

**ANIMAL ETHICS AND CONTEMPORARY ART:  
AN EXPLORATION OF THE INTERSECTIONS BETWEEN ETHICS AND  
AESTHETICS, HUMANS AND ANIMALS, HUMAN AND ANIMAL INJUSTICES**

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## Table of Contents

List of Illustrations.....	iv
Abstract.....	x
Introduction.....	1
Research Questions .....	3
Research Method.....	3
Practice: Methodology .....	7
I - A Re-enchanted Aesthetics .....	12
Art and Holocaust.....	15
Feminist Metaphysics.....	25
Postcolonial Sensibility .....	31
The Representation of Nature .....	37
The Capitalist Sublime .....	46
Animals: Aesthetics and Ethics.....	53
II - Theoretical Context.....	63
Violence against Animals.....	64
Capability of Suffering .....	65
Suffering and Vulnerability .....	66
Eternal Darkness: Animal Holocaust .....	69
Alienation and Fragmentation.....	72
Hierarchies, Dichotomies, and Categories .....	76
III - My Art Practice .....	88

Chicken Meat Project .....	90
Grotesqueness .....	92
Painting Objects.....	93
Black and White .....	97
Bird Panopticon.....	100
Animal Panopticon and Human Gaze .....	101
Animal Debris and Human Dream .....	106
Why Birds Matter .....	110
Chinese Bird and Flower Painting.....	115
Hide and Seek.....	123
Punning Name and Folding Screen .....	124
The Re-enchantment of Oriental Ethics and Aesthetics .....	126
Stuplimity .....	131
Suitable for Vegetarians .....	136
The Bird of Immortality .....	142
Whiteness.....	148
IV - Conclusion.....	157
References:.....	167

## List of Illustrations

1. Chicago, Judy (1993) *The Fall*, [Modified Aubosson tapestry], 4'-6" x 18', woven by Cowan, Audrey, Robert and Audrey Cowan Family Trust.  
At: <http://www.throughtheflower.org/projects/holocaustproject>, (Accessed on 30.01.16).
2. Chicago, Judy (1995) *Four Questions*, [Sprayed acrylic, oil, and Marshall photo oils on photo linen], 42 in. x 198 in. x 4 in. Photo: © Donald Woodman.  
At: <http://sites.psu.edu/artlinkstohistory/2014/07/08/four-questions-by-jc/> (Accessed on 15.02.16).
3. Boltanski, Christian (1987) *Chases High School*, [4 black-and-white photographs in metal frames, 88 tin boxes, and 4 lamps], 223 x 238 cm, the Israel Museum, © 2005 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris. Photo © IMJ, by Meidad Suchowolski.  
At: <http://www.arcv.org/?q=node/384> (Accessed on 16.02.16).
4. Boltanski, Christian (1990) *Reserve: Lake of the Dead*, [Installation], Institute of Contemporary Arts, Nagoya, Japan, 1990. Courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery, New York/Paris.  
At: <http://www.kulturwest.de/buehne/detailseite/artikel/es-geht-um-die-zerstoerung-von-koerpern/> (Accessed on 16.02.16).
5. Coe, Sue (1991) *Dead Meat*, [collage], courtesy of the artist.  
At: <http://www.obieg.pl/artmix/24252> (Accessed on 16.02.16).
6. Spero, Nancy (1967) *The War Series*, [Ink and gouache on paper], 61 x 91,4 cm, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid.  
At: <http://www.museoreinasofia.es/en/collection/artwork/clown-and-helicopter> (Accessed on 16.02.16).
7. Spero, Nancy (1985-1989) *Torture of Women*, [handprinting and typewriter collage on paper], 14 panels, 51 x 3810cm overall. Photos courtesy National Gallery of Canada.  
At: <http://blog.art21.org/2010/04/16/nancy-speros-torture-of-women/#.VsLs3GfcuUk> (Accessed on 16.02.16).
8. Jin, Lipeng (2015-16) *Hide and Seek* (Details) [Polyester habutai, ink, wood, poultry feathers, and yellow light], 3 six-panel folding screens, each panel 202 × 65 cm. Collection of the artist.
9. Spero, Nancy (1987-88) *Sky Goddess/ Egiption Acrobat*, [Handprinted and printed collage], 11 panels, 274x671cm overall, in Bird, J., Isaak, J., & Lotringer, S. (eds.) *Nancy Spero*, London: Phaidon, 1996, 142.
10. Chicago, Judy (1992) *Arbeit Macht Frei / Work Makes Who Free? In the Holocaust Project*, with Donald Woodman, [Sprayed Acrylic, Oil, Welded Metal, Wood, and Photography on Photo Linen and Canvas], 5' 7" x 11' 11", Photo© Donald Woodman.

At: <http://www.judychicago.com/gallery.php?name=Holocaust+Project+Gallery> (Accessed on 15.02.16).

11. Walker, Kara (2008) *Slavery! Slavery! Presenting a GRAND and LIFE LIKE Panoramic Journey into Picturesque Southern Slavery!*, [Cut paper on wall], 144 x 1,020 inches, 365.76 x 2,590.8 cm. Hammer Museum, Los Angeles. Photo: Joshua White.

At: <http://bombmagazine.org/article/1000130/kara-walker-larry-walker> (Accessed on 15.02.16).

12. Kentridge, William (1991) *Mine*, [Production stills; 16mm animated film transferred to video], 5:50 min. Copyright and courtesy of William Kentridge.

At: <http://www.art21.org/anythingispossible/slideshow/on-animated-films/#art21-wkaip-films-011> (Accessed on 16.02.16).

13. Kentridge, William (1997-1998) *WEIGHING...and WANTING*, [Charcoal, pastel on paper], Collection of the Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego © 2000 William Kentridge.

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14. Dion, Mark (1993) *The Library for the Birds of Antwerp*, [Installation, Eighteen African finches, tree, ceramic tiles, books, photographs, bird cages, bird traps, chemical containers, rat and snake in liquid, shot gun shells, axe, nets, Audubon prints, bird nests, wax fruit, and assorted objects], dimensions variable. Installation view: Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst, Antwerp, Belgium. Courtesy Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York.

At: <http://www.art21.org/images/mark-dion/the-library-for-the-birds-of-antwerp-1993?slideshow=1> (Accessed on 16.02.16).

15. Snæbjörnsdóttir, Bryndís & Wilson, Mark (2007) *Three Attempt*, [3 channel audio video], in *Between You and Me*, [installation].

At: <https://interactivefutures2011.wordpress.com> (Accessed on 30.01.16).

16. Bryndís Snæbjörnsdóttir & Mark Wilson, *You Must Carry Me Now*, [14 image-and-text works], in *Trout Fishing in America and Other Stories*, Arizona State Museum of Art. Photo: Damion Julien-Rohman).

At: <http://www.statepress.com/article/2014/11/trout-fishing-exhibit-delves-into-importance-of-conservationism>, (Accessed on 30.01.16).

17. Olly & Suzi (1998) *Cheetahs*, [C-Type photograph mounted on aluminium with perspex], Namibia, Limited Edition 15, 2 AP, 48" x 32".

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21. Dion, Mark (1994) *Flotsam and Jetsam (The End of the Game)*, [Mixedmedia: Boat, sand, wooden platform, chair, electric fan, net, assorted beach debris], dimensions variable. Installation shot at De Vleeshall, Middleburg, The Netherlands.

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22. Gaba, Meschac (1997) *Draft Room*, [Mixedmedia installation], © Gert Jan van Rooij, Museum De Paviljoens.

At: <http://www.depaviljoens.nl/page/55305> (Accessed on 16.02.16).

23. Hirst, Damien (1991) *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind*, [Installation: Glass, steel, silicon, formaldehyde and shark] 217 x 542 x 180 cm, © Damien Hirst. All rights reserved, DACS 2010, Photograph: Prudence Cuming Associates.

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30. Jin, Lipeng (2015-16) *Bubble Life* (Details), [Polyester habutai, ink, wood, poultry feathers, and yellow light], six-panel folding screen, 202 × 65 cm. Collection of the artist.

31-34. Jin, Lipeng (2012) *Chicken Meat Project*, [Black and white acrylic, 22 canvases], each 220x220cm, LICA Instalation Site, Lancaster University. Collection of the artist.

35-45, 49. Jin, Lipeng (2014) *Bird Panopticon*, [Polyester, dye, ink, black acrylic, poultry feathers, and blue lighting]. Dimension: 50 pieces of painting, each 75 x 585cm; feather cushion: 250cm in diameter, A28, LICA Event Space, Lancaster University. Collection of the artist.

46. Emperor Huizong or Ji, Zhao (1108 or 1109) *Pigeon on a Peach Branch*, [Hanging scroll, colour on silk], 28.6 cm × 26.0 cm (11.3 in × 10.2 in), private collection in Japan.  
At: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emperor\\_Huizong\\_of\\_Song#/media/File:Momohatozu\\_Huizong.JPG](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emperor_Huizong_of_Song#/media/File:Momohatozu_Huizong.JPG) (Accessed on 16.02.16).

47. Cotán, Juan Sánchez (1602) *Still Life with Game Fowl, Vegetables and Fruits*, [Oil on canvas], Museo del Prado Madrid.

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48. Audubon, John James (1825) *Carolina Parakeet* (*Conuropsis carolinensis*), Havell plate no. 26, [Watercolor], New-York Historical Society.

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50. Jin, Lipeng (2015-16) *Hide and Seek*, [Polyester habutai, ink, wood, poultry feathers, and yellow light], 3 six-panel folding screens, each panel 202 × 65 cm. Collection of the artist.

51. Attributed to Ding, Qu (active ca. 1023-1056) *Early Spring*. [Handscroll, ink and color on silk] 45.5 x 115.3 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

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52. Qiu, Anxiong (2006) *New Book of Mountains and Seas*, [Animation, three-channel video projection], 30 mins 15 sec, Metropolitan Museum of Art.

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53. Hamilton, Ann (1990/1996) *Between Taxonomy and Communion*, [Steel table, iron oxide powder, and approximately 14,000 human and animal teeth], dimension: table: 32 1/2 x 168 x 56 inches (82.6 x 426.7 x 142.2 cm), Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York Gift, Ginny Williams in honor of Ann Hamilton, 2004. Photo: Richard Loesch.

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55. Jin, Lipeng (2015-16) *Suitable for Vegetarians* (Details) [Polyester habutai, ink, wood, poultry feathers, and yellow light], 3 six-panel folding screens, each panel 202 × 65 cm. Collection of the artist.

56. Jin, Lipeng (2015-16) *Suitable for Vegetarians*, [Polyester habutai, ink, wood, poultry feathers, and yellow light], 3 six-panel folding screens, each panel 202 × 65 cm. Collection of the artist.

57. Jin, Lipeng (2015-16) *The Bird of Immortality*, [Polyester habutai, ink, wood, poultry feathers, and yellow light], six-panel folding screen, 202 × 65 cm. Collection of the artist.

58-60 Jin, Lipeng (2015-16) *The Bird of Immortality* (Details), [Polyester habutai, ink, wood, poultry feathers, and yellow light], six-panel folding screen, 202 × 65 cm. Collection of the artist.

61 Jin, Lipeng (2015) Feathers inside a panel (Experiment).

62. Jin, Lipeng (2015-16) *Bubble Life* (Details), [Polyester habutai, ink, wood, poultry feathers, and yellow light], six-panel folding screen, 202 × 65 cm. Collection of the artist.



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**Abstract**

This research provides artistic interventions into the question of institutionalised violence against animals. With a relational and holistic vision in mind, this artistic enquiry explores the intersections between ethics and aesthetics, humans and animals, human and animal injustices. It is dualistic and anthropocentric thinking that underlies both human and animal oppression. A Derridean approach invites us to think about the shared vulnerability among all beings through the presence of the animal other, calling our infinite responsibility towards the animal and dismantling entwined dualisms. With regard and respect, we are encouraged to appreciate the animal as a singular, specific, valuable being, rather than a predetermined, dualistic category.

Formally and conceptually informed by contemporary art addressing both human and animal oppression, this enquiry critically reflects on the *invisibility* of violence towards animals which contributes collective ignorance and indifference to animal suffering. Translating the testimony of animal's plight into poetic representation, I propose three pieces of large-scale, mixed-media installation works, combining aesthetic elements such as paintings, feathers, fabrics, lights, spaces, and audience experiences to confront the viewer with this question. In so doing, I believe that the poetics of art has the potential of

transforming public consciousness of thinking about animals in non-binary and non-instrumental terms.

## Introduction

This research addresses the ethical status of animals and it does so (a) by artistically thematising pervasive violence against animals and (b) by questioning the dominant ideology of anthropocentrism with its interrelated dichotomies and hierarchies. Situated in the intersections between humans and animals, ethics and aesthetics, the research develops within the realm of the visual and artistic practices in an effort to understand the ethical lacuna that is, in the aggregate, *animal suffering*. I enquire and examine the unrelenting cycle of violence towards the animal other through intellectual and scholarly endeavour to identify and describe the theoretical and historical debates relevant to this theme and to contextualise my artistic practice.

Located in the context of human domination of animals and nature, and the context that humans and animals do not have a shared language, the question of violence against animals requires us to keep eternal vigilance about whether I can *speak appropriately* for the animal other. There are indeterminable and undecidable dimensions of ethics in relation to our responsibility and obligation to the animal. This means that I need to critically assess the research outcome and consider the constraints and limitations of my research in order not to fall into a state of complacency. Thus, I ought to question and remind myself at every stage of this research, in my production of knowledge, if the information underpinning the research is mediated, edited, and labelled as fact. I need to ask myself seriously and critically over and again if I put myself in the position of animals, rather than acting as a privileged salvager superior to the oppressed, seemingly speaking for them, giving voice for those voiceless animal victims, perhaps, still with a condescending attitude towards them. With this in mind, I have made so far three field

trips to a pheasant-shooting site, a chicken factory farm, and a chicken processing plant (the only one that I failed to get permission to enter, while having been given a large bag of newly plucked feathers, and a case that indicates the invisibility of animal suffering, the leitmotif and difficulty of this research). However, in the face-to-face encounter with the animals, living or dead—the pandemonium in the large crowded warehouse, or the dead bird bodies that are shot to death with their bodies still warm, the plucked, filthy, and fetid feathers, these horrific truths, which I empirically experienced and bore *true* witness to—afford a possibility that I can offer a testimony for their suffering, a testimony through aesthetic articulation.

Animal suffering—intensified in factory farming or scientific labs—carries implications for rethinking the relationship between humans and animals, provoking philosophers such as Peter Singer and Jacques Derrida to advance our understanding on the question of violence against animals. It is Singer’s book *Animal Liberation* (1995) that catalysed my enquiry in this field. Correspondingly, I have used Derridean critical tools for deconstructing the categorical human-animal dualism and acknowledging the alterity of nonhuman others. Unlike Singer’s utilitarian calculation, Derrida invites us to pay attention not only to the horror of the institutionalised exploitation of animals but also to the interruptive ethical force of the vulnerability and suffering of a specific animal. In so doing, he dismantles the preconceived human-animal categories and calls into question their anthropocentric exclusivity. Additionally, the interdisciplinary visions provided by the Dutch anthropologist Barbara Noske and the American feminist writer Carol Adams, underscores the relationship between human and animal oppression.

Through theoretically apprised, practice-based research, I set out to question socially condoned practices and institutionalised violence against animals. While my work strives

to achieve high aesthetic standards, a key aim is to promote public concern with the unprecedented scale of animal suffering that is perpetuated by anthropocentrism and the related human-animal dualistic thinking<sup>1</sup>. The critical examination of human-animal dualism indicating the convergence between human and animal oppression provides a relational approach to my research questions.

## **Research Questions**

In what ways can an artistic enquiry concerning the ethical status of animals provide a different and valuable form of knowledge unavailable to other disciplines such as philosophy, and how is it manifested in my work?

## **Research Method**

In order to address the ethico-political problems of animals and induce social change through the agency of art, this enquiry concerns itself with three dialogic relationships: first, between the question of animal ethics and other overlapping postmodern discourses (e.g., feminism and post-colonialism); second, my art practice and Derrida's and Singer's philosophical discourses; and third, my artworks and their relationship with other socially or politically charged contemporary art practices.

First, the question of animal ethics is inextricably entwined with other political and social questions, such as sexism, racism, colonialism, and capitalism. What is important is not only to explore the philosophical debates surrounding the moral concern for animals, but

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<sup>1</sup> Anthropocentrism, as Rob Boddice notes, is 'either expressed as human chauvinism, or as an acknowledgement of human ontological boundaries', and thus 'in tension with nature, the environment and non-human animals' (Boddice, 2011: 1).

also to develop a holistic and relational way of thinking for unravelling the interlocking structure, a similar exploitative paradigm that perpetuates various forms of oppression. With an insightful and holistic worldview, theorists such as Derrida and Adams, and artists such as Judy Chicago and Sue Coe, have located animal exploitation alongside human oppressions and hierarchies of class, race, and gender inequality. Weaving theoretical references addressing oppression against humans and nonhuman animals in such a manner enables intellectual insights into articulating the problem of violence against animals.

Secondly, philosophical interrogation of violence against animals is closely associated with the thematic concern of this artistic enquiry. Singer's or Derrida's depiction of animal abuse carried out in modern agribusiness has provided significant impetus to my artistic engagement in this issue. The formal aspects of my works are informed and shaped by a postmodern paradigm; for example, Michel Foucault's accounts of the Panopticon, linking the power of vision with control and discipline, offers a compositional and formal ground for artistic mockery of what I consider to be bigoted anthropocentric thinking and employ as I develop in my second project.

I staged field trips to enable me to encounter the suffering of real animals and to gain first-hand experience about this question. It was Derrida's disposition that inspired this approach. Unlike Singer's moral reasoning, Derrida places emphasis on proto-ethical (face-to-face) encounters with the vulnerability and suffering of a real animal (Calarco, 2008: 116). During these events, what struck me is that the encounter with an animal's specific vulnerability functions as a disturbing and startling force that not only calls for our responsibility and respect of an animal's otherness, but also fosters empathic, poetic thinking beyond the abstract philosophical definition of animal ethics. Carrying a significant ethical imperative, the specific animals' gaze in such disturbing encounters, like

Derrida's naked encounter with his cat, prompts me morally and aesthetically to foreground their constant suffering and moral relevance.

Thirdly, the intersectional territory of oppressions between humans and animals provides shared ground where a variety of socially and politically oriented art works are positioned. The profusion of contemporary art practices with their particular socio-political critiques principally addressing various social injustices—patriarchy and hierarchy, sexism and racism, abuse and torture—helps to shape my aesthetic ground and contextualise this enquiry. For example, Christian Boltanski addresses the question of the Holocaust; William Kentridge concerns himself with the collective amnesia of his racialized native country; Kara Walker attends to the ramifications of the historical subjugation of black people. Nevertheless, ironically, there remains a prevalent lack of interest or avoidance of engaging in ethical concern for animals with these socially engaged approaches; or more counterproductively, some of them even contribute to the dystopian rhetoric, the prejudice and violence against animals. Yet, such circumspection or aesthetic violence is juxtaposed with art practices concerning animal advocacy, such as Sue Coe's and Britta Jashinski's works. Here, it is also worth noting that many artists convey their concerns over the overlapping relations of different socio-political problems. For instance, Walker's work on racism can also be read simultaneously within the context of sexism and patriarchy while Coe generally conveys her diverse range of concerns—animal exploitation and abuse, sexual and racial oppression, war and deprivation—through different works.

Although many of these practices have been informed by the postmodern philosophical discourses, art can propose, as Martin Heidegger pointed out, 'fundamentally different kinds of truth' (Mcneill, 1993: 40). Thus, I want to highlight the difference, significance, and necessity of artistic intervention into this question by proposing a comparison in the



conclusion between philosophical argumentation and poetic thinking, especially surrounding the question of the animal. Premised on this understanding, my visual enquiry does not serve as a simple translation from theory into practice; rather, it approaches the issue poetically to address the question of violence against animals. That is, the artistic enquiry is a way of revealing the truth, but paradoxically, to borrow Maurice Blanchot's words, 'by veiling it and concealing it' (Blanchot, 1982: 196), and the dialectics between revealing and re-veiling is characteristic of such a poetics. By contrast, animal rights activists generally use explicit and graphic images to expose the horror of institutionalised violence against animals. In eliciting the viewer's compassion, however, I argue that the poetic articulation of pain and trauma is more powerful and thought-provoking than a direct graphic presentation of animal suffering. Indeed, how to strike a balance between exposure and concealment, and between the harrowing subject and aesthetic attributes, is central to my enquiry.

In addressing this question, there remains an ongoing thematic and representational challenge. One of the most difficult conundrums for this research is the *invisibility* of animal suffering that is systemically screened from daily life by the institutional power of capitalism, thus rendering the human consumer unaware of the connection between the consumed meat and a particular animal. With factory-farmed animals exiled from public vision and transformed as *meat* by standardised production, the invisibility of animal suffering that creates moral distance is therefore the primary concern of this research. A further complication is that the invisibility of animal suffering is also situated in the context of global capitalism, an exploitative system and a complex network that inflicts violence on both domestic and wild species, humans and nonhuman animals (these injustices are interconnected and concealed). With a relational and holistic approach, this

invisible force of globalised production underlying the question of animal suffering will be addressed in my final project.

Secondly, although animals are abundantly conscripted into contemporary artistic experiments, most of these experiments are not concerned with raising public awareness of the ethical status of animals; usually, such inquiries obscure or overlook animals' identities or predicaments in favour of their use as mythical, metaphoric, or aesthetic models. In fact, there is always a risk of addressing this underexplored problem of animal exploitation by employing animal images or animal material (like feathers), a risk that they may also be rendered *invisible* by reductive interpretation as humanistic tropes or associations. The imperative of such *invisibility* makes both my field trips and the visual presentation necessary.

### **Practice: Methodology**

My artistic practice develops a nexus of dialogical relations between theory and practice, particularly, the relationships between aesthetics and ethics. Sceptical and critical ethical thoughts project a holistic vision that enable me to expand my initial interest on the question of violence against animals to a wide range of interrelated socio-ecological issues. The intricate connections of these problems offer nuanced conceptual insights and pose an artistic and intellectual challenge in realising my artworks.

Located in a space of uncertainty, artistic experimentation is an essential aspect of my research. I must also, therefore, carefully consider and critically examine the connection between the aims of my practice and the paradigms of contemporary art, especially other artists similarly engaged or art with animal imagery, to enrich the visual codes and strategies in my art-making process. In my artworks, postmodern aesthetics influence my

methods and approaches—like black and white, animal materials, punning titles, and minimalist-like organising principles.

In addition, my field trips and empirical experiences motivate my studio practices. Privileging the encounter with the singularity of the animal means that aesthetics and ethics are not disparate entities and that the act of looking at the other literalises intimacy and fusion of both. It is my encounters with the bodily presence of the real animals, living or dead, that catalysed this fusion and inspired the different facets of my practices. Conceiving the animal as a specific, sentient being, my aesthetic act intends to address the question of violence against animals by weaving the threads of delicacy and fragility of life, the embodied exposure of shared vulnerability, into my art and the animal subjects.

In this light, I am aware of what I encountered in my field trips are the singular and specific animal others. However, the invisibility of the suffering other enabled by institutional powers and geographical distances (e.g. species extinction in Amazon) makes it difficult to witness and document the graphic scenes of abuse and torture. Also, the limits of my resources (both time and finance) did not allow me to stage more real encounters with animals' clandestine suffering (Sue Coe spent a few years in building a good rapport with the owners and workers in the slaughterhouses in order to get into these spaces) (Kniesch, 2013). This difficulty of reality constitutes a dilemma that compels me to use the online images of animals in factory farming and the Amazon rainforest. There is a painful process of *grafting* my real experience—of which the psychological aspect is intense—on to a second-hand source when creating my works. With the sensitising power of my field trips and Derrida's thoughts, the painting process becomes an embodied process of sensitisation and re-traumatisation, an imaginative exercise transcending and transforming the illusive aspect of an image of the other into a *concrete* other. Thus, rather

than reduced to anesthetised voyeurism, my art-making is a process of bearing witness in relation to the ethics of seeing and using these images of pain and suffering.

To translate the animal's vulnerability into artistic presentation, the artist's studio is a place where experiments involving technical and practice-based concerns through experimenting with different materials in different settings occur. In constructing the relations and synthesising entities, I carefully utilise research devices such as drawing, photograph, video, and scale model to document and develop the research. To marry the studio practice with a particular displaying space requires an informed process: on the one hand, the concept can germinate in the studio through drawing and model making targeting a possible space; on the other, the characteristic of an exhibition setting, with its original function and special ambience, may help either trigger a new idea or change to a different concept, which entails further conception and experiment in the studio. With this in mind, my first project falls in the first category and the second in the latter. Of course, there often remains a chasm between studio and exhibition space, denoting that in order to create a situation of reflection, this marrying always demands compromise or even sacrifice coming chiefly from the studio, either for technical or financial reasons. After painful experimentation and testing begins the laborious and systematic production of my works. Meanwhile, a part or small amount of work completed in the studio also requires tests to know if it attains the expected effects or needs fine tuning. This development of the relationship between studio and exhibition space is a central concern of my practice.

To address this visual and conceptual challenge, I will deploy the poetics of installation art, which offers an array of approaches, devices, and audience experiences to sensitise the viewer. By accumulating and multiplying smaller painting units into the large-scale installations, I want to employ such artistic constellations that fit into specific spaces to

mock what I consider to be an exploitative paradigm involving the manipulation and mass-production of animals and to connote the scale, complexity, and significance of this problem. With multi-perspective and multi-sensorial experiences, the immersive installation works play a key role in engaging the viewer and provoking thinking.

Predicated on the context of contemporary art, in which many artists use real animal materials, dead or alive, to make unorthodox art works—yet in most cases, serve as symbols and metaphors in anthropocentric and transgressive art—the animal material used in my mixed-media projects nevertheless functions both as a reminder of the life and death of a real animal and as a poetic counterpoint to the paintings. The interplay between the paintings and the feathers taking into a new aesthetic form is crucial for reading my works: the feathers counter the limits of painting and solicit more visceral response from the viewer on the one hand; the paintings provide the necessary signposts to avoid anthropocentric associations with the feathers on the other.

Evocative of my Chinese background, the materials (Chinese ink and brush, and silk) and format (folding screen) not only metaphorically link with Chinese tradition and philosophy but also suggest the troubling reality of ethical and ecological crisis related to increased factory farming and meat consumption in China. By appropriating or subverting traditional iconography to address these imperatives, my works provide implicit critique on the ironic tension between the oriental tradition of reverence towards nature and animals and our current collective indifference to the suffering of animals and this planet. Delicate and ethereal, the oriental artistic ingredients are metaphorically associated with the vulnerability of life and, as a way of aesthetically re-veiling, combined with particular lighting and feathers, help to create a poetic distance or aesthetic sublimation that better enables the viewer to absorb meaning from my work and its pained reality.

A concern of this research is to highlight the connectedness between the subject matter and the viewer, and the dialogues between the artworks and the viewer, so as to create social transformation and avoid the danger of retreating into academicism. Thus, audiences are an integral part of the presentation of my art. Audiences do not merely serve as aesthetic elements (the shadows created by the viewer, for example), but as participants and constituents, with constructive interactions and impromptu conversations. There is an overarching issue, namely, that of the connection between animal welfare and the future of each of us and this planet. The shared vulnerability of all species is a notion utilised and conveyed in my artworks to unite the viewer, the artist, and the animal—thus to provide the possibility of generating the embodied empathy towards animals.

Finally, the thesis, as a complementary site to the visual outcome, helps to document the process of working through the complexity of artistic, philosophical, and socio-political intersections. Its structure is as follows: the first chapter will provide an artistic and intellectual context for this research. In examining contemporary art practices concerning either animal ethics or other related social and political issues, the second chapter establishes a theoretical basis upon which I propose my artistic exploration. Framed by this discussion, the third chapter demonstrates how I can address my ethical and aesthetic enquiry, concerned with the question of animal ethics, through an investigation of installation art, and its instrumental application, in a gallery or exhibited context, to challenge the ethos of society. The conclusion will critically assess the outcomes of my research with the aim of contributing ways in which future possibilities for thinking about animals can be driven beyond their cultural constructions as food, resources, properties, and metaphors.

## I - A Re-enchanted Aesthetics

Routinized violence against animals attests to an increasing tension between humans and animals that is largely perpetuated by the creed of modernity, a paradigm of instrumental rationality which promotes the notion of ‘progress’.<sup>2</sup> The ‘progress’ of the modern human subject, through technological advances, as Steve Best puts it, is defined on the quantitative terms ‘such as production quota, employment rate, ... consumer confidence level, and the Gross Nation Product’, rather than on ‘human meaning, satisfaction, and happiness’ (Best, 2014: 144). Predicated upon Cartesian, mind/body, subject/object binary thinking, such progressive notions have created a troubling human-animal relationship formed by construing nature and animals as mere resources, opening an ‘ontological and moral chasm’ between humans and animals (ibid.). Modernity and the concepts of reason, freedom, liberty, and individualism have indeed created freedoms for capitalist elites, in the name of ‘progress’, by restraint of freedom of other groups of people, having enslaved them as instruments, and reduced their relationships to nature to mere exploitation. This contemporary paradigm that stresses extraction, mastery, and relentless accumulation over a balanced view of the health of this planet condemns tens of billions of nonhuman species to miserable conditions.

As a dominant view, Cartesian dualist metaphysics has also permeated human culture and art and shaped modernist aesthetic assumptions, which, centred on the alienated self, extol virtues of individual creativity and freedom, at the expense of diminished connectedness and capacity to care. In her book *Has Modernism Failed* (1984) and *The Reenchantment of Art* (1991), Suzi Gablik responds to a growing sense of modernism’s inability to accommodate Western capitalism to changing values, to differences in gender, race, class,

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<sup>2</sup> Instrumental rationality means that rational planning and cost-benefit analysis offer the superior, or perhaps even the only path to improving human society, and that ethics and aesthetics are secondary (West, 2007: 29).

and gathering economic divergences and environmental concerns. Reflecting on pressing ecological imperatives and oppressive consumeristic ethos, she offers critical comments on the modernist separation between the aesthetic and the social (Gablik, 1991: 9). She diagnoses ‘the psychic and social structures’ underlying modernist aesthetics as ‘too profoundly antiecological, unhealthy and destructive’ (ibid., 5-6). Conditioned by non-relational, dualistic, and patriarchal thinking, this aesthetic paradigm highlights a disengaged artist self, aloof from socio-ethical concerns and unable to respond to the cries of this world.

In order to unite art and social responsibility, Gablik invites us to develop a dialogical relationship with people and nature to engage critically with a wide spectrum of social issues through the multiple lens of art praxis. Shifting to community and environment, a new aesthetic paradigm with new approaches may offer a sense of relatedness, empathy, and responsibility. The prominent pioneers of this paradigm are artists Joseph Beuys, Hans Haacke, and Judy Chicago, who engaged in a range of socio-political and ecological agendas. In Documenta 5 in Kassel (1972), Beuys staged an information office for *Organisation Direct Democracy Through Referendum*, discussing the nature of democracy with audiences. In *Rhine Water Installation* (1972), Haacke cleaned polluted water from a river to breed fish in order to address an endangered ecosystem. More recently, in the 1980s, Keith Haring went into a New York City subway car as a ‘conceptual act’ to draw directly for commuters while interacting with his audiences, reflecting on social issues such as drug abuse and AIDS. The Polish-born artist Krzysztof Wodiczko’s video projections transformed public monuments giving voice to the homeless people, immigrants, and victims of violence.



Such active interventions continue to inspire many contemporary practices aimed at counteracting the totalising environment of late capitalism and at initiating social transformation. Creating a contradiction between beauty and grotesque, Mona Hatoum's multimedia installation works encourage intellectual contemplation on complex problems such as displacement, oppression, conflict, and sexual identity. Investing ordinary objects with conceptual twists, Cornelia Parker's recent artworks communicate her concerns with war, violence, the loss of life, and ecology.

Situated in this expanded context of empathy and connection, the practices of Christian Boltanski, Judy Chicago, and Sue Coe, which I examine, address contemporary issues of ethics, power, and memory, offering artistic insights into formulating my projects. Slaughterhouses, tin boxes, entangled clothes, and silhouette tableaux—this jumbled imagery conjures up the cartography of trauma, suffering, torture, and abuse, inflicted on both human and nonhuman others. More pointedly, the inclusive, holistic insights gained from Coe's and Chicago's oeuvres addressing the connected dystopias help to locate this project within a cosmology of universal consideration, creating a space for empathy and respect and, consequently, replacing the dualistic notions of objectification and dominance.

Coe's and Chicago's projects demonstrate that a new paradigm of 'listening' and 'opening', a praxis of caring, is still incomplete and biased, if we offer hospitality merely to human others yet fail to reflect on the symbiotic relationship with our fellow species, especially fail to consider that the planetary apocalyptic crisis is intimately bound up with the compulsive pathological ways of consumption and production of animals, and with unconscionable animal suffering in our socio-economic routine. By casting this aesthetic and ethical nexus of care wider to involve the animal others, I want to go further along this path of 're-enchantment', reminding that animals as sentient individual subjects enable our

embodied empathy and poetic thinking. Moreover, to address the question of violence against animals should be the essential part of this new aesthetic paradigm, because the human-animal dualism perpetuating this violence is also the root cause of virtually all forms of socio-ecological conflict. With this in mind, this new aesthetic vision, as a fusion of poetry and empathy, of creativity and responsibility, will I hope function as a catalyst for transforming our thinking about animals.

### **Art and Holocaust**

Considering her art as an agency to transform social consciousness, the American artist Judy Chicago staged her iconic collaborative project, *The Dinner Party* (1979), reflecting on women's achievements and their oppression throughout history. After a few years, she extended her feminist insights into an underexplored and overwhelming subject, the Holocaust. Motivated by a realisation that the historical accounts of the Holocaust have been much influenced by male perspectives and, thus, biased and imbalanced, she believes that the Holocaust should not be viewed as what has been assumed and addressed as a mere specific human historical event.

Informed by her eight years' field trips and investigations into the question of the Holocaust and a wide range of historical and contemporary issues, Chicago—in collaboration with her husband, Donald Woodman, a Jewish photographer, has created a collection of works called *Holocaust Project*. This large multimedia installation (mainly air-brushed, photography-based paintings) is a poetic manifestation of her holistic vision, offering her feminist insights into understanding the universal significance of the Holocaust. Inspired by her lifelong interrogation of patriarchal ideology. Chicago contends that the Holocaust cannot be read as isolated from other social, historical traumas and

atrocities; rather, the Holocaust, as a metaphor, signifies all forms of oppression and violence, with logic of power, dominance, and mastery. By investing the question of the Holocaust with her universal socio-ethical concerns, her understanding is exemplified in this project through the juxtaposition of the imagery of the Holocaust with those of slavery, nuclear war, slaughterhouse, animal testing, the abuse and oppression of women, police brutality, and the poverty of the dispossessed.



Fig.1 Chicago, Judy (1993) *The Fall*, [Modified Aubosson tapestry], 4'-6" x 18', woven by Cowan, Audrey, Robert and Audrey Cowan Family Trust. At: [http://www.throughtheflower.org/projects/holocaust\\_project](http://www.throughtheflower.org/projects/holocaust_project), (Accessed on 30.01.16).

For her, the most significant problem is the interrelatedness of human atrocity and animal exploitation. After visiting a scale model of one of the four crematoria in Auschwitz, she reached her revelation, '[T]hey were actually like a giant processing plant—except that instead of processing pigs they were processing people who had been defined as pigs' (Chicago, 1993: 57). The strikingly similar manner and scale of the industrialized slaughter of humans and animals attest to the profundity of the question of the Holocaust that has a particular relevance in addressing violence against animals. Only after these Jewish victims have been designated as animals—a vilifying campaign carried out by the Nazi propaganda machine, by denigrating them as 'vermin' and 'pigs' and turning Jewish people into 'subhumans'—could the implementation of the Holocaust be made possible (ibid.). Precisely, pigs were in fact among the first 'things' on the modern assembly line (ibid.); ironically, the assembly line of Fordist-style production was moulded directly on

the first modern meat-processing plant in Chicago in the U.S. This intertwined connection is conveyed in this project by a piece called *The Fall* (Fig. 1)—with the imagery of the suspended human and animal carcasses on the same ‘disassembly’ line.



Fig.2 Chicago, Judy (1995) *Four Questions*, [Sprayed acrylic, oil, and Marshall photo oils on photo linen], 42 in. x 198 in. x 4 in. Photo: © Donald Woodman.  
At: <http://sites.psu.edu/artlinkstohistory/2014/07/08/four-questions-by-jc/> (Accessed on 15.02.16).

This comparison between human and animal oppression also appears in another work in this project, called *Four Questions* (Fig. 2), dealing with scientific and medical experiments as performed on human beings during the Holocaust and on animals in America (ibid., 146). These posed ethical reflections through four visual jumbles by employing a cunning format (an optical system of slat), depicting a historical image when looking from left side and an image of contemporary issue when looking from the other. For example, her first ‘question’ *Where Should the Line Be Drawn?* juxtaposes the image of an animal experiment in the U.S. with that of a high-altitude experiment from Dachau inflicted on a Jewish prisoner. This comparison prompts us to think the question of where to demarcate a moral boundary; human experiments are now regarded as unjustifiable, yet animal tests are justified by some people as acceptable, especially for human good. Her project suggests that there exists a ‘chasm’, between the minimal ethical evolvement of humans and their huge technological advances (ibid, 149), a gap that requires us to engage critically on our moral quandaries. In juxtaposing the imagery of the Holocaust with other examples of atrocity and oppression, the historical and contemporary vignettes, her approach to the Holocaust finds resonance in my strategy of making complex connections

between the visible and the invisible, the vignettes of our lives and those of the clandestine suffering of animals in relation to mistreatments and habitat destruction.



Fig. 3 Boltanski, Christian (1987) *Chases High School*, [4 black-and-white photographs in metal frames, 88 tin boxes, and 4 lamps], 223 x 238 cm, the Israel Museum, © 2005 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris. Photo: © IMJ, Meidad Suchowolski. At: <http://www.arcv.org/?q=node/384> (Accessed on 16.02.16).

Evoking, if not explicitly, the enigma of the Holocaust, the French artist Christian Boltanski's sombre and theatrical installations address the universalised concerns with human death and vulnerability. Constructed with flickering candles, out-of-focus photos, and stained tin boxes, his artworks carry a patina of old collective memory about trauma and tragedy, infused with cultural and personal references, and with contradictory senses of irony and ambiguity. For example, in *Altar to the Chajes High School* (1987) (Fig. 3), he deliberately uses anonymous photographs of children whom no one knows to be dead or alive. This uncertainty possesses an ironic twist and gives his work a multi-layered reading about life and mortality. These re-photographed, blurred images are integrated into 'structures reminiscent of a Catholic altar' (Bohm-Duchen, 2005: 66), which is associated



with a site of remembrance, yet comprised of rusty chocolate tin boxes and clamp-on lamps, echoing his half-Jewish and half-Catholic identity.



Fig. 4 Boltanski, Christian (1990) *Reserve: Lake of the Dead*, [Installation], Institute of Contemporary Arts, Nagoya, Japan, 1990. Courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery, New York/Paris. At: <http://www.kulturwest.de/buehne/detailseite/artikel/es-geht-um-die-zerstoerung-von-koerpern/> (Accessed on 16.02.16).

As a meaningful device, recycled garments are also frequently used as material in his art, as, for example, *The Reserve: Lake of the Dead* (1990) (Fig. 4). In this work, thousands of old clothes are haphazardly spread over the floor, in contrast to the ordered electrical lamp wires on the surrounding walls. Walking on these clothes, perhaps ‘symbolically connected with murder and death’ of the victims of the pogrom, the viewer might associate with a feeling of treading on human bodies (Gumpert, 1994: 118). Evocative and eerie, these clothes, as a signifier for human body and life, materialise the irremediable absence of the once living, walking, and breathing lives.

Evoking an eerie sense of countless individual lives manipulated and transformed into meaningless scraps by totalitarian regimes, the artist’s use of more expendable materials such as photographs or clothing not only creates a stupefying sense by accumulating them to a level of magnitude (Fig. 6) (corresponding with the *stuplime* aesthetics that will be

introduced later), but also, the practice of permutation and manipulation of these visual data functions as a signifying act, an artistic mirroring of the profound loss of an individual's dignity. As he muses, 'In my use of photos of children, there are people about whom I know nothing, who were subjects and who have become objects, that's to say, corpses. They're nothing any more. I can manipulate them, tear them apart, and stick things in them' (Bernier, 2012: 67).

The manipulation of individual lives symbolised by Boltanski's artistic act can be read in the context of Adorno's philosophy of which the evil of Auschwitz is a central part (Freyenhagen, 2013: 245). As Adorno famously argues, 'Auschwitz begins whenever someone looks at a slaughterhouse and thinks "they are only animals"'. So the destruction of human life in Auschwitz 'would be (an extreme) form of disregard of our animal nature' (ibid.). The dehumanisation and trivialisation of human life critically addressed by Chicago's and Boltanski's works suggest the implications and syndromes of human-animal dualistic thinking.

Following Giorgio Agamben, dualistic metaphysics has long been associated with the fact that a human subject endeavours to excise the animal aspects within his body (considered as uncivilised, evil, abject, and obscene) as an extreme solipsism in which the subject strives to destroy all that is other (Bell, 2011: 169-72), be it a woman, a black or a Jewish person, or an animal. The human-animal dualism embedded within human body functions as a destructive exclusionary mechanism that perpetuates ongoing prejudice which reduces the other to a mere animal. Positioned in opposition to animals and nature, the exclusionary, violent nature of the human-animal dualism not only renders the Holocaust inevitable but makes continuing conflicts and suffering possible. In addition, inherent in the evil of Auschwitz is not just massive physical abuse and suffering but a ruthless denial

and negation of every trace that belongs to the specificity and particularity of an individual life (Freyenhagen, 2013: 245).

Encoding traumatic memory with looming faces and garments, the power of Boltanski's Holocaust-related art not only lies in his effective and paradoxical evocation of their presence in the de facto absence of the deceased *individuals*, but also in the re-photographed images and melancholic light, in his lament on the loss of *memory* about these individuals. His works are thus linked with my concern with how to communicate the senses such as the loss of life, the vulnerability of the other, and of the unspeakability of trauma and how to deploy the indeterminate and ambiguous dimension of art to seamlessly suture poetry and tragedy.

Even more relevant to my research is the American-based British artist Sue Coe's works, directly addressing the large-scale killing and exploitation of animals. Regarding herself as a 'visual journalist', she adopts a hard-hitting activist approach and relies on the power of mass media like newspapers and magazines to bring about social change (Baker, 2006: 73). Visiting many slaughterhouses and meatpacking plants (where cameras are not allowed) across the U.S., she has experienced the real horror of animal genocide and sketched the excruciating scenes on the spot. Bearing her witness to the concealed atrocities, her drawings and prints offer trenchant social commentary, direct and uncompromised. A sense of awkwardness embedded in her works suggests her attempts to 'sabotage her instincts, her faculty' and to keep vigilant on the limits of her material to articulate this difficult subject (Baker, 2013: 155).





Fig.5 Coe, Sue (1991) *Dead Meat*, [Collage]. Courtesy of the artsit.  
At: <http://www.obieg.pl/artmix/24252> (Accessed on 16.02.16).

In a comic strip style, her book, *Dead Meat* (Fig. 5) is a visual and textual documentation about her infiltration into meat-processing plants. As she recounts in this book, wearing ‘a knee-length white coat, rubber boot, a safety helmet, goggles earplugs, and hair net’, she saw the protective outfits as ‘an armour’, which completely ‘separated us (human) and the animals, whose terrible vulnerability is no second skin and no skin at all’ (Coe, 1996: 118). Although the association of factory farming with the Holocaust can naturally arrive unbidden, she feels a sense of hierarchy that an animal’s horrific condition ‘cannot exist on its own’ (ibid., 72). As she puts it, ‘The Holocaust keeps coming into my mind, which annoys the hell out of me ... I am annoyed that I don’t have more power in communicating what I’ve seen apart from stuttering’ (ibid.). Similarly, according to the American feminist theorist Carol Adams (1991), ‘the emotionally loaded and historically grounded term such

as Holocaust or slavery' used to describe human suffering in human social, cultural context cannot help us to comprehend the real suffering of the real animals behind them (Demello, 2012: 269). So by directly conveying the harsh reality that she has witnessed, this work communicates the immediacy of animal suffering and expresses her visceral response to the inferno scenario of factory farming.

Inherited the tradition of social realism from Francisco De Goya and Käthe Kollwitz, her painting and drawing grotesqueries not only offer a criticism on animal atrocity, but also decry the horror of sexual violence, apartheid, poverty, prison, sweatshops, and wars, conveying her holistic insights that all forms of social injustices and violence against humans and animals are interconnected and inevitable within a hierarchical oppressive system.

To examine her art in the context of the Holocaust rather than the later section about pro-animal art is an attempt to complicate this question of violence against animals. Regarding the comparisons between human and animal holocaust, we do admit the vastly different historical and social contents between the particular historical event of the Holocaust and a contemporary event of factory farming or scientific laboratory. For example, there is a huge ideological difference between the campaign that Nazis initiated to vilify Jewish people and hatefully depict them as vermin or bacteria and one that depicted animal life as more sympathetic in a peaceful and idyllic scene by institutional power (Novek, 2013: 140). Thus, the intent is not to equate the human Holocaust to animal genocide thereby devaluing the suffering of human beings.

However, as Matthew Calarco argues, this does not mean that any analogies between inter-human and interspecies violence is impossible or objectionable, especially on the grounds that 'human suffering is always and everywhere more important and of more valuable than

animal suffering' (Calarco, 2008: 112). For example, following Derrida, Calarco questions humanist value hierarchies that privilege human beings and endow them with more inherent value (ibid., 111). Certainly, it is superficial or even offensive when parallels are made in a blunt, thoughtless way. Thus, he invites us to 'think through both kinds of suffering in their respective similarities and parallel logic at work where they exist' (ibid., 112). Feminists like Chicago challenge the patriarchal root behind these atrocities and oppressions imposed on both humans (especially women) and animals. In my view, it is the human-animal dualism that operates behind these two events, a paradigm that creates the monstrous category of the 'animal' and justifies not only the extreme form of inter-human violence, the Holocaust, but also that of violence against animals, the industrialised killing of animals.

Also, influenced by Emmanuel Levinas's thoughts that highlight the significance of the particularity of a human other, a Derridean approach encourages us to think about 'the specificity and singularity of the situation of animals' (ibid.). That is, in the context of the Holocaust, industrialised and legitimised violence against both humans and animals imposed by sovereign powers exemplifies the disregard and denial of a specific, singular human or nonhuman other.

With respect to articulating the continued suffering of animals in my research, these artworks addressing either human Holocaust or animal genocide reveal a representational challenge—a difficulty confronting all art addressing the traumatic and unpleasant, a difficulty of how to engage the viewer and enable dialogue. Admittedly, there always remains an aesthetic imperative, the unrepresentable, unspeakable dimension of both the human Holocaust and animal genocide regarding the appalling truth, but nonetheless, as Chicago remarks, 'Visual art has the power to provide us with a way of facing aspects of

reality that are too painful to approach except through the oblique path that art allows' (Chicago, 1993: 165). With this in mind, the visual *modi operandi* of the discussed practices addressing the painful subjects may hopefully shed light on the formulation of my works. The examination of Boltanski's, and particularly Chicago's and Coe's works, has revealed a number of important strategies in the depiction of violence, memory, and trauma. These alongside wider developments in feminist art have informed my holistic approach to research and the development of a socially engaged practice aimed at addressing ethical concern for animals.

### **Feminist Metaphysics**

Imbued in Coe's and Chicago's oeuvres is their feminist consciousness that motivates post-patriarchal art to transcend dualistic, oppressive pathology. The feminist thinkers like Adams have examined the intersections between human (especially woman) and animal oppression and their points of view speaking for marginalised groups have greatly inspired animal rights movements. As Friedrich Nietzsche argues, there is no explanation, only interpretation; his 'perspectivism' invites us to consider a variety of perspectives, especially from subjugated groups, to avoid the limited, partial interpretation of the dominators (Best, 2014: 2-3). Without taking into account the standpoints of subjugated groups, the history written from a particular point of view, be it patriarchy, racism, or speciesism is often biased and distorted.<sup>3</sup> With this in mind, feminist thinkers' conviction that Western patriarchal dualistic thinking that has structured historical discourses is the ontological root for the entangled oppressions, and this insight has been revealed by feminist metaphysical aesthetics.

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<sup>3</sup> Speciesism refers to the assumption of human superiority leading to the prejudice against and the exploitation of animals.

In Chicago's *Holocaust Project*, she combines the emblematic scene of the male prisoners staring out of stacked bunker beds with the strange images of sexual abuse of Jewish women by inmates, Nazis, and liberating soldiers—conveying gender imbalance about the historical accounts of the Holocaust through foregrounding the hidden imagery of women. The disturbing overlapping images challenge the stereotypical male narrative of the Holocaust, and in achieving this, she unravels a strand within Nazi ideology, that is, the patriarchal values of power and mastery that dominate human culture and perpetuate the atrocities and injustices of various kinds.



Fig.6 Spero, Nancy (1967) *The War Series*, [Ink and gouache on paper], 61 x 91,4 cm, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid.

At: <http://www.museoreinasofia.es/en/collection/artwork/clown-and-helicopter> (Accessed on 16.02.16).

Like Chicago, her compatriot, the Jewish artist Nancy Spero also links the horror of war with the phallic power of patriarchy. Inspired by the Vietnam War, in *The War Series* (1966) (Fig. 6), she uses a series of paintings to interrogate the brutality and violence of war. Executed on delicate rice paper, her gestural brushstrokes which signify the violence of war depict anthropomorphised bombs, fragmented body parts, and mushroom clouds.

The destructive weapons defecate the victims' severed or disembodied heads, spew out a torrent of fire or blood, or metamorphose into male genitalia, serpents, or predatory insects, suggesting that war machines are propelled by male sex hormones. By using recognisable imagery of swastika and crematorium chimney, she generalises her critique to include male violence against women. Contrasting with her brutal bold images, the fragile rice paper allows her more spontaneous and visceral responses, not only articulating her attack on masculinist militarism, but also contesting male-dominated institutions of art that have historically marginalised female artists. Echoing her material concern, my choice of fragile, delicate fabric symbolically represents a Derridean disposition, the vulnerability shared by humans and animals.

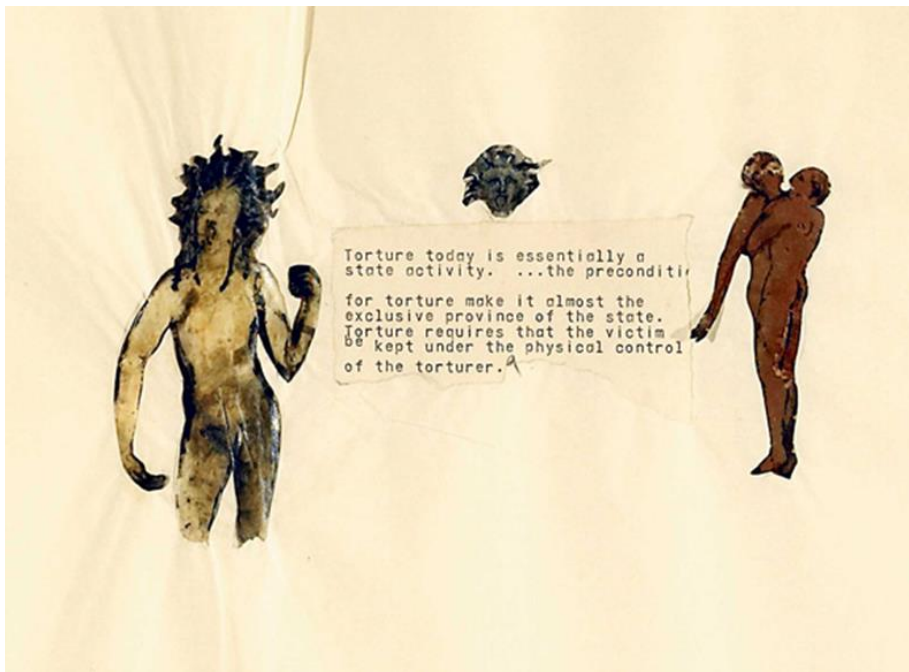


Fig.7 Spero, Nancy (1985-1989) *Torture of Women*, [Handprinting and typewriter collage on paper], 14 panels, 51 x 3810cm overall. Photos courtesy National Gallery of Canada. At: <http://blog.art21.org/2010/04/16/nancy-speros-torture-of-women/#.VsLs3GfcuUk> (Accessed on 16.02.16).

Voicing her anger over the oppression and destruction of woman, she draws our attention to the tortured female body. Stylistically she develops contradictions and tensions between the horror of her subject matter and visual carnival in the seemingly casually arranged collages and handprints. Interweaving on long scrolls the verbal and the visual, her work,



*Torture of Women* (Fig. 7), is an epic work, a frieze-like, fourteen-panel scroll. As a furious indictment of brutal violence against women throughout a number of histories and geographies, the harrowing, hand-printed text of victimisation of women are recovered from mythological tales and documents from Amnesty International and contemporary news stories.



Fig. 8 Jin, Lipeng (2015-16) *Hide and Seek* (Detail) [Polyester habutai, ink, wood, poultry feathers, and yellow light], 3 six-panel folding screens, each panel 202 × 65 cm. Collection of the artist.

In contrast to the visual symbolism of mythological figures and imaginary hybrids, these interspersed texts can be read as voice or ‘sound space’ of the victims, permeated with pain and anguish, both mental and physical (Spero, 1985: 126). Unevenly printed on torn paper, with split letters and hand-written corrections, these texts sometimes make meanings hard to decipher, they are, however, strongly suggestive of ‘the vulnerability of the narratives and their subjects’ (Malvern, 2013: 222). By contrast, in my final project, I use texts such as ‘used by dates’ or ‘keep refrigerated’ in a subtle way in which the small

words are partially revealed or arranged obliquely, insinuating the invisibilisation of animal suffering within the matrix of consumerism (Fig. 8).

In her work, Spero leaves much of the paper support untouched, and, embedded in its emptiness and the implied silence of the surrounding space, is her intention of representing ‘the pain as isolation—the terrible aloneness of the tortured’ (Bird, 1996: 56). The ‘scattering’ of the mythological and factual dissolving tragedy into poetics is an effective strategy for presenting the unrepresentable, the anguish and obscenity of both life and trauma. Likewise, I deliberately leave empty some circles of my final work, functioning as an interval between filled circles, as ellipsis between animal suffering and human consumption, and inviting the viewer to fill it with his/her contemplation on the question of animal suffering.

It is also worth noting Spero’s treatment of mediaeval witch hanging (Fig. 9). In the early modern period, the eradication of witches, who were regarded as representatives of the devil, is symbolic of the obsession of subduing the anomalous, disorderly nature (Donovan, 2007: 67). According to feminist theorists, this practice reflected the human/nature and man/woman dualistic thinking that sanctions male domination over women and nature. Writing of the formation of modern science in *The Death of Nature*, Carolyn Merchant highlights the significance of recognition that a worldview associated nature with a living organism or a nurturing mother is replaced with the Enlightenment mechanist paradigm construing the nature as machinelike (Donovan, 2007: 65). As a reductionist paradigm, this Western metaphysics has marginalised and ‘reduced women to psychic and reproductive resources’ by confining them to serve domestic roles (Merchant, 1982: 165). In promoting the politics of male science, Francis Bacon’s accounts are instrumental in associating the devalued female imagery with nature, and by transforming



‘a nurturing mother and womb of life into a source of secrets to be extracted for economic advance’ (ibid.). Sanctioning the denudation of nature and subjugation of women, this masculinist, mechanist, and reductionist framework is compatible with a capitalist creed of expansion and progress at the expense of the other.



Fig.9 Spero, Nancy (1987-88) *Sky Goddess/ Egiption Acrobat*, [Handprinted and printed collage], 11 panels, 274x671cm overall, in Bird, Jon., Isaak, Jo Anna, & Lotringer, Sylvere. (eds.) *Nancy Spero*, London: Phaidon, 1996, p.142.

By reducing the other, in this case women, to a mere machine, this paradigm, as Val Plumwood puts it, ‘permits emotional distance to society and nature which enables power and control, killing and warfare, to seem acceptable, just as it did in the case of the animals Descartes’ followers used for experimentation’ (Plumwood, 1993: 119). Without ethical and qualitative consideration, the mechanist assumption has reduced the world based on quantitative values with little regard for the suffering of other beings. Realising the alienating and brutal force of this paradigm, and motivated by feminist consciousness of

connection and care, Chicago, Spero, and Coe deploy their iconoclastic power of art as aesthetic resistance in order to solicit the viewer's empathy for the suffering of the other.

Geared towards economic growth and imperial expansion, it is no wonder that capitalism has also created the category of colonial 'others' for millions of enslaved blacks and Indians dehumanised on British imperialists' tea plantations. The legacies of colonialism still linger in society and subconscious addressed by many post-colonial artists.

### **Postcolonial Sensibility**

Exalting the notions of reason, civilisation, and progress, a Western Enlightenment subject construes himself as most civilised, rational, and advanced. His compulsion of civilising and 'emancipating' the other, considered as 'less human', uncivilised, and barbarous, has led to the subjugation of the other (women, indigenous peoples, and nature). In this process of civilisation and modernisation, the violent nature of the Enlightenment project has historically created the unprecedented scale of human slavery through European colonial expansion. The dualist categories of 'human' and 'animal' have shaped racist perceptions and facilitated torture and violence imposed on non-white peoples. Shackled and muzzled, beaten and whipped, branded and sold, African people have been deprived of humanity and individuality when colonisers treated them like animals (Demello, 2012: 265). Interrogating dualistic hierarchies that justify domination and violence, theorists have written eloquently about the parallel between racism and speciesism, between animal exploitation and human slavery. Challenging exclusionary racist ideologies and stereotypes, the liberating message embedded in a post-colonial narrative can shed light on visualising the potential of formulating the works addressing animal slavery.



Fig.10 Chicago, Judy (1992) *Arbeit Macht Frei / Work Makes Who Free?* In *the Holocaust Project*, with Donald Woodman, [Sprayed Acrylic, Oil, Welded Metal, Wood, and Photography on Photo Linen and Canvas], 5' 7" x 11' 11", Photo© Donald Woodman. At: <http://www.judychicago.com/gallery.php?name=Holocaust+Project+Gallery> (Accessed on 15.02.16).

It is worth noting here that one piece called *Arbeit Macht Frei/ Work Makes Who Free?* (Fig. 10) in Chicago's *Holocaust Project* expresses the dehumanising, brutalising dimension of slavery. By juxtaposing a quarry image of slave labour during the Holocaust with a plantation scene of American slavery, she problematizes the question of the Holocaust, out of which she tried to highlight the interrelatedness of various forms of slavery. It is this work that helps to link two artists: her compatriot, the black female artist, Kara Walker, who intervenes the legacy of American slavery and racism, and the South African Jewish artist, William Kentridge, whose thematic concern focuses on racialized violence and oppression in his native country.

Conjuring the plantation life of the antebellum South, Kara Walker engages with the legacy of American slavery and racism, the psychological aftermath of which lingers on in the American collective unconscious. Staging a riot of tragicomic mayhem of debauchery and indulgence, her postmodern burlesque relies on the spectacular fantasy of the silhouette cyclorama—emblematic of her visual repertoire (Fig. 11).



Fig.11 Walker, Kara (2008) *Slavery! Slavery! Presenting a GRAND and LIFELIKE Panoramic Journey into Picturesque Southern Slavery!*, [Cut paper on wall], 144 x 1,020 inches, 365.76 x 2,590.8 cm. Hammer Museum, Los Angeles. Photo: Joshua White. At: (<http://bombmagazine.org/article/1000130/kara-walker-larry-walker> Accessed on 15.02.16).

The antiquated practice of silhouette is born of Western scholars' obsession with physiognomic studies. Johann Caspar Lavater, for example, employed silhouette to 'classify and characterise people on the basis of nationality and race', and 'to isolate and deindividuate facial characteristics so their proportions could be quantified in the name of racial theory' (Saltzman, 2006: 55). Such a racist practice of the eighteenth century's pseudo-science used for advocating Western supremacy is subversively reinvented by Walker as a powerful means of conjuring up the trauma of the repressed.

No doubt, the silhouettes she resurrects are, as Walker wryly puts it, 'reductions', and the 'racial stereotypes are also reductions of actual human beings' (Lott, 2000: 76). As a hallmark in her oeuvre, her cunning appropriation of cut-out is mingled with past racist lore, and stereotypes of sex and violence to produce a critical and provocative visual language. In her cinematic mimesis, simplistic racist assumption designates the black as

subaltern, re-situated in a tragicomic netherworld where the nightmarish and the grotesque meet the visually seductive and where unspeakable trauma encounters sensual delight. In a further twist, Walker enlarges tiny silhouettes to monumental scale, the black cut-out characters become spectral 'shadows' seemingly cast by the viewers, further implicating them into the moral depravities rooted in the viewers' collective subconscious.

Unlike Walker's satire and parody, the tone of Kentridge's works is lyric and melancholic. The Jewish identity has exercised formative influence on shaping both Chicago's and Kentridge's works, which carry association with the Holocaust. Instead of the polemic and direct sense of Chicago's art, Kentridge regards his practice as a discursive site alluding to the historical trauma and political struggle against Apartheid in South Africa. His drawing-based filmic animation uses the technique of erasure. By photographing and filming successive traces of the erased parts of the drawing on one sheet, he creates stop-motion movement. Confronting the risk of collective amnesia, his art performs an act of remembrance, where, the constant metamorphosis between drawing and erasure metaphorically communicates a struggle between forgetting and remembering. Yet, the indelible smudge and smear intimate the unsuccessful erasure of the memory of trauma, though once suppressed and atrophied.

Also, his technique of erasure mocks one of the strategies of racism and colonialism in the modern era (Christov-Bakargiev, 1998: 31) as an indispensable part of colonial expansion that has confiscated the indigenous peoples' land and replaced their cultures with those of the European dominators. In an age of apartheid in South Africa, the practice of racist's erasure is implemented by assigning menial and dangerous works to the dispossessed mass and by differentiating and segregating them from the dominant groups to render them both inferior and 'invisible' (ibid.).



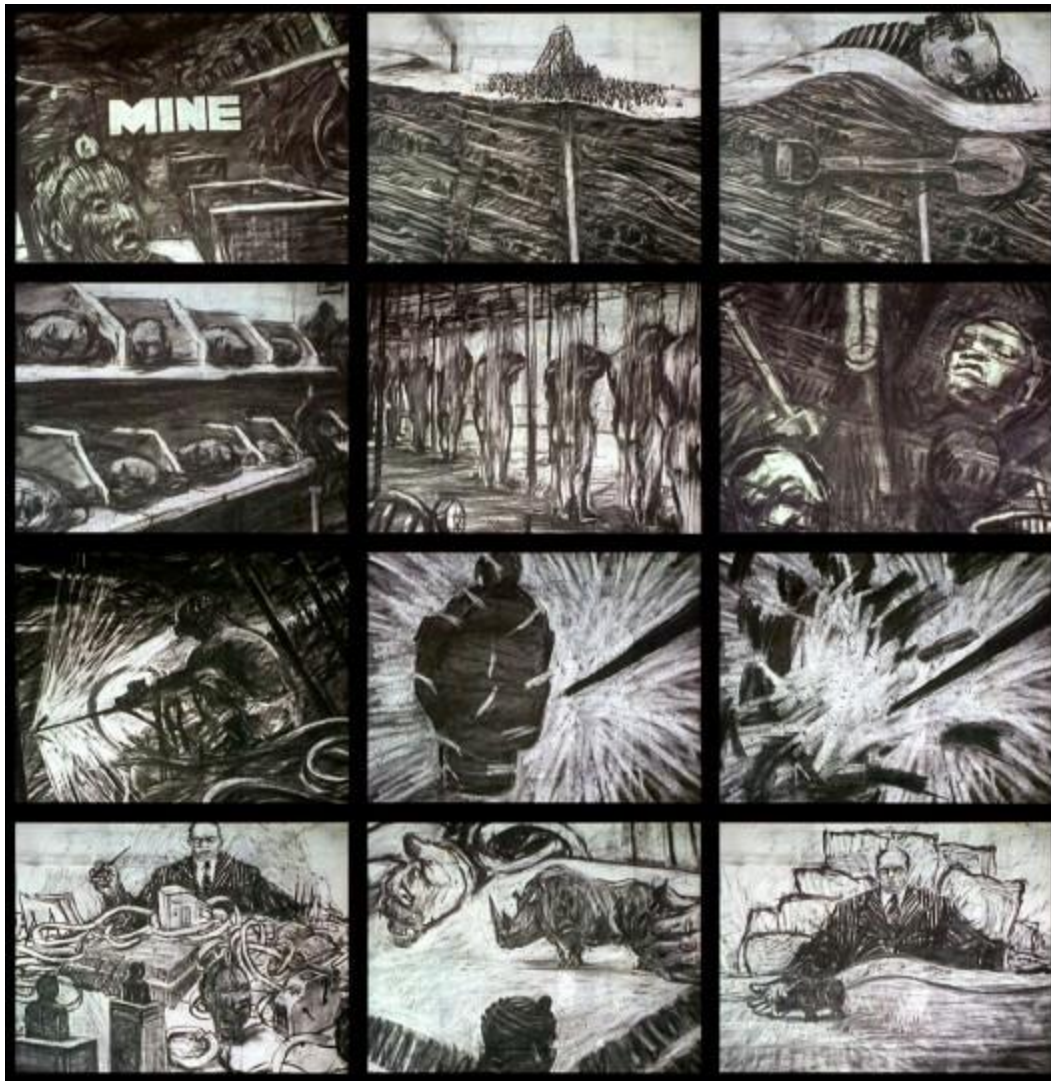


Fig.12 Kentridge, William (1991) *Mine*, [Production stills; 16mm animated film transferred to video], 5:50 min. Copyright and courtesy of William Kentridge.  
 At: <http://www.art21.org/anythingispossible/slideshow/on-animated-films/#art21-wkaip-films-011> (Accessed on 16.02.16).

This separation in his palimpsestic form of art is vividly registered in his third film, *Mine* (Fig. 12), which presents a jarring juxtaposition between the conditions of the underground labouring poor and its antithesis, that of the pampered mine-owner, Soho Eckstein. The pain and plight of those dispossessed is in stark contrast with the indifferent, gluttonous, and dictator-like Soho. The evocation of the Holocaust is not difficult to sense, for the claustrophobic tunnel of the hordes of miners, the bunk beds, and the communal showers are reminiscent of the brutality of forced labour, and of the nightmarish gas chambers in the Nazi camps. Because the depiction is blurry and a mixture of reality and fiction, this

evocation is ambiguous and poetic. His approach of transmuting suffering and pain into artistic manifestation echoes my concern with how to balance between the painful and the poetic.

Another hallmark of his works is to stage oblique view and multiple perspectives (Christov-Bakargiev, 1998: 35), revealing fragmentary scenes such as roadside beatings, eyes in the rear-view mirror, or images in billboards, CAT scans, and X-rays (image within the image itself). Juxtaposing the sequences of past and present, and of reality and fiction, he offers a destabilised, disordered, and non-linear narrative, capturing the ambivalence between remembering and forgetting. Similarly, to achieve a process of slowly unfolding in my final project, the choreography and permutation of the images convey multi-layered messages, echoing the aura of repetitions and fragments of Kentridge's films. Its mechanism operates to decentres the viewer's controlling gaze by showing a multitude of perspectives and associations with a sense of Cubists' spatial simultaneity, conveying the complexity of my subject matter.

Alongside depictions of the physical abuse and exploitation of the native people, Kentridge also present us with images of devastated landscapes (Fig.13). Not for him unspoiled nature and verdant countryside bearing little trace of colonial history and reality, he provides an utterly manmade landscape constructed by mine-dumps, slime dams, pylons, pipelines, and abandoned machinery. With the convergence of ethical imperative and ecological consciousness, the disrupted and abused landscape can be read as his critique on the narrative of modernity, which is intertwined with that of colonialism and industrialisation, with the notion of progress and the Enlightenment project (Christov-Bakargiev, 1998: 34). Yet, the blue hue sometimes irrupting into his desolate charred terrain, indeed, suggests a yearning for healing, a longing to flood the burnt, barren, urban

wasteland with blue water and love (ibid., 11). Invested with this symbolic meaning of hope, his oneiric poetry offers a redemptive possibility for addressing the ghastly post-colonial landscape, a denuded and depleted landscape, with mass extinction at an alarming rate.



Fig.13 Kentridge, William (1997-1998) *WEIGHING...and WANTING*, [Charcoal, pastel on paper], Collection of the Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego © 2000 William Kentridge.  
At: <http://www.ago.net/william-kentridge> (Accessed on 16.02.16).

### **The Representation of Nature**

The industrial detritus depicted in Kentridge's works is a post-colonial landscape of ecological destruction, one that has motivated a great number of artists to engage with and to challenge what they see as the origins of the present ecological crisis. This crisis, which is inextricably linked with the agonised plight of animals, can be traced to the aforementioned mechanist worldview—reducing nature to an inert machine—that has



shaped and permeated our predominant social values. By turning nature into ‘mere objectivity’ (Adorno and Horkheimer, 2002: 6), the Enlightenment project has rendered the world controllable through relentless classification and calculation, ready for capitalist, and historically, colonialist exploitation and expansion. Displaying bewildering ranges of specimens or menageries gathered or plundered across the world, natural history museums and zoos, as the representations of nature in human culture, are the products of imperialist power and domination. The legacy of colonisers’ thinking, featuring the advanced, civilised, Western culture’s control and conquest of those it deems to be ‘primitive’ and ‘uncivilised’, still haunts people’s subconscious and wreaks havoc to this planet.

With the deconstructing tools of parody and irony, the American artist Mark Dion mobilises his tableaux and simulations to question the biased colonist’s interpretation of nature embodied in the ideological structures of museums and zoos. Taking on a pseudo-scientific approach of grafting his found materials into a museum paradigm yet deconstructed by aesthetic and ironic manipulation, his series of fictional bureaucracies intend to mock the arbitrariness of the nineteenth century collectors’ hierarchical taxonomy reflecting their idiosyncratic interests and flawed worldview. The taxonomical rhetoric of these institutional authorities has largely mediated the public perceptions and knowledge of nature and animals; and his intervention invites us to rethink the ‘truth’ purveyed by these institutions. By foregrounding the sensory experience of the visual, and by a cross-breeding of a variety of interrelated disciplines, his works mock the homogenising effects of the classification of museums’ organising and framing procedures. Such orthodox taxonomy is based on the dualistic, hierarchical, and anthropocentric paradigm that renders collected ‘items’ as ‘decontextualised’ objects rather than interconnected subjects. The objectivity of ‘truth’ embodied in this system in fact indicates that human masters have been severed from the ‘othered’ nature and animals.

Problematizing this paradigm of separation and mastery, and alluding to the complex relationship between colonialism and ecology, his work, *The Library for the Birds of Antwerp* (Fig. 14), is a site-specific installation created for the city of Antwerp. Displayed in the centre, a dead tree is festooned with wooden cages, a bird nest, bird traps, and books about extinct birds hanging from or wedged into the branches, providing an artificial bird habitat for a number of living African finches that help to enliven the work.



Fig. 14 Dion, Mark (1993) *The Library for the Birds of Antwerp*, [Installation/Eighteen African finches, tree, ceramic tiles, books, photographs, bird cages, bird traps, chemical containers, rat and snake in liquid, shot gun shells, axe, nets, Audubon prints, bird nests, wax fruit, and assorted objects], dimensions variable. Installation view: Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst, Antwerp, Belgium. Courtesy Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York.

At: <http://www.art21.org/images/mark-dion/the-library-for-the-birds-of-antwerp-1993?slideshow=1> (Accessed on 16.02.16).

Evoking the lucrative trade in exotic birds in Antwerp dating from sixteenth century, the cages, traps, and the living finches link the work with the colonial past (Bryson, 1997: 91).

Not only wild birds, an enormous variety of different animals from Africa, Asia, or

Australia, defined as ‘colonial commodity’, were transported by sea for many weeks to European marketplaces in the nineteenth century; Antwerp is one of the oldest rendezvous for trading these colonial possessions (Baratay and Hardouin-Fugier, 2002: 117-8). Animals arrived emaciated and wounded, or dead en route (around half amount of animals died during the crossing), or distressed by the separation between mothers and their offspring (ibid.). For in terms of social animals, hunters had to kill the adults and capture the young. Many hunters left vivid accounts in their ‘kill diaries’ in which they boasted in excruciating detail of their skills and of the baby animals that mourned at the other sides of their dead mothers ...’ (DeMello, 2012: 103). Registering the unthinkable suffering imposed by colonial traders and hunters, these wild animal captives bore witness to the genesis of our modern zoo. Yet, the trilling birds in Dion’s work, with their past identity as the colonial other, stand as a counterpoint of the dualistic, colonial paradigm, a representation of nature that the colonial or anthropocentric gaze cannot capture and frame.

With this work the artist aims to foreground the fact that this planet will ‘become a less culturally and biologically diverse place, less wild, more impoverished, economically polarised, uglier and less interesting place to live’ (Dion, 2005: 52). As these gloomy signs are cluttered on a dead tree—metaphorically standing for the tree of knowledge, the tree of life, or Darwin’s phylogenetic tree of placing human at the pinnacle of evolution—this work is tinged with a pessimistic sense about our current environmental dilemma, especially the imperative of species extinction. Yet, by revealing past follies this work nonetheless implies a potential for change.

Likewise, deploying collaborative socially-engaged practices, the Icelandic artist Bryndís Snæbjörnsdóttir and the British artist Mark Wilson challenge the delimiting effects of cultural representation of nature and animals. Their ecologically attuned practices

challenge the anthropocentric mode of thinking that ‘sanction a loss through representation of “the other”’, that is, animal’s death can be understood on the levels both physical and cultural (Wilson, 2012: 9). The representation of nature and animals is an embodiment of human supremacy and binary oppositions that have facilitated the objectification, instrumentalisation, and reduction of nature. In an attempt to seek new engagements with other species, or to borrow their words, ‘alternative tropes of parties in meeting’, they privilege a state of uncertainty and indeterminacy, of ‘the relinquishment of human control’ (Snæbjörnsdóttir and Wilson, 2012: 87-8). The condition of ‘uncertainty’ is considered as ‘a positively useful state, a condition of becoming, of possible reappraisal and potential’ (Wilson, 2012: 5). Shifting from the territory of human language, intellect, and semiotics, they posit the mechanism of art as a way of thinking that has a potential of fostering a responsiveness to the uncertainty of engagement with the non-human others.



Fig. 15 Snæbjörnsdóttir, Bryndís & Wilson, Mark (2007) *Three Attempt*, [3 channel audio video], in *Between You and Me*, [installation]. At: <https://interactivefutures2011.wordpress.com/2011/05/13/exhibition-b-2/> (Accessed on 30.01.16).

Their project *Between You and Me* not only contemplates on the flawed representation of seals in human culture, but also explores their notion of ‘parties in meeting’, an encounter

between human and seal on the coastal area of Iceland. Staging a ‘play with animals with respect and curiosity, the performance video work, *Three Attempts* (Fig. 15) features the collaboration between artist (Snæbjörnsdóttir) and animals. Their initial attempt of enticing seals by imitating their sound still sounds contrived and achieved little ‘reciprocation’. Yet in an attempt to give up ‘control’, their final attempt of restaging nonetheless led to the unexpected moment of excitement among animals, revealing animals’ freedom, agency, and intrinsic value (ibid., 87-8).



Fig. 16 Bryndis Snæbjörnsdóttir & Mark Wilson, *You Must Carry Me Now*, [14 image-and-text works], in *Trout Fishing in America and Other Stories*, Arizona State Museum of Art. Photo: Damion Julien-Rohman. At: <http://www.statepress.com/article/2014/11/trout-fishing-exhibit-delves-into-importance-of-conservationism>, (Accessed on 30.01.16).

Their recent work *Trout Fishing in America and Other Stories* (2014) (Fig. 16) focuses on the Grand Canyon in Arizona, America, addressing the conservation of two endangered species in America, the humpback chub, native to the Colorado River, and the California condor. Adopting ‘strategies of humour, wonder, and surprise’, this project explores the complexity and uncertainty surrounding the concept of sustainability perceived by various



‘stakeholders’ (Snæbjörnsdóttir and Wilson, 2014). By pairing text with photographic images, one of the components of this project, *You Must Carry Me Now*, is comprised of 14 images with each depicting a frozen condor. What strike us is the detailed and touching accounts of the suffering and death of the specific, individual animals; most of them died from lead poisoning by eating carcasses contaminated by lead bullets left by hunters (ibid.). These melancholic images encourage us to recalibrate our senses and perceptions towards other cohabiting species that command our responsibility.



Fig.17 Olly & Suzi (1998) *Cheetahs*, [C-Type photograph mounted on aluminium with perspex], Namibia, Limited Edition 15, 2 AP, 48" x 32". Courtesy of the artsit.

At: <http://www.ollysuzi.com/galleries/v/photographic+editions/photographs/echeetah.jpg.html>, (Accessed on 16.02.16).

Bearing a similar awareness with the interrelationship of all species, the British artists Olly and Suzi also seek to open new ways of representing nature and animals. Like Dion, they travel around the globe to acquire authentic, fresh experience with endangered creatures and their habitat destruction. Working collaboratively in harsh, inhospitable conditions, they depict the encountered wild animals by using natural materials close at hand such as soil, natural pigments, plant colourings, blood, inks, and dyes (Baker, 2000: 12). What is

striking in their aesthetic strategy is the immediacy of encountering and interacting with wild animals, not only by painting them in close proximity—even with ferocious creatures like lions, sharks, or snakes, but also by inviting animals to leave some marks on their works (Fig. 17). These works mark the presence of animals and may serve as an innovative way of giving ‘voices’ to animals. Also, with the aid of a photographer, the performative dimension of their practice is embodied by exhaustively documenting the process attentive to this human-animal interaction.

Building on Wendy Wheeler’s (2006) insight on the relation between attentiveness and creativity, Steve Baker describes their practice as an *embodied* ‘attentiveness’ (Baker, 2013: 31), as a way of facilitating creative thinking while simultaneously taking no heed on logic and rules. Through bodily engagement, their attentiveness helps to combine the process of drawing with the ephemeral, embodied experiences with endangered creatures and fragile wildness (traditionally defined as uncivilised and dangerous) that are increasingly receding from us. Yet, the act of attentively looking at animals, an act embedded in their embodied experience of drawing, which also echoes Coe’s strategy, is crucially significant not only for artistic expression but for our ethical revelation as well. Balanced and intently encoded in their practices is a responsible stance with the act, not of the voyeuristic, consumptive gaze, but of reciprocal ‘looking’.

Yet, according to John Berger, ‘this look between animal and man, which may have played a crucial role in the development of human society’, has been extinguished since less than a century ago (Berger, 2009: 28). To counter the effect of this profound separation between humans and animals, Donna Haraway’s offers a notion of companion species in her book, *When Species Meet* (2008). This concept reminds us that animals as our companion species are not just being passively seen and they are capable of looking back and even

working cooperatively with us. As she notes, ‘To hold in regard, to respond, to look back reciprocally, to notice, to pay attention, to have courteous regard for, to esteem: all of is tied to polite greeting, to constituting the polis, where and when species meet’ (Haraway, 2008: 19). Hence, ethically and constructively, we need to listen, watch, and cooperate with them.

With this in mind, Olly and Suzi’s efforts can, therefore, be read as a ‘re-enchantment’ of the extinguished look and communication between humans and animals, by conceiving animals as our ‘companion species’ that can, like us, respond, communicate, and interact, instead of resting as inert, abstract, dualistic labels and objects.

Reflecting on the magnitude of past errors, these artists have made metaphysical efforts toward a re-conception of nature both in critical deconstruction of the ‘official’ representation of nature and in tentative reconstruction of human-animal relations. Their aesthetic politics, though differing distinctively, attests to the significance of the visual, and to the ways of re-presentation of nature that may enact social change. Behind the conventional practice of taxonomy is an instrumental consciousness that seeing one Great Auk is to see them all. This attitude will foreclose both the ethical thinking and poetic imagination. Once ossified in the category of Great Auk within a standardised, orderly taxonomic system, it is understandable that it ceased to be valued as an individual, living creature (Corrin, 1997: 84). The static, generalising categories and cages, which we use, physically and conceptually, to incarcerate animals is dismantled by Dion’s, Snæbjörnsdóttir and Wilson’s or Olly and Suzi’s embodied engagement with wild animals. Thus, their reconceptualization of nature and animals encourages us to think beyond our previous cultural rhetoric not in terms of instrumental, anthropocentric assumptions, but in terms of symbiotic, interdependent nexus.



Yet, addressing the question of violence against animals, especially factory-farmed or lab animals, is fundamentally different from the re-presentation of wild species. The institutional framework of capitalism has rendered the routinized abuse and killing of billions of animals invisible and foreclosed the possibility of dialogue and ethical thinking. Aimed at acquiring primary experience with the suffering, invisibilised animal, my fieldtrips, though ephemeral or frustrating, have given me motivation and insights into challenging the capitalist representation of animals as machine-like commodities, and the profound disconnection between our daily consumption and the destruction of nature and animals.



Fig. 18 Coe, Sue (2001) *Factory Pharm*, in Coe, Sue, *Cruel Cruel: Bearing Witness to Animal Exploitation*, pp. x-xi, OR Books, 2011. At: <http://bombmagazine.org/article/6696/> (Accessed on 16.02.16).

## **The Capitalist Sublime**

Considering that capitalist exploitation has magnified our ethical and ecological crisis, to address the subjugation of animals and nature needs an analysis of aesthetic representations of terror and wonder created by the capitalist machine. The capitalist

calculation of profitability rather than long-term sustainability, allied to its logic of maximum production with minimum cost, has generated the horror of factory farming. Transforming everything including living, sentient beings as expendable materials and disposable commodities, capitalism clings to the paradigm of the ceaseless expansion of production and excessive consumption. Reflecting on the force of the late (or advanced) capitalism, Jean-François Lyotard notes, ‘There is something of the sublime in capitalist economy...in a sense, an economy regulated by an Idea—that of infinite wealth or power’ (Lyotard, 1991: 105). Such immeasurable or even hysteric sense of infinity and magnitude is deeply embodied in the present ethos of global capitalism, bordering on a notion of the sublime traditionally associated with a series of contradictory feelings—joy and terror, pleasure and pain, attraction and repulsion.

Inscrutable and incomparable, the pleasurable terror enabled by the size, excessiveness, and intensity of the globalised network of capital can be labelled as the capitalist (or postmodern) sublime. The ubiquitous and threatening power of global capitalism, resembling the sublime aesthetics, has been represented in different forms by the sphere of contemporary art. In revealing the evilness of its mechanism, Coe provides a critique on global capitalism that imposes unprecedented violence against animals. Her works indicate that the global capitalist sublime is constructed by countless animals’ bodies. In her recent book *Cruel: Bearing Witness to Animal Exploitation*, she articulates how the capitalist drive of transforming living creatures to machines and packaged commodities, and eventually, to piles of cash. Her dark rendering provides an imagery of a vertiginous industrial regime, reminiscent of Piranesi’s dark labyrinthine-like prisons, spaces densely crowded with tagged, numbered animals conveyed along the ‘disassembly’ line of death (Fig. 18).



Fig.19 Coe, Sue (2002) *Untitled (The 20884 Ton Ship...Sank Below the Waves)*, [Graphite, gouache and watercolour on white Strathmore Bristol board, mounted on heavy tan textured paper], 20 1/2" x 15 1/2", Courtesy of Galerie St. Etienne, Midtown. At: <http://calendar.artcat.com/exhibits/1185>, (Accessed on 16.02.16).

Reflecting on globalised animal production, Coe's book called *Sheep of Fools* (2005) (Fig. 19) was inspired by a news report on a sinking vessel transporting the crammed animal cargo of eighty thousand sheep from Australia to the Middle East. Inflamed by the report of only one human life lost yet without mention of the destruction of all animals (Baker, 2013: 151), she created a short series that later, with more extensive research, evolved into this book as a visual exposé. The book vividly captures the agonising moment when thousands of creatures were burnt to death; the twenty-two crew abandoned the ship while it caught fire. She opens out her concerns to observe the overlapping relation between wool trade contributing to the rise of the British Empire as a world power and the current huge business of live animal transport, suggesting how animals are intimately bound up

with the creation of capitalism at the stage of ‘primitive accumulation’ and the present-day totality of global capital flow.



Fig.20 Gursky, Andreas (2002) *Greeley*, [C-print mounted on Plexiglas in artist's frame], 82 3/4 x 103 3/8 in. (210.19 x 262.57 cm), Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.  
At: <http://www.thebroad.org/art/andreas-gursky/greeley>, (Accessed on 16.02.16).

While Coe’s critical and pictorial intervention exposes the patterns of horror in the global capitalist regime, the German artist Andreas Gursky’s photographic representation objectively captures the topography of late capitalism. Following the style of ‘impersonal objectivity’ established by his predecessors Bernd and Hilla Becher (Galassi, 2001: 11), his deadpan aesthetics neither criticises nor promotes this hysterical dynamism of advanced capitalism. Rather than merely taking on a role of documentation, his works transfigure the mundane scenes into aesthetic spectacles. His mammoth chromogenic colour prints depict enormous, intense industrial or post-industrial spaces and practices of



meat-packing, hypermarkets, landfill sites, or commodity exchanges. Shooting from an aerial viewpoint to offer a panoramic vista, and then digitally suturing a set of composite images to display their vastness, he creates a sense of infinite magnitude with multiple perspectives, both entrancing and decentring. Inherent in his hyper-realistic expression is seriality and repetition that structure the fabric of capitalism. More pertinent to my enquiry, for example, his images of a feedlot (Fig.19) and meat-processing plant exhibit the minute details of those magnitudes of animal commodities and human workers in which both are de-individualised by capitalistic production. Any single vantage point cannot capture such uncontrollable capitalistic multiplication, creating an illusion of infinity, and vacillating between the psychologically terrifying and the visually seductive.



Fig.21 Dion, Mark (1994) *Flotsam and Jetsam (The End of the Game)*, [Mixedmedia: Boat, sand, wooden platform, chair, electric fan, net, assorted beach debris], dimensions variable. Installation shot at De Vleeshall, Middleburg, The Netherlands. At: <http://www.goodwateryallery.com/GW01-06/GW/Artists/Dion/Dion-flotsamjetsam.htm>,(Accessed on 16.02.16).

With its myopic vision, capitalist calculation cannot address but only further social and ecological crisis. Channelling our attention on the juggernaut of capitalist production, Dion's *The Flotsam and Jetsam (The End of Game)* (1994) (Fig. 21) evokes the capitalist sublime through which he broaches the relationship between overfishing and environmental destruction. He stages a catastrophic spectacle with a shipwreck, thrown net, and a pile of beach debris on a wooden platform. With a despondent sense of impending environmental disaster, he laments on the unchecked practices of overharvesting perpetuated by insatiable desire and anthropocentric thinking.



Fig.22 Gaba, Meschac (1997) *Draft Room*, [Mixedmedia installation], © Gert Jan van Rooij, Museum De Paviljoens. At: <http://www.depaviljoens.nl/page/55305> (Accessed on 16.02.16).

In addition to the degradation of ecosystems, the pressure of globalised capitalism has exacerbated the social crisis of the Global South. Confronting us with the questions of

devaluation that has impoverished African people, the African artist Meschac Gaba's works also conjure up the nightmare of the capitalist sublime in a collection of installation works called *Museum of Contemporary African Art*, in which he deploys a substantial amount of decommissioned banknotes, indicating the moribund African economy. Disturbing and eerily hypnotic, *Draft Room* (Fig. 22), as part of this ambitious project, displays several bags of compressed shredded money or piles of notes with small holes. With whole ceramic chickens filled in a fridge-freezer and a mound of ceramic chicken feet on a white metal shelving unit, this piece is also concerned with the unresolvable dilemma of capitalist economy—the soaring growth of production outpacing that of consumption, a phenomenon producing the catastrophic consequences of capitalist fantasy: the ironic transformation of the abundance of commodities into the heaps of waste waiting to be thrown away.

Such apocalyptic fantasies of the capitalistic sublime embodied in the aesthetic tension of these practitioners' oeuvres force us to consider the negative impacts of the never-ending expansion of late capitalism that destructs ecosystems and devalues both human and nonhuman other. Mobilised as food or scientific guinea pigs, animals' bodies are enmeshed into the globalised matrix of capitalist expansion, from primitive accumulation to the present 'animal industrial complex'.<sup>4</sup> By using a dazzling geometric matrix of accumulating a multitude of small painted units, my third project, *Hide and Seek*, evokes the hallucinatory effects of global capitalism and questions the unimaginable scale and the relentless cycle of vanishing animals into commodities and capital. Juxtaposing images and texts of foods coming from animal source against those of chicken processing, the toiling animal labourers, stock market screens, and the 1999 Seattle anti-WTO

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<sup>4</sup> *Animal industrial complex*, a term coined by Barbara Noske (1997) refers to the globally interconnected institutions of animal exploitation ranging from corporations of factory farming and grain production, to companies of fast-food, retail, and advertising, and to financial institutions and governments. They constitute an enormous network producing and promoting animals as food, guinea pigs, or objects of entertainments in order to accumulate profits.

demonstration, I create a layered meshwork suggesting ‘a semiotic and material closed loop’ in which ‘capital becomes animal, animal becomes capital’ (Shukin, 2009: 16).

Yet, as noted by Lyotard, seeking new means of expression and new materials, artistic innovations, in parallel with the sublimity of capitalist economy and technological advances, can also be regarded as the postmodern incarnation of the sublime (Lyotard, 1991: 105). Thus, it is no surprise that animals’ deaths and their inconceivable suffering, along with the contemporary economic sublime, can also be translated into various forms of the aesthetic sublime as well. Through metaphorical and literal employment and aesthetic reduction, animals are framed, fragmented, and fetishized by the contemporary cultural mainstream. Thus, they are almost invariably trivialised and, in many cases, converted into glittering capital as well. For example, the British artist Damien Hirst’s formaldehyde-pickled animals evoke capitalist sensations and fantasies promoted by global capitalists like Charles Saatchi or Steve Cohen and simultaneously raise our concerns for the ethical dilemma of animals. Meanwhile, there are contrasting discourses, like Coe’s art, addressing the politics of animals. With this in mind, it is fitting to follow with a discussion of the dialectics of cultural representation of animals that mirrors our current ethical debates on nature and other species.

### **Animals: Aesthetics and Ethics**

Although the realm of contemporary art has witnessed a surge of interest in the subject of animals, animals are generally recoded as aesthetic objects by the semiotics of human culture. Constrained by the anthropocentric worldview, however, this fascination bears little concern with real animals as specific, sentient, and valuable beings, but as merely metaphorical objects signifying human condition or, generally, the natural world (Becoff,



2009: 77). This disposition is so permeated into the realm of art that even artists with serious social and political concerns have naturalised this strategy, even if their critical stances can be acknowledged. For example, Kentridge employs a canine metaphor for mankind's preoccupation with wars and violence (Palumbo, 2008: 265), whereas Spero uses predatory insects or serpents to convey similar concern. The British artist Mark Wallinger's horse represented in painting, video, and sculpture is still a trope for signifying human social identity of class (Collings, 2011: 6). Yet, with reference to the animal's perspective, as Coe remarks, 'by using an animal (or its image) as a symbol of or for something else, that the animal is effectively robbed of its own identity, and its interest will be eventually overlooked' (Baker, 2006: 78). Thus, by supplanting animal perspective with human, artistic manipulation and metaphorisation have largely marginalised and trivialised animals, with the potential of affecting the way we treat animals.



Fig. 23 Hirst, Damien (1991) *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of a Shark*, [Installation: Glass, steel, silicone, formaldehyde and shark,] 217 x 542 x 180 cm, © Damien Hirst. All rights reserved, DACS 2010, Photograph: Prudence Cuming Associates. At: <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/the-sublime/luke-white-damien-hirsts-shark-nature-capitalism-and-the-sublime-r1136828> (Accessed on 16.02.16).

Not only serving as symbols and metaphors, animals' physical bodies, in many cases, with agony and suffering, are also deployed for artistic spectacles. Transmuting animal death into aesthetic capital, Hirst confronts the viewer with sharks, bisected pigs, lambs, and calves that are displayed in transparent vitrines filled with formaldehyde. In these works, animals' mortifying flesh may metaphorically signify the enigma of death and mortality. Visually haunting and ethically upsetting, the tiger shark was caught and killed particularly for his work *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* (Fig. 23). Moreover, for the problem of preservation technique, the shark began to decay and another tiger shark was ordered to be killed to replace the previous one (Becoff, 2009: 79). In the American-based artist Pinar Yolacan's series *Perishables*, she designed and made a blouse from sewed chicken skin. In so doing, she may intend to challenge our thinking on why certain ways of exploiting animals are reckoned as beautiful and acceptable while other visceral engagements as disgusting (Malamud, 2012: 133-4). Also, other artists staging the killing or torturing of animals want to provoke public responses with the paradox of ethics: some forms of violence towards animals such as factory farming or fishing are socially condoned, while animal cruelty in gallery space is outrageous and contentious? For example, the Chilean artist Marco Evarisitti's piece *Helena* (Fig. 24) displayed ten food blenders, each one filled with water and a live goldfish. The viewers were allowed to press the button of each blender to turn the living fish to 'soup' (Baker, 2013: 12-5). Furthermore, the Swedish photographer Nathalia Edenmont actually killed animals such as rabbits, mice, chickens, and cats, and photographed the decapitated animals with decorative flowers and fruits (Demello, 2012: 293).



Fig. 24 Evaristti, Marco (2000) *Helena*, [Moulinex Optiblend 2000 electric blenders, live goldfish, and water], Dimensions: ten blenders set up on a small table, Trapholt Art Museum, Kolding, Denmark.  
At: <http://challengersofart.blogspot.co.uk/2014/07/marco-evaristti-helena.html> (Accessed on 16.02.16).

The prevailing aesthetic metaphors and violence imposed on animals suggest that there is a pervasive disinclination to communicate the ethical concern for animals in contemporary art, in contrast with the growing engagement of other fields with human-animal relationships (Watt, 2011: 125). Such avoidance of the ethical and political problems of animals is partly because some artists believe that art and politics are separate entities which might be incongruous with each other (ibid.) and, in part no doubt, due to the deeply entrenched ideology of anthropocentrism. Of course, the value of artworks with animal metaphors cannot be utterly discounted, but nonetheless we ought to bear in mind that animals' interests may therefore be disregarded if we follow this way of thinking.

Regarding the entanglement of aesthetics and ethics, I am sympathetic to Carol Gigliotti's notion that artistic creativity should be viewed in a larger context (of the ethical and

ecological) and that artistic metaphors ought to be aligned with its related responsibility (Gigliotti, 2009: 39). She maintains the significance of animal's 'voice' in this communication or 'social exchange', which is ignored or violated in many art practices discussed above (ibid., 45). In manifest opposition to prevalent physical and/or symbolic violence against animals in the name of art, Coe is one of the most prominent figures dedicating her life to addressing the plight of animals. In addition, other artists have committed to affect social change on our thinking about animals as well.



Fig.25 Watt, Yvette (2007-8) *Second Sight* series (sheep, cow, pig, chicken), [Giclee print on hahnemuhle photo rag paper], each work 65 x 59cm.

At: <http://soa.anu.edu.au/event/art-forum-yvette-watt> (Accessed on 16.02.16).

Unlike Coe's explicit exposure of the horror of institutionalised exploitation of animals, the Australian artist Yvette Watt mines the ethical dimension of anthropomorphism, or more precisely, the notion of 'egomorphism' to engage viewers with animals. The former suggests that 'humanness is the departure point for any understanding of nonhuman animals', yet the latter puts the self as the primary point of reference, allowing for the

‘perceiving of similar characteristics in animals’ (Watt, 2011: 127). In her *Offering* series, she produces animal images depicting specific animal beings while using her blood as paint, to demonstrate a ‘symbolic giving up of her own blood’ and ‘the gestures of solidarities with those animals’ (Watt, personal communication, 25 September 2009). Superposing animals’ eyes with her own, she also creates trans-species images conveying human-animal continuity in order to generate empathic feelings towards animals (Fig. 25).



Fig.26 Clouse, Mary Britton (2005) *Nemo: Portrait/Self-Portrait*, [Sepia photograph]. Courtesy of the artist.  
At: <http://www.upc-online.org/thinking/framed-clouse.html> (Accessed on 16.02.16).

As a founder of the Justice for Animals Arts Guild (JAAG), which opposes the violence against animals in the making of art, the American artist Mary Britton Clouse’s works include drawings, paintings, and sculptures featuring the chickens rescued by her and her husband. Interestingly, her sepia photograph series *Portrait/Self-Portrait* (Fig. 26) evokes a

human-animal intersection in which she tries to overlap her face with that of a chicken. Such interspecies dialogue is staged on the basis of mutual trust and respect, thus ‘rupturing the sense of human-animal distinctions and hierarchies’ (Baker, 2013: 107-13). The ambiguous title functions as the recognition of the animal’s subjectivity, and the sepia constituting both artist and the animal suggests the shared properties of sentient beings.



Fig.27 Singer, Angela (2008) *Plume*, [Recycled vintage taxidermy pea hen, jewels, glass]. Courtesy of the artist. At: <http://www.angelasinger.com/recovered.html> (Accessed on 16.02.16).

Recycling dead animals into artworks, the New Zealand artist Angela Singer stages a disturbing encounter with animals’ deaths and vulnerability. Delicate and intricate,



glimmering and glossy, her artworks are a world of reconfiguration from different taxidermic animals, mixed with sprinkling material, like jewels, sequins, or crystals (Fig. 27). In her hybridised works, she wants to elicit a heightened sense of contradiction, a contradiction between beauty and brutality, attraction and repulsion (Baker, 2013: 169). Albeit being criticised as ‘objectifying animal’, she does project her empathic emotion onto animals (Baker, 2013: 168), her reverence and awe for a once living life, her sympathy and compassion for their suffering.

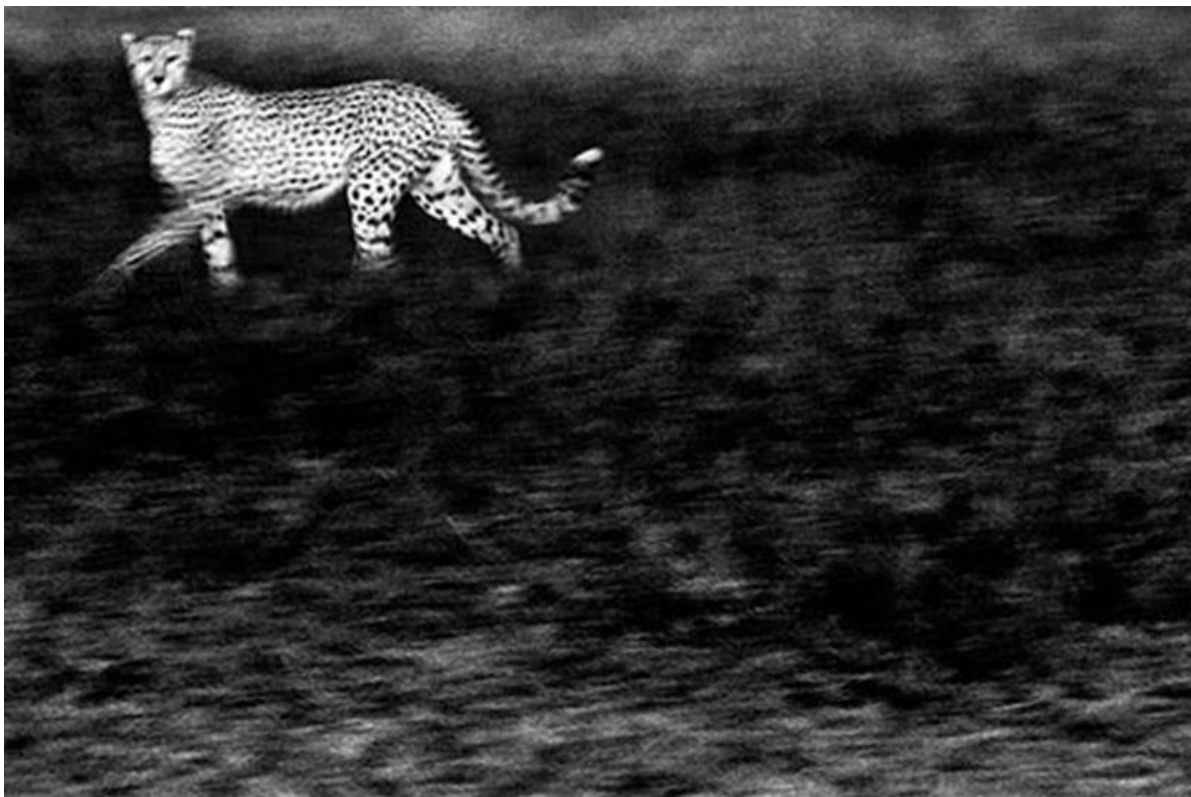


Fig.28 Jaschinski, Britta (2007) *Ghostly Cheetah*, in the *Dark* series, [Photograph]. Courtesy of the artist.  
At:<http://www.treehugger.com/natural-sciences/european-wildlife-photographer-of-the-years-ghostly-photos-of-disappearing-species.html> (Accessed on 16.02.16).

Disillusioned with the widespread mainstream wildlife photography—a ‘selective and manipulative’ regime of the visual, featuring detailed animal images captured by the anthropocentric gaze (Baker, 2013: 162)—the German artist Britta Jaschinski’s photographic intervention connotes the poignant captivity of zoo animals. Purposefully rendered blurry and obscure, her black and white images appear to evoke the dislocated,

disempowered, and distressed animal subjects in artificial alien environments. The disruptive power derives from the gloominess and blurriness of her images. Her *Dark* (Fig. 28) series communicates the unknowable sense of nature which the prevailing human gaze fails to grasp. In so doing, her artworks may echo John Berger's (1980) laments on the decontextualized zoo animals serving as a monument for the irredeemable loss of real animals since capitalist expansion.

Despite the difficulty of reality—the 'disappearance' of animals, the significance of animal suffering, and the general circumspection in the art world surrounding this problem—the practices concerning the 'voices' of animals, though having been generally underestimated by art critics, offer insights into how to think about animals in non-binary, non-symbolic ways. Motivated by the disruptive force of these artworks, I tend not only to question normalised violence against animals, but counterproductive practices in visual culture as well. At the core of my enquiry is a fusion of poetic imagination and ethical responsibility. Yet, addressing this question through the lens of art, along with the complexity and difficulty of this problem, determines the necessity of how to shape the nuanced language of art, to jolt viewers into rethinking the ethics of human-animal relations without a sense of pontification and simple reading.

In writing on socially and politically charged art, the American feminist writer bell hooks considers art practices as 'a philosophy of risk' (hooks, 1995: 83). It is also particularly true with art concerning the question of the animal. With respect to Coe, Jaschinski, and Singer's works, Baker observes that 'art entails provisional decision-making, a preparedness to make changes, and an acknowledgement of the risk of failure, of the audience not getting it, or getting it 'wrong'' (Baker, 2013: 175). In Singer's view, 'the best art is difficult to read', and indulging her interest in such a fine *risk* is 'a great



infuriating joy' (Singer, 2008: 17). Of course, in playing with the *risk* of uncertainty, other contemporary politically charged art often deploys scrambled syntax and cobbles incongruous, disparate materials together, with conceptual and sensory disjunctions and dissonances, to resist any easy interpretation. Boltanski communicates the 'unspeakability' of the Holocaust by purposefully introducing the elements of playfulness, the smiling face of blurred photographs, or the festive material—the coloured metallic wrapping paper bound around the tin frames—in contrast with the sombre, melancholic tone of the subject matter. Such off-kilter assemblages can also be found in Mona Hatoum's employment of hair-balls which evoke the contradictory feelings of the female hair—the long tresses associated with female charm, while discarded hair is conventionally regarded as repulsive.

The unsettling effects of these practices with their uncertainties and ambiguities are indeed one of the most important characteristics of contemporary art, and the equivocal, stuttering sense of art conveys the complex and layered situations. The white cushion in my second piece, for example, evokes the contradictory oscillation between the attractive and the abhorrent, the immaculate, sensual beauty and the irremediable death of animals. In essence, the contradictions and dissonances are useful devices that I want to mobilise to set up the confusing melanges with strong tension—situated on the fluctuating boundary of the aesthetic and the ethical, the familiar and the alien, the absent and the present. Operating with the mechanism of art, albeit with the *risk* of 'getting it wrong', they will attest to their identities as art objects rather than abstract concepts.

## II - Theoretical Context

The dynamic field of art, as an alternative way of thinking, has provided us with abundant visual ideas for addressing the question of violence against animals. Meanwhile, philosophical probing can structure our understanding on the root cause of this problem and propose various means for the possible reconciliation between humans and other species.

Peter Singer's utilitarian philosophy, as the most influential intellectual underpinning in this area, prompted me into this enquiry and, therefore, secures first introduction. This approach is predicated on the fact that sentient beings are capable of feeling pain and suffering, so we should reduce their pain as much as possible and maximise their pleasurable experiences. His sentience-based disposition urges us to extend equal consideration to other sentient beings (Calarco, 2008: 108). The other pioneering figure, the American philosopher Tom Regan, represents a subject-based rights approach, emphasising that animals, like human subjects, are 'subjects-of-a-life' who are singular individuals, having beliefs and desires, perceptions, memories, senses of future ... regardless of what it matters to others. Thus, we must ascribe inherent value to all 'subjects-of-a-life' (ibid., 130). Yet his approach has been criticised for the condition he establishes for moral concern is only applicable to certain animals like mammals with self-awareness, while other animals may be excluded on the basis of such criteria (Keller, 2010: 13). Hence, it is not difficult to discern the narrowness of both his and Singer's ideas of setting up moral hierarchies, which may reject certain non-sentient lives that may not possess subjective lives.

Although having sympathy for both approaches, Jacques Derrida makes a significant departure from the two ways of thinking by interrogating anthropocentrism and the human-animal dualism (Calarco, 2008: 105). What I find attractive and particularly pertinent to this research are his accounts on the enormity of animal exploitation and his proto-ethical position (face-to-face encounter with the singular other) on animal suffering, which offers a refreshing way of thinking beyond philosophical analysis and argumentation. For him, it is the disruptive encounter with animals' vulnerability that gives rise to our empathy and commands our responsibility. Meanwhile, as I have argued above, other thinkers stress the commonalities between the oppression of human and the exploitation of nature and animals. For example, Carol Adams' (1990) attentiveness to the intersections between different forms of oppression, principally patriarchy and animal subjection, highlights the interrelatedness of various ethical and political agendas.

Based on a holistic mode of thinking, drawing different agendas together functions as an important strategy in this research for building up the relations between and within visual and theoretical references. When reflecting on institutional violence, for example, Derrida does not avoid risk by making a comparison between human and animal holocaust, as evidenced in Chicago's work. Though discursive and controversial, establishing various associative links is not a way of sidestepping the research question; rather, the intricacy of the question demands a new paradigm, a cosmology attentive to the intersections of seemingly disparate discourses through questioning the power hierarchy that dictates different forms of oppression.

## **Violence against Animals**

In the eighteenth century, lamenting the fact that animals are treated as mere machines incapable of feeling pain, the British philosopher Jeremy Bentham asked a profound question as a response. ‘The question is not, Can they [animals] reason? Nor, can they talk? But, Can they suffer?’ He regards the mistreatment of both humans and animals as unjustifiable, and wishes that one day such cruelty and oppression could be abandoned (Calarco, 2008: 116). Rather than being resolved or ameliorated, however, with capitalist expansion, the problem of animal suffering has accelerated at an appalling rate and the enormity of violence to animals has provoked many philosophers, like Singer and Derrida, into thinking on the irrational nature of the industrialised killing of animals. In order to address this problem, both philosophers look at Bentham’s question but find themselves going on different paths. For Singer, the capacity for suffering and enjoyment is ‘*a prerequisite for having any interests at all* [emphasis in original], a condition that must be satisfied before we can speak of interests in a meaningful way’ (Singer, 1995: 7). While for Derrida, the Western philosophical tradition considers the ethical questions only based on some essential human traits, especially reason and language; this question thus deconstructs the ontology of human beings by paying heed to the vulnerability and *passivity* of animals that can interrupt and call human egoism into question.

### **Capability of Suffering**

Inspired by Bentham’s question, Singer builds his utilitarian attitude about animal ethics on animal’s capacity for feeling suffering and pain. The natural tendency of avoiding pain and suffering, the preference for living, justifies the fact that every sentient being deserves our equal consideration, if not equal treatment. That is, ‘the capacity for suffering’, as ‘the vital characteristic’, a common denominator, strikingly stands out when we consider the

interest of other sentient beings, even if they cannot utter a word and even if they cannot demonstrate high reasoning skills as we do (Singer, 1995: 7). So whether or not they possess the capacity for language and reason—the vital characteristics that humans have—is not pertinent to the suffering of sentient beings that dictates moral decision making (Calarco, 2008: 117). Also, we should weigh up and maximise the satisfaction of others' interests that are affected by our action. Following this logic based on animal's interests, that even every human being wants to consume meat cannot justify the suffering of billions of animals.

Yet, Singer's neutrality of calculation and reasoning obviously downplays a fundamental problem that what we encounter is a real individual animal's suffering, and the specificity of even just one suffering other commands our moral obligation (Turner, 2012: 170-1). The very exposure of their naked vulnerability and powerlessness is the most disruptive site that calls for our responsibility and regard. The *proto-ethical* encounter with a singular animal and the specificity of this animal's vulnerability are central to Derrida's position.

### **Suffering and Vulnerability**

Rather than focusing on animals' capacity for suffering, in *The Animal That Therefore Am*, Derrida makes a distinctive departure from Bentham's question of 'Can they suffer?' He argues that the utilitarian consideration about 'whether an animal can suffer and how much moral weight that suffering should have' is not the kernel of the question of our ethical bond with animals (Calarco, 2008: 117). At stake in his reading on Bentham's question is the power of *passivity*, animals' inability to avoid suffering, a significant force that Derrida links with Levinas's concern.

Instead of reasoned analysis or logical argumentation, the ethical response for Levinas emerges from the face-to-face encounter with the other, especially the suffering and vulnerability of the other. An encounter with the naked vulnerability of the other serves as an interruptive event that will disturb our egoistical considerations, a sudden realisation in which we should abolish presuppositions and prejudices and think about this being in a new way. According to his anthropocentric disposition, the human face is an intrinsic entity for triggering ethical considerations, and as he maintained, ‘the face [human] has turned to me—and this is its very nudity. It is by itself and is not by a reference to a system’ (Levinas, 1969:75). That is, it is the nakedness of the other’s face, through which its vulnerability shines, that calls our egoistical existence into question (Aaltola, 2012: 146-7). Inasmuch as Levinas’s accounts in many cases emphasise the ethical imperative coming from the vulnerability and finitude of the other, the death and destitution of the other, which could possibly ‘transform my being’ into ‘being-for-the-Other’ (Calarco, 2008: 69). Also, in opposition to Singer’s statistical analyses in which the interests of the many often outweigh those of the few, another distinctive aspect of Levinasian thought is the significance of an individual’s suffering, which in any case cannot be downplayed. The Levinean ethical obligation is provoked by the individuals’ faces, rather than statistics (Turner, 2012: 171). Hence, individuals, with their vulnerability and specificity, refuse to be categorised and totalised, a pernicious process which will affect our decision-making and fail to do justice to other beings.

Extrapolating from Levinas’s anthropocentric ethics, Derrida reaches the ethical epiphany by perceiving an individual animal’s vulnerability from his naked encounter with his cat after a bath. In such encounter with a *real* animal, instead of a generic category, as he stresses, he senses that the animal is in a pathetic position of *nonpower*: what animals could completely exhibit is their ‘passivity’ and ‘vulnerability’, in their pathetic openness,

their ‘not-being-able’ (Derrida, 2008: 28). So what is striking for him is not a question of whether or not they possess the capacity for feeling pain, but instead, a question of ‘Can they *not be able*’ (ibid.), that is, a question of animals’ ‘inability’ to avoid pain and impossibility of escaping from suffering, a fundamental site that interrupts our egoistic pursuit.

Given that in the Western philosophical tradition the question of the animal has been primarily conditioned with regard to human attributes like language and reason, Bentham’s question is regarded by Derrida as ‘a turning point’, by concentrating on the point of *passivity*, an *incapacity* which precedes all capacities which may differentiate humans from animals. Thus, when we encounter animals’ naked vulnerability, what is most relevant is not ‘moral reasoning’, which always seeks to attain the *indubitable* (proof that animals can suffer) and, therefore, might have the tendency to downplay the significance of the interruptive event of animal suffering (Calarco, 2008: 118-9). Rather, Derrida asks us to put trust on the *undeniable* of this event, which is indeed prior to the indubitable (Derrida, 2008: 28). Thus, the affect towards the undeniable dimension of animal suffering and its poignant *inability* can afford the possibility of calling for our responsibility to other beings.

For Derrida and Levinas—both of whom have provided critiques of Heidegger’s notion of time, ‘Time is not only irrecoverable; being irrecoverable, time is ethics’ (Beardsworth, 1996: 129; Wolfe, 2003: 24). So the point of ‘passivity’ and ‘vulnerability’, for Derrida, is linked with Heidegger’s existential concern of ‘being-towards-death’. Thus, the ‘embodied exposure’, the mortality and finitude that humans share with animals, can be seen as a force of ‘radical passivity’ (Beardsworth, 1996: 130-1), a site where our ethical responsibility arises and extends to animal others. Following Derrida’s logic, compassion

could be aroused and reach towards animals for the realisation that all lives have to face their inescapable fate, their anguish and death. For all lives, the body (like Levinas's concern with human's face and body), with its delicate vulnerability, can function as an 'empathetic bond' between humans and animals (Aaltolia, 2012: 301). The possibility of mediation, the possibility of rapprochement, between humans and animals, by and large, resides in the realisation of this shared vulnerability, suffering, and finitude.

Transmuting this theoretical understanding into a form of visual language, I use translucent ink and delicate fabric and feathers which intersect with the delicate depiction of animal (and human) eyes and organisms. Foregrounding the presence of the animal as emotional, sentient beings, the juxtaposed images of chickens' and humans' eyes in my third work seem to be reminiscent of Mary Clouse's *Portrait/Self-Portrait*, in order to convey a sense of shared embodiment, vulnerability, and the human-animal continuity.

Moreover, these eye images are often interrupted by the depiction of disembodied commodities—the dissected, packaged, and cooked animal flesh. The depictions of erasing animal entities through physical and cultural violence speak of animals' inability to avoid suffering, encouraging the viewer to consider the present ethical imperative. That is, with the advance of a wide range of knowledge, 'zoological, biological, ecological and genetic', animals have been relentlessly transformed into and objectified as mere raw materials on an industrial scale—a scenario of, as Derrida puts it, 'the unprecedented proportion of subjection of the animal' (Derrida, 2008: 25). It is the institutionalised power that wages war on compassion (ibid., 28), a war that not only annihilates being but also feeling, and that aims to facilitate the continuous killing and deflect our attention from caring.

### **Eternal Darkness: Animal Holocaust**



If any kind of animal exploitation has come to be emblematic of the vast amount of unnecessary suffering and pain of animals, it is undoubtedly factory farming. This practice is generated by the desire of infinite capitalist accumulation and the needs of soaring human population. The sheer number of animals exploited in such practice surpasses those of animals in any other forms of exploitation. In 2003, around 10 billion land animals have been killed and consumed in the U.S alone (Blatt, 2011: 113). The significance of factory farming arises from the fact that, for most people, though often unwittingly, eating meat is ‘the most direct contact with non-human animals’ (Singer, 1995: 95). Devoid of the aura of past bucolic scenery, modern animal husbandry is a site where a great number of animals are crammed into a confined space, a site where ‘animals are treated like machines that convert low-priced fodder into high-priced flesh’ (ibid., 97). Not surprisingly, the significance of such modern horror has engaged many philosophers in addition to Derrida and Singer in thinking about the underlying reasons and implications of factory farming.

Controversially, Derrida (an Algerian Jew) does not reject the notion of drawing an analogy between human holocaust and animal genocide as many animal rights activists and theorists do. In both cases, as I have discussed, an individual life’s specificity and value are ruthlessly denied and violated. By portraying an eerie picture utterly alien to our ancestors’ understanding, he regards industrial farming or biomedical testing as a new type of exterminism (instead of ‘final conclusion’), systematically carried out by following a seemingly contradictory logic of the *overpopulation* of animals, namely, the mass-production of animals (Derrida, 2008: 26). Destined to be killed and consumed, indeed, in modern agribusiness, a normal life *proper* to animals is completely deprived by such industrialised and institutionalised violence, which profits from ‘the exploitation of an artificial, infernal, virtually interminable survival’(ibid.). Manipulating animals’ lives and

deaths, and transforming animal death and suffering into capital, normalised violence towards animal functions as a significant force demands our critical attention.

Carol Adam's concept, *absent referent*, is useful in questioning a system of power relations that ontologically determine this massive annihilation of animals. Animals, as she notes, 'in name and body are made absent as animals for meat to exist' (Adam, 1990: 51). Deceptively facilitated by human language, *meat* entices people in a gastronomic sense, and functions as a substitute, an absent referent for animals' dead bodies. This absent referent as a way of linguistic and metaphorical objectification, in parallel with the objectifying, panoptic gaze, inevitably entails the next step—the actual fragmentation and dismemberment of animals that are thus converted from living subjects to consumable objects (ibid., 58). In this cycle of 'objectification, fragmentation, and consumption', animals are stripped of their 'original nature' and 'ontological being' (ibid., 59). Simultaneously, these fragmentations also fundamentally 'change the way in which we conceptualise animals', that is, the fragmented, butchered parts are renamed—from cow to beef, steak, and hamburger (ibid.). Consequently, through such linguistic manipulation that further erases their subjectivities, animals have conceptually disappeared as well.

Central to my research, my final project intends to address this representational challenge of invisibility and absence. I juxtapose small images of our daily encounter with the *absent referent* at dinner table or supermarket, with those of the clandestine suffering of individual animals in factory farms, slaughterhouses and during transport. As an extreme case of the various forms of disembodiments, the texts I used about pet food ingredients (made from chicken by-products) exemplifies a cycle of endless processing that further invisibilises the animal. I strive to foreground the invisible institutional structure that

widens the ontological chiasm between human and animal world, and that continuously dissimulates the unpalatable and extinguishes compassion.

In fact, the mighty power of invisibility embedded in industrial farming manifests modern ways of discipline, regulation, and control of both humans and nonhumans. The parallel logic between factory farming and other institutions is the panoptic way of management and control that aims to discipline both humans and nonhumans and treats them as mere expendable material. The panoptic gaze of sovereign power not only underpins the industrialised confinement, breeding, and slaughter of farm animals, but also the regulation and exploitation of virtually all the flora and fauna on this planet. As Wadiwel Dinesh Joseph noted, ‘Animal life, even when not held in captivity and governed by specific regulations relating to the use of animals for food or research, is nevertheless contained by the powers of the sovereign’ (Joseph, 2015: 82). Building on this insight, my second project, *Bird Panopticon*, reflects on the panoptic power of disciplinary regimes (factory farms, slaughterhouses, scientific labs, and zoos, for example) and of anthropocentric ways of looking at and thinking about animals, unfolding the question of factory farming in a larger context of disciplining all animal life (including human) in modern society. Both humans and nonhuman animals are rationalised, deskilled, and subjected to the disciplinary processes and techniques of surveillance and control that underpin the institutional structures of a modern society.

### **Alienation and Fragmentation**

Incarcerated in an infernal confinement, factory-farmed chickens have been ‘designed’ by modern genetic science to meet the standards of the industrial labour process. Predicated on the maximisation of profit through exploiting animals’ productive capabilities,

industrial farming as a highly ‘rationalized’ agribusiness is essentially manipulated by the invisible force of the capitalist system, driven by the ‘monopolistically inclined financial interests’ (Noske, 1997: 22). In this process of rationalisation, both human and animal are integrated into the ‘automatons and appendages of machines and computers’ (ibid., 12). Capitalism operates under the logic of maximising profit while keeping costs to a minimum, the very same principle by which both humans and animals are controlled and exploited.

Embedded in the capitalist production line is what Karl Max characterised as four types of *alienation* applicable both to human and animal factory labourers. First, once being employed, a human worker is dispossessed from the *product* embodying one’s labour, thus alienated from the output. Likewise, animals too are alienated from their own *products*. That is, their offspring (e.g., calf or egg) are ‘taken away from them almost immediate [sic] from birth’ (ibid., 18); the animal has lost control of its own body, once an autonomous body, which is now transformed into a product controlled and manipulated by human owners. Its body becomes a site of an ‘alien and hostile power confronting the animal’ (ibid.), a site of dislocation, burden, toil, endless torments, and ordeal.

Secondly, with their whole bodies controlled by modern management, human workers (predominantly male), as Marx put it, may feel like a stranger while working; that is, repetitive, soul-destroying work makes human workers feel alienated from *productive activity*. Thus, only when human workers are not working does he feel at home. Their specific skills (productive activity) serves as a hostile and alien force (ibid., 13), constraining him from realising his well-rounded, creative, and intellectual talents. In fact, a mode of modern assembly line, which is based on the fragmentation of an individual’s work, was formulated by the American industrialist Henry Ford, who was inspired by

watching the fragmented activity in a Chicago slaughterhouse (Patterson, 2002: 72). Fordism has reduced a worker to objectification in the machinery, and thus be mutilated and rendered as a fragment of the whole human (Noske, 1997: 13). Yet, compared with human labourers, animal workers cannot ‘go home’ at all, for they are rendered *homeless*. In this system, their sentient bodies, fully conscious of any physical pain and psychological distress, are tightly bound up with cold, round-the-clock modern production lines, and their whole life time is entirely transformed into working time (ibid., 17). Like the de-skilling, de-humanising paradigm imposed on the automated industrial worker, animals, too, in a similar way, are forced to *specialise*, if more strictly, in one particular job, while subjected to being ‘deskilled’ in any other ways (ibid., 19). According to different end uses, hens basically can be divided into laying hens that are supposed to lay as many eggs as possible, and broilers which are designated to fatten.

Thirdly, the bondage of human workers with machine and factory eventually alienates them from their *species life*, that is, their natural relation with fellow humans (ibid., 13). Regarding domestic animals, their social life with fellow members—essential to what accounts for a *proper* animal life—is also deprived by the industrial production of cramping animals in great numbers (ibid., 19). Yet their social contact and communication ability attests to their existence not only as biological objects. As highly social animals, their sense of family, group, or herd is obliterated and, in a deep irony, so is their sense of sociality. The very mechanism by which our ancestors used to domesticate them is distorted and used to destroy them.

Finally, living in artificialized environment, human and animal workers are inevitably alienated from their surrounding nature. Deprived of the open air, the feel of earth, the contact with their natural environment, animal labourers work in a world replete with wire-

mesh, concrete or metal-slat floors, fetid air, and darkness. Sanctioned by the ruthless laws of production, they have lost touch with nature—which is also fundamental to animal life, and are forced to live in a gloomy, crowded, and filthy environment.

In factory farming, the relationship between the animal workers and their human stewards is also profoundly changed. Now one person may control over twenty thousand birds on a battery farm, or manage one hundred, or even eight thousand pigs on a pig farm (ibid., 28). With many fewer people working with living animals, and more people dealing with processing animal products, their carcasses, meat, bones, and offal, the weight of human experience for animal husbandry has shifted from a balance of care and delivery to market to principally one of mass processing. Hence, it is worth noting that the harrowing scene of the *de-animalisation* of factory farming runs parallel with the *dehumanisation* of modern production lines (ibid., 18). A modern slaughterhouse is one of the most dangerous, dirty, and brutalising places to work. Reduced to a mere cog of assembly line, ‘a worker endlessly does the highly monotonous, repetitive menial job’ (ibid., 28). The danger of this job not only lurks in the brutal speed of assembly line which causes a high level of injuries, but also in the risk of a variety of diseases infected by contacting animal carcasses.

As such, human workers are indeed subject to the same capitalistic principles, the same exploitative system of torture and control, if not murder, imposed on animals. Thus, when Coe depicts animal cruelty and atrocity, she does not forget to project her sympathy onto the abattoir workers, conceiving them as victimised actors compelled to play out roles in the grotesque capitalist production. Echoing the aforementioned discussion on the comparison between human worker and animal labourer, I question this brutalising, profit-driven regime which negates the interests of both human and animal beings, with the close-up depictions of slaughterhouse workers’ gloves, high-speed automated machinery,

and moving carcasses. Yet, no matter how much effort we make to draw the analogy, those animal workers are placed in a zero-sum situation. Transformed from a living individual to the dismembered and renamed body parts, the animal has been physically and conceptually rendered invisible, occupying the lowest position of a moral hierarchy.

### **Hierarchies, Dichotomies, and Categories**

The massive exploitation and slaughtering of animals, culminating in meat industry's so called 'disassembly line', essentially emerges from the project of modernity. With instrumental attitudes towards nature and animals, through modern science and technology, this project further reinforces human's domination over and separation from animals. Central to this project is the anthropocentric and human-animal dualistic thinking which is the origin of hierarchies, oppressions, and our current ecological crisis.

The human-animal divide (or dualism) and other hierarchical and oppressive discourses originated from the domestication of animals. In hunting societies, humans had an egalitarian disposition towards the hunted animals (Serpell, 1986: 5). Yet, the transition from hunting to farming marks a profound change in human-animal relations. Captured in the wild, the domestic animals, especially younger ones (like piglets), can be easily tamed (ibid., 6), because they are social animals. Thus, no longer foraging independently in the wild, animals became subjected to the control of human masters. Through the use of castration, branding, ear-cropping, and devices such as the leather apron, whips, prods, chains, and collars (Patterson, 2002: 7), control became oppression. Along with euphemism, other kinds of mechanism such as detachment, rationalisation, and denial, are used to suggest human's moral superiority to animals, thus cutting the former emotional tie

with animals developed in hunting society, further distancing people from the oppressed animals (ibid., 11).

The domestication and oppression of animals led to humans' dualistic separation from nature and animals and cultivated Western hierarchical dichotomies—theorised and broadened by philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, and Kant. Such dualisms included human/animal, subject/object, culture/nature, mind/body, reason/emotion, man/woman, and white/non-white, with the dominating power on the left and the disempowered on the right. The human-animal dualism may typify all such interrelated dyads. Such dualistic paradigms, as Donna Haraway puts it, reflect the One's domination over the Others: women, lower class people, non-white, and all those whose task are to mirror the unitary self (Haraway, 1991: 177; Emel, 1995: 92). The ontology of a human subject, especially a Western male subject, is structured by the process of objectifying the other, a process in which the identities of subject/object are mutually reinforced (Emel, 1995: 92). The exclusive, objectifying, and violent nature of dualisms carries deep ethical and political implications for both humans and animals. That is, the hierarchical dualisms underlie the interlocking oppressions, for not only perpetuating legitimised violence against animals, but also putting the marginalised human groups into the category of 'subhuman', thus facilitating social injustice.

Traced back to ancient Greece, the human-animal dualism finds its philosophical foundation in Aristotle. In his hierarchical system (known as *Scala Naturae*), 'nature is essentially a hierarchy in which those with less reasoning ability exist for the sake of those with more' (Singer, 1995: 189), and the criteria for a privileged position is 'rationality, the ability to reason' (Bernstein, 2004: 163). Based on this principle, each group, be it dirt, plant, animal, slave, woman or male citizen, can be placed in a fixed category which



forecloses any possibilities of ‘progress’ or ‘self-improvement’ (ibid.). Women, for example, were regarded as ‘incomplete’ and ‘imperfect’ and doomed to play a secondary role in society. Men, with the possession of the greatest rationality, were entitled to rule women, slaves, and animals. Animals, with the least reasoning ability, were purposefully created for the sake of all human beings. This prototype of a hierarchical system for classifying life has had profound influence on human civilisation for more than 2,000 years and even now holds sway over our thinking.



Fig.29 Dion, Mark (1994) *Scala Naturae* [Stepped plinth, artifacts, specimens, taxidermic animals, and bust], 93 3/4 x 39 3/8 x 117 inches. Courtesy Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York.

At: <http://www.art21.org/images/mark-dion/scala-naturae-1994> (Accessed on 16.02.16).

Yet this paradigm is questioned and mocked by Dion’s *Scala Naturae* (Fig. 29), a ladder-like installation work. It is an artistic deconstruction of Aristotle’s hierarchical taxonomy.

On the first staircase of this receding ladder lie some man-made products of different ages, like a spinning wheel, an arrow and clock (suggesting time), going up past fungus, corals, fruits and vegetables, butterflies, fish, a stuffed cat, and duck. It finally culminates with a bust of a classical Western male scholar, positioned at the top of the evolutionary ladder (Corrin, 1997: 74). Neatly and systematically arranged, the multitude manifest a poignancy in which a timeless and aimless nature serves the needs of a rational human male. In my final work, *Hide and Seek*, my reference to the eyes of a bust of Aristotle, which are mingled with animals' and humans' eyes, is also a mockery of his hierarchical classification of this world.

In mediaeval time, Aristotle's hierarchical system served as a model for the later Christian concept of the 'Great Chain of Being', a system where God is at the top and European Christians stand on the highest rung, a position conveying entitlement to rule the rest of the world (Patterson, 2007: 21). This hierarchically ranked system not only further legitimised the supremacy of human over other creatures, but also reinforced social hierarchies and oppressions. That is, many people were unfortunately considered to be less human and destined to be what Aquinas described as "animated instruments of service" (slave)' (ibid., 22), like the domesticated animal slaves as human's animated tools.

With the rise of the Enlightenment, such an ontological chasm between human and animal, between subject and object, was further widened by the instrumental ideology of reducing animals and nature as mere resources for the betterment of human beings. 'The Enlightenment subject is a being capable of possessing dignity, reason, and intrinsic meaning, while all others who fall outside of this identity occupy an inferior plane of being' (Bell, 2011: 164). In the evolvment of reason, any affinity between human and nature has increasingly been sieved out from the sphere of the subjectivity of man. Following the

logic of objectification and control, the position of animal others reached the nadir when the French philosopher Rene Descartes proposed his notion of *animal automata* that reduced animals as mere machines, subject to the most brutal violence (e.g., vivisection). In my final project, through the partial depictions of a seventeenth century French clock and a speculative diagram of the 18th-century French inventor Jacques de Vaucanson's 'digesting duck', I critique this reductive, mechanical conceptualisation of all forms of life.

The Enlightenment subject has honed intellectual and rational superiority into a tool for expansion and subjugation. Not only has this tool subdued the vast forests, mountains, savannahs and rapidly wiped out countless 'vicious' wild animals, but it has also compromised, dispersed, and sometimes tragically destroyed a great number of 'barbarous' aboriginal peoples. Colonialism, as Patterson argues, was a 'natural extension of human supremacy over the animal kingdom' (Patterson, 2002: 26). Thus, the moral principle of human domination that removed animals from the sphere of human concern and responsibility, as Keith Thomas puts it, 'also legitimised the ill-treatment of those humans who were in a supposedly animal condition' (Thomas, 1983: 44). Along with the expansion of Western colonialism, Europeans abducted and enslaved a vast number of black people, tearing them from home, breaking their family ties as people do with the dairy cows and calves, transporting them across the Atlantic for months with no concern for their suffering, branding them with a hot iron to claim and identify them as property.

Established on the human-animal distinction, the interlocking oppressions are also manifested in our linguistic practice. Historically, white males, the people with power, often used the opprobrious epithets associated with animals (the lowest creature in this power hierarchy) for the oppressed groups, women, the poor, and people with colour, in order to objectify and debase them, to render them inferior and abject. For example, animal

pejoratives, like ‘catty’, ‘shrew’, ‘dumb bunny’, ‘cow’, and ‘bitch’, were often assigned to women (Dunayer, 1995: 12), or racist epithets, such as ‘monkeys’ and ‘gorillas’, were related to blacks. By likening animal imagery to dehumanise certain groups of human beings, such verbal abuse is not only a metaphorical manifestation of the interrelatedness of dualistic paradigms—that is, the human-animal dualism being central to hierarchical thinking—but also intensifies oppressors’ domination and control and facilitates exploitation and torture.

With the ramifications of binary thinking in mind, actors in the postmodern efforts of decentring the human subject and abandoning the human-animal dualism have problematized such dichotomies. According to Derrida, this dualism is reinforced even when humans utter the words, ‘Man with a capital M and Animal with a capital A’, a process of cramping ‘a heterogeneous ... multiplicity of organisations of relations between living and dead’ into a reductive confine, a general singular category—Animal (Derrida, 2008: 31). With its homogenizing implication, the oppositional category ‘animal’ is viewed by Derrida as a ‘crime of the first order against animals.’ Because there is no ‘Animal’ in reality, if we pay attention to the multiplicity of different kinds of beings which, for its spectacular specificity, cannot be simply put into fixed ‘categories’ and ‘hierarchies’ (Aaltola, 2012: 151). The act of putting a multiplicity into a stabilised, reductive category is a symbolic, conceptually violent act that may reinforce the established presuppositions and prejudice. In this light, the delicate portrayal of a variety of different rainforest species in my final project may offer a glimpse of the irreducible heterogeneity and multiplicity of the nonhuman world, so as to challenge the reductive category of the ‘animal’ and animals’ ontological status as inferior, undifferentiated beings.

For Derrida, the motifs of history or historicity are conceived within the humanistic scope, and thus belong to the dogma of the *auto-biography* of man (Derrida, 2008: 24). That is, the accounts implicating animals in humanistic archives cannot actually do justice to animals. Meanwhile, the *auto-biography* of man which severs clearly from nature and animals, is also entwined with the process of excising the animal aspects within the body, so-called auto-vivisection (Bell, 2011: 166), a process described in Agamben's 'anthropological machine', which underlies the human-animal dualism (Agamben, 2004: 37). For Agamben, the 'anthropological machine' constructs the ontology of being human through the excision of the 'not yet human', that is, the animal residue, thereby 'isolating the nonhuman within the human' (ibid.). Such pursuit of isolating animal traits from humanity also engenders the nineteenth century palaeontologists' passion for the 'missing link from speechless ape to speaking human' (Calarco, 2008: 93). Many indigenous people captured by Westerners were unfortunately confined and exhibited alongside animals, as scientific indicia of revealing the early stage of human evolution. The other typical evidence of such animalising certain groups of human beings is the victimised Jews in the Holocaust, who were, as Agamben states, 'the non-man produced within the man, produced the neomort [human body after the death of brain], and the overcomatose person, that is, the animal separated within the human body itself' (Agamben, 2004: 37). Agamben defined this pathetic type of being as 'neither an animal life nor human life—only a *bare life*' (ibid, 38), that is, as mere biological existence, naked and exposed to abuse, for having been stripped of all legal and moral protection. For him, the sovereignty of modern politics is one exemplification of such a machine through which human's biological (animal) aspects are manipulated and controlled (Aaltola, 2012: 150). It is no wonder that the overarching aim of Agamben's project is to call for abolishing the human-animal

dualism and halting the ongoing anthropological machine which generates such dualistic thinking (Calarco, 2008: 94).

Corralling animals into one generic box, a process examined by Derrida, is based on the logic of annihilating differences and individualities, a logic deeply embedded in this ruthless ‘anthropological machine’. This ‘essentialising’ tendency of treating others based on ‘predetermined intellectual configurations or categories’ is regarded by Levinas as totalisation, which will blind our perception and lead to apathy. Indeed, categorisations and classifications are the essential nature of Western philosophy and anthropocentric frameworks (Aaltola, 2012: 151). These reductive categories that regard countless different individual beings as abstract labels have facilitated the violence and killing in historical (e.g., Nazi) and contemporary ‘concentration camps’ (factory farms, hunting fields, and laboratories). The commonality of these regimes generated by the anthropocentric categories is to control and manipulate the other, treating individual lives as expendable things and doing violence against humans and animals alike.

In calling into question the anthropocentric categories, of significance is also a Levinasian approach to addressing the alterity of the human other, an approach to recognising the presence of the other that has a power to derail my own hedonistic existence (Levinas, 1969: 76), one that is infused with a force—equivalent to hunger—which obliges us to give and care (ibid., 75). In the face-to-face encounter with the other, the ethical epiphany of thinking about the embodied vulnerability of a *real* other being emerges from a sense of the obvious, rather than the clinical, philosophical jargons. Thus, this line of thought entails a realisation that we can appreciate and respect the alterity, the valuable existence of the human other, without the predetermined confines in relation to sex, race, or class. Yet, in relation to the animal other, it will become more constructive to bear in mind what Calarco calls ‘an ethics of universal consideration’, which ‘would entail being ethically

attentive and open to the possibility that anything might take on a “face” (Calarco, 2008: 73). A face, a ‘naked face’, with all its specificity and subjectivity of an individual life, is possessed by both humans and animals, commanding our thinking on their delicate vulnerability and infinite alterity.

We now return to the event of Derrida’s inter-species encounter with his female cat, and her piecing gaze, in which he revolutionises thinking about the irreducible singularity of each being. That is, the objectifying gaze of Western binary metaphysics has been reversed at this moment, because in the immediacy of this encounter, he realised that he turned out to be an object, beheld and addressed by his cat. As such, it was, as he puts it, a moment of ‘madness’ (Derrida, 2008: 10) in which the predetermined categories of humans and animals collapsed. The animal’s interruptive gaze, specific and immediate, had revealed that she is a subject rather than a faceless, valueless object, a subject that that human philosophical language cannot address and comprehend.

With its specific gaze, the animal refuses to be assigned with any prefixed and generic labels as ‘animals’, nor as a valueless, faceless object. Hence, through animals’ gaze, Derrida provokes us to deconstruct the concept of human subject structured in the framework of Western metaphysics, an anthropocentric thinking mode which forecloses the possibility of ‘regarding animals as full ethical subjects’ with reference to human characteristics and capacities like language, reason, and self-awareness (Calaco, 2008: 131). This destabilisation of Western philosophical tradition is Derrida’s response to the reformative attempts made by the mainstream animal ethicists (like Singer and Regan), which are, from his vantage point, still grounded on the discourses of anthropocentrism underlying present legal and juridical systems (ibid.).

According to Derrida, this undermining strategy also relies on a holistic consideration through which he interrogates the traditional definition of subjectivity by coining a term of *carnophallogocentrism*—a combination of the *sacrificial* (carno), *masculine* (phallo), and *speaking* (logo). The notion suggests that the full subjectivity is associated with ‘a meat eater, a man, and an authoritative, speaking self’ (Adam, 2010: 6). The interlocking connection of carnivorous sacrifice and virility, established by Derrida, is further illuminated in depth by Adams in her book *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, which explores the implications of the connection between a culture of predatory consumption and that of male dominance (ibid.). Also, this neologism stresses ‘the potentially violent nature of the exclusionary logic of the metaphysics of subjectivity’, that is, not only animals are excluded from legal protection by the traditional metaphysics of subjectivity, but so also are many humans who were, at least historically, not referred to as full ethical subjects, especially women, children, the minority, and ‘other Others’ (Calaco, 2008: 131). For example, as Adorno and Horkheimer point out, conceptualised as ‘an embodiment of biological function, an image of nature’, ‘The woman is not a subject for enlightenment’ (Adorno and Horkheimer, 2002: 206). In another instance, the genealogy of animal rights, according to Peter Singer, indeed originated from a parody, namely, the idea of ‘the Rights of Animals’ was invented by Thomas Tylor, a philosopher in Cambridge University, to vilify the case for women’s rights proposed by Mary Wollstonecraft (Mary Shelley’s mother) in her *Vindication of the Rights of Women* in 1792 (Singer, 1995: 1). This case not only exemplifies the plight that women have long been excluded from the sphere of legal and juridical subjecthood, but also once again attests to the intersections of different forms of hierarchies.

The human-animal dualism which highlights the domination of the Western Enlightenment model of the human subjects over animals and nature is thus entwined with other dualisms



creating predetermined categories of difference, such as, gender, race, and class. These dualisms construct ‘difference in terms of the logic of hierarchy’ (Plumwood, 1992: 12) and form an ‘interlocking structure’ (Plumwood, 1993: 43) that requires thinking through the commonalities and intersections ‘between what have traditionally been seen as categories of oppression’ (an interdisciplinary approach called *intersectionality*) (Twine, 2010: 5). Essentially, intersectional thinking which promotes a non-oppositional, non-hierarchical disposition enables me to synthesise a diverse range of different visual narratives and political discourses for addressing my research questions. Through the lens of intersectionality, many philosophers like Agamben argue that the question of human-animal dualism is ‘more significant than that of human rights’ (Aaltola, 2012: 150); thus, human social injustice could not be tackled without calling into question the anthropocentric categories and hierarchies. With intersectional thinking in mind, in my third project, the depiction of a starving African child’s eye in parallel with the main narrative of animal suffering suggests the connection between human and animal injustices by linking the issue of factory farming with that of world hunger (Fig. 30).

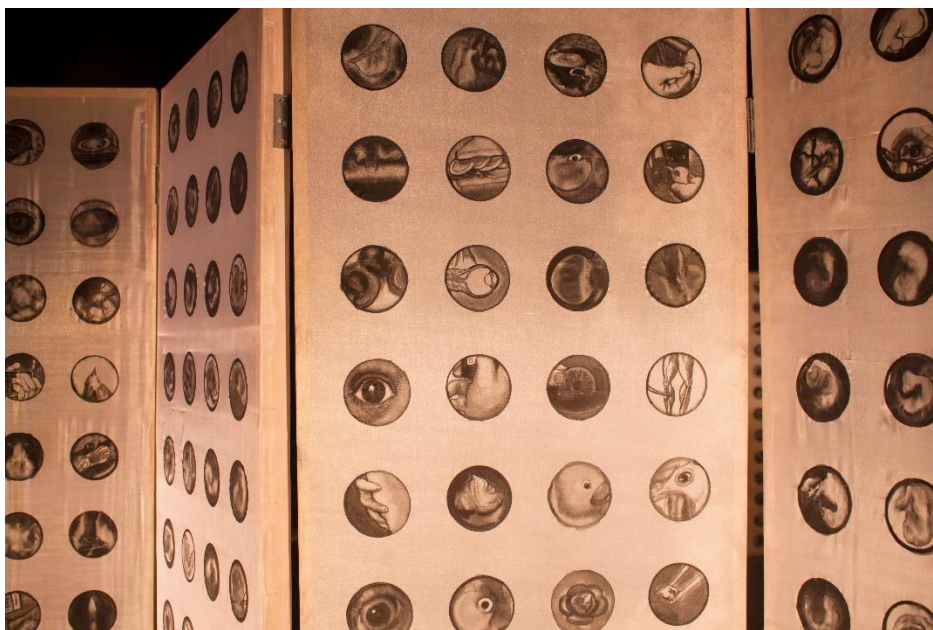


Fig. 30 Jin, Lipeng (2015-16) *Bubble Life* (Detail), [Polyester habutai, ink, wood, poultry feathers, and yellow light], six-panel folding screen, 202 × 65 cm. Collection of the artist.

With various political and ethical imperatives, a thorough collapse of the notions of human-animal dualism and human subjectivity are closely connected with a notion of 'life as responsibility, where life is understood not exclusively but broadly and inclusively, ranging from human to animal and beyond' (Calarco, 2008: 106). Indeed, by weaving different forms of subjection embodied in contemporary art, and by the examination of animal and human subjugation, the calling for open-ended inclusiveness and unconditioned responsibility towards the other, towards all the categorised and homogenised, objectified and oppressed others, is one of the thrusts of this research. As Derrida's epiphany is located on 'a disruptive, face-to-face encounter between singular beings' (ibid., 142), to think of human-animal relations in a non-hierarchical, non-binary way requires the establishment of singular relations that will open up new ontological vistas with regards to a variety of different beings in a complex world.

### III - My Art Practice

Inspired by the critical insights from both philosophy and contemporary art, I mean to combine my social critique with the situational aesthetics of installation art to initiate new ways of thinking about human-animal relations. The dynamism of installation art—blending multiple sensorial experiences to enable the viewer’s embodied engagement—has demonstrated a liberating dimension on the levels of both aesthetics and ethics by many socially committed artists.

According to Erwin Panofsky, the conventional way of looking, related to the Renaissance perspective, say, when we look at a painting, demands a rational, self-reflexive Cartesian viewing subject (Bishop, 2005: 13). Consequently, there exists a hierarchical relationship between the ‘centred viewer’ and the painting object. In feminism and post-colonialism art discourses, many critics maintain that ‘the fantasies of “centring” perpetuated by dominant ideology are masculinist, racist and conservative’ (ibid.). For example, the American feminist artist Mary Kelly connects a single-point perspective to (patriarchal) ideology (Bishop, 2005: 36). Yet, the multi-perspective dimension of installation art—as one of the most important forms of contemporary art—provides the subversive and disruptive force to deconstruct the ‘possession’, so as to disrupt the ‘visual mastery’ and ‘centring’ of the hierarchical model of looking (ibid.). With its emancipatory and decentring tenor, the multi-perspectivalism in installation art has been rhetorically used by the feminist artists like Spero and Walker, and which I also employ in my work for the viewer to encounter animals’ vulnerability and suffering.

This multi-perspectivalism in my practice, aligned with the monumentality of the works, relies on the viewer’s movement and participation to fulfil the meaning of my works.

Hence, the enquiry is attentive to the relationship between viewer and work, subject and object, to transform a detached, impassive onlooker into an accomplice, an interlocutor. The implication of the viewer also derives from the fact that the imperatives of the research questions are intimately bound up with everyone. As such, the viewer's embodied and participatory experience is of significance for the production of meaning and the generation of social change. With perhaps a jarring and dissonant sense, a confrontational situation is my attempt, through the viewer's somatic presence and sensory immediacy, to realise his/her encounter with animal's interruptive exposure of suffering and trauma.

In addition, I want to explore the concept of the *post-medium* condition termed by Rosalind Krauss (1999: 32), through which she attacks the notion of medium specificity. In her book *A Voyage on the North Sea*, she places the emphasis on the blurred boundary between different disciplines and, therefore, on the 'rampant impurity' and hybridity of contemporary art practices (ibid., 33). With this in mind, my practice will mingle different materials, formal and procedural elements into a hybrid assemblage, the factors of the figural and the abstract, the pictorial and the tactile, the factual and the fictitious.

Through the animating power of light, the installation of paintings and other objects makes it easier the complex and ethereal interplay between the translucent delicate materials, pictorial elements, and the viewer. Inviting the viewer to complete the meaning of my works, my installations enable an immersive, social, and contact space, a site that marry the political contents with the poetic attributes. Also, the fragile materiality of my second and final installations that evokes a Derridean notion of shared vulnerability and passivity is intended to inspire empathy and embodiment.

Additionally, installation enables the construction of the paintings based on the conceptual notions such as Panopticon and invisibility. In orchestrating all of these elements of the

painting installations, I propose three large-scale projects—*Chicken Meat Project*, *Bird Panopticon*, and *Hide and Seek*—to forge an encounter with the alterity of animals and posit a non-binary, non-hierarchical relationship with them.

### **Chicken Meat Project**

As an artistic response to the industrialised degradation of animals in factory farming, my first project (Figs. 31-34), *Chicken Meat Project*, is an installation comprised of thirty pieces of large paintings. Gloomy and eerie (also intended to be claustrophobic, depending on exhibition space), this work invites the viewer to contemplate the ethical dimension of chicken meat produced in factory farming where the cruelty to animals almost reaches its zenith and where the encroaching danger of the related biohazards is also looming so large to us.



Fig.31 Jin, Lipeng (2012) *Chicken Meat Project*, [Black and white acrylic, 30 canvases], each 220 x 220cm, dimension variable, LICA Instalation Site, Lancaster University.Collection of the artist.



Fig.32 Jin, Lipeng (2012) *Chicken Meat Project*, [Black and white acrylic, 30 canvases], each 220 x 220cm, LICA Instalation Site, Lancaster University. Collection of the artist.

Seemingly ordinary and innocuous, chicken meat represented in this work is indeed devoid of palatable gastronomic reference and transformed into a subject, a redeeming artistic device. When entering the exhibition space, one can notice that the rough surface of dark grey walls is stacked with several levels of square, banner-like, black and white paintings. Each painting as a constituent unit depicts an individual chicken, in many cases, a headless, eviscerated, or roasted chicken, a disembodied object rendered by institutionalised violence and our gustatory pleasure. As a unifying compositional and formal element, each chicken is incarcerated in a white round space—metaphorically signifying a harsh spotlight (a raking beam of light in a dark warehouse), a plate, the confinement of animals, or perhaps, a Pandora’s box for these monster-like creatures created by modern agribusiness.





Fig.33 Jin, Lipeng (2012) *Chicken Meat Project*, [Black and white acrylic, 30 canvases], each 220 x 220cm, LICA Instalation Site, Lancaster University. Collection of the artist.

## Grotesqueness

Echoing Coe, Spero, and Walker's works, which are replete with the grotesque presence, the grotesqueness in this work embodies the industrialised, machine-like bodies of factory-farmed chickens. Regarding the grotesqueness in this industry, as Michael Watts puts it, 'What is striking is the chicken is the extent to which the 'biological body' is actually constructed physically to meet the needs of the industrial labour process' (Watts, 2002: 15-6). Enlarged to monumental size, the images in my work mock an obsessive Frankenstein desire of 'constructing' excessively large chickens. Inflated by the force-feeding of antibiotics and unchecked genetic engineering, they are fast-growing, six-week-old baby chickens called 'broilers'. Reduced to a mere meat-producing machine, a broiler exemplifies the most unconscionable abuse and torture that humans inflict upon a sentient organism.

Like Dr. Frankenstein's monster, however, lurking in the bodies of these broilers is a set of potential risks, the biohazards (e.g., avian flu), which, though rendered unaware in our daily lives, might have been made clear through the depiction of the excessively oversized chicken carcasses and the ominous gloominess of the exhibition space.

Ugly or distasteful, the chicken carcasses nonetheless prompt the viewer to seek the truth in reality, suggesting Adorno's conviction that the subversive power of art resides in *ugliness* instead of beauty. As he states, 'If one originated in the other, it is beauty that originated in the ugly, and not the reverse' (Adorno, 1997: 50). For him, the agency of the ugly and grotesque, signifying the oppressed and the unpalatable reality, contains a redeeming potential for social change. In my work, the ugliness of the contorted, flayed, and truncated bodies of animals implies the modern fantasy of factory farming that imposes the biological deformity and monstrosity upon them, transfiguring them to monsters and haunting spectra.

Comingled in this sense of grotesqueness is a distinctively expressionistic touch in most of these paintings, as my visceral response to the grotesqueness of the physical and genetic mutilation of animals. Charged with emotional intensity, many paintings feature vigorous agitated brushwork, expressive facture, with occasionally some accidental spatters. The depiction of these monstrous creatures serves as a painterly sublimation of colossal animal suffering and our troubling reality.

### **Painting Objects**

Apart from the iconographies of the phantomised chickens, a sense of factory farming may also be conjured up by the strategy for the display and construction of these painting



objects. Unburdened by stretchers and frames and constructed based on a conceptual mode and a specific spatial situation, I also explore the material and sculptural dimensions of painting in this project. These banner-like canvases are meant to be hung or suspended on two or three levels and, therefore, carry an association with the battery cages stacked in tiers in factory farming.



Fig.34 Jin, Lipeng (2012) *Chicken Meat Project*, [Black and white acrylic, 30 canvases], each 220 x 220cm, LICA Instalation Site, Lancaster University. Collection of the artist.

The sculptural dimension of this work needs to be understood in the context of contemporary painting, which, as Daniel Birnbaum notes, is ‘a zone of contagion’, ‘constantly branching out and widening its scope’ (Birnbaum, 2002: 158). This fact is exemplified in, for example, Spero’s husband’s, Leon Golub’s, works—pictorial representations approaching overwhelming human violence and torment. Like Golub, my concern has also moved beyond the painted space, the internal space of representation, and reaching towards the concern with its physical presence in conjunction with other

constitutive elements (for example, the surroundings, the viewer, the audio, and lighting) as new ways of executing and displaying painting.

The frame of painting offers a means of ‘neutralizing a work’s surroundings and constituting the space of representation’ (Greenberg, 2013: 39); in French, frame (*cadre*) has multiple meanings, including frame, executive or director, political elite, hierarchical power, and its related value system (*ibid.*, 22). Deprived of the elevated status associated with the traditional support of painting—frame and stretcher—each of these component paintings, like Golub’s unstretched canvases, sag down gently, and are either tacked to the walls with nails or suspended from the square truss. With pleated and ragged edge—and in Golub’s case, with cuts, tears, and collaged elements, they are material objects affirming the tactile and physical dimension of painting. This understanding might also formally echo Robert Ryman’s concern with painting as an object, the very materiality of painting. Moreover, the dangling, banner-like paintings as constituent units, provide more possibilities of configuring large-scale installations corresponding to my conceptual ends, mirroring the paradigmatic model of factory farming in this project and an ocular regime, the Panopticon, in the next one.

The construction of these painted objects is also related to the concern with elevating the viewer’s embodied experience of space as a means of transforming once passive art consumers to participants, as integral aspects of the work. Their bodily engagements and the embodied responses are central to the research aim of deploying the poetic language of art to enact social change.

Sharing with Golub’s material, the use of acrylic in my work also facilitates the rapid production of large-scale paintings, making the application of primer unnecessary and registering the performative dimension of painting through physical entanglements with

canvases. In Golub's case, except for incision and tear, the intimately physical attack on canvas corresponds to his constant scraping off paint with a meat cleaver, vigorous reworking of painting's surface (Bird, 2000: 9). This painting performance might be an effective way of not only intensifying the tactility of painting, but also alluding to the traumatic negation of oppressed bodies through the scarred, victimised body of painting. In my practice, the physical engagement with the surface of painting, not only made the acrylic paint embedded into the weft and warp of unstretched canvases, but gradually left the indelible marks on the wall, as the indexical trace of laborious production (Fig. 35). Inspired by Warhol's aesthetics of serial repetition, metaphorically and mimetically, the performative aspect in my work is also an aesthetic response to a Fordian paradigm of mass-producing animals through the repetitive, systematic production of painting based on the same format of black square and white circle.

In the visual instantiation of violence against animals, the redemptive, subversive power of painting is located in new ways of making and reading, in the porous borders between painting and other interrelated media. Extended from the pictorial, the subtle, specific tactility and materiality of painting, with edges, naps, furrows, margins, or frayed parts, will be fit into this narrative as well. The heaviness and coarseness of canvas, along with black and white acrylic, correspond to the seriousness of this subject matter and echo the surroundings, the roughness of the walls as well. However, the lightness, delicateness, and ethereality of polyester used in the next project, coupled with the ephemerality of dye and feathers, suggests the spirituality and vulnerability associated with bird. Such material concern will be combined with other constituents of the poetics of my installation works, including the execution and construction of the paintings, the specific surroundings, the embodied viewers, found material, light, the temperature, and the audio—indeed, in this

work, the intended connotation of a factory farm is also evoked by dreary, monotonous, background drone.

### **Black and White**

In addressing animals' plight and suffering, this project relies on the pensiveness and sombreness of black and white. In fact, socially critical artworks have placed an unusual premium on the use of black and white, which is intended to exude seriousness and evoke critical thinking. Having the power of 'translation or codification' to transform the everyday mundane (Beloff, 1985: 94), this transcendent possibility of black and white lies in its potential of visually translating serious issues, such as pain, trauma, and suffering, and of provoking the viewer's meditation. For 'Sober business need sober suits' (ibid.), the deployment of black and white is conditioned by the serious tone of my subject matter.

The power of black is also linked with Adorno's notion of *black art* (*schwarze Kunst*) in response to a blackened reality—rather than the same name for a different aesthetic concept referring to art addressing the identity of black people. He notices an intimately mimetic relationship between a critical contemplation of modern art and its addressee, the darkened reality. *Black art*, for him, is therefore not darkened by itself, but rather, the 'darkening of the world', 'radically darkened art' (Adorno, 1997: 9). In *Black as an Ideal*, as he points out, 'Radical art is synonymous with black art; its primary color is black' (ibid., 39). The recalcitrant tone of black is encoded in its 'dissonance', vis-à-vis colour—the 'consonance' of hedonism in reality (ibid., 40). Functioning as a site of otherworldliness, of aesthetically sublimating or translating the suffering in reality, the use of black is my strategy for engaging viewers and for provoking them to think the unspeakable pain and suffering of animals.

Pertaining to this philosophical meditation, the subversive and pensive dimensions of black are mobilised by many socially committed artists. Metaphorically connoting the skin colour of black people, Walker uses black silhouette figures as against white walls to insinuate the tension between blackness and its surrounding whiteness. In addressing the collective dark memory of trauma, for Kentridge, the power of black lurks in the metamorphosis of his charcoal drawings with poetic melancholy. Reflecting on death and tragedy, the blackness of Boltanski's works is attached to the re-photographed, blurred images, on the one hand, and the dancing, phantasm shadows created by light, on the other. With its dramatizing power, the bold contrast of black and white intensifies the visual shock of Coe's social commentary. Revealing and engaging, their works embody yet aesthetically dilute the brutal real. While the pensiveness of Jaschinski's black and white images, by contrast, is in the way that they invariably conjure up 'loneliness, alienation, displacement' (Malamud, 2012: 54), senses that certainly may not be achieved if shot in colour.

As a signifying element, black in this work not only psychologically suggests a serious subject matter but also carries other associations, with, for example, the heat of their inferno-like sheds or oven, the incineration of chickens with bird flu, or the pain of the cauterized bird's body. With this in mind, the meat represented in this work does not evoke the playfulness conjured up in the American Pop artist Claes Oldenburg's painted plaster meat—made from plaster-covered muslin and painted with strong colours. Nor does it echo his compatriot Roy Lichtenstein's *Turkey Shopping Bag* (1961), which is a shopping bag with the silkscreen-printed image of a turkey appropriated from newspaper advertisements. Thus, to elicit viewer's ethical response to animals, I consider black in my work as a redemptive, poetic, and political device, for the elegiac, mysterious, brooding

blackness bears an intimate relation with the unutterable aspect of tragedy, the enigma of trauma.

Located in a windowless, enclosed, secluded, and dimly illuminated place, along with the roughly textured dark walls and the black paintings, this work is permeated with achromatic gloominess, evoking a sense of a torture chamber, a site for the ordeal and torments of animals. Corresponding with the aesthetics of the grotesque addressed above, an eerie, apocalyptic sense inheres in this distressful, claustrophobic, and endless darkness, which belongs to the world of chickens.

Perhaps, these black square paintings may conjure up Mark Rothko's *Seagram Murals* (1961), the black rectangular canvases produced in his late years. While Rothko's pieces, though dark, if not utterly black, 'seem to emanate light' through the special surface sheen and tonality, with 'velvetiness' suggesting 'indeterminable depth' (Borchardt-Hume, 2008: 24), the pitch-black of the square background of my work is a 'burial ground', hardly associated with the gleam of crepuscular light.

The painterly rendering of black and white, the alternation of black and white, coupled with the monumentality and the theatrical arrangement of the paintings, perform an act of visual lament, an unpleasant and unexpected encounter with the spectral presence of the miserable animals, indeed, one of our most intimately-related animals. Thus, it challenges our day-to-day perception of these animals as enticing, gastronomical objects, prompting the viewer to reflect on the collective indifference towards animals. Yet viewers or human consumers too, to some extent, are powerless victims, rendered unaware, manipulated and fooled by the unseen, pervasive institutional force behind the ordinary scene that, relentlessly and deceptively, promotes a sense of prosperity with the abundance of 'Frankenfood'.

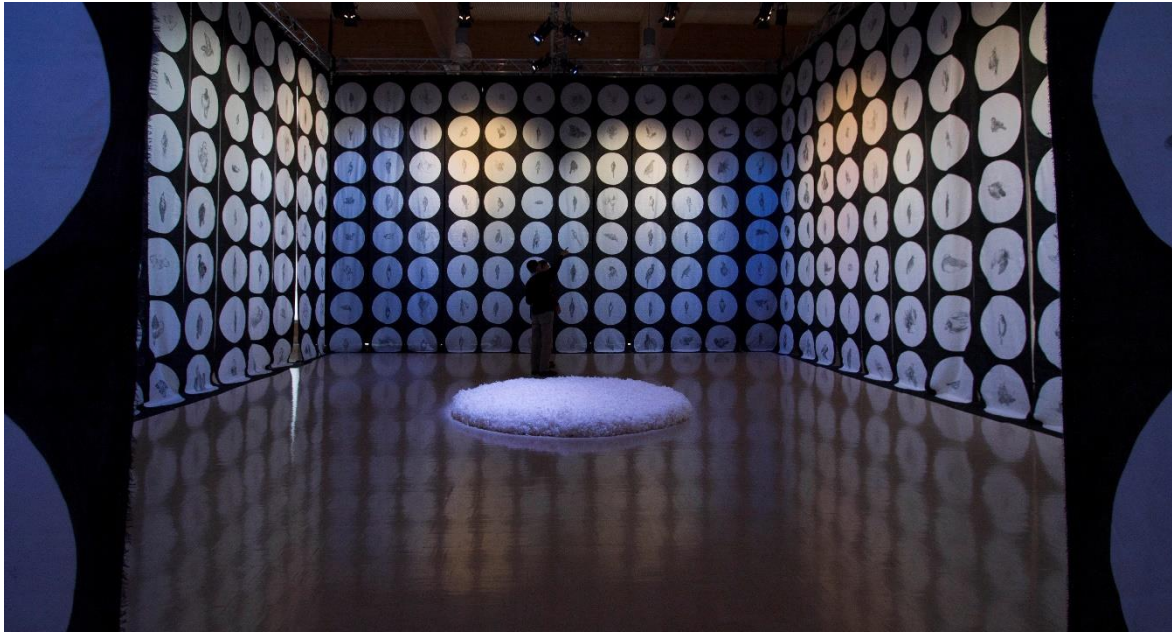


Fig. 35 Jin, Lipeng (2014) *Bird Panopticon*, [Polyester, dye, ink, black acrylic, poultry feathers, and blue lighting]. Dimension: 50 pieces of painting, each 75 x 585cm; feather cushion: 250cm in diameter, A28, LICA Event Space, Lancaster University. Collection of the artist.

## **Bird Panopticon**

In a diaphanous and immersive architectural space, 50 pieces of polyester, banner-like paintings, unfurled and suspended, with nearly 400 bird images coming from different sources, are fabricated into a narrative, a mimesis of the Panopticon—a prototype of the monitoring, controlling, and objectifying gaze, which we are accustomed to cast upon animals (Fig. 35-45). Theatrical, meditative, and ethereal, the whole piece evokes the pathos of animals' plight under such a panoptic gaze. Through the agency of bluish light, the bird images seem to be animated and transmuted to haunting spectres, as viewers amble around the mournful draperies. The feathers, shaped into the form of a large cushion, recount two paradoxical, contrasting discourses: the real, the presence of animals, and the absence of those, the irredeemable loss; human's illusionistic dream, comfort, and sensual pleasure, and its premise—animals' pain, death, and suffering.

## **Animal Panopticon and Human Gaze**

As the title *Bird Panopticon* suggests, a conceptual space structured here offers a parody of the Panopticon. Formulated by Jeremy Bentham in 1787, the Panopticon was a prison structure from which a monitor at the central location could survey all surrounding inmates' cells. Yet prisoners do not know whether they are being watched due to the special design of the architecture, making the supervisor invisible. An ocular prototype like this creates 'nonreciprocal paths of visibility' and a 'hierarchical relationship' between overseer and prisoner (Lee, 2008: 238). Not confined to prison, according to Bentham, the apparatus of the Panopticon is applicable to a series of collective 'houses', such as manufactories, orphanages, kindergartens, asylums, and chicken farms (ibid.).

Discerning the power of the 'ocular regime of surveillance' in this prototype (ibid.), Michel Foucault argued, in his *Discipline and Punish* (1977), that modern institutions use this mode of panoptic gaze, effectively and economically, to regulate, discipline, and control the oppressed others. As he pointed out, La Vaux's Menagerie at Versailles was the Panopticon's precedent, although Bentham did not mention if it inspired him. Precisely, the menagerie was an octagonal pavilion where the Sun King himself in his salon in the centre of the ground floor could watch the isolated different species of exotic animals. The whole structure not only implies the king's authority and sovereignty but also signifies the supremacy of human culture over nature and animals. This panoramic zoo and the panoptic prisons share 'a similar concern with individualising observation, with characterisation and classification, with the analytical arrangement of space' (Foucault, 1977: 203). Thus, one may suggest that this enterprise has laid the cornerstone for modern institutional violence against animals.





Fig. 36 Jin, Lipeng (2014) *Bird Panopticon*, [Polyester, dye, ink, black acrylic, poultry feathers, and blue lighting]. Dimension: 50 pieces of painting, each 75 x 585cm; feather cushion: 250cm in diameter, A28, LICA Event Space, Lancaster University. Collection of the artist.

To retrace this origin of the Panopticon back to Le Vaux's Menagerie is to bring into focus the relationship between this panoptic structure with humans' relentless desire to control and manipulate animals via the mastery and objectification of the one-way gaze. This logic operates in modern zoos, factory farms, slaughterhouses, scientific labs, and natural history museums—all of which exist to classify and control their subjects. Thus, even if not necessarily in a circular or octagonal form, conceptually, they all cast an enormous net of an objectifying gaze upon animals, attesting to the Foucauldian connection between visibility and power embedded in this 'hierarchical observation' (Foucault, 1977: 70). This panoptic way of looking at and thinking about animals has deeply etched itself in human minds and, thus, without surprise, has fixed the boundaries within which human inspectors objectify, classify, punish, and discipline animals.

The problem of human gaze must take into account a salient difference between look and gaze. According to the U.S. feminist writer Ann Kaplan's analysis, look is 'a process, a relation', reciprocal and interactive, whereas gaze suggests a 'one-way subjective vision' from an 'active subject' towards a passive object (Kaplan, 1997: xvi). Thus, the characteristic mechanism of the Panopticon, which divides the sovereign, monitoring subject and the subjugated, self-disciplinary object, operates in some different while related concepts of gaze—male gaze (from male towards female, proposed by Laura Mulvey) (1975), imperial gaze (from white towards non-white, theorised by Ann Kaplan), (1997), and human gaze (from man towards animal, put forward by Randy Malamud) (2012)—all of which are nonreciprocal, domineering, and voyeuristic. With this in mind, the agenda for tackling this problem of gaze therefore lies in the efforts of, as Sarah Worth argues, how to address the inequality and 'imbalance between the subject and object' (Worth, 2001: 445) and the extent to which we can seek a difference to the contextualised thought within social, economic, and species inequalities. Consequently, the strategy of representation needs to 'develop either an aesthetic theory that (either) takes this inequity into account, or one which attempts to diffuse it from the outset' (Worth, 2001: 446). Corresponding to these theoretical examinations of the imbalanced, panoptic, and hierarchical gaze, contemporary artists have forged new ways of looking at and thinking about animals.

One of the powerful strategies contemporary artists employ to disturb the panoptic gaze is to blur the animal images purposefully—as in Jaschinski's fuzzy photographs of zoos—which invoke a memory of those long-lost animals, or invite us to ponder on their abnormal situation imposed by a hubristic human gaze. Some documentaries too adopt this strategy, like George Butler's *The Lord God Bird* (2008), which greatly subverts the ideological gaze of a human subject. In this film, the birds (ivory-billed woodpecker) are

rendered almost absent, seen only through some blurry clips of them, which meaningfully disturb our conventional scrutiny and satisfaction on clear animal images (Malamud, 2012: 86)—that are results of our panoptic, omnipresent gaze. This blurriness deployed by different artists is instrumental in questioning the profuse animal images of films and photographs produced by the panoptic human gaze. The accessibility and availability of these images have estranged people from real animals, the world for which, disturbingly and haplessly, is being rendered remote from us with a residue of increased misconceptions about them (ibid., 10).

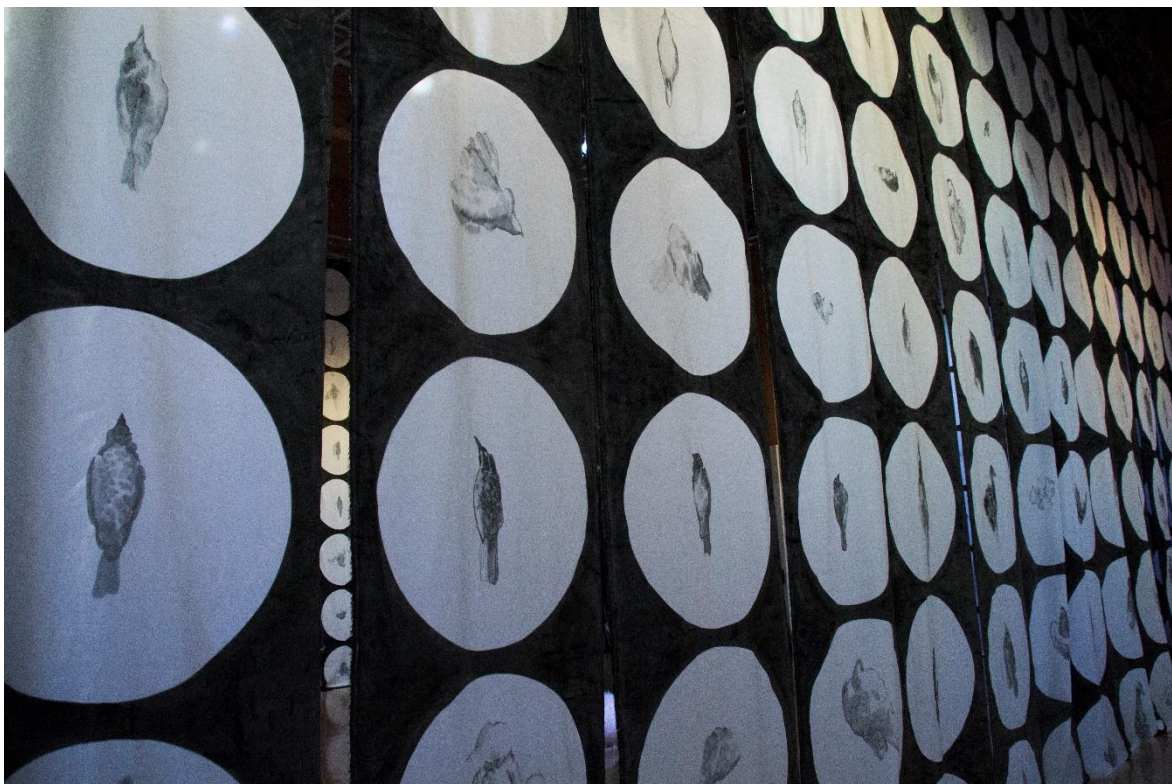


Fig. 37 Jin, Lipeng (2014) *Bird Panopticon*, [Polyester, dye, ink, black acrylic, poultry feathers, and blue lighting]. Dimension: 50 pieces of painting, each 75 x 585cm; feather cushion: 250cm in diameter, A28, LICA Event Space, Lancaster University. Collection of the artist.

Still, rather than adopting a strategy of blurriness, diffusing it from outset, this project intends to make a simulacrum of the Panopticon that poetically and implicitly critiques the panoptic gaze. By enclosing and, thus, transforming a space by the pendent, banner-like, scroll paintings, I employ an agglomerate of the dense, isolated, cell-like, white, and round

compartments to mirror this panoptic world. This constructed space becomes a large ‘aviary’, because generally each bird image is framed within these compartments. Bemoaning the tragic plight of animals, the white round cushion denotes gaze, or spotlight, or a delimited frame and enclosure, where people might gaze towards and/or physically confine animals, living or dead, in factory farming, laboratories, zoos, or museums—through the scrutinising lens of cameras or binoculars, for example, if we gaze rather than look.

In relation to the aesthetic strategy of repetition and accumulation, the geometry of these white, dense, and repetitive ‘cells’, evoking a minimalist structure, is somehow a response both to the systematic surveillance and categorisation, and the suffocating sense of modern mass production. By multiplying the black-and-white units into a monumental scale, the aesthetics of repetition creates a dazzling perceptual experience of the postmodern sublime generated by a capitalist totality. Indeed, with endless serial repetition, this panoptic gaze of discipline, inspection, governance, and reproduction of animals is propelling a capitalist machine, simultaneously and inevitably evoking a sense of anxiety.

This structure of repetition perhaps also brings to mind Boltanski’s gloomy, eerie, archive-like installations, which are also established on the orderly minimalist matrix yet infused with strong emotion. Likewise, the side-by-side, ethereal banner paintings, reminiscent of mournful draperies, are imbued with spiritual and emotional elements as well, which are contradictory to rigorous, cold, and rational Minimalism. In addition, those identical, distinctively enclosed compartments are painstakingly handmade in contrast with ‘the eradication of the hand in Minimalism’ (Phillip, 1999: 149). Added to this painterly counterpoint is also the physical engagements of the viewer, that is, the swaying and pulsing slightly of the ethereal and translucent polyester scrolls with the movements of the

viewer who walks in and around the enclosure of draperies. So for me, these dense units of confinement are, therefore, not just aesthetic reverberations with Minimalism, but are, more conceptually, settings for bird apparitions, or perhaps, containers for the ruins of animal's body—disquieting, melancholic, and reflective.

By fabricating a panoptic fantasy—entailed by an objectifying and voyeuristic gaze and given rise to the suffering of animals, humans as supervisors and monitors who enjoy their supremacy in the centre of the world gazing at the peripheral animal trophies. It does not mean, however, that this systematic control and surveillance might not risk an impending peril. In viewers' perambulation within and around this immersive space, they may get a sense of being environed by the shadows of bird spectre. True, we are, like the Sun King, still dreaming, insensitive to animals' voices and intruding into their realm through our relentless gaze as well as powerful instruments; but in turn, correspondingly and unpredictably, humans' slumber might also be interrupted by the ominous expansion and encroachment of animal phantasms—avian flu, for example.

### **Animal Debris and Human Dream**

The objectifying, panoptic way of looking at and thinking about animals precludes further exploitation by physically transforming living animals into commodities as meat in factory farming, as props in zoos, as surrogates in scientific labs, or as art fetishes in contemporary art world, all perpetuating an anthropocentric dream. By incorporating white feathers and shaping them into a large cushion situated on the centre of the floor, I intend to question this hubristic view, the humanistic reverie.



Corresponding to the question of the ethics and aesthetics of animals, many contemporary art practices mirror our facetious or flippant insensitivity towards animals and attest to human's arbitrary negation of animals in the name of art (Malamud, 2012: 136). However, artworks like Dion's *Library for the Birds of Antwerp* even involve living animals, but provoke us to reflect on our historical misdeeds with animals based on the anthropocentric proposition. Of course, it will be an endless debate about the legibility of using animal materials, living or dead, in today's art world. From my perspective, if the materials taken from animals are debased into human aesthetic tropes or burdened with humanistic meanings, this manipulation will deflect the main purpose of this research—addressing the plight of animals.



Fig. 38 Jin, Lipeng (2014) *Bird Panopticon*, [Polyester, dye, ink, black acrylic, poultry feathers, and blue lighting]. Dimension: 50 pieces of painting, each 75 x 585cm; feather cushion: 250cm in diameter, A28, LICA Event Space, Lancaster University. Collection of the artist.

The feathers, as animal material, which are used in this work, have long been fashioned into human's fineries and decorative fetishes, into totemic, religious props in primitive

rituals, and, of course, into artistic, metaphorical objects. For example, the British artist Susie MacMurray, in her site-specific installation, spreads snowy white feathers all over the floor, perhaps once again transmuting animals as fragmented accessories of human culture. With this in mind, I acknowledge that there is a risk that embedded in the white feathers used in this project, that is, a risk of the habitual associations of a comforting sense with soft, unsoiled feathers, rather than a subversive, artistic agency. Nevertheless, not completely relinquishing the conventionally fetishized identity of feathers, rather, by utilising this associative quality, I want to tackle this conundrum by proffering a logical disjunction, both the presence and absence of animals.



Fig. 39 Jin, Lipeng (2014) *Bird Panopticon*, [Polyester, dye, ink, black acrylic, poultry feathers, and blue lighting]. Dimension: 50 pieces of painting, each 75 x 58.5cm; feather cushion: 250cm in diameter, A28, LICA Event Space, Lancaster University. Collection of the artist.

The feather cushion functions as a visual and conceptual fulcrum that structures the narrative of the whole work (Figs. 38-9). Essentially, the reflective dimension of this work comes both from the central position of this cushion that elicits the viewer's reflection on

anthropocentric ideology and from the juxtaposition of the scroll paintings and the cushion. Certainly, a comparative reading between the paintings and the cushion is pertinent. Furthermore, the homespun, simple formulation of the feather cushion is a counterpoint to the laborious, time-consuming process of painting. Sharing the similar silvery, glimmering quality, and somehow informed and homogenised by the minimalist mechanism of geometry, they therefore echo each other in the formal and haptic senses. More importantly, however, they are thematically and conceptually complementary, because it is animal's death that interrelates them. A constellation of bird images, pantomised by using the special paint—dye, marks the presence of illusionistic, wavering shadows, immaterial bird spectres. The paintings function as an inventory of birds' suffering and death, haunting and surrounding the cushion, and suggesting the absence of real birds. By contrast, involving the feathers from the fragmented *real* animals, the cushion serves as an eerie echo with the surrounding mournful veils of the painted dead birds, paradoxically evincing both their absence and presence.

Correspondingly, spectators might experience a dialectic movement wavering between a sense of a habitual connection with the feathers' sensual beauty, warmth, and comfort—further evoked by the round format of the feather cushion, as an abode of our dream and reverie; and the opposite sense, animal's death and pain, with their icily cold fear and trepidation. The large feather cushion might also provide the other paradoxical site of contemplation: on the one side, the intimate human-animal relations exemplified in this case, for example, that we use feathers for insulation, for warm and comfort, but, on the other, the untraversable, noncomprehensible chasm between humans and animals, the enigmatic, ontological gap that may enable the exploitation of animals. Because of these ambivalences and ambiguities, there might remain a potential risk of misreading by the viewer.



Also, a large circle on the floor is not a mimesis of Richard Long's stone circles—conveying a sense of reverence for the harmony of nature, the eternity of the universe. Instead, it serves as a form of black humour, a site where animal subjects are conjured rather than figured, a site that hints at the brevity of beings caused by a panoptic anthropocentric regime. Perhaps, psychologically, the feather cushion also carries the overtone with Mona Hatoum's *Prayer Mat*, in which thousands of nickel-plated brass pins standing upright on a canvas base, for the viewer to reflect on its material ambiguity and contemplate the dialectic between security and threat, the appealing and the revulsive, and the delicate illusion and the inexorable power of supremacy. More apposite to my material concern, however, is her selective reclamation of her own and other women's hair, as a signifier of women, and of pain and vulnerability in relation and responding to the oppression of machismo culture. By the same token, these feathers are an undeniable register of animal suffering for the repose and delectation of human beings. Perhaps, also resonating with Boltanski's thousands of entangled old clothes chaotically strewn all over the floor, these feathers, immaculate, sensual, and evanescent, are enmeshed together suggesting the negation and objectification of individual lives.

Hence, to weave the feathers into this narrative is to offer a plea for conceiving animals, like us, as vulnerable, mortal beings, and for realising that animals' deaths have been mediated and screened from our daily lives. With the aforementioned war on compassion in mind, in addressing the subjugated 'voices' of animals, art is still a battlefield between the subversive power which might trigger the discomfiture and enlightenment, and otherwise the entrenched ideology adamantly fabricating animals into oneiric anthropocentric fantasies, where we still remain comfortably cocooned.

### **Why Birds Matter**

The significance of birds has been implied in the title of this work, and it is no accident that I nominate birds as the work's protagonists as being representative of animals. This work recounts birds' intimate cultural and economic bondages to human beings, for 'Birds at the service of society—decorative, gastronomical, sporting, spiritual, economic, allegorical, anthropomorphic—and as social appendages' (Dion, 1997: 130). Certainly, birds are common sights in our daily lives, too common to be neglected; they share our cityscape more than any other wild animals (ibid., 128).

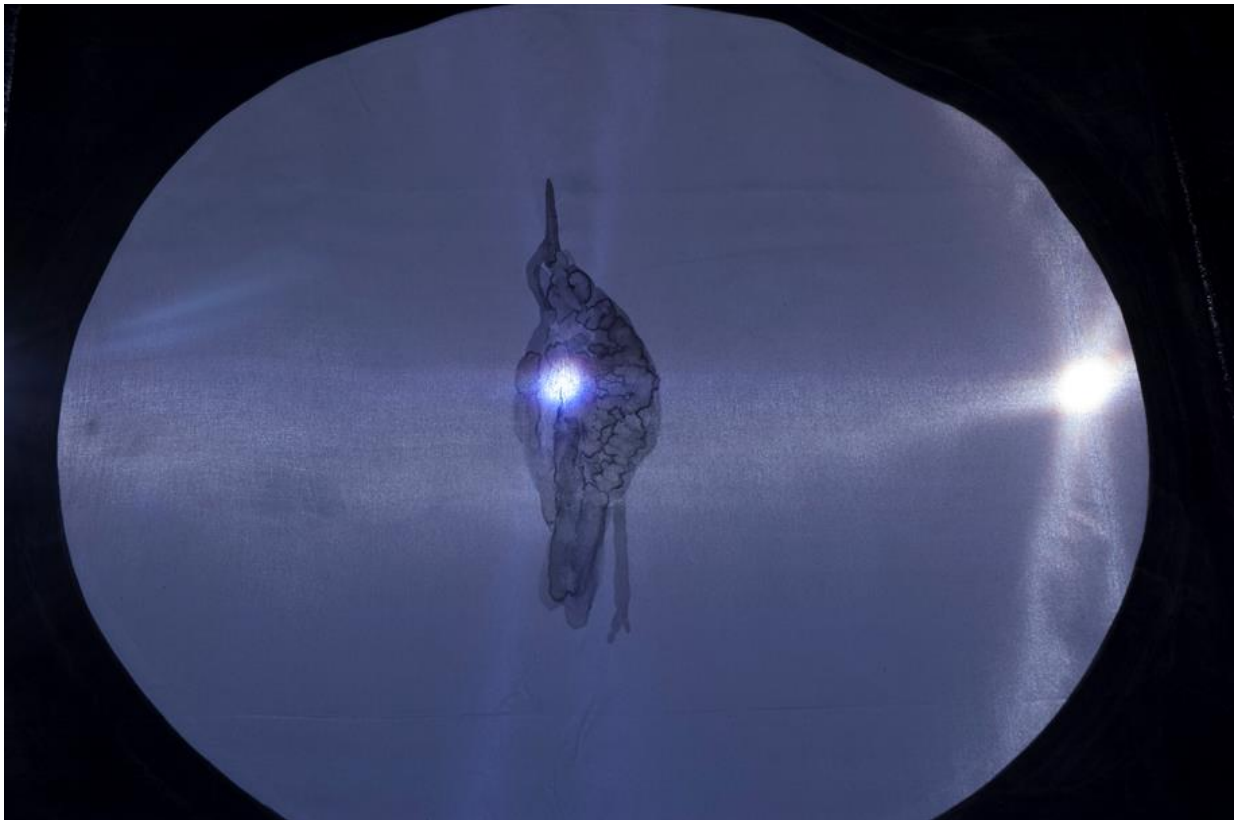


Fig. 40 Jin, Lipeng (2014) *Bird Panopticon*, [Polyester, dye, ink, black acrylic, poultry feathers, and blue lighting]. Dimension: 50 pieces of painting, each 75 x 585cm; feather cushion: 250cm in diameter, A28, LICA Event Space, Lancaster University. Collection of the artist.

Birds are creatures burdened with a diverse range of human spiritual, cultural, and symbolic meanings. For example, Bald Eagle stands as a national symbol of the United States, and even most of the 50 states have a state bird. In this work, the fabric, the polyester used for painting, with its ethereal beauty, evokes our spiritual connections with

birds, and this sense is further enhanced by the interplay of bird images and lighting, and by vertical hanging that might imply the ascent of spirit or soul.

Ironically, this spiritual association (often with dove or bird of prey) is in stark contrast with some images of chicken, the most miserable and *debirded* bird, attesting to the shock of factory farming. As one of the oldest domesticated species, our companion species, it nevertheless seems doomed as human's food, 'contributing most to mankind's consumption of protein', convincingly affirming our corporeal and economic relations with birds (Diamond, 1987: 100). To articulate this contrast, I involved some upside-down, disembodied chicken images as a reprise of my first project, suggesting animal suffering and death caused by institutional violence.

Historically, numerous wild birds, passenger pigeons, for example, were hunted as cheap and sustained food sources for early Western settlers in North America (*ibid.*, 102). Because of colonists' relentless hunting, this bird, once one of the most abundant of bird species in the world, along with many other birds, has been eradicated from this planet within 150 years (Halliday, 1978: 40), indicating the vulnerability of even a thriving species when faced with greedy human predators.

Although food is definitely not the main reason for killing wild birds, for some humans, hunting still triggers a frisson of excitement through shooting birds to death. With a rich cultural and historical association, hunting (pheasant shooting in Britain, for example) still fascinates people in many countries. For instance, in a field trip in 2013, I witnessed thousands of pheasants reared in an appalling pheasant shooting site in the northwest of England (Fig. 41). Of course, this fascination has a complex historical origin, which was skilfully and realistically recorded in abundant Western game bird paintings; thus, I appropriated some images from game bird paintings to express the brutality of this human

proclivity. As hunting trophies, bird's ravishing plumage has long been used for ornamentation and clothing. While the white feathers used in the feather cushion in this work not only suggest a still widespread practice of using down for insulation, they also allude to a site of animal suffering, a site of our humanistic dream.



Fig. 41 Jin, Lipeng (2014) *Bird Panopticon*, [Polyester, dye, ink, black acrylic, poultry feathers, and blue lighting]. Dimension: 50 pieces of painting, each 75 x 585cm; feather cushion: 250cm in diameter, A28, LICA Event Space, Lancaster University. Collection of the artist.

Birds also exemplify people's shifting attitudes towards nature and animals from the seventeenth century onwards. As Keith Thomas states, 'In the Hanoverian period the cruelty of trapping wild birds, clipping their wings, slitting their tongues and confining them in cages became a common theme of poetic lament' (Thomas, 1983: 279).

Again the slaughtering gun is heard,  
And wildly screams the parent bird.  
All night she mourns her lessen'd brood. (ibid.)

Currently, our concern with birds indeed evolved from this previous sensitivity to the vulnerability of animals and endangered ecology.



Fig. 42 Jin, Lipeng (2014) *Bird Panopticon*, [Polyester, dye, ink, black acrylic, poultry feathers, and blue lighting]. Dimension: 50 pieces of painting, each 75 x 585cm; feather cushion: 250cm in diameter, A28, LICA Event Space, Lancaster University. Collection of the artist.

Indeed, the fragile birds have never failed to witness the process of environmental deterioration due to human activities. From the eye of ornithologist, ‘Birds are among the most sensitive and valuable indicators of the health of our natural environment’ (Diamond, 1987: 107), assuming the role as ‘the miner’s canary’. This ecological significance of birds is also implied by the round format of each image, which carries the association of binoculars and bird watching, as one of the most fascinating recreations in Western society. Located in the diaphanous, architectonic space, and lurked in that immaculate white cushion, birds in this work may function as signifiers for the different forms of animal exploitation and subjugation. Also, related to this interest on birds is another concern, a lament on the profound contrast between the harmonious aura conjured up in Chinese bird-

and-flower painting—influenced by traditional Chinese philosophy—and present escalating violence against animals in China.

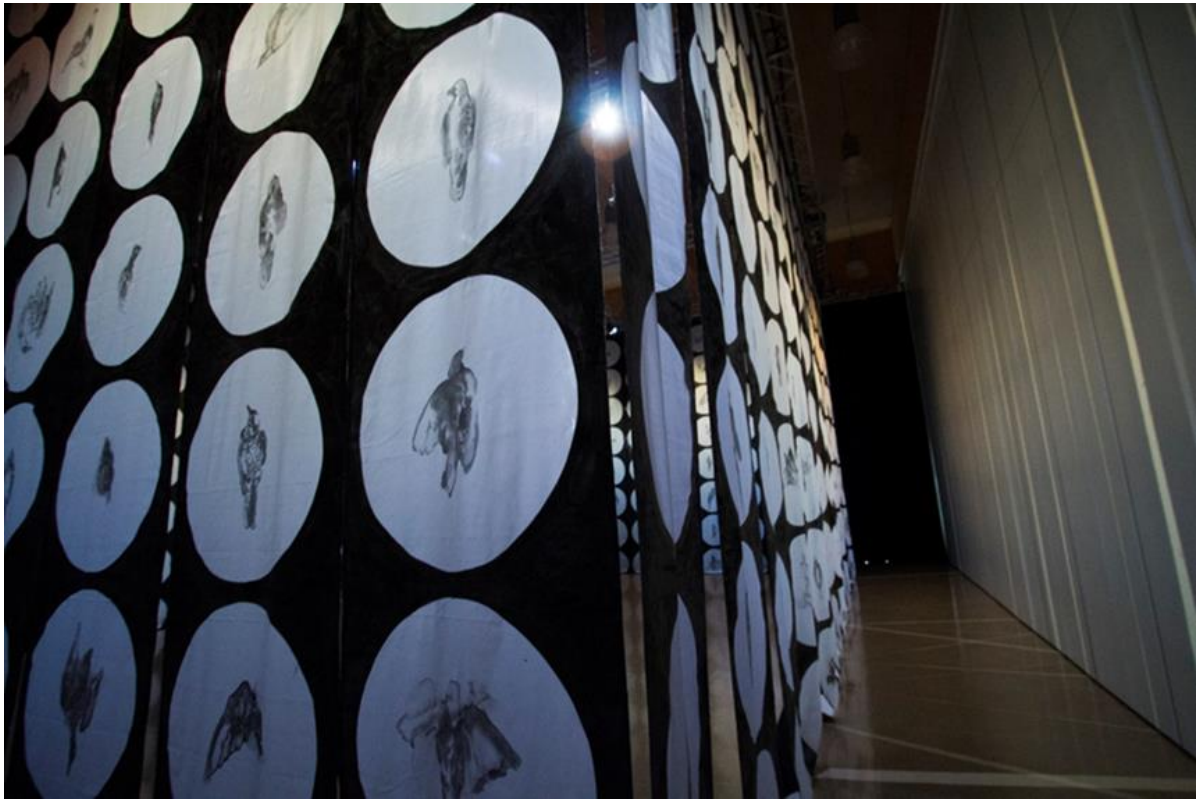


Fig. 43 Jin, Lipeng (2014) *Bird Panopticon*, [Polyester, dye, ink, black acrylic, poultry feathers, and blue lighting]. Dimension: 50 pieces of painting, each 75 x 58.5cm; feather cushion: 250cm in diameter, A28, LICA Event Space, Lancaster University. Collection of the artist.

### **Chinese Bird-and-Flower Painting**

Fashioned in a theatrical way, and evocative of the historical myth fabricated on birds, these bird images with diaphanous fabrics are also reminiscent of Chinese bird-and-flower painting, which suggests the harmony of nature and our enchantment with the beauty of animals. My paintings are precisely executed with Chinese brush, ink, and polyester (similar to silk often used in Chinese painting); thus, it is useful to discuss the relation between traditional Chinese painting and this work.

Here, the white background for bird subjects seems to allude to the round fan surface

format as well—often used in Chinese bird-and-flower painting, if not exactly round, or something between round and square—suggests a harmonious relationship between humans and nature. When we closely examine it, however, this rigorous minimalistic roundness, with the stark contrast of black and white, and with relentless repetition of this round unit, is alien to the traditional aura radiated from a quintessential Chinese painting. This aura is intimately bound up with the agricultural, idyllic past which has now been supplanted by an age of rationalised mass-production, corresponding to the repetitive cell-like units in this work. Too, the not-exact-roundness has morphed into an accurate likeness of the harsh spotlight, the spotlight of harsh reality.

In my work, the emptiness within each round space is linked with a semiotics embedded in traditional Chinese or Japanese sumi painting, which often features a vast expanse of emptiness in contrast with, perhaps, a small patch of painted area. It is worth noting that, in sumi painting, the emptiness does not just function as a compositional device; rather, in the semiotics of Chinese painting, it is a site of circulation of ‘qi’, the vital breath, which, according to Chinese cosmology, permeates the whole universe and generates all existents. The liveliness of a painting lies in capturing this dynamic, omnipresent breath, in part, through the significance of median emptiness (Cheng, 1994: 63). Yet the emptiness in each round painting unit is my lament on the loss of traditional semiotics and philosophy, and this white empty space has been transformed to one where we impose and project our objectifying gaze upon animals.

Furthermore, the paints I use are mainly velvet-black dye, with a bit of ink to accentuate some parts in painting. Unlike enduring, indelible ink, through which some ancient Chinese painting has survived for about 1,500 years, dye is somewhat a rather fleeting, volatile material, hinting at the vulnerability of an ephemeral life. When the dye is diffused



with water, the entropic metamorphosis—from a realistic and recognisable bird image to an amorphous or abstract form—might suggest a transient life, the vanishing or decaying process of a vulnerable life (Figs. 44-5). Melting away into abstract shadows, these representations of animal life are reminiscent of Boltanski's purposefully re-photographed foggy human portraits conveying fleeting memories and the finitude and temporality of life, and of Jaschinski's hazy, grainy photographs which speak of the vulnerability and poignancy of animals' alterity.



Fig. 44 Jin, Lipeng (2014) *Bird Panopticon*, [Polyester, dye, ink, black acrylic, poultry feathers, and blue lighting]. Dimension: 50 pieces of painting, each 75 x 585cm; feather cushion: 250cm in diameter, A28, LICA Event Space, Lancaster University. Collection of the artist.

With a sense of finiteness, entropy, and enigma, these destructed and abstracted images, are never found in traditional painting. Displaying variations and oscillations with those realistic and unspoiled images, they also serve as a visual taunt that traditional iconography has been troubled by reality, and that we are negating and transmuting



animals to spectre-like commodities. Thus, by using dye, this aesthetic fashion of negating animals is a way of mimicking the degradation of animal life and the disavowal of its subjectivity in reality.

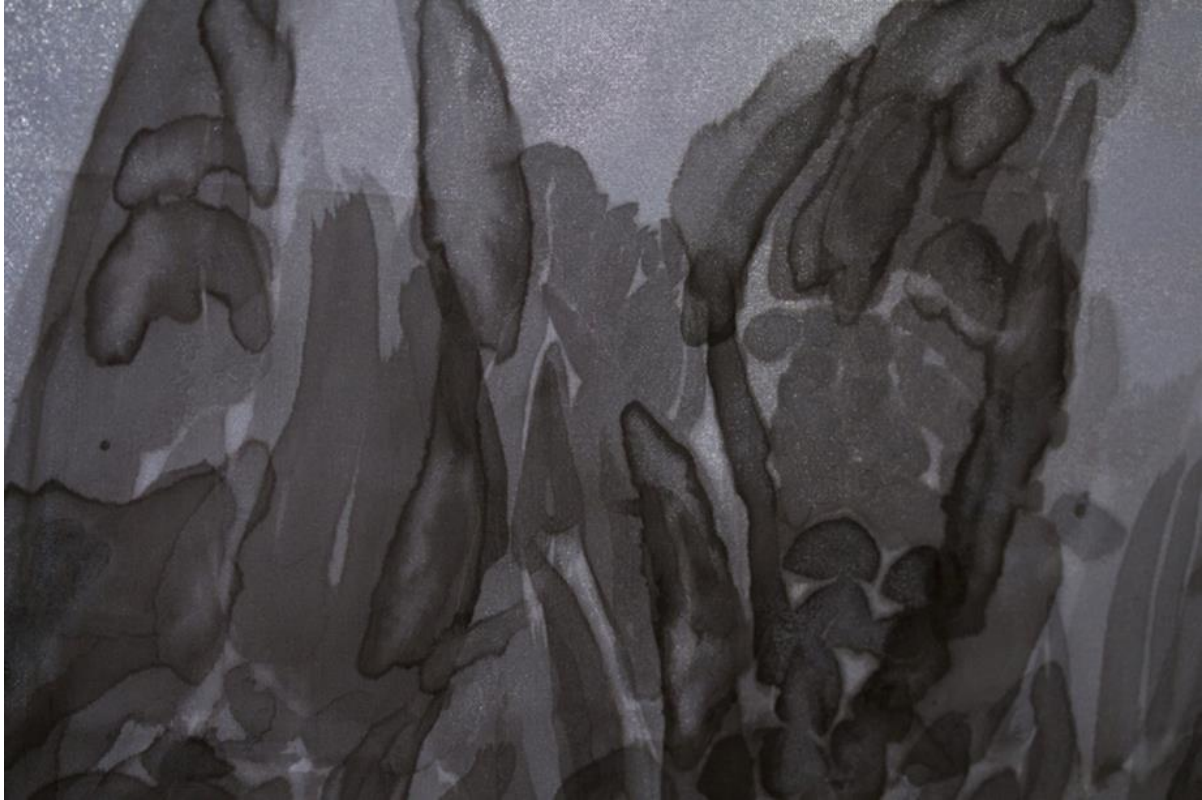


Fig. 45 Jin, Lipeng (2014) *Bird Panopticon*, [Polyester, dye, ink, black acrylic, poultry feathers, and blue lighting]. Dimension: 50 pieces of painting, each 75 x 585cm; feather cushion: 250cm in diameter, A28, LICA Event Space, Lancaster University. Collection of the artist.

Nor can we find the employment of light in conventional Chinese paintings. Like the evocative, dramatic lighting so intrinsic to Boltanski's oeuvres, the flecks of light, as an important dimension of this work, seem to interact with the bird images and animate them through the membrane-like fabric, the veils of poignancy, if the viewer walks around and watches from the outside of the enclosure. Thus, the artificial silk, the polyester, as the coruscating surface of painting, with the wraiths of birds adumbrated by the meagre light, are more like shrouds for their delicate lives, evoking profound sadness.

Perhaps, it might be interesting if we do some comparative readings between the references from Chinese bird-and-flower painting and my quotations from Western traditional game bird paintings and bird illustrations—the American naturalist John James Audubon’s work, for example—meaning that this pictorial contrast might demonstrate a different understanding between Western and Oriental philosophy regarding the question of animal life. A bird-and-flower painter needs to convey the lively spirits of creatures, and the imagery of dead animals generally does not enter the space of traditional painting. In my work, some of the bird iconographies refer to the iconic Chinese bird-and-flower paintings, for example, by the emperor-artist Hui-Zong (Fig. 46), one of the greatest exponents of bird-and-flower painting. He had an outstanding talent for capturing the spirits of birds to create a peaceful and harmonious world that traditional Chinese philosophy also intends to fulfil.



Fig. 46 Emperor Huizong or Ji, Zhao (1108 or 1109) *Pigeon on a Peach Branch*, [Hanging scroll, colour on silk], 28.6 cm × 26.0 cm (11.3 in × 10.2 in), private collection in Japan.  
At: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emperor\\_Huizong\\_of\\_Song#/media/File:Momohatozu\\_Huizong.JPG](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emperor_Huizong_of_Song#/media/File:Momohatozu_Huizong.JPG) (Accessed on 16.02.16).

By contrast, the references from Western game bird painting may offer a different glimpse of animal representation. The birds—wildfowls, like partridge or pheasant, are in many cases dead animals, clustered on a table, or suspended from a beam dangling with fruits and vegetables (Fig. 47). With these bird objects, the sumptuous still life might invariably bestow the bounty of nature and display the opulence and luxury of aristocratic hunting life (Ebert-Schifferer, 1999: 149-50). Invariably, however, the affluence and abundance that this worldview celebrates are established on the death and suffering of animals, which are fit into the bereaving mood of my installation, in which death is the main theme expressed through different dead bird iconographies.



Fig. 47 Cotán, Juan Sánchez (1602) *Still Life with Game Fowl, Vegetables and Fruits*, [Oil on canvas], Museo del Prado Madrid. At:[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Juan\\_S%C3%A1nchez\\_Cot%C3%A1n#/media/File:Still\\_Life\\_with\\_Game\\_Fowl,Vegetables\\_and\\_Fruits,\\_Prado,\\_Museum,Madrid,1602,HernaniCollection.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Juan_S%C3%A1nchez_Cot%C3%A1n#/media/File:Still_Life_with_Game_Fowl,Vegetables_and_Fruits,_Prado,_Museum,Madrid,1602,HernaniCollection.jpg) (Accessed on 16.02.16).

In his nineteenth century book *The Birds of America* (Fig. 48), which I also cite in this work because of its tremendous popularity and influence, Audubon might give us a



different sense from his bird paintings (Fig. 49). When we are enchanted with the meticulous beauty of these bird images, paradoxically, this book is a bona fide register of animal death, for Audubon's passion for portraying birds was bound up with 'an equal zeal for hunting' (Boehrer, 2010: 90), after which dead birds served as his model to imitate. However, there is a huge methodological difference between this *capture*—whether the subject in the painting is meant to be portrayed as a dead game bird or a living animal by speculating about a lively animal based on a dead motionless specimen, and the *capture* of animal spirit in Chinese painting which relies on acute and sensitive observation from real life. Hence, the bird image in Chinese painting not only embodies the poetic and idyllic past, but also ancient Chinese thoughts on reverence for nature and animals.



Fig. 48 Audubon, John James (1825) *Carolina Parakeet* (*Conuropsis carolinensis*), Havell plate no. 26, [Watercolor], New-York Historical Society.  
At: <http://onpoint.wbur.org/2013/03/19/john-james-audubon-and-the-birds-of-america> (Accessed on 16.02.16).



Fig. 49 Jin, Lipeng (2014) *Bird Panopticon*, [Polyester, dye, ink, black acrylic, poultry feathers, and blue lighting]. Dimension: 50 pieces of painting, each 75 x 58.5cm; feather cushion: 250cm in diameter, A28, LICA Event Space, Lancaster University. Collection of the artist.

Now the situation is completely reversed. Ironically, enough, while Westerners are more ecologically attuned and more sensitive to animal welfare, on the other side of this planet, China is unprecedentedly increasing factory farming and other kinds of animal exploitation. Coming from a Chinese background, and a country that even now does not have any animal welfare or anti-cruelty laws (Li, 2014: 249), I am deeply concerned with such transformation, creating a tremendous inferno for animals, yet deemed as ‘progress’. According to Dr Peter J. Li, billions of farm animals are raised on the industrialized farms on the Chinese mainland. As the world’s biggest farm animal producer, China has been witnessing ‘a nationwide enthusiasm for Western farming practices such as gestation crates, battery cages, ear-clipping, beak-trimming’ which are being phased out in EU nations (Li, 2014: 246). More notorious is the practice of bear farming, extracting bile from living bears imprisoned in small cages for about 20 years. Generating around \$1.6

billion per year, it is a typical example of transforming animal's suffering into capital and social stability (ibid., 249).

Also, the recent massive violence against wild animals is the Sparrow-Killing Campaign happened half century ago, in which the whole nation, even five-year-old children, were called to exterminate sparrows that were found responsible for the loss of grains (Shapiro, 2001: 87). This movement nearly put sparrows on the verge of extinction, and because of this, the insect population soared. Along with other factors, this resulted in one of the greatest famines (20 to 45 million people died) in Chinese history.

Given these recent human-induced crises and disasters, in contrast with the historical aura of bird-and-flower painting, I intend to take issue in this work with this conventional semiotics and disrupt established narrative. This concern mingles with other conceptual contemplations on the Panopticon, gaze, bird, feathers, and lighting, all of which constitute a meditative and immersive space for audiences to rethink and reposition themselves in relation to other creatures.

## **Hide and Seek**

Alluding to the invisibility of animal suffering (both a singular, individual animal and a group as a whole), the conjunction of violence against farm and wild animals and the complexity of human-animal/nature connectivity, my final project is a large-scale installation consisting of three six-panel free-standing folding screens. Each screen presents the monochrome ink paintings on both sides of the translucent panels fashioned from fabrics and wood, with feathers put the inside of each panel, providing a space of poetic, elegant, and ethical meditation. Around two thousand small painted images in the

size of a Petri Dish populate these panels and function as a formal device to create a unifying sense (Fig. 50).

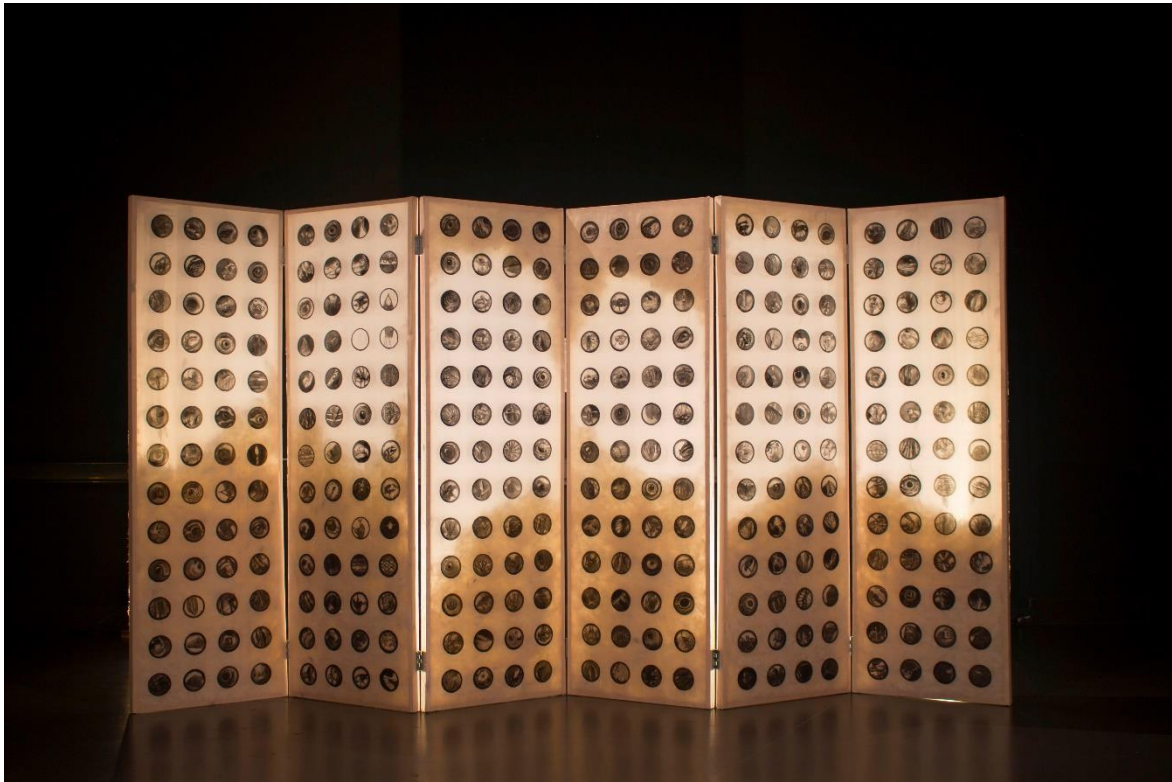


Fig. 50 Jin, Lipeng (2015-16) *Hide and Seek*, [Polyester habutai, ink, wood, poultry feathers, and yellow light], 3 six-panel folding screens, each panel 202 × 65 cm. Collection of the artist.

### **Punning Name and Folding Screen**

This work seeks to address Derrida's concern with war on compassion, that is, the systematic concealment of violence against animals which causes collective public ignorance about this violence. Since factory farms and slaughterhouses have been sequestered away from public lives, spatial distance between an animal and a human consumer inevitably causes moral distance. Moreover, antiseptically packaged cuts of meat or ready-made meals in supermarkets manifest the separation between human and animal and that between animal and so-called 'meat'. The well-designed packaging of animal product does not evoke, of course, the profound distress caused by the forced

separation of cows and their new-born calves, or the intensive confinement of pigs, or the laborious toil of laying hens. As such, it is hard to link the seemingly palatable with the most deplorable conditions in which animals endure.

Thus, with a sense of irony, the title of this exhibition puns on the moral and spatial invisibility of animal suffering and of an act of investigation into the systematic concealment of animal suffering; and conceptually echoes the format of this work, folding screen—that is used for making some private things hidden. Combining panels made from wood, paper, or silk, folding screen is both an important genre in Chinese and Japanese art and a piece of traditional furniture for decorating and partitioning a room that allows a sense of privacy and concealment. Thus, the format and the punning title of this work suggest the dissimulation and denial of animal suffering operating under global capitalism, leading to the poignant disconnection between humans and animals, and thus to the collective insensitivity to animal suffering. In addition, since the title corresponds with the small painted images in which most things are either partially revealed or blurred, it functions as an invitation that encourages viewers to discern, identify each image, and understand the relations between the title and images.

This formal concern is also informed by contemporary practices that employ folding screens. Pairing texts and black-and-white cinematic photographs depicting partially obscured African-American female gestures, the American female artist Lorna Simpson's folding screens critique racialized stereotypes and sexual identity. Dealing with institutional critique of public spaces, Simpson's compatriot Tom Burr uses pristine minimalist-like folding screens which are made up of mirrored Plexiglas. Concerning the voyeuristic gaze and a sexual politics, his screens betray a sense of hiding that intersects with my concern with concealment and exposure. Unlike Simpson and Burr, the Chinese



artist Cai Guo-Qiang's multi-panel screens provide physical support for his large-scale drawings rendered by the explosion of gunpowder, evoking traditional Chinese ink painting and conveying his sensibility to the ontological relation between human and universe.

Yet my deployment of this format combines with other material and conceptual concerns including the visually and tactilely seductive elements, fabric and feathers. The light, shimmering fabric used for my painting is called Polyester *habutai*. *Habutai* is a Japanese word literally referring to two feathers interlaced, thus conceptually corresponding with the soft, white feathers stuffed inside of each panel, suggesting, as in the last project, both the absence and presence of animals. The translucency of the diaphanous fabric and the painted images is mobilised to transcend the invisibility of violence against animals. The delicacy of this soft, membrane-like material and feathers evoke the shared, embodied vulnerability of a living organism; handling this material can be metaphorically linked to handling a delicate life. Balanced between invisibility and exposure, the translucency, instead of transparency, of this fabric, revealing the ambiguous presence of feathers, intimates the enigmatic, non-comprehensible aspects of animals and the unspeakability of animals' plight.

The warm light projected above the screens seems to offer a contradictory element to this difficult subject, a glimmer of the hope of reconciliation between human and nonhuman animals. Thus, the conflation of feathers, fabric, dot-like paintings, and light are the essentials of creating an atmospheric sense of transforming not only the traditional format of folding screen, but also the collective indifference towards the suffering of animals.

### **The Re-enchantment of Oriental Ethics and Aesthetics**

Evoking traditional Chinese aesthetics, my deployment of an oriental format (folding screen) and materials (ink, brush, and *habutai*) is also a strategy of foregrounding an ironic contrast between traditional Chinese thoughts (indicating the interconnectivity between ethics and aesthetics) and its present-day ecological crisis, a result of a booming economy and, more importantly, an ideological transformation from premodern to modern thinking.

Driven by a modernising impulse, China has embraced Western notions of modernity and progress, which are now intimately tied up with the global capitalist system. Moreover, there are few critical discussions and analyses on the ambivalences between prosperity and calamity created by the rapid implementation of modernity, and between its own successes and failures in relation to the question of planetary survival. Following the unsustainable models of industrialisation set up by the West, China, as Wolfgang Sachs puts it, functions as ‘a vacuum cleaner sucking up resources around the globe, be it copper from Chile, soy from Brazil, or oil from West Africa’ (Sachs, 2010: 262).

Relevant to the question of animal suffering is the production and transformation of soy. Vast swathes of rainforests and savannas in South America have been converted into soy fields in order to fuel the industrialised production of chickens and pigs in both China and Europe. Associated with wealth and modernity, and in the name of prosperity and public health, meat-eating in China is increasingly promoted to meet the demands of the emerging middle class. This meat mania has led this country to a position of ‘consuming the largest quantity of meat on the planet’ (Brown, 2009: 230). Radically changing food patterns from a traditionally grain-based diet (with no dairy products) to a Western paradigm, one that is rather unrealistic in terms of ‘the scale of the Chinese population, the extreme inefficiency of meat as a food source (it takes 40 kilograms of feed to grow 1

kilogram of beef), and the scarcity of farmland in China' (Wolfe, 2012: 101). With environmental concerns outweighed by the short-term interests of mass-producing animal flesh, the traditional value of reverence towards nature has been replaced by a new reverence for meat proteins and cars.

This subjugation of animals and nature in China is in contradiction with the traditional thoughts influenced by Buddhism and Daoism. In Daoism, for example, humans are conceived 'as mere creatures on the Earth who share critical similarities with other living beings and animals, and who will ultimately decompose and be recycled into other beings and objects in this ever-transforming cosmos' (Kemmerer, 2009: 458). This cosmological flow that entails the continuity between humans and animals makes it impossible to draw a permanent line between each entity (Dalal, 2014: 25). The Daoist view that conceives animals and plants, like humans, as embodiments of *dao* encourages an egalitarian and respectful attitude towards nonhuman species.

Another important ethical principle in Daoism is *wuwei*, which refers to a responsible non-action, or non-action as action. Based on the understanding that animals possess and follow the *dao*, this maxim requires a non-egoistical attitude towards other beings that should be allowed 'to live freely and pursue their own future', rather than 'competing with them or make them instrumental sources for our material needs' (ibid., 26). Such a non-intervention, non-disturbance disposition is a way of honouring the creative force of *dao*, by which a human form is just arbitrary, created among many possibilities in a process of constant transformation (ibid., 25). On the contrary, factory farming and other forms of mistreatment of animals are cases of forceful interferences and manipulations that run against the will of animals and, therefore, the *dao* in nature. Thus, it can be suggested that a non-binary, non-hierarchical, and non-instrumental way of relating to animals and nature

endorsed in Daoism has relevance in approaching our current ethical and ecological fallout.

As Daoism encourages the cultivation of human self to seek in accordance with *dao*, art-making itself is regarded as not just a process of making objects but rather a process of spiritual meditation and transcendence, intending to achieve a unity between life, humanity, and heaven (or nature). In performing this contemplation seeking universal harmony, the spirit of Daoism is expressly embodied in Chinese landscape painting, or ‘mountain-and-water painting’, referring to the depictions of mountains, rocks, valleys, lakes, rivers, seas, mists, and clouds (which echo the two core elements, ‘mountain and water’, in Daoist philosophy). All of these entities are united and animated by the flow of *qi* (vital breath), the generating force of *dao*, that permeates the universe. Chinese landscape painting communicates an ecological and mystical sense of ‘the underlying interconnectedness of all things’, especially between ‘the microcosmic human world’ and ‘the macrocosm of nature as a whole’(Clark, 2000: 153).



Fig. 51 Attributed to Ding, Qu (active ca. 1023-1056), *Early Spring*. [Handscroll, ink and color on silk] 45.5 x 115.3 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.  
<http://www.comuseum.com/painting/famous-chinese-paintings/qu-ding-summer-mountains/> (Accessed on 25.05.16).

In Western aesthetic tradition, landscape painting assumed a low position of the hierarchy of genres until the 19th century and it generally functioned as a backdrop ‘to the central

drama of human or mythological activity’ (ibid.). By contrast, landscape painting is the supreme form of all genres of Chinese painting. It seeks to depict an idealised world, an ecological utopia, in which humans do not possess ‘a lordly place’ and are purposefully integrated or dissolved into nature (ibid.). In the landscape paintings of the Song dynasty, mist-shrouded mountains and valleys constitute a dreamlike world in which the tiny human figures seems incidental, representing an understanding of the humble position of humans in nature (Fig. 51).

Yet the traditional idyllic landscape has been transformed by the process of rapid urbanisation and industrialisation. In spite of this, ironically, the traditional techniques of Chinese painting still continue to be practiced in present-day China, yet divested of the mythical and spiritual aura and the philosophical depth of Chinese aesthetic tradition. More importantly, they are often irresponsible of our prevalent environmental woes and do not pay critical attention to the huge economic, social, and ecological cost concomitant to the process of ‘progress’, leaving the irredeemable loss of both nature and culture.



Fig. 52 Qiu, Anxiong (2006) *New Book of Mountains and Seas*, [Animation, three-channel video projection], 30 mins 15 sec, Metropolitan Museum of Art.  
At: <http://www.qiuanxiong.net/en/works/2006/shj1/index.html> (Accessed on 16.02.16).

Nevertheless, this dilemma between modernisation and ecological, cultural crisis has been poetically reflected by the Chinese artist Qiu Anxiong’s epic animation work *The New Book of Mountains and Seas* (Fig. 52). It presents exotic, biomorphic creatures wavering between the mythological animals in well-known ancient mythologies, *The Book of*

*Mountains and Seas*, and scientific objects fashioned by modern science. Reminiscent of Chinese aesthetic tradition of monochrome ink painting, his work offers critical comment on a broad range of issues such as rapid urbanisation, mechanised farming, Frankensteinian science, and space exploration.

Likewise, I also deploy the traditional techniques of Chinese art to articulate an epic narrative of violence against animals, a subject matter that connects factory farming and species extinction within globalised capitalistic production, and that links traditional aesthetics with contemporary dystopic issues.

### **Stuplimity**

Instead of representing the traditional Chinese painting of flora and fauna, mountain and water, the whole piece features a multitude of round images with each in the size of a Petri dish, functioning as an aesthetic paradigm to organise the pictorial elements. Like my last project, *Bird Panopticon*, there is an iconoclast intent embedded in both compositional and iconographical concerns of painting to suggest the loss of spiritual import and the reverence for nature and lives. The employment of ‘Petri dish’ format disrupts the smooth flow of traditional art by a minimalist impulse of sequential repetition of dot-like images, implying a sense of anxiety about the industrialised reality.

Responding to this anxiety in an age of mass-production, contemporary art practices often use an important formal and aesthetical structure of systematic accumulation and repetition, as revealed in a variety of works elaborated above (including my projects). This approach is pertinent to Sianne Ngai’s neologism, *stuplimity*—an ‘aesthetic experience’, typical of contemporary art, ‘in which astonishment is paradoxically united with boredom’

(Ngai, 2005: 263, 271). Drawing together the textual, visual, and musical discourses, she regards *stuplimity* as their shared feature, a ‘tension’ that paradoxically holds together the two oppositional poles of stupefaction and tedium and, therefore, compounds them into an admixture (ibid.). Although corresponding to the Kantian sublime of combining both awe and terror invoked by the power of nature, *stuplimity* somehow conjures up the sublime, albeit negatively induced, for it is infused with ‘thickness or even stupidity’—yet devoid of ‘its spiritual and transcendent connotations and its close affiliation with Romanticism’ (ibid.). The nature of the Kantian sublimity is in line with an impervious disposition when confronting a vast or intimidating object that one’s imagination may fail to grasp and, therefore, generates awe and astonishment within oneself. Subsequently, with the faculty of reason, the ‘shocked surprise’ can be somehow neutralised and transformed ‘into a feeling of tranquil superiority’ (Man, 1996: 84; Ngai, 2005: 268-9).

Yet the *stuplime*, albeit similarly evoked by an enormous and accumulative object is more related to an experiential fatigue that may refuse to be linked with the possibility of transcendence and superiority of the self over the astonishing object (Ngai, 2005: 270). Thus, by holding together the two competing and opposing affects—astonishment and boredom—the *stuplime* aesthetic evinces a ‘tension’, which is precisely a paradox of sudden irritation and prolonged fatigue (ibid., 271). Like Kant’s mathematical sublime, *stuplimity* indicates the constraints of our faculties to ‘comprehend a vastly extended form as a totality’, but ‘not through an encounter with the infinite but with finite bits and scraps of material in repetition’ (ibid.). By lumping together the signifying units, the ‘bits and scraps’ of material, the accumulative practices of the *stuplime* aesthetics operate through the logic of repetition, seriality, and permutation. As Ngai suggests, this paradigm is exemplified in, for instance, the American female artist Ann Hamilton’s enormous installations, such as 16,000 teeth arranged on an examination table (Fig. 53), or 800 shirts

stacked and shaped into a huge wedge, or 750, 000 pennies marinated in honey, or the vast spread of horse hair (ibid., 263).



Fig. 53 Hamilton, Ann (1990/1996) *Between Taxonomy and Communion*, [Steel table, iron oxide powder, and approximately 14,000 human and animal teeth], dimension: table: 32 1/2 x 168 x 56 inches (82.6 x 426.7 x 142.2 cm), Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York Gift, Ginny Williams in honor of Ann Hamilton, 2004. Photo: Richard Loesch.  
At: <http://www.guggenheim.org/new-york/collections/collection-online/artwork/13006> (Accessed on 16.02.16).

Yet, what I do not subscribe to is her point that the aesthetic experience of *stuplimity* does not involve ‘terror or pain’, but only ‘*ordinary fatigue*’ that refused to be neutralised (ibid., 270). So *stuplimity* may not precisely describe the aesthetic response of the aforementioned capitalist sublime, as manifested by many practitioners like Coe and Gursky, whose works depicting industrial farms or landfill sites reveal the terrors of the relentless capitalist expansion. In the Israeli-born video artist Michal Rovner’s video installation, *Time Left* (2002) (Fig. 54), tens of thousands of tiny, silhouetted human figures—achieved through digital manipulation—endlessly march in the circuit of four walls, alluding to the historical traumas, the Holocaust, the exile and diaspora of Jews. In



the Colombian artist Doris Salcedo's case, thousands of chairs were filled into a void between two urban buildings in the 2003 Istanbul Biennial, resonant with the chaotic state of war and the absence of countless, anonymous victims. Thus, it can be suggested that this paradigm is inspired by the dystopic reality of the dualistic capitalist oppression, objectification, and categorisation, which are tied up with the sense of terror.

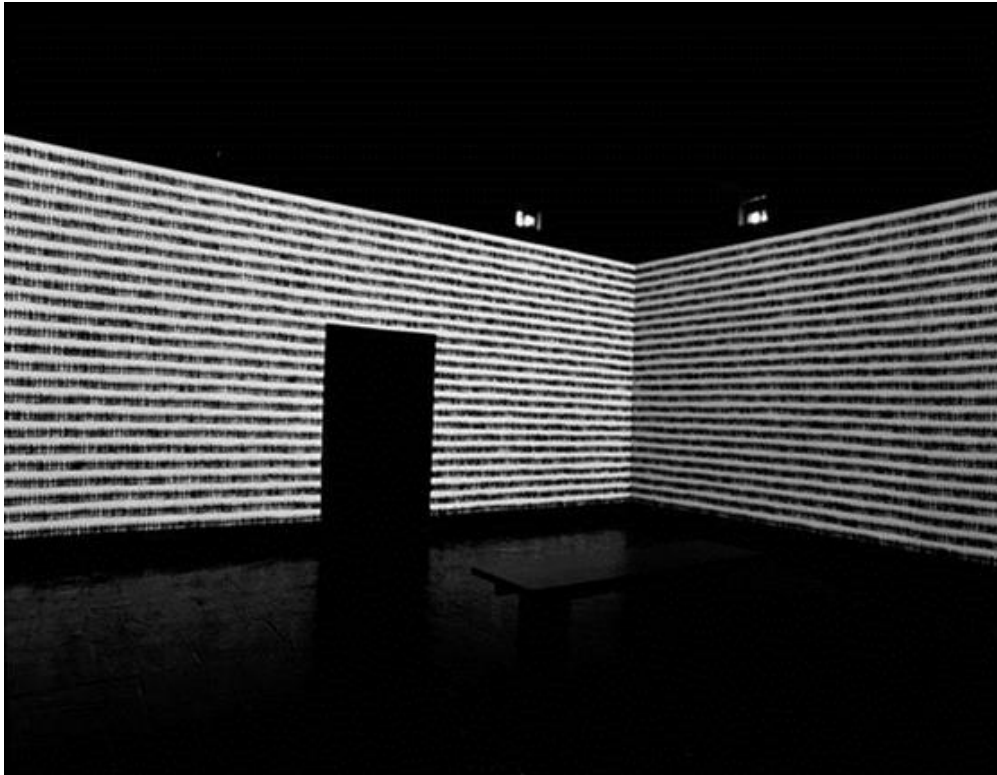


Fig. 54 Rovner, Michal (2002) *Time Left*, [Video projection], courtesy of the artist, the DHC Art Foundation, Montreal and PaceWildenstein, New York.  
At: <http://mag.magentafoundation.org/2/reviews/particles-of-reality> (Accessed on 16.02.16).

By accumulating the crafted or found pieces to raise the aesthetic tension, this aesthetic strategy of accumulation and accretion is also deployed in my projects as an artistic response to Taylorised serial iteration, and a visual parody of the capitalist manipulation and control of the nonhuman others.<sup>5</sup> In my practice, as a systematic act of simulation, the aesthetic matrix of *stuplimity* is merged into the conceptual paradigms of factory farming and the Panopticon, which are constructed by banner-like paintings as purposefully

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<sup>5</sup> Taylorism referring to a system of scientific management to improve economic efficiency is utilised in modern mass-production including the meat industry to repetitively churn out a large amount of products at a high speed.

repeated forms. Also, the viewer, as an integral part of the work, is expected to be implicated in these visual discourses or to fill the gap of narrative. For example, in the second project, the concatenation of the pictorial units is structured to simulate the ocular and political paradigm of the Panopticon. The dialectical relationship of the *stuplime* between excitation and fatigue is evoked correspondingly by the immersive, dramatized panoptic enterprise and the repetitive, cell-like components with their stern geometric formation. The logic of the repetition, agglomeration, and agglutination of the finite ‘bits and scraps’ directly addresses the magnitude of the controlling, invasive human gaze and the mass-production of animal commodities in factory farming and is, therefore, the result of a purposefully constructed strategy of aesthetic and political engagements.

In this work, by combining the Chinese aesthetic tradition of folding screen and monochrome ink painting with the *stuplime* aesthetics, this structural logic provides a cunning means for addressing my concern with situating the question of violence against animals, especially in factory farming, in a vast context of the globalised capitalist production verging on the contradictory senses of shock and awe. Interwoven in a multitude of small Petri-dish-like images are the entwined imperatives and events enabled by global capitalism such as industrial farming, cash crop production (e.g., soy), deforestation, species extinction, and climate change. By drawing on the seemingly disparate discourses, my intention is to highlight the delicacy and complexity of this question with a holistic and planetary consciousness. This large-scale work also suggests the unimaginable scale of animal suffering (both wild and domestic animals) culminating in global capitalism.

Artistically concealed in this structural format, these dystopic episodes are enmeshed with the depicted vignettes of our daily routine, waiting for viewers themselves to examine the

re-veiled forms and figures and contemplate the dialectic between the visible and the invisible. This nuanced exposure can be read as my negotiation between Boltanski's abstaining from the images of victim and atrocity and Coe's explicit exposure of torture and violence, in order to achieve a poetic balance and facilitate the engagement from the viewer. Also, corresponding with the title, this paradigm mirrors both the logic of concealment and the process of aesthetic appreciation and investigation into the invisibility of animal suffering.

### **Suitable for Vegetarians**

Embedded in this *stuplime* aesthetics, this work juxtaposes the practice of vegetarianism with that of animal suffering in the context of global capitalist production, touching on the troubling relationships between human consumption and the suffering of nature and animals, between species extinction and factory farming. My creative impulse is mobilised by a sense of an invisible, complex network of the globalised production, a sense of interconnectivity between a human consumer and the remote areas producing his/her food, with which they mutually shape each other.

For example, with the ever-increasing demand for meat, egg, and dairy products in the West and in China, each year both China and European countries import vast amounts of soy from South America to be used as animal feed to feed the factory-farmed pigs, poultry, and cattle. The cheap Brazilian soy plays a pivotal role in fuelling the industrialised farming in China and Europe. In 2003, an area of the Amazon rainforest the size of Belgium was cleared to grow monocrops, especially soybeans (Sage, 2011: 73). The expansion of soy production in South America is thus inextricably connected with a rapid escalation of both deforestation and factory farming.

The unprecedented scale of soy production and animal exploitation should be understood in a context of the delocalised food production associated with globalisation. As a natural extension of modernity, globalisation has facilitated increasing violence against farm and wild animals and people in the Global South, threatening animal welfare, human, and global health. This phenomenon asserts Derrida's description of globalisation as 'more inegalitarian and violent than ever' (Derrida, 2005: 155). In the case of the explosive expansion of soy, transnational corporations producing soy have caused enormous social and ecological effects: the conversion of rainforest into monocrops leads to deforestation and the loss of biodiversity; the cheap soy induces the worldwide increase in factory farming; the expropriation of land displaces small farmers and indigenous people; the overuse of herbicide and pesticide has deleterious effects on local environments and people; the protein-rich feed, also with the residue of pesticide, causes animal and human health problems; and the workers in this industry are exploited as well.

What further complicates the problem is that the imported soy is not only used for feeding cows and chickens to produce milk and eggs labelled as vegetarian food, but also for direct processing into many vegetarian and vegan foods, such as yoghurt or soy milk. Thus, vegetarian and vegan diets may be connected with either direct or indirect consumption of soy that has caused the devastation of rainforests. The seemingly animal/planet-friendly food implied by the label *suitable for vegetarians* communicates a sense of irony. With a Derridean approach, Calarco writes, 'there is simply no way of nourishing oneself in advanced, industrial countries that does not involve harm to animal life (and human life, as well) in direct and indirect forms' (Calarco, 2008: 134). That is, although vegetarianism (and veganism) undercuts the mainstream practices and social norms, and although most soy is used to produce meat and most nutrition is lost during this inefficient conversion, we also need to pay vigilant attention to the practices and ways in which we engage or are, in

most cases, unwittingly complicit in violence against environment, wild animals, and people, most likely, in the Global South. That is, vegetarianism is far from an ethical ideal if the exploitive and oppressive capitalist system remains unchallenged.

Critically reflecting on vegetarianism, this work articulates the invisibility of the correlations between factory farming, monoculture (soy production), deforestation, species extinction, and social injustices. Through the lens of ‘Petri-dish’ paintings, I confront the viewer with a conjunction of apparently disconnected vignettes, but in actuality a relational matrix. These images make the fact visible that through the simple act of eating, our corporeal bodies are intimately bound up with this globalised world, especially the endangered biome on the opposite of the globe. Indeed, extinction events as an equivalent of the slaughter events of industrial farming are not distant from our consumers, though equally invisible, with species even undiscovered and unnamed before they extinct.



Fig. 55 Jin, Lipeng (2015-16) *Suitable for Vegetarians* (Detail) [Polyester habutai, ink, wood, poultry feathers, and yellow light], 3 six-panel folding screens, each panel 202 × 65 cm. Collection of the artist.

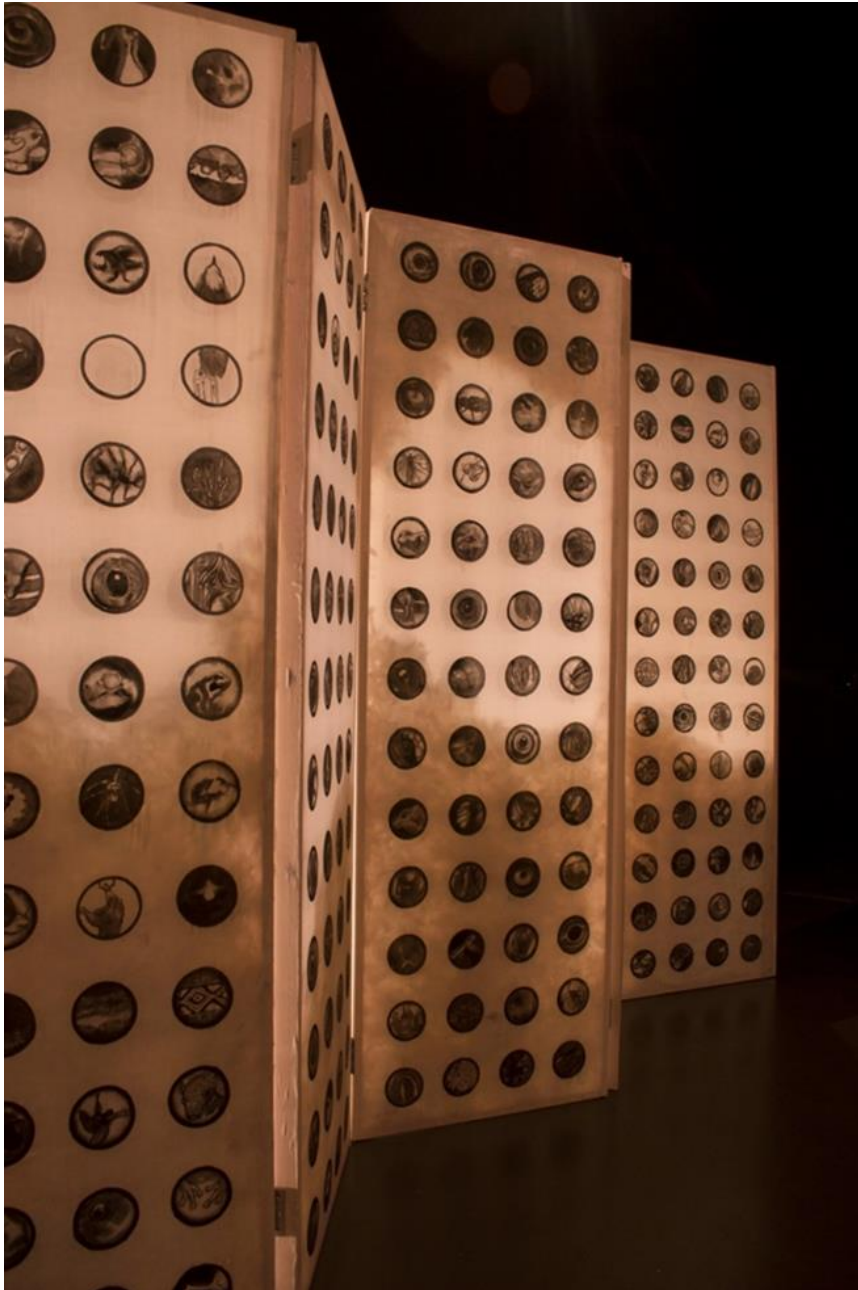


Fig. 56 Jin, Lipeng (2015-16) *Suitable for Vegetarians*, [Polyester habutai, ink, wood, poultry feathers, and yellow light], 3 six-panel folding screens, each panel 202 × 65 cm. Collection of the artist.

Concerning extinction events, most of the images refer to wild animals and plants in the Amazon (with the richest biodiversity) and the Cerrado savanna where soy cultivation is displacing these animals' habitats at an alarming rate in recent decades and creating a biologically impoverished world (Fig. 55-6). With a wide range of depictions of different species, this problem of 'impoverishment' is linked with the Daoist environmental ethics. The Daoist concept of *wu* refers to the myriad transient existences with a variety of

different forms (such as things, matters, and creatures) generated by the invisible, eternal, creative force of *dao*. According to Daoism, ‘Affluence means each *wu* that is maintained. When each *wu* is maintained, heaven regards it as rich’ (Wang, 1960: 30). The Daoist view understands affluence as ‘the largest number of species and individuals that an ecosystem can support’, that is, ‘the state of climax community’ (Chen & Schonfeld, 2013: 69). In this light, I argue that the continued extinction of thousands of species per year (one species becomes extinct every half-hour) that is induced by anthropogenic causes has been impoverishing this planet, with both the irredeemable loss of innumerable individual lives and also valuable genetic information.

The asymmetry of human-animal relation in that such richness in biodiversity is extremely vulnerable to human technological advancements and global capitalist encroachments. Inspired by a Derridean approach of recognising the vulnerability or passivity of the nonhuman others that enables our empathy and responsibility, my work seeks to foreground this ethical dimension of vulnerability through the use of delicate materials and techniques and through the depictions of the indigenous flora and fauna.

The subtle aura of the ink paintings exudes an ineffable and mysterious sense of life that seems to refuse to be reduced or objectified as unfeeling, inert objects. With close-up, blurry, or semi-abstract images that are sometimes hard to decipher, it is an act of remystifying life that, with its own meaning, mystery, and dynamism, may trigger our respect, awe, and aesthetic appreciation; an act of questioning the objectifying Cartesian gaze cast on nature and animals that entails manipulation and exploitation.

By incorporating insects, snails, and spiders into my iconographic concern, this strategy contests Peter Singer’s ethical approach based on sentience as a criterion of moral considerability. Fostering the richness and harmony of this world, Daoism shows its

compassion and reverence towards not just mammals and birds, but also insects, worms, plants, mountains, and rivers, chiming with the aforementioned notion of ‘universal consideration’ proposed by Calarco. If we conceive animals in terms of sentience and subjectivity in trying to discern the ‘sameness’ or ‘likeness’ from a nonhuman other, it is still an anthropocentric attitude that, therefore, forges an ethical hierarchy that includes certain animals and at the same time excludes the majority of animals.

The images of snake or spider also bear my concern with the question of charisma species that feature in human culture (and science). Generally, we tend to establish sympathetic link with animals with charismatic appeal such as elephants, giraffes, polar bears, or penguins. While animals like snakes or insects are unfortunately helpless to arouse our sympathy, the societal bias on the unfamiliar and uncharismatic animals reflects the anthropocentric representation of nature. With deep caring and compassion, however, the Daoist egalitarian attitude encourages gentleness and ethical attentiveness to the needs of all lives (Kemmerer, 2009: 459). Thus, this holistic, relational vision reckons with all nonhumans species, the domestic and the wild, the charismatic and the unglamorous, the named and the unnamed, the advanced and the primitive, megafauna or microfauna, in order to achieve a harmonious unity between nature, animals, and humans.

By establishing the connection between the suffering of farm and wild animals, and between the ethical event of eating and the survival of exotic species in seemingly remote locations, this work seeks to sensitise viewers to the question of the interconnectivity and relationality between their bodies and the external world. As vegetarians also live in a system of domination and exploitation, a constant ethical vigilance in relation to ‘what we eat’ or a Derridean concern with how to ‘eat well’ (Derrida, 1991) is always pertinent to how we relate ourselves to nature and nonhuman others. Following Derrida, also with



Nicole Shukin, the shared vulnerability of humans with nonhuman others contains the radical potential of changing our thinking and extending the ‘absolute hospitality’ to other species (Derrida, 2008, 28, 37; Shukin, 2009: 223). The interrelated, invisible dystopias and the delicate lives that I delineate provoke the imperative of how to eat on this increasingly impoverished planet, with respect and responsibility.

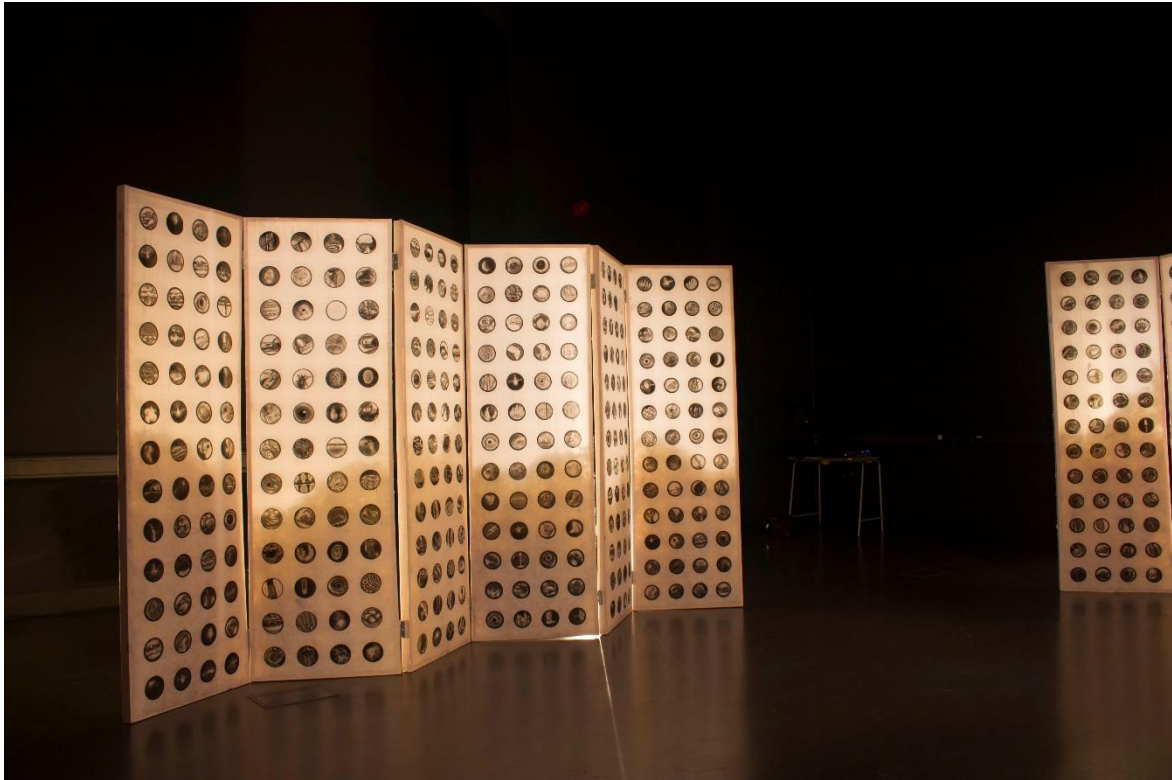


Fig. 57 Jin, Lipeng (2015-16) *The Bird of Immortality*, [Polyester habutai, ink, wood, poultry feathers, and yellow light], six-panel folding screen, 202 × 65 cm. Collection of the artist.

### **The Bird of Immortality**

Linking the fates of two bird species together, factory-farmed chickens and the endangered red-crowned cranes, *The Bird of Immortality* (Fig. 57) addresses the continuous suffering of chickens, species extinction, and misguided animal representation. Despite the fact that an individual chicken’s life has been reduced to incredible shortness, chickens are relentlessly rendered to be reborn and mass-produced in factory farming. Thus, such a

species (*Gallus gallus domesticus*) seems unable to die out, thus even verging on a sense of immortality.

The immortal aura shrouded on these birds betokens to them, of course, not a blissful scenario, but eternal plight. At stake here is the striking fact that, as Annie Potts puts it, ‘though they exist in the billions, laying hens and broiler (or meat) chicks are the breeds of *Gallus* least on show; that is, until they appear on supermarket shelves or in cans of pet food’ (Potts, 2009: 29). Considering this huge contrast ‘between the most numerous and the most hidden’ (Probyn-Rapsey, 2013: 244), this work seeks to elicit a critical reflection on the exile of farm animals out of public vision and thus into the moral margin. The ‘industrial, mechanical, chemical, hormonal, and genetic violence’ inflicted on these countless exiled animals (Derrida, 2008: 26), the silenced and hidden violence, is the thematic concern of this work. Yet the poetics of artistic presentation, with the ‘Petri-dish’ format, and with materials and techniques I work with, may engage the viewer through the act of discerning the clandestine exploitation to which animals are subjected. Merged with my primary experience with the animal, the online images of animal suffering, their deplorable conditions, and human technological power, function as a visual source for my paintings to evoke animals’ radical passivity and incapacity to avoid suffering.

In this work, the interspersed images of the flecks of light in darkness suggest the artificial environment at factory farm such as the practice of denying chickens’ exposure to natural light. Devoid of the experiences of dusk and dawn, this artificial control and manipulation of animal life not only represent ‘a reduced mechanised life for animals, but also a diminished spiritual and moral life for humans’ (Linzey et al., 2013: 377). In this regard, these images of artificial light imply the spiritual and moral impoverishment in modernity, an impoverishment that reinforces the exploitation of nature and animals.

Though hidden among a multitude of images, the viewer may find the images of chickens with disfigured appearance. Equally disturbing, these images refer to the denaturing practice of cauterising birds' beaks, called *debeaking*, to avoid cannibalism (picking). Birds are mutilated without anaesthesia, on the assumption that they are mere replaceable machines, commodities, and things. Adding more ingredients of dark humour, the images of ear-mouse (though a fake case of generic engineering), along with the bloated roast chickens, represents unchecked scientific violence against animals.

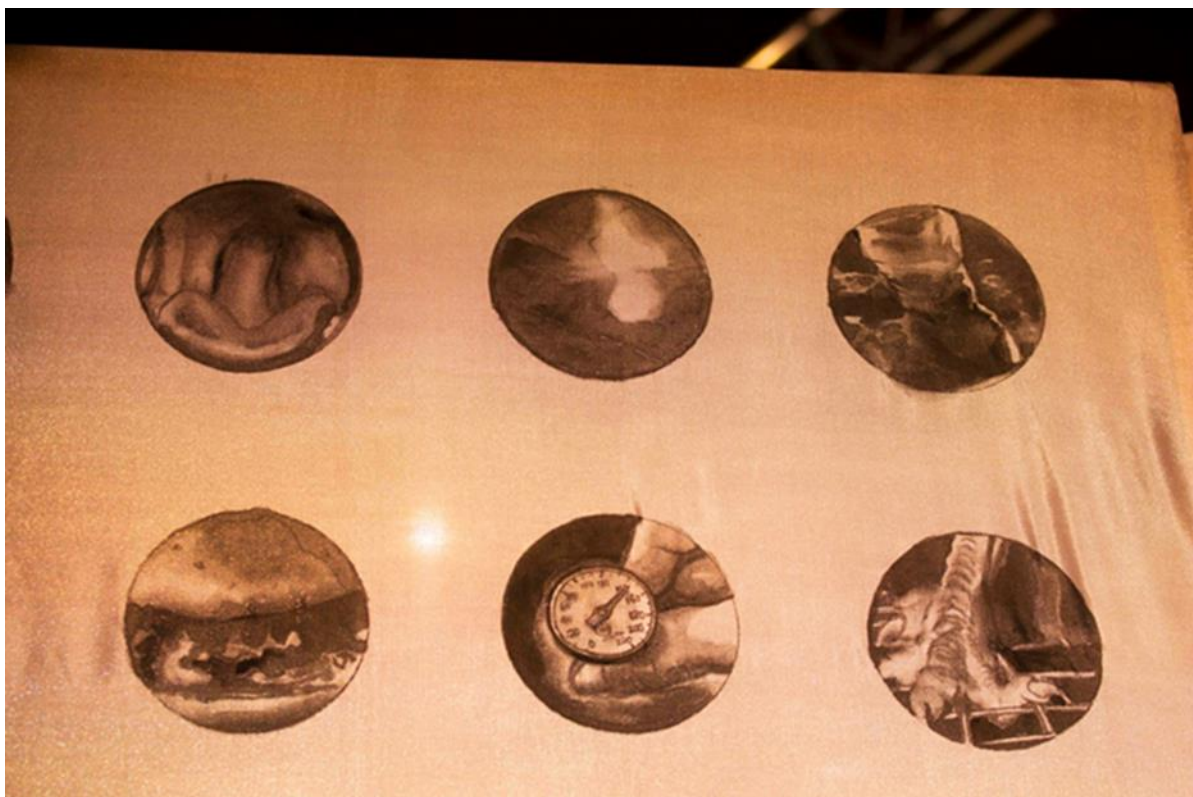


Fig. 58 Jin, Lipeng (2015-16) *The Bird of Immortality* (Detail), [Polyester habutai, ink, wood, poultry feathers, and yellow light], six-panel folding screen, 202 × 65 cm. Collection of the artist.

Echoing Judy Chicago's concern with the gap between ethical framework and unbridled technology, this project also suggests that the exponential growth of technology has rarely been seen through the lens of ethics, leading to the violence of industrialised violation of both humans and nonhumans. In this light, I put an image of an astronaut's foot stepping on the lunar surface above that of a cramped laying hen's foot (Fig. 58). The close-ups of

their legs and feet indicate their depleted bones and deformities caused by genetic manipulation of putting so much weight on their collapsing bodies.

In addition, the portrayals of the process of disposing newly hatched baby chicks—as unwanted ‘by-products’ of the egg industry, tossed, grinded, gassed, or suffocating in trash bags—also creep into the narrative of their dire situation, suggesting an ethical dilemma that the killing of male chicks seems unavoidable even in the production of free-ranged eggs.

The plight of chickens is also manifested by depictions dealing with the worldwide culling of birds during the outbreak of the avian flu epidemic, with chickens stuffed in sacks, buried alive, or burnt alive. Yet, ‘culling’ that means, according to the Oxford dictionary, to ‘reduce the population of (a wild animal) by selective slaughter’ is not a correct word for describing the en masse slaughter of both infected and uninfected birds. Also, news media generally focus on the number of human deaths and economic damage, yet not questioning the intensive confinements of the birds’ living condition, which provides a hotbed for the mutation and spreading of virus, and more importantly, rendering the suffering of innumerable individual animals as inconsequential and morally invisible.

Yet the narration of their predicaments is sometimes punctuated with depictions of our gastronomical pleasure, chicken drumsticks or nuggets, for example, suggesting their machine-like anonymity imposed by modern production. More pointedly, these images create the polarity between the invisibility of animal suffering and the *hypervisibility* of chickens either presented or represented as meat everywhere in our daily lives, widening the gap between a human consumer and the animal consumed.

Not only facilitating the correlated oppositions between suffering and pleasure, between invisibility and insensitivity, the institutional powers also create a substantial imbalance

between the ‘over-flourishing’ state of chickens and the near-extinct situation of wild species. For example, ‘The biomass of Great Britain’s 800 million chickens is now over 100 times greater than the total biomass of Britain’s wild birds’ (Halley, 2015: 152). Specifically, it is the notion of immortality that conflates the overpopulation of certain species such as chickens multiplied for human consumption and its opposite, the ‘depopulation’ of many wild species, such as the red-crowned cranes, that are also depicted in this work.



Fig. 59 Jin, Lipeng (2015-16) *The Bird of Immortality* (Detail), [Polyester habutai, ink, wood, poultry feathers, and yellow light], six-panel folding screen, 202 × 65 cm. Collection of the artist.

Since the red-crowned crane can live up to 40 years in the wild, it is a traditional symbol of longevity, immortality, and good fortune, permeating Oriental cultures such as China, Japan, and Korea. Its high visibility is represented in numerous paintings, sculptures, and crafts populating both history and reality. Loaded with cultural references and affective functions, the red-crowned crane has also been used by Japan Airlines as its corporate crest



for over half a century to, virtually and mimetically, if not viscerally, reproduce capital. Thus, the longevity myth still lives on in East Asia, coupled with other auspicious messages such as prosperity and happiness. Yet, a cruel irony consists in its invisibility: due to ever-increasing habitat loss, only around 2,000 birds live in north-east Asia, in contrast with its *hypervisibility* in Oriental cultures, a situation rendering the title of this bird—‘the crane of immortality’—as somewhat of a dark humour (Fig. 59-60).



Fig. 60 Jin, Lipeng (2015-16) *The Bird of Immortality* (Detail), [Polyester habutai, ink, wood, poultry feathers, and yellow light], six-panel folding screen, 202 × 65 cm. Collection of the artist.

Yet, considering the prevailing deceiving representation of chicken’s identity as mere meat, the contrast between the socially visible and invisible is more evident in the situation of chickens. Moreover, not only their suffering as a group is hidden from public purview but also the suffering of an individual animal is rendered disappeared by programmatic, institutional regimes. This hidden, abstracted, deindividualised suffering of a singular animal is of great import in addressing the invisibility of animal suffering.



Fig. 61 Jin, Lipeng (2015) Feathers inside a panel (Experiment)

## **Whiteness**

The negation of the specificity and singularity of the animal—a parallel logic also operating in human genocidal regimes—is crucial in understanding the question of animal suffering. It is the living, unique singularity of the animal other, instead of generic, abstract rules and principles, that functions as a concrete call commanding our responsibility and respect towards the other. In this work, the interplay between the white feathers stuffed inside the panels and the images of the individual animals conveys the poignancy of the vulnerable singularity of the animal extinguished in standardised production in factory farming—including the abstract, impersonal aggregates that incarcerated them and, more pointedly, the selection of the specific, biological attributes (Fig. 61-2).

My concern with the de-individualising and distancing mechanism of industrial farming is informed by Fiona Probyn-Rapsey's notion of 'whiteness'. Her epiphany derives from a white feather stuck on her windscreen wiper. Then she realised that the feathers came from a truck stop in a traffic jam carrying hundreds of white chickens crammed in stacked crates. In further examining the crouched chickens, what struck her was a sense of 'uniformity', that is, these white birds are 'in a mass of undifferentiated state', stacked and standardised, '*visible but also invisibilised at the same time*' (Probyn-Rapsey, 2013: 239-40). This invisibility of an individual animal with which this work is concerned is entailed by the mode of standardisation and rationalisation of modern production.

The quality of whiteness fostered by industrial agriculture is construed as exceptional and desirable. In Giorgio Agamben's term, exceptional state is designated by sovereign power to *bare life* (as heretofore discussed) as 'that which may be killed and yet not sacrificed' (Agamben, 1998: 8). Following Agamben, as Nicole Shukin argues, such a state of exception—designated certain groups of humans to the concentration camp—'finds its zoopolitical supplement in Derrida's theorization of the "noncriminal putting to death"', that is, 'a related state of exception whose paradigmatic scenario is arguably the modern industrial slaughterhouse' (Shukin, 2009: 10). Conceiving the animal as 'owing its life to us' and, thus, as replaceable material (Probyn-Rapsey, 2013: 241), the trait of whiteness suits the need of standardisation in both industrial farm and scientific lab with which it is easier to conceal an individual animal, be it chicken, mouse, or rabbit, and render it invisible, dooming the animal to the state of the exceptional and thus perpetual state of captivity and suffering. Moreover, a specific animal is further concealed by a Fordist paradigm of infinitely multiplying their standardised, machine-like bodies insofar as their overpopulation reaches a state of 'their whiteness in the billions' (ibid., 242). Their killability is thus tied up with their invisibility facilitated by multiplication and uniformity.



Once a singular life is rendered disappeared, it is hard to generate a trace of ethical contemplation.

Thus, the whiteness that conceals the animal echoes the title and theme of this work. This strategy foregrounds the fact that not only the process of industrial killing animals has been rendered invisible because of spatial distance and packaging, but also that of breeding, fattening, confining, and slaughtering an *individual* animal is enabled at least partly by the very attribute of whiteness. Yet, whiteness can also be appreciated in this work in terms of its aesthetic quality, ethereal and exquisite, registered in both the sculptural presence of the mass of snowy feathers and the silvery fabric as painting support. On the other hand, with the critical analysis of whiteness, an eerie sense could be evoked by whiteness associated with death and exception in that the standardised animal machines are destined to a state of ‘living’ death, a relentless cycle of birth, suffering, and death.

In addition, the employment of white feathers offers a deconstruction of traditional Chinese aesthetics. If viewed at distance, the mass of white feathers seems to evoke ethereal, undulating mountains in Chinese landscape painting. Located inside the space of the panels, the silhouetted forms conveyed by the feathers are not solid and fixed; they may change to different forms when exhibited next time. This changeability of form carries the undertone of traditional Chinese cosmology in which everything in the universe (such as mountains, clouds, and water) is in a state of constant flux and transformation. Yet, the use of animal material seems to indicate that this worldview has been supplanted by a superficial ideology of consumerism and material exploitation, a contemporary sublimity of feeding ‘a continuous stream of animal onto the moving tracks of capital’ (Shukin, 2009: 129).

What further complicates the meaning of this work is that white feathers also symbolise peace, purity, and cowardice, bringing together more ambiguities and ambivalences in reading this work. Therefore, a haunting paradox of both the present and the absent, of the grotesque and the delicate, of the negative and the positive, of concealing and revealing, is encoded in this whiteness to form a complex tension that may capture the viewer's imagination.

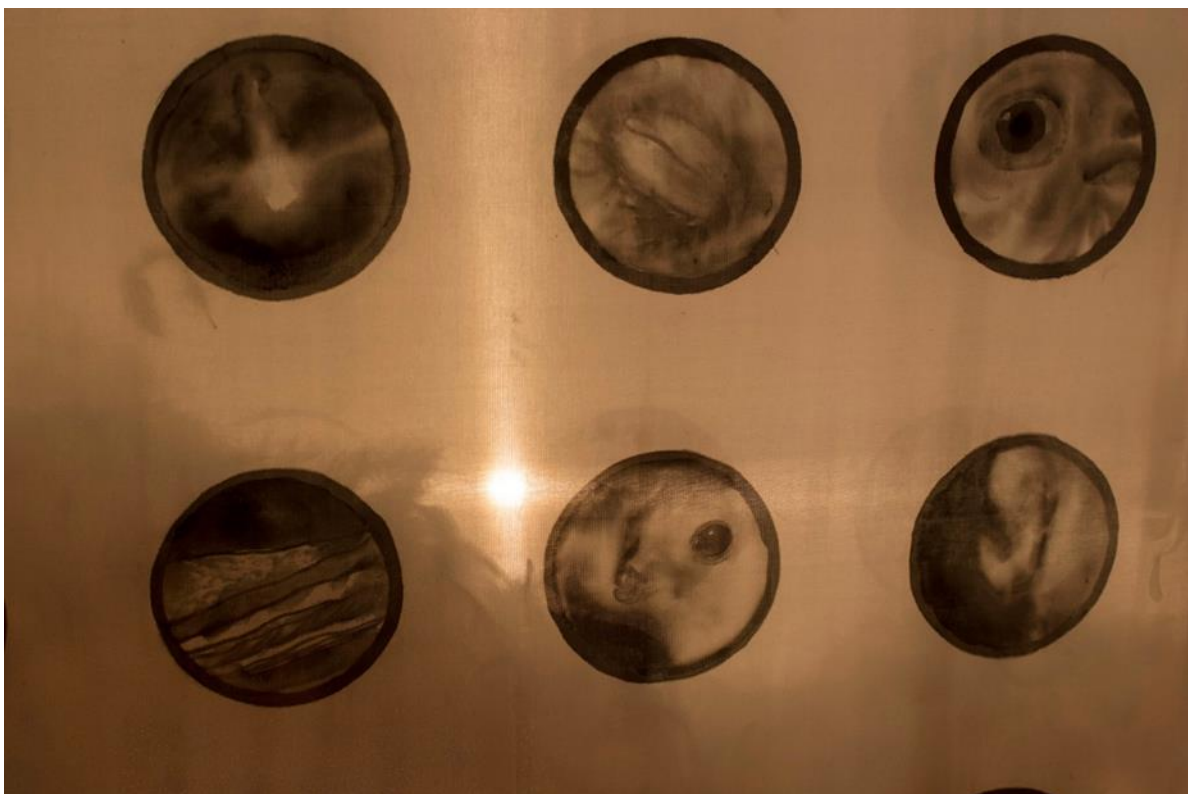


Fig. 62 Jin, Lipeng (2015-16) *The Bird of Immortality* (Detail), [Polyester habutai, ink, wood, poultry feathers, and yellow light], six-panel folding screen, 202 × 65 cm. Collection of the artist.

However, in this work, my intention is not simply to stage a simulacrum, a parody of this industrialised destruction of individual lives. That is, the 'Petri-dish' images connoting factory farming offer the viewer some clues to contemplate the invisibility of the suffering of an individual animal. In a process of slowly unfolding, the specific animal face and gaze, speaking of the irreducible singularity and passivity of the animal, is intended to

disrupt the de-individualising process of modern animal subjugation and counteract humanist associations and narratives, eliciting our ethical responses to the event of animal suffering.

### **Beyond the Visual**

Alongside the visual and conceptual factors, the olfactory presence of feathers adds more complexities in reading this work. The whiff of feathers, though ephemeral, was not indiscernible at the beginning of the exhibition, especially when I reminded the viewer of it; and the smell of feathers was stronger while I worked with the feathers in my studio. Likewise, the presence of animal scent can also be found in some contemporary artists' works, Andy Goldsworthy's *Sheep Paintings* (1997-98), for example. Relying on the primary medium of chance, he placed a circular mineral block on each blank canvas laid on filed. When the sheep came to feed from the mineral, the paintings were then 'painted' by the mud and the faeces and urine of sheep with a white circle left by the removal of the mineral block (Goldsworthy, 2007: 153). The odour of the resultant paintings seems to remind the viewer of the social and political implications of sheep on human history.

The sense of smell, according to Adorno and Horkheimer, is the 'most animal' of the senses: 'Of all the senses the act of smelling, which is attracted without objectifying, reveals most sensuously the urge to lose oneself in identification with the Other' (Adorno and Horkheimer, 2002: 151). Hence, the smell in this work registers animals' otherness and has a potential of shattering stable identities and transgressing boundaries.

Yet the mild, ephemeral olfactory element also recounts the conundrum of this research, the invisibility of animal suffering. Considering the intended poetic coherence between

paintings and feathers, the feathers used here are not those that I collected from a chicken processing plant where I was not permitted entrance. The collected feathers were so damaged and emitted a vile smell, even if having been washed many times in my studio (with chicken guts and even feet picked out of the feathers). Indeed, the act of washing and smelling the feathers is my most visceral and abhorrent experience with animals, which indicates the un-representable, unspeakable nature of the concealed animal death. Linked with the pivotal concern of this work, the concealment and distance of violence against animals, the repugnant smell in which I viscerally engaged registers the real suffering of animals from which the abstract terms such as rights or welfare seem detached.

Meanwhile, my failure to get into the slaughterhouse which dissimulates the foul smell and violence attests to the inaccessibility of violence to the public. To borrow Zygmunt Bauman's words, 'the course of civilising process' is characterised by 'the redeployment of violence', and the redistribution of access to violence' (Bauman, 1989: 97). 'Enclosed in segregated and isolated territories', violence in the age of modernity is 'on the whole inaccessible to ordinary members of society' (ibid.). Moreover, the control and concealment of violence also correspond with the regulation of foul smell during the rise of modernity. As Bauman argues, 'Modernity declared war on smells. Scents has no room in the shiny temple of the perfect order modernity set out to erect' (Bauman, 1993: 24). The contrast of the fetid smell of the collected feathers with the fragmented animals destined as food enabled me to better understand the relationship between the extinguishment of empathy and the neutrality of violence as a result of sequestering the grisly business of slaughter. This olfactory element provokes questions about the dialectics between civility and barbarity, and between visibility and invisibility, and urge

me to ponder how modernity bereft us of empathy and reverence towards other beings through the concealment of violence.

Yet, facing the difficulty of presentation, the olfactory element in my research also speaks of my dilemma and compromise, and of the painful negotiation between poetic quality and a painful reality. Although I may choose the direct presentation or photographic representation of the materials deriving from the real suffering animals in my future works, the feathers used in my current works were purchased on-line which were undamaged and whose smell is mild and much less obtrusive. Since I am not sure if they are ethically sourced, however, I do feel a moral unease in having used these feathers in my works. Nevertheless, rather than being used as upholstery and conceptually invisibilised in our daily lives as they are meant to be, they are intended to foreground animals' otherness and plight in conjunction with the depicted images of animal suffering.

Alongside the olfactory register, I want to go further to point to the limits and constraints of the visuality of my works by examining the animal substance involved in the Chinese art materials I use. After having finished this work, I have realised that my brushes are made from animal hair (goats and pigs) and the ink contains a small amount of gelatin which is meant to make the ink more durable—although I just used a few brushes and a small amount of ink. Yet my pivotal concern is not with how much violence and suffering occurs during the production of ink or brush, but with the clandestine drama of the capitalist rendering of animal life in which all of us are unwittingly *engaged*.

In her book *Animal Capital*, Nicole Shukin has unravelled the 'double entendre of rendering', which both connotes imitation and representation (painterly, musical, linguistic, filmic, or other media) and denotes 'the industrial boiling down and recycling of animal remains' (Shukin, 2009: 20). She maintains that the capitalist system has created a

fusion of the biological capital of species and symbolic capital of animal sign. More relevant to my concern, she uncovers the covert geopolitical history of gelatin production within the Kodak company that transformed animal remains sourced from different parts of the world into gelatin, the homogenous, amorphous substances used for filmic emulsion (ibid., 112). This animal protein infused with industrial violence against animals provided filmic and photographic stocks a magic possibility of mimetically *capturing* animal life (ibid., 108).

Building on Shukin's formulation, Giovanni Aloï' initiates a re-conception of art historical discourse on animal materiality from a post-anthropocentric perspective. As he notes, a substantial amount of animal substances was involved in the making of pigments and glue in classical paintings, and conventional art history has rendered this discourse of animal death *invisible* (Aloï, 2015: 13-4). He argues that we ought to pay equal attention to the animal death in contemporary art as to that concealed in classical paintings (ibid.).

In this light, this tiny amount of animal ingredient (gelatin) involved in my artistic production, the mimetic act of rendering animal images, also prompts me to think about the intersection between representation and materiality. Gelatin—alongside other by-products of the meat industry such as glue, glycerine, bone meal, and soap—'is a protein extracted from the skin, bones, and connective tissues of cattle, sheep, and pigs' (ibid., 74; 104). Though seemingly insignificant in my practice, this invisible ingredient, widely used in food, pharmaceutical, photography, print, and paper industries, indexes the pathos of animal suffering and our prevalent alienation from animals. It resonates, however, not the symbolic animals that encourage consumptive hubristic gaze, but with the depicted dystopic images of cruelty and violence that demand ethical responses from the viewer.

By teasing out the animal substance involved in my paintings, I want to point to the inherent convolutions of my practice and the uncanny invisibility of animal suffering which my visual works and the representational register cannot fully address. Informed by a materialist and deconstructive consciousness, these boundaries and constraints of representation mean that my practice can never obtain ‘alternative ethical seal of approval’ (Wood, 1999: 32), and that animals’ death and their subjugated alterity, concealed in the broadest social economic context, demands our unlimited responsibility.

## IV - Conclusion

Addressing the question of animal suffering, my critical inquiry examines the human-animal dualism that underlies animals' continued trauma (and human social injustice) and investigates the logic of distancing and concealing animals' suffering operating through modern disciplinary systems such as agribusiness and scientific laboratories. Reflecting on the scale and implications of this problem, I want to ask why we need to see this painful subject through the lens of art. Many scholars have acknowledged that the limits of language, or philosophical language, may fail to convey the richness of the world (Georges Bataille) (Calarco, 2008: 143), and may thus fail to do justice to the question of animal suffering. In her essay *The Difficulty of Reality and the Difficulty of Philosophy*, Cora Diamond has argued, 'Philosophy characteristically misrepresents both our own reality and that of others, in particular those "others" who are animals' (Diamond, 2008: 57). For her, the clinical analysis and detached reasoning of philosophy carry a risk of deflecting our attention from the real suffering of the other, from what should be evident and immediate—an embodied reality. Disillusioned with philosophical argumentation regarding the difficulty of reality, she trusts the power of poetry, rather than philosophy, for us to gain a sense of 'what it is to be a living animal' (ibid., 53). Philosophy, as she implies, is 'meant to settle' things (Diamond, 2008: 56; Baker, 2013: 101), while poetry and art create a disquieting and disruptive sense to provoke thinking.

In a similar vein, as Derrida muses on the limits of philosophy for considering the lives of animals, that is, 'For thinking concerning the animal, if there is such a thing, derives from poetry. There you have a thesis: it is what philosophy has, essentially, had to deprive itself. It is the difference of philosophical knowledge and poetic thinking' (Derrida, 2008: 7). The aesthetic or poetic thinking resides in the realm of 'imagination, fantasy and empathy'



which may trigger ethical thoughts and openness to the nonhuman others (Amberson & Past, 2014: 7). This stance is therefore contradictory to traditional Western dualistic formulation established on the logic of mastery and utilisation. Thus, faced with such difficulties, likewise, my artistic intervention also does not intend to arrive at a settled position; conversely, the power of contemporary art, more often than not, is located in its temerity to transgress conventional rules, and its tendency towards the unsettling and the disturbing, though carrying a risk of misreading. Yet, this openness and unknowingness of art do not justify violence (at least physical violence) against animals imposed by contemporary practitioners, a practice complicit in dominant anthropocentric thinking about animals in mere instrumental or metaphorical terms, as importantly discussed herein. It is also noteworthy that although poetic or aesthetic registers may counterbalance the weakness of rationality and language of philosophy, which may not do justice to the suffering of animals, philosophy still holds its relevance in reaching an ethical understanding that guides my artistic imagination and meditation on the question of animal suffering. In respect of disciplinary perspectives addressing the question of the animal, Cary Wolfe notes,

It is only in and through our disciplinary specificity that we have something specific and irreplaceable to contribute to ‘this question of the animal’ that has recently captured the attention of so many different discipline: not something accurate to contribute, but something specific. (2010: 115)

While it is also true within the sphere of contemporary art, acknowledging the strength and weakness of each medium is also required to address my research questions. With the advantages of multi-sensorial experience and structural arrangements, mixed-media installation works can critically and poetically reflect my concerns with the invisibility of animal suffering and the anthropocentric ways of thinking about animals so as to affect the

viewer emotionally, aesthetically, and viscerally in configuring new ways of human-animal dependency.

To position this difficult question in the context of contemporary art that I consider as more open to our reading—as different from the activists’ strategies used in animal rights campaigns—is to seek a range of formal and conceptual devices to shape the ambiguity of art. My main interests as an artist is to complicate the problem of violence against animals, due to its delicacy and complexity, not only confronting or interrupting the viewer’s expectations conditioned by our social, cultural constructions of the animal as food, prop, or metaphor, but also challenging even vegetarianism or veganism—if this practice failed to connect itself to a vast social, economic, and ecological framework. Also, this relational approach should be negotiated with the openness and depth of art as an intellectual and aesthetic venture, with uncertainties and precariousness, with potential risks and failures. In order to diffuse the human-animal divide poetically, the mixed-media installations I deploy provide a variety of means to stimulate the embodied sensorium of the viewer—exploiting the transcendent possibilities of paintings, fabrics, feathers, and lights, and by coalescing these different elements into a new aesthetic form inhabiting in the physical fabric of the specific spaces. With spatial planning and mapping, the elaborate construction and systematic arrangements of painting units are infused with the conceptual notions of, for example, surveillance and gaze (a Panoptic paradigm in the first project), or invisibility and exposure (the translucent screens in the final one).

Informed by Nancy Spero’s poetic, ephemeral, and theatrical constructions of scroll paintings and prints, and by Kara Walker’s arrangements of silhouetted figures, the unfurling visual epics in my first and second projects attest to my understanding of the dialogical relationship between viewer, work, and space. Determined by the architectural

spaces, the scale of each work conveys the magnitude of animal subjection and exploitation, further amplified by the pictorial device of repetition, the repetitive images of animals' death and suffering.

Forged in the mode of the *post-medium* condition, my painting practice mingles the pictorial, painterly, material, and tactile elements into a visual narrative of hybridity, transgressing the boundary between painting and other media. Devoid of their traditional support, stretcher and frame, in my first and second projects, the floating banner paintings function as the melancholic and mournful draperies of visual elegies, forming all-encompassing environments in which the viewer may think about troubling human-animal relationships.

Within my installations, of significance too is the interplay between paintings, fabrics, and feathers, between the visual, the tactile, and the sculptural. In fact, my iconographic and material concerns are linked together. In relation to the invisibility of animal suffering, the whiteness of feathers corresponds to the depicted individual animal that is subjected to institutional violence. Yet the poetic coherence of delicate, fragile materials in my works is not intended to aestheticize animal suffering but to evoke the animal being within us and to enable ethical attentiveness to the shared, embodied vulnerability with animals. The ethereal, diaphanous fabrics may suggest a possibility that human-animal boundary is permeable, and that hierarchies are collapsible, a possibility that may generate the senses of empathy and relatedness.

Evocative and ephemeral, the sculptural presence of feathers resurrected in my installations implies the absence and presence of real animals and a presentation of temporality, materiality, and vulnerability of a living body, as a visual and haptic counterpoint to the pictorial representation of animals. (More pointedly, the feathers

collected from a pheasant shooting site register the suffering and death of the *real* animals and also, through contact and touch, my *real* engagement with the animals and the intensive feelings of an artist as an embodied being). The animal materials I engage with also manifest Krauss's notion of connecting objects to subject in the *post-medium* condition (Krauss, 2000: 26); that is, the feathers I work with are not disarticulated objects used as humanistic metaphors but are closely tied up with this subject of the suffering and killing of animals.

With the interplay between material and painterly rendering, my pictorial delineation of the pain and finality of the animal is inspired by Coe's, Spero's and Chicago's works through which I strive to navigate between poetry and poignancy, beauty and horror. Vacillating between the realistic and the abstract, the metamorphosis of animal imagery, metaphorically and artistically, communicates the suffering and death, the loss and decay, the manipulation and mortification, and the vulnerability and ephemerality of the nonhuman others, through my painterly rendition of ink and dye to create the transitions between realistic and abstract forms. Also, the painterly rendering of animal death or suffering on the fragile fabrics may be read as an embodied process of honouring the dignity of life and that of recognising both humans' (myself) and animals' flesh and blood vulnerability. Besides, the slowness of the execution and appreciation of the paintings may give the artist and the viewer more time for thoughts and reflection.

With black paint, ink, dye, and white fabrics, the monochrome, black-and-white aesthetics creates a sense of continuity and simplicity throughout my projects and adds a critical, contemplative, and melancholic aura to my works as a way of translating animal suffering into artistic, reflective meditation. Also, blackness as an atmospheric agent that enshrines in my works seems to echo Adorno's statement that 'in the history of art, late works are

the catastrophes' (Adorno, 2002: 567). With all its aesthetic tension, its apocalyptic sense, its sepulchral tone, and its redemptive possibility, the blackness jolts the viewer into a pondering on animals' plight. With respects to whiteness, in the last project, the negative aspects of whiteness that signify the uniformity, standardisation, and the negation of the singularity of animal death and suffering is in stark contrast with the positive factors offered by the aesthetic presence of feathers and fabric and with the symbolic meanings of white feathers, thereby creating subtle ambiguities and associations.

Typical of my practice is also the delicate balance between the fragile materials and a geometric, repetitive aesthetic order, i.e. *stuplimty*. The exploitation of the *stuplime* aesthetic may be understood as a critical reflection on the loss of tradition and spirituality—harmony and reverence towards nature and life, vividly represented in the dominant form of the traditional Chinese paintings of flora and fauna—that is supplanted by a reality of the industrialised, standardised production of animals. Correspondingly, the pictorial representation of animal suffering betrays a sense of protest against the collective indifference and the anthropocentric perception towards animals.

Adding the complexity of narration, the paradigm of *stuplimity* also enables me to interweave a vast array of seemingly disparate vignettes (both temporally and spatially). In doing so, I create the discursive, non-linear narratives to communicate the poignancy of the disconnection between daily consumption and the suffering of nature and animals (and humans as well).

Illuminating all the exhibition spaces and enhancing the installations, the intense presence of light offers a unifying element. With dim light in the first one, blue light in the second, and warm light in the last one, the colour, intensity, and temperature of light are relevant in articulating my conceptual concerns with creating a specific mood and ambience to affect

the viewer. The shift of tone and chrome in light is linked with my endeavour and struggle of how to strike a balance between a difficult subject and aesthetic attributes, the harsh reality and the transcendental possibility of art.

The atmospheric effects of light also create the shadows of the viewers to activate my works poetically. More importantly, however, intentionally involved in the spaces structured by the arrangements of paintings, audiences function as an artistic agency and an integral part of my works. In reshaping the public perception of nonhuman animals and collapsing the hierarchy between the viewer and an artwork, the generative and modulative dimension of art depends not just on my artistic intention and creation but also on the responses of audiences through interaction and dialogue. Not to retreat into a secluded space of a studio, my artistic intervention, therefore, holds its relevance to public life and community so as to influence social consciousness towards our fellow species.

Thus, the interaction between the artist and audience is crucial in deciphering and constructing the meaning of my works. For example, with partially shown subjects, the small petri-dish format used in my final work evokes a sense of invisibility, but the viewer may miss the point, indicating the importance of the artist's dialogue with the viewer. When showcasing my second project, I was moved while listening to the viewers' personal accounts. A viewer, for example, repented for the mischievous act of killing birds in his childhood, leaving the questions of 'how to regain people's sensitivity towards animals'. Another viewer had sadly witnessed countless roadkill on his car journey during Easter holiday; another, a member of a teaching staff, mentioned that the warm temperature of the exhibition space could be contradictory to the message I want to communicate. Such constructive feedback aids critically in the evaluation of my research outcomes and provides conceptual insights into formulating my future works.

Integral to this artistic and conceptual enquiry is also the titling of my works, especially in my final project, *Hide and Seek*, serving as an important strategy to engage the viewer, to insinuate the troubling situation of the silenced animal suffering, and to echo the aesthetic form of this work. Eschewing the influences from artists such as Boltanski and Hatoum—who create interesting interplays of title and work, of words and matter, of the verbal and the visual, I invite the viewer to do comparative readings of both so as to better understand the meanings of my work.

Crucial to my critical engagement with the issue of animal suffering is an attempt to see and articulate this problem through the perspective of the animal, in contrast to our daily rituals of subjugating and repressing their voices and of increasingly producing the deceiving knowledge, the distorted truth that dictates the animals' dystopia, their eternal tragedy. In Jaschinski's photographic intervention, she tries to shoot her image 'from the angle of the animals rather than the viewer' (Baker, 2013: 160), thus subverting the familiar, stereotypical, and anthropocentric gaze. Recognising the interconnections between human and animal beings, Angela Singer works in a way of 'using animal bodies that retain the look of a living body because the animal body speaks to the viewer's human body' (Baker, 2013: 171). Their poetic laments and aesthetic engagements vis-à-vis the plight of nonhuman entities are invariably inspired by the process of shared emphatic embodiment in order to foreground the 'voice' of the animal.

Relevant to this concern, too, is Derrida's question, 'Can one from the vantage of the animal see oneself being looked at naked? (Derrida, 2008: 21)', a question provoked by the intense gaze of his cat. Not surprisingly, a mixture of feelings—beguiling and elusive, on the one hand, and simultaneously disquieting and even painful, on the other—will emerge when our thinking is oriented towards the perspective of the animal, a perspective

bound up with the fact that we are indeed, like animals, ‘embodied beings’ (Wolfe, 2010: 72).

Yet, in trying to address their voices in my enquiry, it is important to be attentive to the relevant pitfalls in relation to the question of truth that is also one part of the representational risks mentioned above. In writing on Foucault’s concern addressing the subjugated and oppressed groups, Sara Mills argues, ‘Every instance of production of knowledge, every instance when someone seems to be speaking on behalf of someone else, no matter how good their intentions are, needs to be interrogated’ (Mills, 2003: 78). With this light, in pursuit of ending animals’ plight, one needs to be aware of the conundrum of ethical concern for animals that animals cannot *speak* for themselves as could the historically or presently marginalised groups such as women, black people, and the poor. Thus, bearing witness to the reality of the animal, I ought to question if the aesthetic translation of animal suffering, the expressivity of the chosen medium, can *speak properly* of the actual experience of the individual animals and prompt the viewer to rethink human relationships with other beings.

To sum up, by bringing to the fore what are once effaced from daily life, the violence against and the suffering of the *individual* animals, the distance and detachment from people towards animals, what I want to instantiate in this project is the unprecedented subjection of animals, on the one hand, and the systematic disguise of this problem to quench people’s empathy, on the other. The fact of the misrepresented and misconceived animals in human history and reality, and of the silence and avoidance of addressing this socio-political issue in the realm of contemporary art, impels me to consider how to present the identities of the animal others, the non-symbolic roles of animals. With all the ethical and ecological imperatives of the invisibility of animal subjection in mind, I believe



that the agency of art, as a subversive and redemptive device, can give forms to the seemingly irredeemable absence of those long oppressed, trivialised, suffered, and tortured animals. Addressing this ongoing ethical and aesthetic challenge at a time of forging ‘new models of the human and the animal’ (Baker, 2000: 165), my work will continue to challenge the dominating anthropocentric gaze and try to transform people’s thinking about the animal (and human) others, not based on instrumental, hierarchical dualisms, but on the shared vulnerability and embodied finitude, with regard and respect.

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