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OTHER BEINGS, JULIE ANDREYEV

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What constitutes animal, being human and the nature of our interrelationships with other beings are some of the key questions fielded within the discourse of post-humanist and post-anthropocentric thought. Not only are critical theorists, philosophers and scientists exploring these questions but also artists who materialize their ideas through interspecies art. Julie Andreyev, Canadian artist-activist, researcher and educator, explores relational exchange with animals and other beings in her *Animal Lover* project through the creative process of art making. Her art practice applies cognitive ethology in relation to communication ethics and is in dialogue with post-anthropocentric and ecofeminist thought around human-animal relationality and its ontological consequences for subjectivity, individualism and agency. In *EPIC_Tom* and *Biophilia*, both performed at Emily Carr University as part of the “Time, Light and Sound” series and in her current work *Bird Park*, Andreyev engages with her companion dogs, Tom and Sugi, forest beings and a family of crows in creative collaborations. These collaborations culminate in new media works that provide conduits into more-than-human subjectivities, activating through representational ethics an emergent aesthetic that is both process-oriented and participatory in nature.¹

In the improvised sonic event, *EPIC_Tom*, Andreyev and Simon Lysander Overstall generate live soundscapes and animation while participating musicians, DB Boyko and the VOICE OVER mind Choir, respond with human vocalizations to both a projected animation of her dog, Tom, against a changing abstract aura and a score of his vocal utterances, representing different canine emotions of wonder, desire, excitement and anticipation while reaching for a ball. In these collaborations, Andreyev applies “interspecies generative indeterminacy,” an approach she developed based on John Cage’s method of indeterminacy, to create democratic conditions for the dogs to contribute with less authorial control.² She also included “communication ethics to avoid harms” that combines knowledge of different communication modalities with compassionate acts of listening, seeing and feeling. This combined methodology incorporates ecofeminist and environmental philosopher Val Plumwood’s ideas of communication ethics based on knowing “other-than-human modes of communication” and communicating “on their own terms.”³ Communication ethics ensures that consent, a necessary condition for mutual collaborations is granted by both parties. For instance, when the dogs pawed at the head-covering parts of their mocap suits designed to record their facial expressions, she removed them. Subsequently, this mutual exchange influenced the aesthetic choices to use canine vocalizations and full body gestures to represent canine emotions.



Julie Andreyev, *Bird Park*, 2017-2018.
Multi-species research project. Video (still).
Courtesy of the artist.

In the studio and in life, Andreyev thinks of her canine collaborators as “companion dogs” within a relational context of canine individuality and agency. This differs from Donna Haraway’s view of dogs as a “companion animal” defined within “human-animal” ontologies in their various societal-based roles as “biosocial” animals like service dogs, dogs as family members or dogs as weapons.⁴ For Haraway, dog is a “companion animal” belonging to a much larger, heterogeneous taxonomy of “companion species” that are compositions of biology, difference, semiotic materiality and commodity culture.⁵ For Andreyev, all life forms, including dogs, are not defined so much by socio-political historicisms but as sentient beings, articulated through individuated multi-subjectivities and enacted through thoughts, feelings and senses. This core animal ethic extends to her other interspecies collaborations with forest beings.

In *Biophilia* (2017–2018), Andreyev and her human collaborators make art with a forest, improvising to digitally-mediated sounds and video based on her recordings of a coastal old growth forest located in Fillongley Provincial Park on Denman Island, British Columbia. In a performance held in 2018, with Simon Lysander Overstall, generating live sounds and images through algorithmic software, Andreyev used sonic cues to manipulate the pitch and timbre of the outputted soundscape with a theremin, an electronic “sound-making instrument” and a guitar pedal to provide richer effects, while DB Boyko and the singers of the VOICE OVER mind Choir responded to the live sounds and projected video with a palette of human vocalizations. What unfolds is an immersive sonic and visual experience of an

ecological aesthetic, a verdant forest resonating with life. Andreyev’s reflections and perceptions of the forest, are made “standing still” and observing, listening and feeling the forest in “biophilic attention,” a technique she describes as a “form of mindfulness” to generate relational connections between the self and other beings. In *Biophilia*, the self and other forest beings make connections, forming embodied encounters. These are exchanges of objective relationality produced through a multi-subjective, decentered subject position. This is a position of “zoe” that ecofeminist philosopher Rosi Braidotti described as an “enlarged sense of inter-connection between self and others” in egalitarian inclusivity among all living matter.⁶ In *Biophilia*, by positioning humans in self-reflexivity with forest beings, connecting in symbiosis over a shared biota network, Andreyev offers alternatives for thinking beyond the parasitic relations of anthropocentric disparity. Like Haraway, she also makes connections between the processes of symbiosis and creativity as knowledge practices, in sympoiesis of “making with.”⁷ In *Biophilia*, human collaborators are “making with” a forest. However, the relations and processes of Andreyev’s “making with” differ from Haraway’s. This is revealed through their distinct approaches to kinship. Andreyev’s kin is not Haraway’s kin in which “kin is a wild category” and “making kin as oddkin” happen regardless of genealogy or networks, occurring instead, along tenuous pathways—always connecting, reconnecting, disconnecting.⁸ In forest collaborations, Andreyev and human artists make kinship over shared networks of biological exchange. Non-kin with kin of microorganisms with trees with birds with fungi with insects with soil with plants in “a space of biophilia,” becoming forest beingness.⁹



Julie Andreyev, *EPIC_Tom*, 2014-2017.
Multi-species audio-visual installation.
Motion capture session in collaboration
with Simon Lysander Overstall and Tom.
Courtesy of the artist.





Andreyev expands these social dialogic spaces into the wild living of crows, engaging in interspecies collaborations with a mother, father and daughter of a crow family. *Bird Park* is a dynamic site installation and field research station situated on the roof deck of her studio and home where Andreyev stages interactive elements such as stone caches, perches, water bowls and foraging spots that serve as material cues for the crows to gather, play and socialize and to provide points of contact where Andreyev and the crows can make connections. By applying Fluxus methods that use instructions to produce indeterminate outcomes through participatory art making and by incorporating varying degrees of direction, these interactive elements provide opportunities for interspecies creativity. These elements include a central recording and interactive station incorporating a long piece of rebar where the crows would perch. The rebar is outfitted with vibration sensors that pick up the crows' movements, outputting them as sounds that are then recorded. Another "instructed" element is an area of several wide, shallow clay bowls filled with fresh water where crows enact seemingly everyday crow activities like soaking food to soften it for digestion or flapping their wings in the water. Forage spots where Andreyev leaves affordances of food are more specifically directed. These include hand-woven jute pouches containing dog kibble and popcorn strategically placed near the primary recording installation. And a stone cache, incorporating an interactive game of search-and-find, which elicits crow interactions with "rewards" of almonds that are more instructive.

In the first year of their relationship, the crows brought Andreyev assemblage-like objects made of broken mussel shells, white beach glass and regurgitated matter. While it is hard to resist imposing human-meaning-making onto these objects as Duchampian ready-mades it is perhaps more compelling to think of these objects as representing crow-initiated acts of gift-giving. Recent ornithology reveals that gift-giving occurs among crows themselves and even with humans as signs of trust.¹⁰ Although crows and humans share commensal relations, living alongside each other with typically minimal contact, crows as social beings have come to understand human behavior. Through their daily, direct interactions with Andreyev and the interactive elements, meaningful and lasting connections are made. As with forest kinships, interspecies creativity involves kin making with non-kin over shared networks, which in the case of crows, are still largely nascent, yet-to-be-made.

Julie Andreyev, *Biophilia*, 2017- 2018.
Multi-species audio-visual installation. Production photo
in collaboration with Simon Lysander Overstall and birds,
insects, plants and trees in a forest. Courtesy of the artist.

Some of the crows' interactions in *Bird Park* are produced in short video segments that show moments of crow cooperation, sharing and learning. Recorded at ground-level perspective from a crow's point-of-view, how they function as artworks is a matter of representational context. These videos may function as both documentation for research and as "performance works."¹¹ It is curious to wonder whether staging these videos as interactive elements within the installation, would interest the crows. Would the crows enjoy watching themselves? Crows enacting crow sentience in crow play, crow work and crow lessons: all emerging in *Bird Park* as interspecies creativity. Throughout these interspecies collaborations, Andreyev explores how other beings communicate and behave in more ways than we, humans, may recognize, and believes this affords us an ethical position of humility from which to relate to animals and more-than-human life forms.

1. Julie Andreyev, "Responding to Dogs," *Humanimalia: a journal of human/animal interface studies*, vol. 8, no. 2 (Spring 2017), 134.
2. Id., *Ibid.*, 136.
3. Val Plumwood, *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason* (London: Routledge, 2002).
4. Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press), 12-13.
5. Id., *Ibid.*, 15-16.
6. Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Durham and London: Polity Press, 2013), 49-50.
7. Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2016), 57-58.
8. Id., *Ibid.*, 2.
9. Julie Andreyev, "Biophilia: Making Art with a Forest," *Green Humanities*, upcoming issue, 2.
10. "The Secrets of Gift Giving Crows," *Wburs The Wild Life*, March 22, 2015, <http://thewildlife.wbur.org/2015/03/12/the-secrets-of-gift-giving-crows/>.
11. <https://vimeo.com/album/5314726>.

Penny Leong Browne holds a Master of Applied Arts degree from Emily Carr University of Art and Design and has exhibited her work and had her writing published widely, from Western Front (Vancouver) to the Pace Digital Gallery (New York). Her critical texts have appeared in various journals, and recently in the *Contemporary Media Arts Journal* (School of Contemporary Arts, SFU). Her art practice utilizes methodologies of close study along with repetition and seriality as parameters towards creative production and research. She is currently investigating aesthetics and representation around obsolescence and ephemerality. What emerges, she considers not only as art works but equally, as artefacts of research.