plenty
Falls to the solid ground of hunger
Rice and more rice and a small pickle
So big we see how small
The time before and after
A bowl to hold*

I'm indulging in working on stuff. Here's another one:

*These days
bound together like bananas
bunched bland like dizzy spells*

FR: You're writing about food!

SF: That's right [laughs]

FR: To very simple but nutritious food, rice and bananas and it's right not so nice, so you're guided by words and your writing in English?

SF: I'm writing in English

FR: It's very different from your previous writing. It's more grounded in the present than your previous book, *The Bear in the Mirror* [2018], where you're revisiting elements of your life.

SF: Yes, I've also been reading because I realised I have my bookshelves full of wonderful books that I've never looked at, I don't even know how I accumulated them so what I'm reading now is *The Theatre and its Double* by Antonin Artaud. Before that, I was reading William Carlos Williams. And someone sent me an article about a man who crossed the Atlantic a little boat by sea another the crazy guy yes tell that took me that took me somewhere in my imagination I crossed the ocean too.

It also relates to how I feel about being the age that I am. You and I are chatting here, but a lot of my colleagues are gone; Marcia Hafif is gone, Carolee Schneemann is gone, Nancy Stark Smith is gone... In a way, I might as well be gone too. I don't need to be doing these conversations. I can be gone too. So, what I can do is be a beginner again, in a new form.

Appendix B

Interview with Joan Jonas

This conversation took place in January 2019 in Portland, Jamaica, at the Alligator Head Foundation, an organisation dedicated to the area's marine preservation initiated by TBA-21, whose Academy has commissioned Jonas' Moving Off the Land II project. The artist's stay there coincided with its development, which largely focused on marine and local cultures and endangered habitats. I accompanied the artist as part of my research of the thesis and this dialogue takes this new work commission as a starting point to reflect on Jonas' practice, her relationship to source materials and motifs and our present times.



Filipa Ramos: How did this new commission come into being: what were its references, its starting point and the articulation between the various elements that will constitute it?

Joan Jonas: There were actually different threads that came together in Venice for *They Come to Us Without a Word* [Jonas' presentation at the 2015 Venice Biennale, 2015]. But it started in 2010, when I began to work with Halldór Laxness' novel *Under the Glacier* for a part of *Reanimation* [a performance combining choreography, drawings and closed-circuit video projections, accompanied by music]. I called it a lecture-performance, but it was really a performance for the camera witnessed by the audience. And it's now part of the final version of *Reanimation*, the installation. It's based on actions I do with my hands and with photographs and special effects, made in my studio. I was really interested in the very poetic way in which Laxness writes about nature. I think what he says is beautiful. For instance, the way he describes what the bee does, that it's a super communion. A miracle. And that influenced, at that moment, how I began to think about certain creatures and the phenomenon of what they can do, which is kind of miraculous. At the same time, I had to consider the fact that *Under the Glacier* was written in the 1960s, while now the glaciers are melting, therefore the piece became partly focused on the situation of the environment and what's going on in relation to the climate, the creatures and the land. Then, at about the same time I had a project in Japan [*they come to us without a word*, CCA Kitakyushu Project Gallery, Kitakyushu, 2013], which was not related to Laxness' book. On my way to Japan I was thinking of all the fish the Japanese eat, and I decided to make 100 drawings of fish. This group of drawings was presented in Japan and nowhere else, though I included them in a different way in my show in Venice. *Reanimation*, on the other hand, had already been fully developed and realised as a performance and an installation. I continued to be inspired by Laxness, even if I wasn't focused on him. That statement about bees became part of the Venice installation. I had five different rooms in Venice: bees, fish, mirror, wind and homeroom. The bees specifically related to him. Later, I was invited by Francesca von Habsburg and Markus Reymann to do a performance about the oceans. I first presented it as a lecture performance, which is a kind of new form for me, and I called it *Oceans – Sketches and Notes*. It became a parallel, ongoing project that I haven't finished, and it's not even fully developed. But I began this work by going back to what I did in Venice with fish. I will continue to work on the performance, but in the end it will also take the form of an installation. By now I've collected too much material to include in just a performance.

FR: I'm interested in the presence of fish and of fishing—as well as other sea creatures, mermaids for instance—in your work. Going back to the series of fish drawings that you made for the exhibition in Japan, and also thinking about your animal drawings in general, did they come from your own imagination, or are they based on books?

JJ: No, they were copies. I mean, I made those drawings by copying them from a book, which is the way I work. I found an old book about Japanese fish in a second-hand bookstore in San Diego—a beautiful book, with illustrations, beautiful drawings. It's purely information, a nature encyclopaedia from Japan. I made those drawings by opening up the book and choosing a certain fish to copy. I'd put it on the ground and then I'd copy it as an ink drawing with blue ink on paper, very fast. So they're not exact copies, but they're totally based on those particular fish. I include all different kinds of fish. I'll say that in general I never make up my own animals, I'd rather go directly from nature.

FR: These marine creatures seem to have a major presence in your recent work. Is there a growth of an environmental consciousness in present times that's permeating your

practice and shaping your understanding of the sea?

JJ: I've always been interested in the world of so-called nature. This is just something that we're all thinking about now, but which has come into focus in my work over the last ten years. Besides fish, I've also been drawing birds for the past few years. A friend gave me a book about birds in Thailand, and so I began to copy those. Before embarking on this oceans project, I was beginning to develop a project about birds and trees, which I'll take up again at some point.

I recall that [curator] Ute Meta Bauer told me something really interesting: she said that in the Pacific, people don't believe that there's a separation between the sea and the land, but that they are one and the same thing. So birds aren't exactly a different subject from fish. And I wish I could somehow incorporate that assumption into this project, because it combines these two interests of mine. But no, I've always been interested in nature. I love to work in different landscapes and to deal with their inherent situations. But the only animal I've really worked with is the dog, with my own dogs.

FR: This year [2019] you're going to have a big retrospective exhibition, which opens in March at the Tate Modern. You can do a retrospective in many ways; how has this show been conceived? What are the specific threads, choices and ideas behind it?

JJ: I call it a survey show because it's not really a big retrospective. It's a limited number of pieces. In particular, it's a development from a larger show at the HangarBicocca in Milan, "Light Time Tales" [an exhibition of installations and single-channel videos ranging from across Jonas' career, 2014]. There I just made a selection of as many as possible of my favourite pieces. There were some works that I couldn't show due to the environmental situation of the space. Andrea Lissoni, the exhibition's curator, collaborated with me, of course. For instance by deciding to show *Waltz* (2003), Andrea put in evidence my interest in the dog, it focused on a certain aspect of my work, which is nice. He'll also be the curator of the show at the Tate, and here he has a similar significant role. In the past I've always wanted to control exactly what I show, with the help of a curator, but in this case, I enjoy Andrea's input into the process. Naturally there are threads that go through my work, but the show will not follow a specific theme or chronology. *The Juniper Tree* (1976, turned into an installation in 1994) is owned by the Tate, so that will be included, partly because it was my first narrative fairy tale. I've wanted to show the "Organic Honey" series [Jonas' first performance to integrate video, 1972] since Milan. For me it is really important to have that piece; we can't show it at the Tate because there's no room for it, but we'll show it in Munich and in Portugal. I also wanted to have my later work well represented, as *Lines in the Sand* (2004) and of course the work that was shown at Gavin Brown's exhibition in New York [*What is Found in the Windowless House is True*, 2017], parts of which were also shown in Spain at an exhibition at the Botín Foundation in Santander ["Joan Jonas: stream or river, flight or pattern", 2016]. I worked with curator Catherine Wood on the performance part of the show as her curatorial input is concerned with the live aspect of the show. I wanted to do an outdoor piece based on my early outdoor works, and she came up with the idea of doing it on the Thames, which will be a new version of my outdoor works. It's sort of a gamble. We're also going to show something called *Stage Sets*. This was totally Andrea's idea — I never would have thought of that. But he really insisted on it, and I think for a good reason.

FR: Can you tell me a bit more about *Stage Sets*? Is it a display or a proper artwork?

JJ: It was a work that I made for an exhibition ["Joan Jonas/Stage Sets"] at the Institute of Contemporary Art of the University of Pennsylvania in 1977. It's a combination of props

and elements from different stage sets of the 1970s: receding paper walls from *Funnel*, a six-foot metal hoop, a group of accounting chairs from *Organic Honey*, tin cones from *Mirage* hanging from the ceiling as light fixtures, an octagonal structure like a magic mirror box, a table with a drawing on it against a wall with another drawing on that—all arranged in a certain way to suggest a stage set. This work does not include video, so it's rather different in nature from the other works in the show. It's more sculptural. And I understand Andrea's decision to include a variety of pieces, and I actually think it's a good idea, but you know, sometimes I look at my work and I don't see what other people see, I don't find it as important as somebody else might find it. I like this input, somebody else stepping in, which is a new experience.

FR: Despite the fact that you seemed to have left behind more conventional approaches to sculpture at an early phase of your career, there continues to be a strong sense of volume and a specific construction of space within your work. Do you see this interest as an ongoing dialogue with the tradition of sculpture?

JJ: Yes. From the time when I stepped from sculpture to performance, I thought of bringing my ideas about sculptural space to my performances. I've always made 'stage sets', so the transition to installation was a natural one. I really do consider this a kind of expanded sculpture. It's interesting that, in academic institutions, the kind of work that I do was first accepted by sculpture departments.

FR: I'd like to move to your performing activity, to your performing self, where you sometimes become a blackbird, as in *Merlo* (1974), a howling dog (*Waltz*, 2003), a seducing woman (*Organic Honey*). Do you see these gestures as a way of becoming other?

JJ: I don't think of it exactly that way. From the very beginning I was role-playing. I thought of performing as playing roles. So after the *Mirror* pieces [a series of performance and video works begun in the 1960s], which were very abstract and not at all about representing a character or anything, I began to work with characters, starting from *Organic Honey*. *Organic Honey* is a character that I created with masks and costumes—a female persona that was androgynous also, and I shifted back and forth in the piece in these disguises. And from that time on and until recently, I really focused on playing roles of women. In *Lines in the Sand* I was interested in the poet H. D., Hilda Doolittle, who wrote *Helen in Egypt*, a version of the Trojan War with Helen of Troy as its main character. I didn't want to play H. D. or Helen, but their personas and their presence inspired the subject matter of the work. While I didn't directly represent them, there were many references. So it's always about disguises and role-play. When I begin to work on a performance, I always try to imagine who or what I represent, and I often just find a costume—a dress, a hat—to give me an identity. It's not easy to talk about or describe what happens when I enter into the performative aspect, when it becomes non-verbal, and I am interacting with the material and moving, trying to find movement. Over the years I've worked with movement in several different ways. Lately, not focusing on tasks.

FR: What about in the performance *The Shape, the Scent, the Feel of Things* (2004), which responds to the life and work of Aby Warburg? What was your relation to Warburg there?

JJ: I never became Aby Warburg. But I did speak his text. In that piece I play the parts with Ragani Haas, who was the other woman performing. José Luis Blondet played Aby Warburg, because I wanted the character to really have dimension. That was very conscious. That had to be played by another performer. And Ragani and I were different,

we were the nurses in the sanatorium. I thought of that space at Dia:Beacon as being the sanatorium where Warburg was living when he wrote that text [Images from the Region of the Pueblo Indians of North America] about the Hopi people. The performance took place in the basement of Dia:Beacon in a long narrow corridor defined by columns with the audience sitting on a bleacher at one end. There were very high ceilings. Then I entered into another kind of performative dimension, while not playing any particular person. Just pure performance. And there's a voiceover in which I'm reciting his words and the titles of photographs. Because I didn't want to use any of his images that he took in the Southwest. So while I represent Warburg, I'm not playing Warburg at all.

FR: You've been working as an artist for an extended period of time. How has age and ageing influenced your performing?

JJ: I can't do strenuous things the way I used to, but so far it hasn't hampered me. I'm not interested in exerting myself in a certain way anymore. There's a limit to what I can do, jumping up and down and running around, for instance. But that's why I'm working on another kind of movement. For my piece *Stream or River, Flight or Pattern* [a multimedia installation exploring the relations between humans and the environment, 2016-2017], I was interested in developing another kind of movement for myself, in the work. I perform in the projections, in costumes, and in this place I'm not playing a particular role. I'm not representing a particular character. I'm moving in relation to the projected background, as I consider the visual effects of this interaction. The movements are really choreographed, and partly determined by this shallow space that I have to work in, in order to remain fully in the projection. I'm continuing to work this way in this new piece, commissioned by TBA21. I'm interested in the form of a lecture-demonstration, which in this case is about articulating information and a longer-than-usual verbal narrative, in relation to pure movement and performance, as I interact with the projected video images. And the subjects that I'm dealing with—the sea, sea creatures, mermaids, and so on. Mermaids exist in this work because I decided, as I always do, to deal with myth.

FR: I'm particularly interested about your collaboration with dogs. How did it come into being and how did you relate with the various dogs you've had?

JJ: I've had three dogs in my adult life. The first was Sappho, and I always say that Sappho was a saint; Zina was a comedian. I'm not sure about Ozu. He's sort of a prince. Sappho... She is in my work, and you see her, she's more of a person. She's a very beautiful dog, with one blue eye and one brown eye. The image of the dog is all through my work. And also the image of that dog, of each dog I've had and I've drawn.

In *Organic Honey*, for instance, I was exploring from the very beginning the function of myth. So one idea is the concept of the animal helper that women have. An animal helper can be a cat or a horse. The force that drives you, the animal force, energy. So, in *Organic Honey*, I justify the idea of having a dog as being the animal helper, a driving force... and then I become a dog and I howl. I was slightly influenced by Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood* (1936), where Nora, one of the female characters, howls like a dog. Then Zina, the second dog. I drew her over and over again, I was fascinated with her. She was the one who decided to enter into my work. Every time I got up to make something in front of the camera she'd get into it, because she'd come and interact with me. I never told her what to do. She just participated.

FR: Was she the one jumping the hoop in one of the My New Theater pieces?

JJ: Yes, well, I did tell her to jump in the hoop. I taught her so she could easily do it. I think

Sappho could jump through a hoop too, but Ozu won't go near it. I recently made a piece called *Beautiful Dog* (2014), with Ozu in it. We tied a GoPro camera onto his collar. It recorded upside down facing backwards through his back legs. He's very different to those two dogs. They're cattle dogs, shepherds, and they have a different way of relating to people or to a situation. Ozu is a poodle, and I haven't yet made many drawings of him. So I want to do more with Ozu but it's a different process—he is very sensitive, very intelligent, but he'll behave in his own way. He is intent on trying to understand what I'm saying when I speak to him. He understands many words.

FR: My favourite work of yours is *Barking* (1972). The reason I like it so much is that it takes the interest some of your earlier works have in distance and perception, and turns it to a more intimate sort of triangle between a camera, an animal and two women. In the black-and-white video, you can't see what the dog is doing, but she's barking and there's a person following her, plus the camera. I like how the triangular relationship between person, machine and dog is so articulated in such a simple video. And I was curious to know how it came into being.

JJ: Oh, that's funny. Well, that video was shot in Nova Scotia in 1972. Actually Simone [Forti] was visiting me. And from the very beginning when I started going to Nova Scotia, I had my camera and I recorded everyday events, choreographed actions, and the landscape. I really love the landscape there. So, my camera was at hand. It was recorded in the kitchen of an old house. And the dog was outside, and it was barking. So I picked up the camera and started to record it, and Simone walked into the room and said 'She's still barking.' It was just something that came together in a very organic way. I haven't looked at it in a long time, I should look at it. But it's just organic, the way things in my life happen. The unplanned becomes part of my work.

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