

Beyond control: Towards an Ecology of Uncertainty

Mark Wilson
BA (Hons) Fine Art

**This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of PhD by Published Work.**

October 2012

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Beyond Control: Towards an Ecology of Uncertainty

With the exception of acknowledged references to the published texts, this thesis has not (either wholly or in part), been submitted previously for a degree or other qualification in this or any other University or other institution.

Of the five published works here submitted, my collaborative partner, Dr Bryndís Snæbjörnsdóttir has previously submitted her own analysis of three of the associated collaborative projects, these being *nanoq: flat out and bluesome, between you and me* (but not however, the chapter *The Empty Wilderness*, specifically) and *((a)fly*) for her own PhD submission in 2009, (University of Gothenburg) in respect of which she was successful.

The projects *Big Mouth* and *Uncertainty in the City* have not been the subject of any such submission previously.

As part of the thesis I have included (on page 11) a Statement outlining the shared nature of our practice, at all stages of development and exposition.

I confirm that the thesis submitted here is my own analysis and contextualization of the work, including the ideas, strategies and methodologies embedded within it.

Mark Wilson
October 2012

...we couldn't see where we going and when we looked back, neither could we
see where we'd come from...

(Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson, 2004. P.24)

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Key terms: Uncertainty, Ecology, Liminal, Environment, Other/Othering, Relationality, Becoming, Nomadic, Site Specificity, Social Engagement, Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson

Abstract

With specific reference to five discrete projects, this supporting text sets out to explain the methodologies, dynamics and rationale behind the installation-based and collaborative art practice of Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson, in relation to contemporary art methodologies and the chronologically parallel and equally emergent academic fields of Artistic Research and Animal Studies.

The projects are represented by four monographs and one book chapter, each of which has its basis in a substantial art project involving a sustained period of interdisciplinary research and practice and involving one or multiple exhibitions.

A series of research questions pertinent to the cross-disciplinary nature of my practice has been tested in respect of each project within the context of an overarching set of meta-questions pertinent to the practice as a whole. As my practice seeks to challenge assumptions, regarding for instance knowledge systems and representation it is the function of this text to present the projects in relation to knowledge production more widely, its currency, value and the basis upon which its value is estimated.

I demonstrate how the dynamic of collaboration is integral to the principles of relationality embedded in the work and how those principles reverberate through our

methodology and through the participation of the professionals, amateurs, and academics who contribute variously to the projects.

Although working counter to subject-specificity as a matter of strategy, I discuss how certain subject-specific models (for example anthropological interview techniques and surveys, museum display, hunting etc.) are nonetheless appropriated and deployed in order to ground and inform critique.

The latter and significant proportion of the text is devoted to providing a conceptually and materially descriptive summary of each project, clarifying project-specific research questions and propositions and detailing the relationship of each publication here included, to the research field(s) and the associated artworks.



Figure 1

Introduction

The published works submitted here are *Big Mouth* (2002-04) – an examination of disparate human stake-holding, loss, desire and the significance of nomenclature in respect of a specific animal extinction, *nanoq: flat out and bluesome, A Cultural Life of Polar Bears* (2001-06) – the reconciliation of animal material with its specific provenance as an examination of colonial residual effect and new taxonomy in a post-colonial context, *a(fly) between nature and culture* (2006) – an examination of domestic human/non-human animal cohabitation and shared ontologies, from an imagined zoo-centric perspective, *The Empty Wilderness, Seals and Animal Representation* (which draws on the project *between you and me*, 2009/10) – an examination of the flawed nature of representation, the profound obstacles it provides in re-imagining and configuring ecological sustainability and the positing of ‘parities in meeting’ and *Uncertainty in the City* (2007-10) – an exploration of human/non-human animal proximities and their challenges to reason within urban and suburban contexts

In 2004, in the essay entitled *negotiating liminal areas* written for the publication *Big Mouth*, (p.24) I referenced the experience of a nine-day walk undertaken with my collaborative partner, Bryndís Snæbjörnsdóttir in Hornstrandír, an uninhabited and remote coastal area in the very north of Iceland.¹ The walk was made in July and so at that time there was 24-hour daylight. Remarkably however, for virtually the entire hike, we were submersed in a shroud of dense mist. As a consequence for over a week we were unable to see much beyond a few paces ,either back from where we had walked or ahead in the direction we were walking. At the time, paradoxically, for me this had been a heady experience close to epiphanic in its effect. Where the physical activity of walking

¹ See also the pre-collaborative catalogue essay *Magnetic, 1998, Appendix 1*

in 'wild' landscape for that length of time is normally associated with retinal reward, with 'views' to draw the eye into a distancing and objectifying relationship with the terrain and away from the immediacy of bodily location, in this case our attention was entirely held in an enforced myopia. Our vision was constantly impeded by mist. Unable to draw upon the reassuring and conceptual certainties of a commanding view and so (dis)placed beyond the controlling apparatus of representation we were cast instead into the stumbling blindness of uncertainty, of indeterminacy, instinct, intuition, of saving our skin - in short, into the awkwardnesses of close terrain negotiation, survival, way-finding, sustenance and - most significant of all - into the ontology of 'the moment'.

Nevertheless, this was revelatory, but in ways then I barely understood. I registered it at the time as a form of cerebral locking-in, where the deprivation of seeing either forward or back left me suspended in a series of disconnected 'nows'. The terrain remained to be negotiated, (we were driven with increasing anxiety by the imperative of an arranged rendezvous with a boat many miles south of our starting point) but this necessitated navigational means, which were suddenly and lastingly bereft of the faculty of vision. Like most people I have experienced conditions of uncertainty and fear many times before, but this was altogether more all consuming and immersive. Simultaneously, it must be said, it was also exhilarating. In the essay itself the point of this is as a reference from which to suggest that there are other ways (involving the relinquishment of control) of experiencing and understanding the world transcending what is deliverable to us by means of language, semiotics and whatever means we customarily deploy, in order to control. It touches on ideas of the familiar and unfamiliar in relation to landscape; it suggests what it might have been like to encounter something possibly dangerous for the first time in an alien land and the methods we have used and use to soothe and calm our anxiety and to populate our perceptual world instead with representations that present no threat. It touches on the consequences of that 'survival' impulse. It is no exaggeration to see the fear that prompts us to protect ourselves as

being one of the drivers behind the acquisition of knowledge. The need to bring everything into the realm of what is understood and 'known', has led us to cut ourselves adrift from things which otherwise would tax us. But the reductionism implicit in this process has left us impoverished in other ways. Our insulation from environments beyond our urban or agrarian control has robbed us in turn of the know-how of how to be, not just *in* the world, but *with* the world.

I return to this episode here, presented in the first publication *Big Mouth* (2004), as both an example of and metaphor for the method and conduct of my artistic research as a field of collaboration and exploration in a continuing journey towards an ecology of uncertainty.

I

Over the last ten years, the art practice of *Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson*² has employed a series of specific human/non-human animal interfaces, in order to examine human behaviour in respect of historical and contemporary perspectives on issues including environment, anthropocentrism and relationality. The significance of human and non-human animal relations for us is as a relative and substantial inheritor-of-note in a vital continuum of race, gender, queer and post-colonial discourse. It is in this sense that there are parallel and resonant threads between these historically controversial 'others' and the othering, which runs through contemporary animal studies discourse. The history which prefaces these relatively recent 'corrective' perspectives can be seen as increasingly anthropocentric up to the present moment which may now be deemed a critical turning or breaking point. Environmental awareness forces us to take ideas of relationality and species-interdependence seriously, concomitant with a rebuttal of a long-held view of the exceptionalism of the species *Homo sapiens*. As will be shown, in keeping with ideas of radical interdependence, we have used the methodologies of art in such a way as to

² Henceforth 'my practice' will refer to my collaborative practice with Bryndis Snæbjörnsdóttir

privilege relationality over reductionism in our presented work, offering plural, cross-referential readings rather than singular or conclusive findings. Accordingly, we acknowledge a continuum of ontology across species, rooted in concatenated worlding (articulated by Haraway, 2003, p.61), *umwelt*, (Von Uexküll, 1957) and shared space. In ways as fundamental as it is possible to imagine, we propose that as an ecological package, we are irrevocably enmeshed – we (humans) are the animals along with the (non- human) animals and we are all of us – animal, vegetable and mineral – temporary and interfolding networks and entanglements of matter. As such, whether we like it or not, what we as a species do to others, we do back to ourselves. Unsurprisingly, therefore, through our artistic research and practice, we promote ideas of a nature-culture continuum – their ‘diffraction’ (Barad) or interleaving – rather than the model of binary opposition, which these terms have constituted throughout the modernist period.

II

Further to the challenges to orthodox systems of thought presented by my practice, I acknowledge the relevance of the nomadic theories of Deleuze and Guattari and latterly, Rosi Braidotti, (2011) in foregrounding, not individuated events or objects, but instead, the dynamics and becomings intrinsic to each event and each object, as a consequence of being a part of a discrete spatio-temporal network of juxtapositions and juxtaposed meanings. Counter to the linearity and binaries of modernist thinking, Deleuze and Guattari proposed the model of a rhizome:

A rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezzo*. The tree imposes the verb ‘to be’ but the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction. ‘and ... and ... and...’ This conjunction carries enough force to shake and uproot the verb ‘to be’. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p.27)

and

There is no longer a tripartite division between a field of reality (the world) and a field of representation (the book) and a field of subjectivity (the author). Rather an assemblage establishes connections between certain multiplicities drawn from each of these orders... (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p.25)

The complexity implicit in this claim constitutes a fatal challenge to ideas of autonomous objects and indeed to dependable or independent chains of causality, privileging instead the model of a world in flux, which requires us to look more closely at specificity and context for meaning. In this way, what we once imagined as hybridity we now see as irresistibly more dynamic and complex (Latour, 1993, p.78). The resistance of transitional conditions to representation, arising from closer attention to the particular, have always been and continue to be important to me in my work.³ Another thread running consistently through the projects is the testing and exposure of our cultural reliance on semiotics and on the ramifications and consequences of that trust in our dealings with an otherwise unmediated and infinitely more complex environment than such filtering allows. I see our work as challenging and testing of the binaries for instance that still, despite our professedly more sophisticated perspectives, broadly underpin our culture. We critique the binary, illusionary basis of certainty, which often seems to cloak or distract attention from scientific inadequacies and by which the machines of capitalism are allowed to deny and drive our suicidal and zoo-icidal environmental habits.⁴

I describe the mechanisms of our art practice and how research is deployed using tactics for instance of surprise, dissonance, humour and subversion. I consider the condition of 'uncertainty' to be a positively useful state, a condition of becoming, of possible re-appraisal and potential. In the construction of our work, uncertainty has a crucial part to

³ The flawed nature of representation (its shortcomings and consequences) is the main driver for instance, in our project *between you and me* (2009).

⁴ 'Shell is moving right now – we need your help ...in a sick twist of logic, as burning fossil fuels melts the Arctic ice, oil companies see this as an open invitation to explore for more oil...' Greenpeace appeal, 5th Sept 2012.

play – in drawing attention to and destabilising assumptions or problematic parameters within cultural tropes. In the presentation of our artwork, active de-stabilization itself is an important dynamic; we work, often with others, across multiple disciplines and position our artwork between disciplinary or practical fields, where disparate models of practice are acknowledged, referenced or juxtaposed, requiring audiences in turn to ground the work personally, using whatever fragmentary, unexpected or dissonant parameters are suggested. This is a process of ‘strategic diffraction’ (Barad, 2006, p.71) (the reading of one phenomenon or ‘text’ through or in the context of another) and acknowledges the importance of the unique experience/knowledge-set of respective viewers (*nanoq, (a)fly*). In this regard, the relationship between knowing and constructively not-knowing (or as Samuel Beckett has it, know how and no-how)⁵ and the chauvinism of expert culture is foregrounded in many of the works – the dis- or low regard within monistic culture, for unclassifiable knowledge (knowledge without a home) is critiqued (obliquely or otherwise) and the potential value of amateur contributions or voices is posited. Our knowledge is examined as an amalgam of what we know, the mechanisms by which we come to know it and everything else we perceive by other means – including cultural conditioning, intuition and instinct.⁶ I discuss the participation in our work of amateurs, professionals and academics, devoting a short section in each of the project summaries, to indicate the contributions and effects of participant activity.

I consider the idea that the application of anthropomorphism may not always constitute a depletion of animal-others under examination and so weigh its possible functionality in approaching an understanding of the worlding or umwelt of other species. Bound up with this thought is the paradoxical notion that anthropomorphism does not necessarily

⁵ Maharaj, S. (2009) ‘No-how embodies indeterminacy, an “any space whatever” that brews up, spreads, inspissates.’

⁶ In the project *Big Mouth* the idea of combined and embodied knowledge is rehearsed by means of the conflation of a variety of voices to create a symbolic surrogate in a narrative of extinction.

have to be an anthropocentric instrument – but that it can serve to inform an acknowledgement of ontological confluence. ((a)fly)

Ultimately we regard the work we produce as a tool for thinking – each project and each component within each project has a set of meanings either strategically or logically embedded within it. But because we are working with elements that are not simple signs, replaceable with words, we intuit and subsequently, consciously read further meanings in the work, during and beyond the processes of its making. In this process of revisiting and experiencing the works and continuing to engage in their analysis (as a consequence for example of the distance provided by our engagement with new projects), this ‘work-as-instrument-for-thought’ functions as a crucial aspect of the practice and its productions. It is also why the unravelling of content, during and on the site of the exhibition, using the fora of seminars, conferences and discussion is for us, an integral dynamic of the work itself.

III

Culturally, collectively, we have come to trust language and to be myopic in our understanding of its profound effect on our phenomenological experience. Its apparent capacity to banish uncertainty is bound up with the semiotic illusion it provides of stability. Our reliance on language, as the dependable way of processing and articulating thought is, paradoxically, perhaps prejudicially, all determining. Because we also know, in a profoundly logical sense, that the tools we customarily use for a job, in themselves determine the nature of what they allow or reveal to us. This can be observed equally in myriad approaches to photography for instance or in anthropological enquiry. The presence of the camera and operator, the interviewer and the recording device, each in itself affects the nature and outcome of the investigation. In the context of quantum physics from which the Uncertainty Principle derives ‘...there is something fundamental about the nature of measurement interactions such that, given a particular measuring

apparatus, certain properties become determinate, while others are specifically excluded. Which properties become determinate is not governed by the desires or will of the experimenter but rather by the specificity of the experimental apparatus.” (Barad, 2007, p.19).⁷

All testing, all confirmation and disconfirmation of a hypothesis takes place already within a system. And this system is not a more or less arbitrary and doubtful point of departure for all our arguments: no, it belongs to the essence of what we call an argument. The system is not so much the point of departure, as the element in which arguments have their life (Wittgenstein, 1969, p.147)

At the heart of the shift from language dependence to our alternative trust in the processes of art (and indeed artistic research) there is an acceptance that whilst the knowledge it can provide is neither reductive nor definitive, it offers us (and audiences) a way of unlocking our often misguided and illusory anthropocentric focus, allowing instead observation, consideration and possibly an understanding of the world in its complexity and relationality, rather than its individuation and fragmentation.

By revisiting and examining historical events or behaviours, which have informed our cultural position and by questioning the basis of subsequent cultural initiatives and direction we aim through our work, to render some current modes of thinking unstable and therefore, *uncertain* and *open* to reconsideration.

I can say without apology that the work, by these means, attempts to ask questions and not to provide answers – but nevertheless within the work it is possible to pick out specific findings, the effects of which, it is our intention, should ripple through the systems from which they derive and out across related and other systems in juxtaposition.

⁷ The Uncertainty principle and its differing interpretations by Heisenberg and Bohr are explored by Karen Barad in this her Introduction and later expanded upon in chapter 3 (*ibid*, p.97)

As previously stated, my art practice is collaborative, conducted in partnership with Icelandic artist Bryndís Snæbjörnsdóttir and known as **Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson**. We conduct our work from bases in the north of England, Iceland and Gothenburg, Sweden. With a strong research grounding, our socially-engaged projects explore contemporary relationships between human and non-human animals in the contexts of history, culture and the environment. The practice sets out to challenge anthropocentric systems and thinking that sanction a *loss through representation* of ‘the other’ and propose instead, alternative tropes of ‘parities in meeting’ by examining and testing ideas of the border, hybridity, strategic dissonance, cultural others, the specific over the generic and so on. Recently I have found much that is correspondent with my thinking, in the writings of feminist theorists Rosi Braidotti (*Nomadic Theory*) and Jane Bennett (*Vibrant Matter*). Both writers make substantial reference to and build on the work of Deleuze and Guattari (*A Thousand Plateaus*) amongst others. While the correspondence with such philosophical writing (also Derrida, Latour, Agamben, Haraway and others) has been reassuring in the resonance it provides us in relation to our Practice, it should be said that our aims, methodologies and production run ‘in parallel’ with aspects of these writers’ works and are neither dependent upon, nor an illustration of, them.

Overarching Research Questions:

Through artistic examination of our shared habitats and ecologies, what methods of engagement with different animal species and classifications (quarry/pets/pests) best challenge historical modes of representation (museum archive, photographic, academic studies, etc.)? *Uncertainty in the City, (a)fly, nanoq*

How might such artistic processes inform perspectives or knowledge of ‘otherness’ and inter-species relationality? *(a)fly, Uncertainty in the City, between you and me*

How might such a relational artistic research practice contribute to contemporary art theory and practice on the one hand and to the field of animal studies on the other?

(a)fly, Uncertainty in the City, between you and me, nanoq, Big Mouth

What are the potential effects and opportunities of the condition of *Uncertainty* in our encountering with the world? *Uncertainty in the City, (a)fly, between you and me, nanoq, Big Mouth*

How is art practice and production instrumental in the shaping of new thinking and new knowledge?

What can we learn through art practice from an examination of our relationships with non-linguistic others?

If through art and its methodologies, we discount language (the basis of our semiotic conduct), by so doing, may we become better equipped/positioned to acknowledge and learn from intelligence in other things and other beings? *(a)fly, between you and me*

By relinquishing anthropocentric values and focus and by calling into question the validity of our metric methods, how might we approach an interspecies symbiosis? *Uncertainty in the City, between you and me, Big Mouth*

What (useful disruption) is to be achieved by turning to specific rather than generic models in our representations of the world? *Uncertainty in the City, nanoq, Big Mouth, between you and me*

What are the roles (positive and otherwise) of the condition of *uncertainty* in our encounters in the world? *Uncertainty in the City, (a)fly, between you and me, nanoq, Big Mouth*

Statement: concerning the shared nature of our collaborative work.

As artists and critical observers, our work is genuinely collaborative; that is, we have joint ownership for all the many facets, demands and responsibilities arising from our projects. Either one of us can equally and honestly say that we regularly conceive projects, contribute equally to their development both conceptually and practically, write essays concerning the projects or issues arising from them, lecture and deliver papers in respect of our work, negotiate with other individuals and institutions during the developmental stages of projects, conduct interviews (often a necessary and pivotal component of our work), take photographs, shoot video, edit, design installations and sculptural components and so on. In practical terms, the fact that we work collaboratively means that we can manage a greater number of discrete projects simultaneously, or research more deeply or widely than if either one of us was working purely independently. Conceptually, the internal dynamics of the collaboration allow us to air and test ideas within the creative fold and to allow cross developments to occur as a consequence of such airing.

Our position therefore, is that our individual contributions to the collaborative enterprise are inseparable. This supporting text is my own contextualization and analysis of the submitted published work.



Figure 2

The Critical Field

Whilst encroaching upon other disciplines of knowledge, my own critical field is that of contemporary art. This is a broad discipline and it is therefore necessary to give an account of my particular approach. We are an artists' team working collaboratively in a relational and socially-engaged practice. Our research examines conditions or behaviour often accepted as commonplace or 'given' in the society in which we find ourselves and through the process of art, shed 'light', or new insights, into the hairline fissures of its constitution. In this way, this 'light', may be seen, as a means by which to reconfigure thinking or at least offer the opportunity for audiences to reappraise accepted cultural tropes. We also use the term 'relational' in accordance with the understanding suggested by Donna Haraway, of *reaching across species and parallel lives* and, as we shall see, in critical proximity to its application by the curator and commentator Nicolas Bourriaud, to describe a significant field of contemporary art practice to have emerged over the last two decades which seeks to integrate aesthetic questions with social, ethical and political concerns and which has become known as 'relational art'.

We look for margins of tolerance, and see a range of opinion as providing a promising field of inquiry in itself, as indicative of contradictory or certainly unresolved schisms in our social and socio-environmental fabric. Where such diversity of response to a phenomenon exists, it suggests there may be a susceptibility to change. Variance of opinion is not by definition a problem, but where those opinions are embedded over time and lie unchallenged, we see merit in shuffling the pack and seeing new juxtapositions – inviting new readings and opportunities for understanding and behaviour.⁸

I consider our work to be pluralistic and intrinsically 'relational' where we work directly with specific select communities or enlist the assistance of specialists, channelling *their*

⁸ I first suggested this in a paper *Uncertainty in the City* delivered at the seminal Animal Studies conference *Animal Gaze* hosted by London Metropolitan University in London (November 20-21, 2008)

experience, expertise or passion in order to inform the direction and substance of our own work. In this respect and in the sense that the functions of art are fluid and themselves subject to constant reappraisal within the contexts of space and audience, the writings of Nicolas Bourriaud (*Relational Aesthetics*, 1998/2000) have some degree of relevance. In this his seminal work he chronicles the relational turn in the 1990s and significantly points out:

The idea of including the other is not just a theme. It turns out to be as essential to the formal understanding of the work. The persistent issue [...] might be summed up thus: 'how can I live in your reality?' or 'how can a meeting between two realities alter them bilaterally'. (Bourriaud, 2000, p.52)

In our publication *Uncertainty in the City*, Rikke Hansen, whilst considering the project in the light of Bourriaud's signature work along with writings on his ideas from other commentators (Kester, Morton), points to the participatory nature of the project as constituting a correspondence with the themes of *Relational Aesthetics*, but also suggests the departure that *Uncertainty* provides by 'facilitating a radical openness' in its utilisation of 'more-than-human hospitality', making further reference to Derrida (2008) in the effect the work mobilises, in rendering us "naked', stripped of our usual contours of identity'. Indeed by dwelling on complexity, uncertainty and irresolution within the work, our ideas chime more with Claire Bishop's proposed 'relational antagonism' (2006), itself put forward as a critique of *Relational Aesthetics* on the basis of the lack of specific critique attributed to the work of some of Bourriaud's key artist-exemplars. Two further points are significant in Hansen's essay. One is the insight that like *nanoq*, the project seeks to privilege the individual encounter and indeed, individual being, as an antidote to cultural and generic presumptions. The other is the intrinsic 'ecological' nature of the work. She quotes Timothy Morton (Hansen, 2010, pp.115,116)

[Ecological thinking] isn't just to do with the sciences of ecology. Ecological thinking is to do with art, philosophy, literature, music and culture [...] Ecology includes all the ways we imagine how to live together. Ecology is profoundly about coexistence. Existence is always coexistence No man is an island. Human beings need each other as much as they need an environment. Human beings *are* each others' environment. Thinking ecologically isn't simply about nonhuman things. Ecology has to do with you and me.⁹

She goes on:

Put differently, the 'model' for an alternative form of relational aesthetics offered by Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson's *Uncertainty in the City* is thoroughly ecological [...] because it investigates the complex interconnectedness of living organisms, whether human-to-human or human-to-animal (this list could be extended by including human-to-plant, plant-to-mineral, animal-to-plant and so on).¹⁰

Fascinatingly, Jane Bennett extrapolates this still further in her *Thing Power, Walking Talking Minerals* (Bennett, 2010, p.11) with the vital materialist view that life and humanity is a 'particularly rich and complex collection of materials' – materials in effect which collude to drive us into being.

Separately and collectively, historically and today, through our work both Bryndís (Snæbjörnsdóttir) and myself have been interested in exploring borders as liminal zones, in the condition of flux and in (mis)representation.

⁹ Timothy Morton, 'Thinking Ecology: The Mesh, the Strange Stranger and the Beautiful Soul' in *COLLAPSE: Philosophical Research and Development*, Vol. VI, Urbanomic, 2010, p. 207

¹⁰ (Ibid. p.116)

During a conversation with Bruno Latour, Anselm Franke¹¹ proposes that where previously Latour has suggested that hybrids are generally without representation 'in the setting of the modern constitution', (Franke, 2010, p.86), exceptionally, art institutions and museums of all kinds always had a license officially to represent such transitional intermediaries, becomings or indeed hybrids. Appearing as this exchange does in the context of a contemporary art exhibition, this comment points to the various manifestations and 'representations' that are in fact the mechanisms and tangible productions of much contemporary art. In this context it is the remarkable function of art (and poetry perhaps) to represent, configure or at least to make visible, not objects, or singular concepts and entities of any kind, but the relationships *between* things.

Representations in the form of symbols, words, logos, motifs, caricatures and so on – in order to function as such, must already reside, chime with or be accepted in the public domain in some way as recognizable and at least to a degree, 'universal'. One-off representations (in reference to unstable entities), which may or may not deploy more established constituent representations as assemblages in order momentarily to frame, destabilize or question their veracity, are by their nature, potentially subversive, but can themselves, if sufficiently potent and memorable, be appropriated by the culture whose cultural givens they seek to complicate. For instance, Damien Hirst's memorable and much-referenced *The Physical Impossibility Of Death In The Mind Of Someone Living* (1991), in which the artist presents a preserved Tiger shark suspended in a vitrine of formaldehyde, may be such an example and serves as a reminder that metaphor and poetry themselves customarily constitute such hybrid representation absolutely. In turn of course, the cultural adoption and media assimilation of these disruptive acts may well mean that in this process they are caricaturized and depleted and their subtexts lost.

¹¹ The interview is recorded in the chapter *Angels without Wings* in the catalogue *Animism* for the eponymous exhibition in Antwerp and Bern, 2010

This is the price of widespread exposure and I will touch upon this later, in relation to our project *nanoq*, one of the subjects of this paper.¹²

With this in mind, in our practice, the things we present are therefore contradicted or complicated by the context in which they are presented; the discrete meanings of all constituents are undone, our thoughts about them unhinged and made newly nomadic. It is a mechanism of constructive meaning-destabilisation. Where absolutes of meaning are to be challenged and the association or juxtaposition of words, behaviour models or other signifiers mobilised to infect and destabilize each other we set out a space for and activate a significant condition of uncertainty and becoming.

In this way, through the strategies of art, it is intended that the action of rendering things uncertain and indeed for the audience the act of getting lost, should be constructive.¹³

Artistic research and Animal Studies

Having established that the work exists within the field of contemporary art and having outlined the nature of my own approach, there are two other areas with which our work has had particular constructive resonance. During the lifespan of our Practice, the fields of Artistic Research and Animal Studies have both emerged concurrently as significant and radical developments whose respective standing is growing and the influence of which are already being felt more globally.

Artistic research

Artistic (or Artists') Research is central to much current debate in northern Europe with bodies such as EARN (European Art Research Network) and ELIA (European League of Art Institutions), who for the last ten years and more, have examined and promoted Art

¹² pp. 24 and 52

¹³ See Appendix 1 *Magnetic (1998)*

research and its relationship to art education (in particular at doctoral and post-doctoral levels). Advocates for Artistic Research as a platform for the production of new knowledge have been keen to assert its (pan disciplinary) importance on an international stage (Slagen, Kaila, Sandqvist) and it continues to be the subject of close attention and debate within art institutions for instance in Scandinavia and northern Europe. For fine or contemporary art (alongside some other creative disciplines, most notably performance) this focus represents a coming of age, its academic status having been elevated in the UK as long ago as the 1970s by the simple adoption, at undergraduate level for instance, of a more robust theoretical component in the form of a dissertation. Simultaneously however there were moves afoot within fine art practice itself, to broaden its base, to diversify from the unquestioning sanctity of 'image' and raise the stakes intellectually through more conceptual work and the conscious contesting by practitioners (Kosuth, Smithson, etc.) of art's traditional methodologies. Increasingly, as artists have established new bases for conversation and engaged more actively with audiences they have recognized the effect of their work in the world and most significantly have made it their business to pitch work in relation to specific social and political contexts. However, within the term 'artistic research' there is for some, both within art practice and beyond, still what appears to be an oxymoronic inner tension stemming without doubt from a time when art was understood to be something more unequivocally retinal and concerned with aesthetics.¹⁴

In discourse surrounding artistic research there is broad agreement that a process of speculation and proposition, rather than deduction, plays a large part. Certainly, within our own practice, whilst fully embracing social engagement and site-sensitivity as benchmarks, there we also acknowledge the value of intuition in sensing and mobilising

¹⁴ Grant Kester in his *Dialogical Aesthetics*, cites Ken Johnson of *Art in America* as having 'coined the term "post-retinal" to describe much of the work in [Documenta 12] Although Johnson intended this term as a mild pejorative, I feel it is quite useful in capturing the ways in which many Littoral projects challenge the tendency of contemporary visual art to function primarily on the level of sensation.'

connections between things – connections which may not always be rational or linear but which nevertheless cohere or can be made to cohere in the processes of production or presentation. When, in her seminal book, *Vibrant Matter*, Jane Bennett uses her observation of the random juxtaposition of disparate discarded objects on a street in her native Baltimore as a starting point for a treatise on ‘thing power’ (Bennett, 2010, p.4) she plugs in to the kind of personal play/discourse that artists in their practice, conduct on a regular basis. This sensibility is founded on the belief that objects themselves are not isolated, discrete events in the world, but are always affected, tuned, given specific meaning and significantly, afforded the power to affect, in ways specific to their context – by their conditional state, their juxtaposition to other objects, assemblages and spaces – in short their momentary interstitial incidence. *Thing Power* – she describes as ‘...the curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle.’ (Bennett, 2010, p.6)

In artistic research, there is a sense that in the questions we frame we choose not to anticipate or pursue specific conclusions but rather, actions to disrupt current or existing tropes of thought – these actions may be interventions upon established platforms of interaction (the Yes Men, Christian Philip Müller, Superflex etc.). They may be constituted by assemblages of disparate material or situated strategically ‘out of place’; they may for instance use the methodologies of one discipline to interrogate or disrupt the protocols of another (Dion, Borland, Deller) – all challenge, directly or indirectly however the unitary (sovereign) status of institutions and things (Braidotti, 2011) alike. All suggest an interrelationality and by inference a symbiotic potential, if not inevitability, in an infinitely complex set of couplings-by-juxtaposition and other spatio-temporal-cultural conjoinings. In the light of these considerations, it is quite easy to see the inadequacies of words alone to articulate such relationality and indeed the constraints that language exercises upon a) the depth and richness of our experience

and b) our awareness of what the non-linguistic world has to show us. There are other immanent repercussions here; not least upon the ethical responsibilities we adopt and in how we register the affects of the world upon us and how we make choices concerning our affect in the world. (Wilson, 1998, pp.3-5)¹⁵

The sense then, that instinct and intuition are dynamic faculties to be nourished and honed, rather than revered in themselves as something divorced from and necessarily preceding cognition, is something that has remained with me from very early on in my practice and indeed my teaching. In contemplating the possibilities and value of Artistic Research I am more conscious and convinced than ever of its relevance. Acts of creativity, like the act of walking, (Solnit, 2001) are serial un-balancings (also Braidotti, 2011, p.153) – speculative, purposeful, towards objectives not always visible or perceptible from the trajectory of the journey, but whose drive is the magnetism of things, of knowledge and the assembling of material in ways by which specific or directed thinking may be triggered, questions posited and affect enacted. The force is one of immersion to learn, gather and present... Interestingly, the process is in many ways correspondent with that of essay writing – the act of writing itself, being the mechanism or faculty that sniffs the terrain which the writer has set out to explore and by which she/he becomes sensitized towards connections and possibilities resonant with a developing theme. The interdisciplinarity common to much artistic research means that such connections may or will often, in a Deleuzian sense, arc, between events or behaviours for instance, equally, across neighbouring or distant disciplinary fields.

All things considered and in a climate where the significance of artistic research is being proposed and acknowledged as being of value far beyond the context of contemporary

¹⁵ See Appendix 1 *Magnetic*

art alone, how do we, as artists, make artistic research and its often non-reductive, non-absolutist outcomes practically effective as a viable alternative or partner to traditional, perhaps more recognizably academic forms of research in science and the humanities? What are the discrete contributions it can make in knowledge production and what else needs to change (across the board) in order for such difference to be made more conspicuous and effective – in short for its influence also to infect constructively and inform the research methodologies of other disciplines?

To write a thesis on the methodologies embodied within my practice is necessarily to examine a process of acknowledgement, respect but also utilisation of academic research and simultaneously its placement amongst other non-academic methodologies. Academic research and analysis is embedded in our practice as a tool that brings recognizable discipline and serves as a test bed for ideas and actions which are generated from both within and without academia, which academia (that is the knowledge of others within specialist fields) informs and helps to shape, but upon which the practice must not, and in fact could never be entirely dependent. It is this tension that the practice sets out to enact and sustain in order that notions of and perceived parameters of academia are tested and stretched whilst at the same time deploying its methods to give identifiable structure to nascent theory and belief. It is no coincidence therefore (in fact it has been of significant importance) that the development of our collaborative practice has taken place concurrently over the last ten years 2001/11 alongside evolving and proliferating debates and discourse concerning Artistic Research and its position in relation to more traditional manifestations of research. In this, and other ways, our artistic research parallels the evolution of its principal academic context: *animal studies*.

Animal Studies

In addition to the growing culture of artistic research, the importance to our practice of an emerging *Animal Studies* field has also been significant, not least because again, its most robust development and coherence has chronologically tracked that of our Practice, (see Appendix 3 for Animal Studies events and publications) and also because it is constituted by researchers from many different academic disciplines, all drawing on the philosophic output of, for example, Derrida, Latour, Agamben, Deleuze & Guatarri, etc. Importantly, for us again, it has declared itself strategically, politically even, to be **not** a specialist discipline but more, a counter-disciplinary field. In correspondence with this integral interdisciplinarity, its members have also actively acknowledged and accorded real value upon our work specifically and in principle, the work of contemporary art more generally, within that field.

Just as the cultural elevation of the human over the animal was predicated on a pincer action between religious misrepresentation and intellectual chauvinism, so too, a culture/nature dichotomy in which we have been conditioned to believe is anomalous. It can be said never to have existed, beyond its own specifically anthropocentric framing.

Our conceptual detachment from other species, our insulation and intellectual isolation from the environment, have had far reaching consequences which have been devastating for humans, our cohabitants and for all our overlapping and shared habitats.

Fundamental to our Practice therefore is an examination of some of the mechanisms by which this has happened and by which mainstream thinking and practices perpetuate such damaging constructs. Again these objectives have clear correspondence with post-human ideas central to the thinking of Animal Studies individuals, groups and initiatives particularly in the USA and the UK, but increasingly also in Europe. Over the last 10 years, from within this area (emphatically *not* a discipline in itself but *necessarily* and crucially an interdisciplinary pooling of

knowledge and perspectives by specialists in a range of subjects such as anthropology, zoology, human geography, museology, biology, ecology and environmental studies) much lively and contentious debate has prompted a formidable catalogue of key writings by scholars such as Erica Fudge (literature), Donna Haraway (cultural critic and feminist philosopher), Garry Marvin (anthropologist), Ron Broglio (philosophy and ethics), Cary Wolfe (cultural theory), Steve Baker (art history) along with museologists, zoologists, biologists and human geographers amongst others. The premise of animal studies thinking is that human understanding of animals historically has been intellectually and practically exploitative to service the needs and will of humans. Most recently, the non-human animal has been identified as a fascinating *other* (challenging anthropocentrism in the way that issues of gender, race and sexuality came to challenge societal and colonial presumptions and preconceptions) that may in fact more rightfully and usefully be seen as being a cohabitant or co-occupant of our shared environmental space. There are ramifications of this perspective that are clearly useful to think about as we adjust to the demands of environmental decline and yet, this is really only one of a host of applications arising from such a shift in thinking. At the heart of our work also, is the acknowledgement that humans are indeed *other animals* and that our behaviour toward others as evidenced in historical, cultural, symbolic and relational terms gives us valuable insight not only into what we as a species have become, but how we could otherwise be.

In relation to our own practice and research, since 2004 we, (myself and Bryndís Snæbjörnsdóttir) have been working with individuals and groups at the heart of this field and during 2007-9 we participated in a programme of seminars hosted by the *British Animal Studies Network* at which many of the most influential international voices in Animal Studies, came to deliver papers. For the inaugural re-launched 'BASN-Glasgow' conference in May 2012 entitled 'Wild', I delivered our paper *Feral Attraction*, which

arises from a current project for which the inspiration is a flock of sheep that lived in a feral condition for over thirty years on an inaccessible peninsular in the Westfjörds in Iceland. We recently gave another version of this paper at the 3rd *Minding Animals* conference in Utrecht (July 2012).

As a consequence of our involvement in this group we have taken part in many other events nationally and internationally by both exhibiting our work and delivering papers on our projects and thinking to seminars and conferences, examples of which are the *US Cultural Studies Association*, Annual Meeting, Portland, Oregon 18-22nd April 2007, *Society Animals & Gender*, Uppsala, Sweden, August 26-29, *Animal Gaze (I)* conference, London Metropolitan University, London 2008 and *Animal Gaze (II)* conference, LMU, London, 2011, *Minding Animals(2)* conference, Newcastle NSW, 2009 and *Minding Animals 3* conference, Utrecht, 2012, *Royal Geographic Society* annual conference, London, 2008, *Interactive Futures*, Vancouver October 2011 and many more.¹⁶

In addition, we have been interviewed and asked to write on our work in a number of widely respected publications including *Art and Research* (2007/2009), *Antennae: the online Journal of Nature in Visual Culture* (2008/2010/2012), *New Scientist* (2007) and so on.¹⁷

In Steve Baker's¹⁸ forthcoming book *ARTIST / ANIMAL* (publication due January 2013) in the section 'Animals, locations and dislocations' he notes:

'... In the case of the UK-based artists Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson – at least since their *nanoq: flat out and bluesome* project of the mid-2000s – one of the major intended sites of effect for their work at many different sites of intervention has been the trans disciplinary discourse of animal studies. At the time of writing, they

¹⁶ See full list in Appendix 3

¹⁷ For a detailed list of articles and essays that either feature our work centrally or (in e.g. the case of the article in *Modern Painters*, cite it as having a significant place in the field), please see Appendix 3

¹⁸ Steve Baker has written amongst other works the seminal *Postmodern Animal*, Reaktion, 2000, which explores the animal in contemporary art and is a staple reference for Animal Studies researchers

are arguably the artists who have most clearly recognized the scope for working at this site of effect, using international animal studies conferences and other such meetings to enable this field's largely "non-art" audiences to look *at* their various animal-themed projects "in the sense of looking *to* art for an understanding of what art is and does," as Mieke Bal puts it. Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson have long been aware of the quiet but considerable impact of moving animal bodies into unexpected spaces. As Wilson observed some years ago, "it's in that sense of relocation ... that everything becomes possible."¹⁹

Whilst the observation regarding intended sites is correct as far as it goes, I would go further. It was and is our intention that this trans-disciplinary audience, which we have identified as being both forward-looking and potentially radical in its various intentions, was ideally suited as a forum for our ideas and the presentation of our work, not only to draw attention to 'what art is and does' but also to inform and inflect in some ways the direction of animal studies discourse itself; consciously to use art as a practical and cross-disciplinary instrument within the field of Animal Studies. With the interest, respect and support from within such an energetically emergent international field, there is tacit acknowledgement that contemporary art works laterally across the specialist disciplines of others, drawing on their methodologies and putting them and their knowledge to other, new work, thereby simultaneously referencing, realigning and subverting such knowledge. The artist Pavel Büchler, in his essay *Other Peoples' Cultures*, considers significant the increasing tendency for a non-art public to appreciate artists for *what they do* rather necessarily for *what they make*. (Büchler, 1999, p.45) He draws attention to the fact that increasingly, artists make it their business to immerse themselves in the cultures (that is, specialist disciplinary fields) of others in order to 'report back' and that the methodologies deployed customarily within those fields for

¹⁹ Mark Wilson, quoted in Steve Baker, "What can dead bodies do?," essay in Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson, *nanoq: flat out and bluesome, A Cultural Life of Polar Bears*. Bryndís Snæbjörnsdóttir and Mark Wilson. Black Dog Publishing, 2006. 148-155.

specific purposes, may be redeployed by artists in pursuit of some other purpose to quite different effects. This process, in principle familiar to artists and art historians as *Détournement*, mobilises the practices and models of other disciplines, for example those in science or commerce, in the service of art and is at once both mindful and subversive of these borrowed methodologies. (Debord, 1967, 206)²⁰ These interdisciplinary qualities and ploys are, perhaps not always consciously so, but necessarily staple ambitions within the field of Animal Studies. Further to this, a crucial aspect of appeal to academic researchers whose work is concerned with relationships between humans and other species is that contemporary art, whilst privileging non-linguistic methods and deploying, as it does, retinal, aural and other sensory means, finds other, less obviously partisan resources than text in order to test the world and carry its ideas. The dominance of language, its refinement, nuanced nature, flexibility and authority has been blinding (deafening) in its effect and its tendency towards reductionism and absolutism has been significant in shaping the direction of our thought regarding the world, the environment and our relationships to it (Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson, 2010, pp.211-226). Specialist knowledge whilst adept at drilling down has never intrinsically best served the relational – the matrix of connections between things and our knowledge of them and their potentialities – as an alternative and more holistic way of reading our position in the world and our relationship to those with whom we share it. Amongst the many aspects of its fascination, the field of Animal Studies has a broader implicit functional effect, as in part we believe, does our practice; by pulling focus on significant historical oversights – the valuable otherness of others, the error of a perceived moral and evolutionary superiority in the world – we may move from an aggressively suffocating and ultimately both suicidal and zoo-cidal anthropocentric perspective to one where within the ecosystem, we acknowledge our symbiotic

²⁰ *Détournement* reradicalizes previous critical conclusions that have been petrified into respectable truths and thus transformed into lies.

potential. Expanding on her term 'geopathology', by way of the project *nanoq: flat out and bluesome* Una Chaudhuri observes:

These photographs—displayed at various museums and printed in a beautiful book about the project—are exemplary documents of what might be called a zoo-geopathology: the infliction—by humans, on the other animals—of the vicissitudes of displacement. Leafing through these brilliant photographs is like journeying through the very definition of the uncanny—in its etymological sense of “the unhomelike:” the oddly estranged, the strangely out-of place (Chaudhuri, 2012, p.47).

The research that positions itself between disciplines, (out of place) must also negotiate and identify a role in managing the incongruities that may exist not only between the views from such discrete fields, but also those aspects altogether *disallowed* by the disciplinary rational and the analytic – anthropomorphism, sentiment, compassion – attributes and tropes that will not readily submit to the calibration of scientific scrutiny. Büchler suggests that ‘...the more we overlap in our work with the practices of other fields – the more we trespass on others’ territories – the clearer and more specific we need to be about our specialist identities and roles to get away with it...’ (Büchler, 1999, p.44)

In discussing the problematics of non-human animal appropriation and inclusion in contemporary art the human geographer Emily Brady writes:

But sentimentality and anthropomorphism, I think, may inevitably have some role: after all, feeling is our way to affection and recognizing affinities with other forms of life (Brady, 2010 p.11)²¹

The artist Mark Dion who habitually works across disciplinary borders (as artist-anthropologist, artist-zoologist, artist-botanist, artist-taxonomist) testing the structures and cultural production of these fields, has suggested that uncomfortable and disreputable though anthropomorphism might be as a way of looking at the world, it may yet prove to be the vital tool that enables the human race to care enough to cease its destruction of the environment and the planet:

I am interested in the strategic deployment of anthropomorphism [...]. I want to imagine the category of animals as one which affirms humans as being firmly a part of the category. I want to fight against the model of the mechanistic animal, the hard-wired being guided by instinct alone. Animals are individuals and seeing them so allows us to bestow more respect and agency to them. (Aloi, 2012, p.150)

One can see the point – that this most curious (and potentially blinding) of temptations constitutes no respectable ambition, but no matter how potentially wayward and paternalistic, it nevertheless allows us to apply the faculty of empathy to imagine the sensitivities of beings other than ourselves and thereby, the insight to see that what we do to them we ultimately may be doing to ourselves. The motivation for change is thus as ever, a selfish one, but it is that deceptively selfless motivation that may give us the spur to act. So anthropomorphism as an applied metaphor provides an analogy not to be trusted in extension, but nevertheless capable of serving as a tool for (qualified) observation and thinking and learning. Within our work this effect is indeed qualified and strategised (albeit in reverse) for example in *(a)fly*, not as a vertical manoeuvre of

²¹ In this article, Brady references the project *Uncertainty in the City*: ‘For these artists, creatures that are marginalized – either [as] pests and vermin (pigeons, rats) or [as] too everyday to be of interest (starlings) – become significant as their crossings between human and natural habitats are exposed’

the conferral of human qualities upon animals, but rather a lateral shift involving a proposition of phenomenological levelling. Again in the work *Three Attempts*, a principle driver is the imagining of parity in meeting between species as a way of rethinking our relationship to environments. There is nothing easy about formulating this kind of reappraisal and in the submitted chapter *The Empty Wilderness*, we go into some detail about the complications and potential compromises involved in this undertaking.

In an earlier passage in her paper, Brady referenced the shifting emphasis of environmental art away from its early tendencies of imposition, towards more situated concerns of ecology and inter-relationality

It might seem that the criticisms raised against early forms of environmental art will have less relevance given that environmental art has been motivated by ecological concern more and more (Brady, 2010, p.10)

This innocuous comment unwittingly illustrates the ways in which strategically pluralist artistic intentions may themselves be selectively cherry-picked. In this process, art projects too may be subject to hijacking by theoretical or representational contraction. There is no question that the work we make is political and consciously so. Acceptance of or identification with our work by established groups or interested parties may be well-intentioned, but such attention may privilege a specific dimension within the work to the exclusion of others, thereby unpicking the cohesion upon which its real integrity as art depends. And yet for as long as we foster, for instance, sympathies for ecological concerns ourselves, it seems churlish and even in itself misleading for us to rebuff such simplified and uncluttered readings. So, a case in point perhaps is when two years after the first showings of *nanoq* and indeed six years after its conception, the national press (Times, New Scientist, Guardian, Time Out, Telegraph, Mail etc.) seized on it as a work concerned with Arctic (and therefore global) environmental decline. In the six years

between its inception (2000) and exhibition at the Horniman Museum in London, which prompted the flurry of articles (2006/7), the function of the polar bear in Western popular consciousness had dramatically changed, becoming as it did a motif or even (vulgarly) the 'poster child' for Global Warming. This environmental, ecological dimension was one, but only one, of many embedded in the project, which by the caricaturisation of this interpretation, became (in those articles at least) eclipsed and overlooked.



Figure 3

Since that time, (in 2012) Una Chaudhuri has written of *nanoq*:

“The artists themselves characterize [the polar bear specimens in] their project as “a notional community,” made up of “animals that had shared a similar fate.” In the age of climate change, that shared fate includes that of the human animals wandering the gallery space, turning that space, suddenly, into a space of ecological consciousness and—possibly—a platform for action...’ [and] *nanoq*’s incarnation as gallery

installation opens a space of performance that I call “the theatre of species,” naming an emergent performance practice of our times. Climate change, which turns familiar sites into landscapes of risk or disaster, also reminds us that we humans are one species among many, among multitudes, all equally contingent and threatened. The theatre of species restages all life as species life, highlighting and foregrounding the ecological dimensions of human life, which include not only biological, climatological, and material factors but also the vast panoply of what Donna Haraway calls “naturecultures”: the ideas and practices through which human beings relate to the “more-than-human” world. The theatre of species brings the resources of performance to bear on what is arguably the most urgent task facing our species: to understand—so as to transform—our modes of habitation in a world we share intimately with millions of other species. The theatre of species addresses what we could call a “zoögeopathology”—the planetary health emergency that is challenging the anthropocentric geographies we have lived by for so long. (Chaudhuri, 2012, p.50)

What science finds dismissible through want of clear parameters and academic or analytical accountability is not necessarily forever immutably so. But the demand for evidence is incessant, unquenchable. What we don't know and what we lack in parameters for knowing, we are inclined to shelve as unreliable *and therefore necessarily of no practical consequence*. Customarily, there has been no acceptable ‘suspension of disbelief’ in the practices of logic and analysis. But for example, in *Leviathan* (Hoare, 2008, p.356), ideas concerning the intelligence and sensitivity of whales once thought fanciful (Lilly 1963)²² are now being given credence by the application of new

²² Lilly J. C. (1962) ‘Consideration of the Relation of Brain Size to Capability for Language Activity as illustrated by Homo Sapiens and Tursiops truncatus (Bottlenose Dolphin). *Electroencephalography and Clinical Neurophysiology*.14, no.3: 424

knowledge beyond the reach of science in the 1960s, to the extent that there is even a growing acceptance that 'culture is not solely the property of humans'. Further to this, on July 7th 2012, at the Francis Crick Memorial Conference on Consciousness in Human and non-Human Animals, at Churchill College, University of Cambridge, the Cambridge Declaration on Consciousness was signed (in the presence of Stephen Hawking). In this landmark document, it was noted, amongst other equally uncompromising statements:

The field of Consciousness research is rapidly evolving. Abundant new techniques and strategies for human and non-human animal research have been developed. Consequently, more data is becoming readily available, and this calls for a periodic re-evaluation of previously held preconceptions in this field. [...] Birds appear to offer, in their behaviour, neurophysiology, and neuroanatomy a striking case of parallel evolution of consciousness. Evidence of near human-like levels of consciousness has been most dramatically observed in African grey parrots.

Mammalian and avian emotional networks and cognitive microcircuitries appear to be far more homologous than previously thought. Moreover, certain species of birds have been found to exhibit neural sleep patterns similar to those of mammals, including REM sleep and, as was demonstrated in zebra finches, neurophysiological patterns, previously thought to require a mammalian neocortex. Magpies in particular have been shown to exhibit striking similarities to humans, great apes, dolphins, and elephants in studies of mirror self-recognition.²³

It is in the arena of perceived need for a reappraisal of anthropocentric thinking and the reductionism of Western modernity towards a more responsive and relational approach to ecologies and environment that I see our practice as having its potential value and

²³ The Cambridge Declaration on Consciousness was written by Philip Low and edited by Jaak Panksepp, Diana Reiss, David Edelman, Bruno Van Swinderen, Philip Low and Christof Koch. The Declaration was publicly proclaimed in Cambridge, UK, on July 7, 2012, at the Francis Crick Memorial Conference on Consciousness in Human and non-Human Animals, at Churchill College, University of Cambridge, by Low, Edelman and Koch

effect. The triangulation of art, art research and animal studies continues to constitute, certainly for the time being, a useful and effective framework upon which to function.

Published Work (submitted with this supporting text)

Big Mouth – by Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson. 84 pages featuring research and documentation of three projects by Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson, with essays by Juan Cruz, Dr Nikos Papastergiadis, Dr Francis McKee and the artists, Mark Wilson and Bryndís Snæbjörnsdóttir. Published by Tramway, Glasgow (November 2004)

nanoq: flat out and bluesome, A Cultural Life of Polar Bears by Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson. 192 pages featuring research and documentation of the project with essays by Patricia Ellis, Rd. Steve Baker, Michelle Henning, Dr Garry Marvin and the artists, Mark Wilson and Bryndís Snæbjörnsdóttir. Published by Black Dog Publishing, London (August 2006)

(a)fly – Flug(a) by Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson. 84 pages featuring research and documentation of the project with essays by Dr Karl Benediktsson, Dr Ron Broglio, Dr Mika Hannula and the artists, Mark Wilson and Bryndís Snæbjörnsdóttir. Published by the National Museum of Iceland, Reykjavík (May 2006)

Uncertainty in the City by Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson. 200 pages (hardback) featuring research and documentation of the project with essays by Rd. Erica Fudge, Rd. Chris Wilbert, Rd. Peter Lurz and the artists, Mark Wilson and Bryndís Snæbjörnsdóttir. Published by The Green Box, Berlin (published June 2011)

Authored chapter

The Empty Wilderness: Seals and Animal Representation

by Mark Wilson and Bryndís Snæbjörnsdóttir from

Conversations with Landscapes in Iceland, edited by Dr Karl

Benediktsson and Dr Katrín Lund. Published by Ashgate, UK

(2010) This essay stems from and makes detailed reference to

the project and installation ***between you and me*** (2009)

A note on the Published Work

Each of the submitted books (and the submitted chapter) exists in relation to an art project with an already exhibited outcome. The objective of each book has been to document the resultant exhibition and in doing so, at the same time draw together research in relation to the respective project/s and set this alongside critical essays by specialists in related fields. The essays centre on both the work itself and on issues surrounding and arising from the work.

In addition to descriptions of the respective projects I have introduced three further classifications, each of which I consider merit specific elaboration in this text:

1) On Participation: This factor is raised in acknowledgement of the important role played by others in the making and discussion arising from the projects. Our wish has been wherever appropriate, to use the experience of others at different stages – in planning, development, execution, discourse and dissemination.

In order to inform ourselves and to inform the development of our research and work we have used the experience and input of selected experts, professionals and members of the public from a number of fields relevant to the inquiry in each case.

These participants have also helped us widen the impact and resonance of the work, whilst the artwork is installed. (Because of the nature of our work, it is rarely manifested as a portable thing or things. Much of the work we do, being installation-based is constituted by the arrangement of sculptural objects, film, photography, texts, etc.). As part of our Practice, we have often organised public seminars, debates and discussions in amongst or adjacent to the work itself in which participants discuss the ideas embedded there with us and with other invited parties who may have specialist knowledge or significant levels of experience in relation to aspects of its content.

We have involved others in order to contribute to the associated publications arising from each project, which act as an archive for the exhibitions and our own research and its analysis. Such contributions provide artistic and other contexts, allowing the art (and its functions) to retain visibly, intellectually, sometimes poetically its connections with other, pertinent perspectives.

2) On the Publication and invited contributors:

Publication is a strategy we have deployed throughout our collaboration. To involve other thinkers and academics in the exposition of our work and publications was a natural approach, in part because through the collaborative constitution of our own Practice and woven into the work is a dynamic extending beyond the individual self and whatever such apparent autonomy might imply. Our actions and the development of the work are in significant part, a consequence of dialogue and exchange. However the means and structuring by which such relationships occur and the instrumentalisation of others' contributions within the projects is highly strategic and managed. Whilst the publication therefore may in some respects have some correspondence with more conventional artist catalogues, whose purpose it is to be a companion document to an exhibition, as an extension to the work on show, or to provide context or a supporting rationale, in fact the publications submitted here are conceived and function differently. From the outset of these projects, in anticipation of the scope and open nature of the work to be done we build in the prospect of a book as a means by which to register, manage and keep visible the relational complexity of the multiple strands and agencies of its constitution. There is no doubt that the book format allows us an alternative and more sustainable vehicle for the presentation of the exhibited work, but its overarching value is its capacity to do this in relation and juxtaposition to the processes by which it has evolved. As with all material and conceptual components within the projects, the structuring of events, the commissioning and editing of essays, and the design and layout

of the book works are necessarily our responsibility (either to execute or to oversee closely) and pivotal as such in the integrity of the work.

At the inception of our Practice in 1999/2001, there were models of art practice known to us where the skills, knowledge and services of others were necessarily and transparently enlisted in the service of the artists' own development and production. The work of artists such as Christine Borland, Mark Dion, Mierle Laderman Ukeles, (later, Jeremy Deller, Christian Philipp Müller) and others, draw the knowledge and skills-base of non-artists into the fabric of their work and in so doing, not only give their work a specific contextual grounding, underpinning the conceptual framework of their ideas but also, to some extent facilitate the demystification of art and its methods, providing a conduit between artist, artistic (and other) practices and audience. For us, this third *intermediary* group (between ourselves as producers and the subsequent recipients in a gallery space) is in some ways the *first* audience for the work – a participatory and *shaping* component, but their involvement is even more significant in its effect on what art becomes in the process. The shift it heralds is in the emphasis from art's product to its production (Bourriaud, Büchler) and performance-dynamic. In the substance of the work, a combined energy that is the exchange between artists and first-audience participants becomes paramount. The knowledge and visibility of context and participation informs the work crucially in its developmental, production and post-production stages and the instrument of the publication provides for us a conspicuous way of containing and sustaining this balance in a single document, long after the exhibition has finished.

3) On post exhibition and publication resonance or impact:

In this section, the effect of the public outcomes (wherever possible) are recorded, examined and analysed. In some cases the information is plentiful and in others, less so.

It is anticipated that over time this disparity may level out, given sustained exposure of all the projects over the longer term.

Projects



Figure 4

Big Mouth

The published works in ***Big Mouth*** for the purposes of this submission combine the project, exhibitions, *lullabies* and *Big Mouth* and the publication.

QUESTIONS addressed by the project:

By the act of naming do we exercise violence on the unnamed?

How, through art is it possible to create agential substance from material absence?

In moving from the familiar to the unfamiliar, how may the conditions of fear and uncertainty lead us unwittingly to the fatal application of semiotic reflex, bound up in the act of naming?

Aware as we were of the re-imagining of extinct species as potentially retrievable through DNA profiling²⁴, we were interested to explore the motivations behind such an idea. In the case of a more recent extinction we wanted to use art as a way of configuring an alternative examination of the combined resonance of loss and desire; especially one so inextricably bound up with human causality. By weighing together a variety of

²⁴ The cinema blockbuster *Jurassic Park* (Spielberg, S. 1993) and before it the novel by Michael Crichton (1990) had popularized the notion that cloning a creature from ancient remains might one day be possible and in so doing had raised the spectre of the ethical advisability of this possibility.

contemporary vested human perspectives, was it possible to give substantive presence to something materially and irrevocably absent? Through art, could a transferrable sense of responsibility be prompted, by presenting only the human echo of something we have physically erased from the world?

In 2002 Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson were offered one of the first Arts Council England International Fellowship Awards to Australia. Our host institutions were the Centre for Ideas at the Victorian College of the Arts in Melbourne and the Ruskin School of Art and Design, at Oxford University. We framed a three-month residency in Australia with two seven-day research periods Oxford.

Our research centred on the prevailing fanaticism and historical contention surrounding the extinct marsupial thylacine or Tasmanian tiger (*Thylacinus cynocephalus*). Research indicated that during the nineteenth and early twentieth century, settlers had used the species expediently, as a scapegoat for poor returns on sheep farms in the colony of Tasmania. As a consequence of a bounty offered in return for dead specimens the extinction of the animal was rapidly accelerated. In 1936 the last officially recorded thylacine died in captivity in Hobart Zoo in Tasmania.

During our residency, we were able to set up meetings and interviews with specialists in Melbourne, Tasmania and in Sydney. These included Dr Robert Paddle, an animal behaviourist and commentator on the history and philosophy of science, Nick Mooney the Chief Parks & Wildlife Manager for Tasmania, Kathryn Medlock, keeper of the natural history collection at Hobart Museum, Buck and Joan Emberg, an environmentalist partnership, Peter Carter, a veteran trapper, Ned Terry, a contemporary 'hunter' of the animal, and Karen Firestone, then a geneticist at the Australian Museum in Sydney, all of whom were engaged and driven by disparate conceptions and possibilities pertaining to

this invisible and believed-to-be extinct creature. Elsie Cupitt was the ninth interviewee. In her account she recalls how as a child growing up in the early twentieth century she had observed the thylacine at the side of a road, a shy creature that in reality had better things to do than hunt down sheep. She had also seen the last Tasmanian tiger in Hobart Zoo. Of the people interviewed, she and Peter Carter were the only ones to have seen the animal alive.

The chief public manifestation of our project *Big Mouth* was as the major installation in the iconic Tramway 2 space in south-side Glasgow (April 16th – May 31st 2004).

But in the year prior to this and by way of preparation, we had made an installation entitled *lullabies* in Hafnarhúsið (the municipal Art Museum in Reykjavík), which included some related research material from both the Australian (ACE, 2002) residency and another three-month residency we had undertaken in Greenland the previous year granted by NIFCA.²⁵ This was the first solo exhibition we'd undertaken since the beginning of our collaboration and was by necessity somewhat speculative. In retrospect *lullabies* made use of the Gallery space as a kind of laboratory even more than we were aware of at the time – the degree of formal experimentation we allowed ourselves was of pivotal importance in helping us begin to shape a set of methodologies. For *lullabies* the exhibition, we showed three videos, a mise-en-scene installation involving a hammock-tent some turf and taxidermic specimens of animals indigenous to Iceland and two light boxes.²⁶ Consisting of material we'd gathered in Greenland, Victoria and Tasmania, these components hinged on a large video-text projection – a duel and dovetailed account of a journey by foot through unfamiliar, difficult and possibly dangerous territory. The two of us had walked together in Greenland through uninhabited and difficult terrain for five days. On our return we each wrote an account of the experience including specific responses to events on the journey including thoughts, anxieties, expressions of wonder

²⁵ Nordic Institute For Contemporary Art

²⁶ (respectively 200 x 300 mm and 850 x 1000 mm approx.)

and even dreams, sequenced in the order by which they occurred. Both narratives begin and end with descriptions of the walk itself but with the serial cut-and-paste delivery of short phrases from each protagonist in turn, the narrative sequence is disrupted as things are remembered differently and with different emphasis. As a consequence, similar experiences reappear almost as memories, haunting the narrative of the other.²⁷

In another component of the show, we screened the playing of a 45rpm vinyl record featuring Country and Western singer Jim Reeves singing *Old Tige*. Effectively this is an animal ghost story, hinging on sentimentality, anxiety and loss. As a preface to the installation proper (the monitor was mounted in an antechamber at the entrance to the main gallery space) this work also set the tone for an examination of fears and uncertainties belying the reassurance of lullabies and even testing the artifice and gloss of popular song.

Our application for the Arts Council Fellowship to Australia had been pitched in the context of the recent Greenland Residency. Although on opposite sides of the world we were interested that both were effectively large, single-nation islands with problematic colonial histories and both with respectively uninhabitable or nearly uninhabitable 'desert' centres, meaning that the majority of the respective populations were coastal. During the Greenland sojourn we'd travelled north and it was in Ilulissat that we'd become fascinated with the colonies of sled dogs occupying some areas within though predominately closely surrounding the town. In Ilulissat at that time, the dogs outnumbered the human population of 4000 by half as much again. What fascinated us and in some senses set off our long term interests in human/animal relationships was the distinctive and liminal place these animals held in a spectrum which we identified at the time as ranging (in decreasing proximity to the human) from pets (companion

²⁷ (see *Big Mouth*, loose appendix)

species) through working animals, to livestock, game, feral and finally on to wild animals. Two further niches however, occupying the far and apparently opposite ends of this taxonomy, rather complicate this simplistic view. One is the contemporary, endangered wild animal over which we have come in principle at least, to imagine and exercise a role of responsibility and stewardship and therefore implicitly a paradoxically closer, paternalistic relationship. The other is the parasitic, microbial and bacterial presence acting upon and within our own (and all) bodies about which the biologist Donna Haraway has commented:

I love the fact that human genomes can be found in only about 10 percent of all the cells that occupy the mundane space I call my body; the other 90 percent of the cells are filled with the genomes of bacteria, fungi, protists, and such, some of which play in a symphony necessary to my being alive at all, and some of which are hitching a ride and doing the rest of me, of us, no harm. I am vastly outnumbered by my tiny companions; better put, I become an adult human being in company with these tiny messmates. (Haraway, 2008. p.3-4)

These are important qualifications and ultimately, within the Practice are considered as having real purchase, not least because of the paradigm of material and conceptual complexity they demonstrate. Nevertheless, there in the north, what we were told and indeed what we observed, was that in relation to the Greenlandic sled dog, the term 'pet potential' is an oxymoron. They have been bred to work for humans whilst still maintaining a highly developed sense of pack hierarchy. Historically, (unsubstantiated) stories abound of the regular replenishing of strength and wildness in the stock by staking females in heat out in areas where there are wolves. In this subject we seized with considerable enthusiasm an embodiment of conflated domesticity and wildness which remained resistant to both classifications.

The installation *lullabies* and indeed the follow up exhibition in Gothenburg *There Are Some Things You Have To Know* explored this apparent conundrum as a philosophical paradigm, extrapolated through a clutch of other fused and conflated binaries whose more complex spectral realities we plumbed – the familiar and the unfamiliar, the real and the imagined, fear and hope, topographical and emotional landscapes and so on.

Big Mouth: the exhibition

The installation *Big Mouth* took place in the darkened, cavernous space of Tramway 2 in Glasgow. In a way similar to *lullabies*, we devised a show made up of discrete parts, each of which was designed to inform the rest. Central to the work was a large video projection, entitled *Big Mouth*, which carried a loop of extracts from the 8 interviews we'd undertaken in Sydney, Victoria and Tasmania. Put together, the series was a nexus of pragmatic, scientific, historical, poetic, nostalgic, anthropological and environmental perspectives where the shape of the absent animal, (the thylacine) was constituted in plurality and in the round by this very disparity.

As a part of the installation a large, three-tiered construction, entitled *Zoomorphic Bench*, was built in the space. Intended also as a seating platform from which to view the other respective works, the risers of the steps were sign-written with a series of two-word phrases. Each was the first part of a simile indicating animal behaviour, attributed as often as not, to humans: *as busy, as loose, as drunk, as cold, as timid...* etc. The bench was one of two textual components of the exhibition. The significance of representation and misrepresentation was key in the demise of the thylacine and so we wanted to draw attention to an unthinking, habitual use of language, which builds on and serially bolsters its biases together with the summary instrumentalisation of other species by this means and to point up the potential consequences of this practice.



Figure 5



Figure 6

The other text-based piece featured the many names, which over the years had been given to the thylacine by British colonists. Many of these names were hybrid assignments betraying the bewilderment and uncertainty in which settlers beheld and imagined the

animal. Conflations of Antipodean, Asian and European types indicate comparisons of appearance and behaviour alike and are a fascinating register of how we go about the often-indiscriminate process of taming by naming. Each of the 30 names was presented as a colourful and graphically striking fingerpost sign on a black ground. The signs were then arranged more or less randomly in a 360° vertically ascending configuration around one of the 12 tall pillars supporting the roof in Tramway. The result was intended to articulate a brash, superficial (Disneyesque even) and ultimately insensitive and hollow act of colonial appropriation – the kind that applies its own terms of reference upon the foreign subject and by doing so objectifies, eliminates or at least entirely fails to connect with its reality.

Another component of the installation consisted of a taxidermised sheep specimen, a red dyed sheepskin thrown across its back and raised up above head height on a hollow podium. The sheep was theatrically spot lit, the lower spread of this light coinciding (almost) exactly with the tapered form of the plinth, leaving a fine and perfectly circular halo on the floor around its base. Poor returns on the Tasmanian sheep stations had been blamed on the thylacine. As a species it was scapegoated and vilified on the back of claims that it was a killer of almost mythic standing – stories circulated that the animal was vampire-like in its behaviour, tearing out the throats of its prey, sucking blood and leaving the carcass otherwise intact.

The final piece, situated behind the zoomorphic bench was another video work. As part of our research we had interviewed the keeper of the Australian collection at the Oxford University Museum of Natural History. Although what she had told us was of great contextual interest, we focused instead on the most visually compelling and indeed hypnotic aspect of the conversation. As she systematically went through the many drawers and boxes of antipodean flatskins, (i.e. non-volumetric taxidermic specimens) she pulled out examples one by one, and continuing to speak, utterly unconsciously used respective specimens in her hand to give emphasis to particular points she was making. I

moved the camera down to her hands – the specimens were passed between her and Bryndís as they spoke and the tied labels hung and swayed forlornly from the hind paw of an echidna or the forepaw of a possum. In editing, with the sound muted and the video slowed, this silent, ponderous swaying, bobbing and exchange between the interlocutors became an absurd, compelling ballet in which the puppet-like specimen, with cotton wool-stuffed eye sockets, seemed eerily and abjectly to live again. (Pp.76,77)

REFLECTION

On Participation:

The dynamics of collaboration, the pooling of disparate knowledge and perspectives and the collective presentation of fragmentary accounts in order to constitute an implicit whole were intrinsic to this project. Important too was the drawing together not just of multiple knowledge bases – genetic science, conservation, zoology, farming, hunting, museology, trapping, animal behavioural study, and the history and philosophy of science – but also the contributions of both professionals and amateurs whose enthusiasm for and commitment to their subject was the conceptual bond holding everything together.

We found that the Fellowship enabled us to develop and extend growing tendencies within our practice towards more collaborative and process-based outcomes. It was rewarding to identify other involved parties with profound if varied vested interests and to enlist their cooperation, knowledge and insights, all of which resonated distinctly when put in what became the ‘collective’ context of the presented work.

As a consequence of the interviewing process, we gained confidence and the effectiveness of this strategic pluralism undoubtedly assisted in the evolution of our practice. In addition it further bolstered our belief that collaboration and the sharing of knowledge and experience is enormously beneficial in the processes of observation and discovery and consequentially in making art.

On Publication and invited contributors:

Big Mouth: *the publication*

The publication for Big Mouth which was launched late in 2004, the year of the Tramway installation, was the first such book project we had undertaken. In some ways the ambitions we determined for this outcome have informed the conception of subsequent monographs we have undertaken although there have been significant discrete differences made in each, according to the specific nature of the projects and respective contents.

Central to the publication were the transcripts of the interviews we conducted and each interview occupied a double-page spread.

In addition to this section, the essayists we invited were Juan Cruz (then at Goldsmiths College, London), Dr Nikos Papastergiadis, (Centre for Ideas, Melbourne) and Dr. Francis McKee, (curator, Centre for Contemporary Art, Glasgow).

Papastergiadis was a member of the Arts Council Fellowship selection panel, which awarded us the residency and although by the time we arrived in Melbourne he had moved on to the University of Melbourne, nevertheless he played host to our residency at Centre for Ideas. In his essay, later republished in Arts Council's yearbook *Freefall* he references our methodology in positive terms and exercises the argument for developing an appropriate critique or appreciation for research-based practice, lamenting the fact that artists have for some time made process a significant component of output and yet the art market recognizes, or worse, for the most part has only the mechanisms by which to recognize 'product':

I'm retelling the circumstances and narrating aspects of Snæbjörnsdóttir's and Wilson's research process, not in order to provide a backdrop, or help set the stage upon which the final artwork performs. These circumstances and experiences do not play a secondary role, mere stepping-stones on the way to

the execution of an object that is the focus of attention in the context of an exhibition. Instead I want to stress the value of the research process that the artists have undertaken and underline that this process is on a continuum with the final product. From the documentation of the exhibition I can perceive a level of ambivalence towards language and landscape that is evident in every part of the project... (Papastergiadis, 2004, p.33)

He goes on:

Despite many decades of artistic practice, in which artists have decided to make visible the dynamics of their practice, the institutions of art have still hesitated in following this lead. Both the market and the gallery are still dominated by the products of art and nervous when faced with the prospect of addressing the process of art. It is as if the response to art can only occur when the work is finished. Artists have tried to get over their sense of the 'preciousness' of the final work to not only allow the work to find completion in the mind of the viewer but find another starting point in every dialogue... (*Ibid*, p.37-38)

He also picks up on the importance in our project of the plurality of voices, which together constitute a representative matrix of the missing animal.

Today, a new kind of hunt is at play and with a great deal of sympathy, Snæbjörnsdóttir and Wilson have explored the hunt to rediscover the elusive Thylacine. Their interviews give voice to the contemporary emotions and needs that are attached to this animal. Each voice is like a flag. It represents an army of like-minded views on the subject of hope and nostalgia. What lies in the balance is the folly of the dream to control nature. *Temporary Migration – A Season in Tasmania*

For the *Big Mouth* publication the artist Juan Cruz provided us with a short but insightful text which drew on an issue embedded in our own writing, that the search for something

often has more significance to the person looking, than any discovery arising from that search, in which he concludes:

We are advised then not to seek in order to find, but to use the possibility of finding, even the inevitability of finding, as an impetus towards searching. (Cruz, 2004, p.11)

Francis McKee's essay for *Big Mouth* discusses the nature of extinction and loss and the disproportionate image of remembered things, projected into their residual space. He cites the knockabout banter regarding empiricism and 'fact' between Russell and Wittgenstein and hints at the folly of imagining, in effect that science can replace a lost button in order to repair a garment it has since systematically shredded – the environment of the thylacine is devastated and so the reintroduction of the animal, even if it were possible, would be into a world it would not recognize:

And in Tasmania today a new controversy rages over the reckless approach to logging and wood-chipping that is doing permanent large-scale damage to the island's old-growth forests and scarring the landscape for generations. Within this context it is admirable that scientists may consider the technical possibility of cloning a thylacine, but naïve and sentimental to believe the project could succeed. (McKee, p.75)

These issues, of loss and memory, of the privileging of process, of the configuration of realities in the interstices between disparate voices and ultimately the greater significance of the search and inquiry over the expression of 'absolutes' were at the heart of the projects *lullabies* and *Big Mouth* and in respect of the contributing essayists it was important for us to have other people, whose approach and angles of inquiry we respected, explore these ideas alongside our own.

The style of the book is rich and busy, including over 60 images. It is significant that the image content sits in parallel with the essays and interviews and although some are reduced in scale to allow their interspersion with text, they are never in specific

correspondence with it. The images (taken largely from our research visits) were placed in the book as a way of indicating variance of contexts for this inquiry. The intrinsic disparity of images from northern and antipodean environments served to move the emphasis towards disorientation, displacement and uncertainty rather than one of consonance and narrative determinism.

The publication also presents documentation of the installation in Tramway 2 by Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson. This photographic record comprises 6 double page spreads, occupying the 12 central pages of the book.

Post Exhibition:

The significance of misrepresentation

In a development of the *Big Mouth* project, in April 2011 we took part of the work back to Tasmania and installed it at the now derelict Beaumaris Zoo in Hobart, on the site of the enclosure occupied by the last recorded living Tasmanian Tiger or Thylacine. For its reconfiguration as *I'm Not There*, at this somewhat inauspicious site we attached the naming signs to a specially erected telegraph pole (extending 8m above ground).

An installation by Snæbjörnsdóttir and Wilson at the old Hobart Zoo site overlooking the Derwent River shows some of the common names given to the thylacine. Visual and verbal representations of this marsupial often suggest a similarity with feared or hated European or Asian animals. They are evidence of a slow but successful campaign to exterminate the Tasmanian 'tiger' [...] and demonstrate the importance of representation to a species' survival. (Freeman, 2011, p.4)

For us this was a coup because we had always intended that the project should at some point have some outing in the place where our research had been conducted in the first place – the last home of the thylacine. For us that had broadly meant Tasmania and so to be able to take the work so specifically to the last cultural home of the animal for whom

the colonial culture could ultimately afford no place was a biting symmetry indeed. We had visited museums with stuffed specimens, we had trawled the periphery of the Island, and in old growth forest visited its erstwhile hunting ground, discussed the fate of the thylacine with experts from different fields in Sydney, Hobart, Melbourne and Oxford and ultimately on the derelict site of the last recorded trace of an entire species we planted a flag of names pointing outwards – a monument to and an indictment of another unnecessary, man-made environmental vacuum.

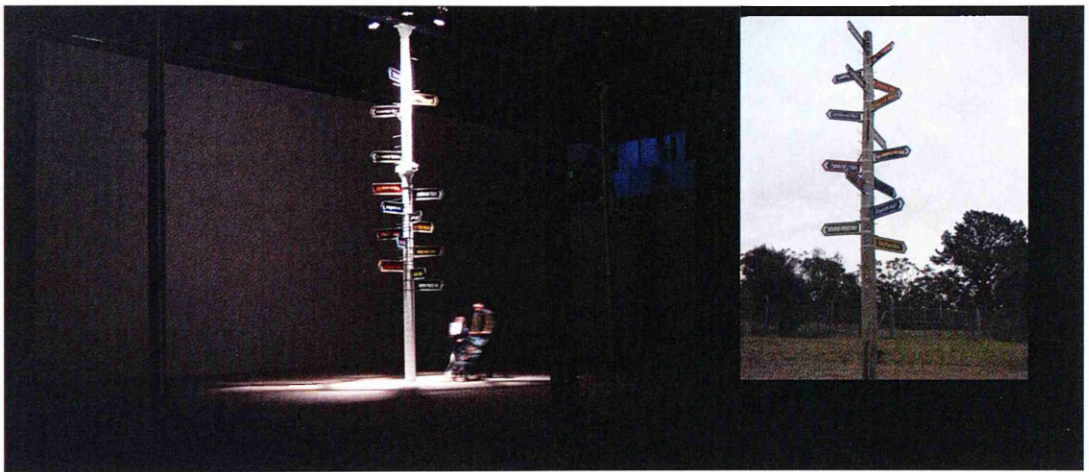


Figure 7



Figure 8

The published works in *nanoq: flat out and bluesome, A Cultural Life of Polar Bears* for the purposes of this submission combine the project, exhibition and publication.

...*nanoq* could be easily considered a “manifesto piece” of human- animal studies.

(Aloi, 2012b, p.76)

QUESTIONS addressed by the project:

How can prevailing taxonomies and hierarchies in Western thought as they are presented in museum and private collections, be productively disrupted as a way of imagining their more networked constitution?

What can the removal of museum contexts and museum didactic signage accomplish in respect of a new collection or assemblage of museum specimens?

In the act of representation – who speaks for whom and for what purpose?

It was our intention to intersperse these and other questions pertaining to singularity and individuation between the layers of established and accepted knowledge accretion based on generic representation. By redeploying prepared animal remains and re-presenting them for instance in the light of their own specific provenance within museum contexts, we wondered if it were possible productively to disrupt the previously generic role of such remains, shifting the emphasis of their meaning to one of discrete, networked singularity? How would the perspective that such an accumulation of singular accounting allows, enable a new reading of colonial enterprise and polar exploration historically and what bearing might this have on contemporary approaches for instance, to the arctic as both habitat and environment? We wanted to explore the relationship between taxidermy and photography as revealed specifically by *nanoq: flat out and bluesome*? And how would the serial re-situating and site-responsive presentations of *nanoq* prompt a cumulative reappraisal of contemporary assumptions regarding taxonomy, polar history, wildness and environment, not to mention taxidermy?

Later, alongside the uninterrupted series of showings of the *nanoq* archive (2006-2012, see Appendix 4) as we continued to weigh the meanings of the project and in the light of recent controversies surrounding contemporary environmental iconography, we have questioned the cultural durability and perishability of our symbols through a series of further related exhibitions.

nanoq: flat out and bluesome is an artists' survey of taxidermic polar bears residing in the British Isles, conceived in four parts, and developed over five years between 2001 and 2006. Today in 2012, the project continues to tour to galleries and museum

collections in the UK and abroad.²⁸ In each new context it is curated and adjusted specifically in relation to the host collection. The sites vary from arctic and natural history (e.g. the Scott Polar Research Centre, Cambridge, the Fram Museum, Oslo, the Oxford University Museum of Natural History) collections to art galleries. In 2008 we were invited to develop the project in the context of the international exhibition *HEAT: Art and Climate Change* in Melbourne Australia. There with the help of the organizers of the show we conducted a survey of taxidermic polar bears in Australia leading to an artwork in the show entitled *Polar Shift*.

In *nanoq*: we referenced and deployed a number of strategies drawn from a variety of models, from contemporary exhibitions to the methodologies of other specialist fields. Of particular influence to us in our early conversations and ultimately in the shaping of our collaborative Practice, had been the 1996 exhibition *Private View*, curated by *Penelope Curtis and Veit Görner* in which the Bowes Museum collection of French decorative arts had been sensitively and provocatively interspersed with contemporary artworks, including examples by Thomas Grünfeld, Damien Hirst and Anja Gallaccio. Our rather special experience of the show (we were given pre-preview access by the collector/curator Greville Worthington whilst the finishing touches were being put in place) was to see it before the exhibits were labeled. In this distinctive and often bizarre historical collection this meant that there was a delicious uncertainty as to which exhibits were the temporary inquisitors and which the hosts. In addition to this experience, we brought our own previous explorations in border-work (Snæbjörnsdóttir, *Sa ira*, 1993 and Wilson, *Aria, (Outstanding Natural Beauty*, 1997 from *BorderAXIS*)²⁹ and a shared interest in Semiotics, in Museum practice and presentation, Zoology and Polar Exploration.

²⁸ (See Appendix 4).

²⁹ See Appendix 3 *BorderAXIS*

The first part of *nanoq* was the survey of taxidermic polar bears in the British Isles, undertaken with the assistance of gallery staff, museum curators and keepers of natural history collections throughout the country.

The second part was to photograph the bears in situ. The complete photographic archive comprises 34 framed, medium format colour images taken in their respective public and private collections and settings. The provenances of the specimens are incorporated into the work, either as part of the image in the form of a text at the bottom of the photograph's white margin or in the case of the larger prints, engraved into a brass plate inserted into the bottom section of the hardwood frame.

Here, in dislodging the historical role of the taxidermic mount from its position as representative of a species and its environment to one strategically less clearly inscribed and consistent, we set out to disrupt a conventional expectation and to transform the meaning of the specimen. In the process that returned a specific history to each specific (ex)animal we simultaneously supplanted a previous condition of generality by individuating the specimens, thus setting off a chain of new readings sending ripples through a set of historical and contemporary fields – museology, polar history, hunting, environmentalism, anthropology and so on. In this process and configuration, a constituency of UK polar bear specimens, which hitherto if ever, had existed only notionally was assembled. A significant and noteworthy element of these photographs was the context within which each specimen had come to reside. From one perspective, when the complete archive is presented, because of the repetitiveness or constant of the bear's appearance, it is possible to examine the images for this variance quite separately. In the cases of so many municipal zoological collections the subtext of each display was invariably a colonial conquest of some kind, although no direct allusion to the provenance of the specimens is made. It is this characteristic cultural omission, which determined our decision to reintroduce the work into these zoological collections in

order to identify and interrogate the presumptions and behaviour traditionally at work in institutions, which, being bastions of public education, have been for so long so profoundly influential in our collective readings of the world. The principle was as simple as it was quietly ambitious, that if it was possible to force a wedge under the foundations of taxonomic belief by using something so iconic as an ice bear, then having attracted the viewer's attention, for her/him it would have the potential at least, to destabilize everything within that context, or at least render open to review the taxonomic subject across multiple fields within the museum. Similarly, the other most typical setting from which we sourced the specimens was that of colonial plunder and the arrangements in ancestral homes of stolen, 'exotica' from other countries. The juxtapositions of artefacts were often, as one might expect, bizarre, as the following examples will serve to testify; In Fyvie Castle in Aberdeenshire, for instance, the half-bear table specimen (together with a similarly truncated seal mount) was surrounded by an assortment of 15th Century armour and weaponry and zoological specimens, both indigenous and exotic (p.50). In Blair Atholl in Perthshire, the specific assortment of objects gathered at the bottom of the stairwell was striking (p.34). The ancient polar bear mount was flanked on one side by a curtain wall of Royal Stuart tartan and on the other by a suit of Samurai armour.



Figure 9

In the case of the Halifax bear (p.54) the contrivance of the Museum's 'attic' installation functioned conspicuously in more ways perhaps than was intended. The effect was supposed to be one of neglect and nostalgia, a Victorian time capsule, suggesting the detritus of another age. For us, bringing our particular focus upon the polar bear, it became one of the most resonant discoveries of the survey – the 'forgotten' bear was starkly different from the rest we encountered in that, rather than being representative, typically for instance of 'species', of an arctic environment or of a powerful or aggressive predator, this specimen was representative of redundancy, obsolescence and 'junk'. In the context of a project that amongst other things, set out to prompt a reappraisal of contemporary assumptions regarding taxonomy, polar history, wildness and environment, this singular find managed simultaneously to drill with significance into all these matters and more. And in relation to the general fusion of tragedy and comedy intrinsic to the photographic archive, the presence of this image in the context of the collection prompted a particularly destabilising pathos.

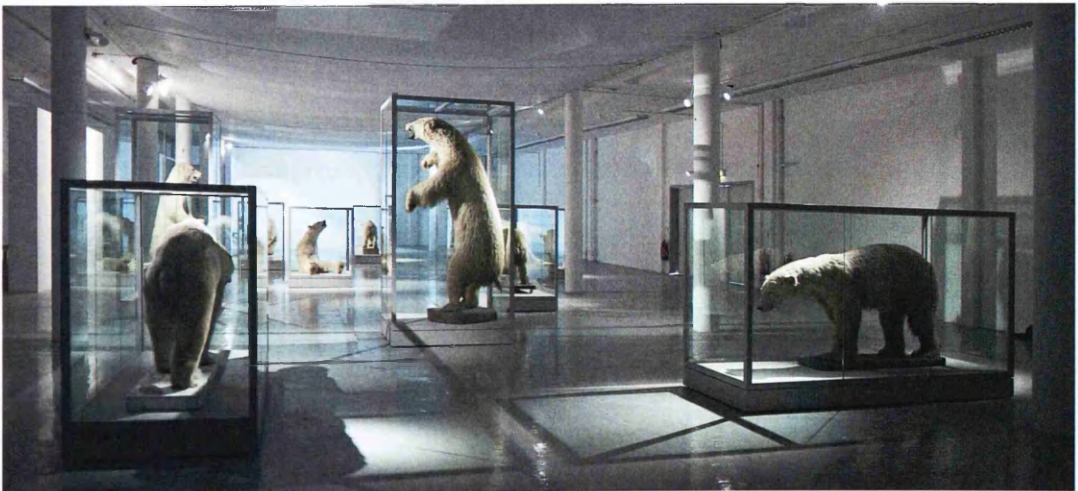


Figure 10

The third part of the project *nanoq* was an installation comprising ten of the bears, which we presented in a converted warehouse art space at Spike Island, Bristol. The amassing of these bear specimens was accomplished through negotiations conducted

over a period of three years. In 'The Right Stuff' *Modern Painters* (March 2009, pp.58-63),

Steven Connor writes:

Perhaps the artists who have made the most serious attempt to use art as a critical displacement of taxidermy are Bryndis Snæbjörnsdóttir and Mark Wilson, who spent four years between 2000 and 2004 attempting to track down every stuffed polar bear in Britain (they located 34), to investigate their provenance and to photograph them in situ. Ten of the bears were also displayed, now lifted out of their contexts, in Spike Island in Bristol and a book, *nanoq: flat out and bluesome* (Snæbjörnsdóttir and Wilson 2006) brought all the materials together. Unlike other artists, for whom the stuffed animal is always a bodily witness, however dismal, or damaged, of an animal life that has been lived, before or behind its current condition of display, Snæbjörnsdóttir and Wilson aim to show the irreversible “eclipse” of the “real” animal’ and its entry into a second ‘Cultural Life’, as the subtitle of their book, *A Cultural Life of Polar Bears* puts it.³⁰

The installation of *nanoq* in Spike Island, Bristol depended on *spectacle* both for initial and memorable effect. A former light industrial space (an old Brooke Bond tea-packing warehouse) it is typical of many contemporary art spaces that have emerged over the last twenty years in its re-imagining as a place for art, a site with an entirely other history.

The new amassing or assemblage of specimens was our attempt to supplant the often misleadingly simplistic and tidy, managed narrative displays discussed above, with something unexpected, surprising and much more difficult to assimilate.

By stripping the specimens of any contextual supplementary information (diorama, props, texts, etc.) it was our intention that beyond the context of the Gallery space and

³⁰ (Snæbjörnsdóttir, Wilson and Byatt, 2006, 34, 33)

the vitrines in which they stood, the bears themselves would be the sole context for *each other*. Any clue that might, coincidentally or otherwise serve to qualify this closed network of signs was eclipsed by the dominant spectacle of the specimens. The assemblage was intended to destabilise the visitor to the space – to present something instantly recognizable and simultaneously uncanny by dint of its plural constitution and to prompt her/him into reaching inadequately for the references that would allow the image or experience to settle. What do I know of polar bears? What indeed is a polar bear? Are these polar bears? In addition, the mounts were anything but confirmatory of each other – the differences between them were striking and lest the viewer was by this time coaxed into reading this as an exotic natural history display, this inconsistency served as a reminder of their profoundly constructed (and therefore representationally unreliable) nature. In this respect, what was unspoken was the cultural identity, orientation, conditioning and confinement of the human visitor, complicit in the acts and practice of collection that for so long underpinned the colonial accrual and narratives of knowledge. Here the legacy tropes of enlightenment-thought (to which I earlier referred), are simultaneously summoned, destabilised and critiqued.

It's worth suggesting that had the specimens been of a smaller species, then this number would surely not have been enough to prompt such questions nor to disrupt expectation so effectively. But in moving through the space and around the vitrines, the more than human scale and physical presence of these animal representations prompted a palpable, overwhelming even, challenge, part physical and part imagined.

Where it was our intention to make the dominant focus of the exhibition the spectacle of the cased specimens, in addition there were other objectives to be addressed. To one side of this warehouse space we had built a wall upon which an inverted, perspectival map of the British Isles was rendered in (vinyl) line. The reference to Tony Cragg's *Britain Seen from the North* 1981 was a conscious allusion but one which was instrumentalised to make a point specific to the erstwhile plight of slaughtered or

captive bears arriving from the arctic as by-products of their respective expeditions. Alongside this, was a column of text providing information of the ten bears included in the installation but with no indication as to which provenance belonged with which mount. Behind the wall was a computer terminal where visitors could access online the website for this project, the complete photographic archive and provenances of all the specimens we had found during the survey. At the far end of the Gallery space was a seating podium, which we'd had built to serve as the locus of the programme of lectures, seminars and conference to take place during the life of the installation. Discreetly back-projected on one side of this construction was a film we had made of the process of the bears' painstaking removal from their respective collections (involving three bears, two museums and an ancestral hall) before making their journey to the exhibition.

During the period of the exhibition we organized a one-day conference (*White Out*) at which four invited speakers (Steve Baker, Michelle Henning, Garry Marvin and Ivars Sillis) presented papers, and subsequently, together with an audience and ourselves, discussed issues around the many associated themes prompted by the project including museology and display, taxidermy, photography, the colonial impulse, arctic exploration, the whaling industry, subsistence and trophy hunting and shifting attitudes to environment.

The fourth part of the project was to bring all of the information gathered during the project, the provenances, the photographic archive, documentation of the installation together in the pages of a publication together with essays from those speakers and writers who took part in the conference.



Figure 11

REFLECTION

On Participation:

Amongst the institutions and individuals with whom participation and to some extent collaboration was crucial, there numbered Museums, Keepers of Collections, Taxidermists, Artists, Hunters, Anthropologists, Art academics and the public

When in 2001/2 we undertook the initial stages of research for the project, there was no database for the information we needed. At that time, many of the museums we contacted did not have the wherewithal to correspond by email. Because we felt the task ahead to be essentially bureaucratic and possibly overwhelmingly onerous, after initiating the process of enquiry we tried at one point to delegate some of the work to Gallery assistants (at Spike Island) and others. Quite quickly it became evident that this relinquishment of contact/control would not deliver to us, the consistency of results we

required. The majority of our enquiries were with keepers of collections in Museums and individual members of the aristocracy in whose possession the specimens resided. Fundamental to these discussions was the element of trust and dependability and because as far as we were concerned we were pioneering an approach to information-gathering in the sense that we intended the hunt for the specimens, its attendant logistics, negotiations and difficulties, to feature in some way in the presentation of the project, the model did not exist for adequately delegating to third parties. It was essential therefore that we shouldered the task and learned as we went along. We knew what we wanted to find out about and our job was to coax those in a position to provide us with that information to believe in and effectively join in the project.

On the Publication and invited contributors:

We based the selection of participants on their suitability to address certain aspects, which we considered to be embedded in the project, namely contemporary use of animals in art (Steve Baker), the relationship between photography and taxidermy (Michelle Henning), taxidermy as trophy (Garry Marvin) and subsistence hunting in the arctic (Ivars Sillis). One further piece of writing we commissioned for the publication was from Patricia Ellis and I discuss the reasons and effects of her contribution in the book at the end of this section.

On post exhibition and publication resonance or impact:

Later, when we made the installation *Polar Shift* (2008) in NSW, because the model was already established, not least in the form of the book, we were able remotely to delegate all of the research to those on the ground in Melbourne. The invitation to participate in this exhibition was at short notice, necessitating this strategy, but by bringing the research in-house in this way it was indeed achievable and we were able to turn what was to be a continuing if intermittent stream of incoming information into a positive

dynamic as part of the exhibit. We commissioned the building of a large and centrally positioned dividing wall within the Gallery at RMIT, which we then had painted black. On our arrival in Melbourne we divided the surface up into columns using white chalk, each column to represent an Australian polar bear specimen. One of the most singular distinctions between this and our initial survey was that, whereas in the UK, the specimens were predominately from 19th and early C20th expeditions, many of the Australian examples had been taken in the last 30 years by antipodean hunters, seemingly travelling north with the specific intention of licensed shooting from Inuit quotas.



Figure 12

At the time of writing we are researching for our project *Matrix*, which concerns the interior spaces of polar bear maternity dens, their significance and their potential semiotic significances. In this respect the *nanoq* project can be said to live on, albeit in a way which is yet more critical in terms of its challenge to representation. I will not go into the progress or ambitions for *Matrix* here, but in a recent artist/curatorial project in

Oslo, *Animal Matters*,³¹ we undertook what I consider to be a conceptually related step in the incremental and strategic 'disappearing' of the polar bear image within our oeuvre. In the exhibition we were invited to work as artists with the research material of a number of international academics from a range of disciplines. The collected essays from this research are soon to be published as an anthology – the culmination of a three-year research project called *Animals as Objects and Animals as Signs* based in the Department of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages at the University of Oslo, and funded by the Research Council of Norway.³²

We were invited to make from this research an exhibition, the objective of which was to move the focus from the texts and direct analysis to be found in the anthology instead to the material remains or documents raised by or associated with the historical and contemporary narratives within the research project.

From the exhibition introduction:

The project is situated within the relatively new field of animal studies, which examines the many ways in which culture and society affect our relationship with other species. The exhibit is intended both to illustrate how animals are transformed into things, into "matter," and how the reification of animals concerns us, how it "matters".

When Liv Emma Thorsen offered us the opportunity to work with a team of academics engaged in a research project exploring *what is an animal?* its possibilities seemed irresistible. Through our own work we were already familiar with a number of the participants (Nigel Rothfels, Henry McGhie, Adam Dodd) and on acquainting ourselves further with all the research specific to this project, the

³¹ Galleri Sverdrup, University of Oslo, May 11 – August 24 2012

³² <http://www.uio.no/english/research/interfaculty-research-areas/kultrans/news/events/seminars/2012/animal-matters.html>

respective papers, and consequent conversation through correspondence, we found the content sitting surprisingly close to our own concerns and artwork.

As artists whose practice engages with human/animal relations and what these can reveal about ourselves and our relationship to the environment, the question of representation – who speaks for whom and for what purpose? – is paramount. To convey thoughts by means of the arrangement of objects, and for such translation or reconfigurations to carry particular meanings, raises questions that are topical in the context of artistic research and its relation to academia. In academia, words are traditionally given intellectual precedence and value over objects, because they have been deemed to be more precise as instruments. However in artistic practice, in artistic research and indeed in our own artwork, relationality is of particular importance and precision of meaning is seen to reside elsewhere than in the reductionism implicit in this paradigm. Multiple resonance and multiple meaning are valued over single, linear narratives. The control over *which* meaning-sets are introduced and held in balance and *which* are precluded or suppressed has always been the business of the artist. In our contribution to *Animal Matters* we acknowledge and it is hoped, expose a complex web of meaning-accrual. With a gallery full of individual objects in juxtaposition with assemblages arranged in glass vitrines, significant resonance is present for instance within the narrative microcosm of each exhibit. In turn, because each arrangement of objects is sufficiently open-handed (non-didactic), a conversation between discrete exhibits in juxtaposition is invited. More widely still, there is an acceptance and sensitivity to the gallery space within a specific institutional context and finally, between these components and considerations and the specific worlding of each visitor to this exhibition.

Here, discrete histories well up refreshingly from ancient artefacts and are revealed as subjective, intimate. As such they remind us that knowledge is always subject to

revision and history can tell us not only why we are what we are today, but how else we can be. {Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson, 2012, p.1}

Without going into further detail about this exhibition, I will focus on one component, which has direct relevance to *nanoq*. As part representation of the research of the doctoral student, Guro Flinterud (Oslo University), we imported a polar bear into the installation. In her research she writes on the celebrity of erstwhile polar bear cub, Knut who, until his death in March 2011, was the star attraction at Berlin Zoo. In her essay from the anthology, Flinterud 'examines the feelings human beings may [and clearly do] develop [towards] a polar bear in captivity through an analysis of a popular blog centred on Knut himself. Knut's own blog was opened in March 2007 and continued for nearly two years'. The extracts from the blog from which we made our selection but in many ways were typical of the wider content are intensely sentimental and indicate the degree and nature of human projection, which has militated for so long against any positive or constructive aspects that the practice of anthropomorphism might offer. They are saccharin in extremis³³ and as far as we could see, left us in no doubt that accordingly, access to the image of the bear, whilst being useful within the exhibition should be strategically and severely restricted.

Amongst other ideas here was the intended reading that the reality of the animal or being in question, was an irrelevance – that the intensity and (for want of a better term, Disneyesque) fervour of the entries is so extreme that it precludes the very subject of its focus that is (or was) Knut. This eclipsing of subject is given added poignancy in light of the fact that Knut unexpectedly (and perhaps mercifully) died at the very young age of four, by drowning after collapsing into his enclosure's pool while suffering from encephalitis, an ignominious fate far from the dreamy and infantilizing musings of his blog fan club.

³³ **Susan Marie** meinte am 03.05.2007 03:18 Dear Sweet Little Knuti - I hope you are sleeping beautiful polar bear dreams. You will never know how you brighten the days of people many miles away from you - well, maybe your cute Daddy can tell you about it but it's very true. I will check on your progress tomorrow - till then sleep tight and be a good boy. Love and Greetings from the USA Susan Marie



Figure 13

After nanoq: flat out and bluesome: A Cultural Life of Polar Bears

Since the completion of the project *nanoq: flat out and bluesome* (2001–6) the photographic/text archive from their survey of UK taxidermic polar bear mounts has gone on to tour continuously to a host of zoological collections, maritime and polar museums in northern Europe and most recently in the Arctic region itself to Svalbard and Trømsø. One of the prime ambitions of the project was to bring discrete singularity to the remains of specimens whose individuality had been erased – whose individual, sole cultural purpose had hitherto been to act as representative for a species – and sometimes, even more generically, its environment.³⁴

Through its numerous manifestations – the installation, the photographic archive, the conference and the book – the project has been interpreted and read in a variety of ways

³⁴ As I write, we are also currently in the process of authoring a chapter concerning the later readings of *nanoq* for a forthcoming publication, *Displaced Heritage, Displaced Nature* for *Heritage Matters* Series, International Centre for Cultural and Heritage Studies, pub. Boydell and Brewer Ltd, Rochester NY.

and continues to be analysed in papers, articles and chapters in Museum journals, Art publications, Animal Studies periodicals and academic publications.³⁵

When the photographic archive from *nanoq* visited the Horniman Museum in London in 2007/8 it prompted articles in most of the major national newspapers including *The Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Telegraph*, *the Daily Mirror*, *Daily Mail* etc. Most latched on more or less unequivocally to the dimension of arctic-environmental-decline for which, since the project's inception in 2001 the polar bear had evolved into being its unmistakable symbol.

Indirectly answering Baker's question "of whether the naturalistic representation of animals can really be called postmodern" (Baker 2001, p.11), we find *nanoq* embracing naturalism through the use of unaltered taxidermied bodies and simultaneously entering the realm of the postmodern through a series of subtle shifts, culminating in the isolation of the animal mounts from the original context of the natural history museum and the relocation in glass cabinets in the gallery space: a form of intervention that gathers the bear bodies in a multiplicity that simultaneously enchants and horrifies.

Most importantly for the context of contemporary art in which the work operates, *nanoq* aims at adding a critical dimension to the resurfacing of taxidermy, a revival that brought pre- served animal bodies centre-stage of the mainstream scene through the work of Damien Hirst, and most recently many other artists (Tessa Farmer, Steven Bishop, Vim Delvoye, Oleg Kulik, and Polly Morgan, to name a few). The counterpoint *nanoq* offers to viewers is crucial in the problematization of a phenomenon that may otherwise only be understood as a hollow fashion rather than the complex one it really is. In other words, *nanoq* functions as a "problematizer" to any other contemporary work of art employing taxidermy as a medium. In

³⁵ Most recent of these is the 2012 volume *The Breathless Zoo: Taxidermy and the Cultures of Longing*. Poliquin, R. in which *nanoq: flat out and bluesome* is the subject of the book's Introduction. (pp.1-5) A new Thames and Hudson publication devoted to taxidermic representation is currently also being prepared which will feature the work of Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson.

doing so, it embraces human–animal studies arguments on the representation of the animal in art, simultaneously questioning the solidity of its very roots. (Aloi, 2012b, p. 576)

For us, the artists, *nanoq* is first and foremost about the issue of representation and how representation itself must always be a depletion and distortion of that which is represented. Historically, by removing the bears from the arctic and populating museums with these and similar colonial plunder, the will to construct culturally aggrandizing narratives through the display of the ‘tamed wild’ is writ large. When in 2004, the specimens were removed again en masse by Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson for *nanoq* the installation, their mutual effect upon each other was to simultaneously cancel out their representational and iconic currency and render visibly as counterfeit, the promises they’d been called upon to convey.

In April 2011, at the *Cultures of Preservation* conference at the Natural History Museum in London, in declaring it to be a seminal work, Hunterian Museum director, Dr Sam Alberti made the observation that *nanoq: flat out and bluesome* had led him and other UK zoological museum curators to reappraise their approach to the collections in their charge. We took this statement as an unequivocal acknowledgement of the *impact* of this project, of art and the potential of art interventions upon wider disciplinary fields.

Pondering the Solution of Wainwright: Perhaps what has not been accounted for until now is our decision to commission a short story as the first section in the publication for *nanoq*. Curiously it is a component that despite all the positive criticism the book overall has received, it has never itself been mentioned or engaged with critically. This may be because its inclusion and function/s are self-explanatory and that it quietly performs its duty in a way demanding no particular comment. On the other hand it’s probably worth clarifying here in a paper that after all sets out to audit many of the decisions we have made in respect of these projects. When we approached London-based artist and critic Patricia Ellis, it was her idea that her contribution might take the form of a story. She had

recently written an introduction using this approach for a catalogue for the artist Michael Raedecker. We felt that with the academics (Baker, Marvin and Henning) already on board, here was an opportunity to provide another dimension – to tilt the book at an early stage, towards the imaginary. At the same time we saw it as a mechanism for smuggling ‘facts’ regarding polar bears into the book without that in itself becoming overbearing or shifting the work away from our overarching philosophical/artistic intentions. In order to accomplish this precarious balancing act we provided Ellis with the (not inconsiderable amount of) facts we wished to be included and asked that they take the form of footnotes or notes-to-the-text of the story and that although they should be in a conspicuously smaller font, (denoting a supportive role) they should at times, by dint of their sheer bulk, be allowed physically to dominate and squeeze the narrative on the page.³⁶

³⁶ The narrative itself carried a number of historical and contemporary threads involving a trapper, a neglected and declining arctic lumber town, its museum and the protagonist, a taxidermic polar bear specimen, Wainwright named after the founder of the settlement whose last descendent was now drinking himself to death. These threads reflected at least some of the key themes we’d unearthed in our museum research and significantly, alongside the ‘bear fact’ annotation allowed the reader an insight into how Inuit hunters perceived the polar bear and how their relationship to it was predicated on respect, both in life and in an afterlife. The relationship, which as revealed within the story served as a reminder to the reader of a non-Western-centric approach to nature and environment denotes crucial differences not only between subsistence and materialist cultures but importantly, suggests the darker consequences of the concomitant disenchantment of nature. In keeping with the central assertion of *nanoq* therefore, the ruthless exploitation that a dominant anthropocentricity allows is both cause and effect of the rupture between humans and nature, which so profoundly lay at the heart of the modernist project.



Figure 14

(a)fly

The published works in *(a)fly*, for the purposes of this submission combine the project, including the exhibition and publication.

QUESTIONS addressed by the project:

Is it possible that by the processes of art, momentarily to visualize our own 'othering' in the world of the animal?

What is the ontological nature of shared 'dwelling' for concatenated species?

By deploying random survey techniques in order to provide access to particular domestic instances of non-human animal occupation and human/non-human cohabitation rather than generalized statistical data, we wondered if it were possible through art to articulate a new and constructively problematized integrity of method and findings? In accordance with our overarching interests, we wondered how the mobilisation of the condition of uncertainty in the constitution and presentation of an image could be directed towards the purpose of ontological reappraisal and whether therefore, it might be possible to use an inverse anthropomorphic projection through imaging, as a means by which temporarily to escape a habitual anthropocentric perspective?

(a)fly, (2005/6) is a project which served to extend the artists' cycle of projects examining human relationships to landscape and environment by way of observing the human/animal interface. In this instance we concentrated on domestic animals and animals within an urban environment. The title (shortened from *a fly in my soup*) makes reference to an often awkward and sometimes problematic collision between culture and nature. By taking the city and even the domestic environment as the coalface of this exchange the project sought to stake out new ground for a reappraisal of the way we relate to the wider environment, as suggested through this particular set of relationships.

The basic structural device of the project was a survey, identifying the presence of and mapping pets in the inner city area of Reykjavik. The choice of Reykjavík was important because of an historic sensitivity in that City in respect of the keeping of pets. Until the 1980s, dogs for instance were not allowed within this area.³⁷ In addition, a range of animals commonly accepted as domestic pets in the UK for example, are disallowed in Iceland generally. Despite the rules, many 101 dwellers do still manage to import or acquire forbidden reptiles and other creatures.. Reykjavík 101 is the catchment area for an established primary and secondary school called Austurbæjarskóli. Part of our project was developed with the cooperation and participation of both pupils and staff at the school. We distributed a brochure through the school introducing the project and offering those students interested in animals to take part in a project where they could draw and/or paint their pets or those of their friends and family. They were also asked, in short essay form to consider the origin of these animals and what might be their 'natural' habitat.

Another component of the project was a series of photographs taken of the environments (homes) of pets, either constructed or provided by keepers and sometimes chosen by pets within the environs of their hosts. One of the contributors to the publication, Ron Broglio writes:

³⁷ Since the law was relaxed, with the residual taboos and tensions in place, there has been an annual day of public dog walking –popularly known as a Dog Pride Festival. (Benediktsson, K. 2006. p.18)

'...The photographs do not include the animal - only their setting. As with nanoq, the absence of the animal haunts their work. In this case, viewers must negotiate the (often oedipalized) human expectations of a pet with the question of what the animal perceives. There is an uncomfortable fit between the animal's residual space in the human's habitat and the photograph which makes the animal's place central...' (Broglio, 2006, p.23)

A key component of the project (the documentation of which formed a significant part of the exhibition) was the undertaking of a random survey, set up to identify pet keepers in the City of Reykjavík.

On the 13th November 2005 we rendezvoused with four ptarmigan hunters in a disused quarry on the outskirts of the City. The quarry is used on a fairly regular basis, for target practice by local hunters. The survey we wished to undertake was designed to enable us to identify urban homes where humans cohabit with animals. In addition to the four hunters we had brought along four large-scale, mounted maps of the central area of Reykjavík 101, which were sufficiently detailed to show specific footprints of individual dwellings and residential blocks.

For pragmatic reasons we chose a quarry as the site at which to conduct a performative shooting because, like most quarries, it is away from the city and therefore our activity would be relatively discreet and unnoticed – but in so doing we were mindful also of the association of a number of other meanings of the word:

Symbolically, we were interested in its functions typically described as *an open excavation from which material is extracted by blasting and a rich source of something*. Another pertinent and typical definition of 'quarry' is *an animal or bird that is hunted by something or somebody and somebody or something that is chased or hunted by another*. Finally the verb transitive use of the word, denotes the '*act of extraction*' and (of particular note in

this case), *the obtaining of something, such as facts or information, by searching laboriously and carefully*. Once more, it will be seen that there is an emphasis here for us on process and methodology and how these aspects of our practice are deployed and managed in specific accordance and resonance with the objectives of each project.

The weapons used for ptarmigan hunting, in common with game shooting in the UK are shotguns (aka scatterguns). Following the trajectory of the pellets from a discharged cartridge, the work imagines a passage through several different kinds of space – in the first instance following the real journey down the barrel of the gun and from there a further 50m across the space of the quarry to the symbolic space of the map. Here the pellets punched holes and in some cases, remained embedded in the map, thereby identifying specific houses or apartment blocks. Ultimately, through subsequent research we were able by this means to identify the presence of specific animal occupancy within homes in Reykjavik 101, some 30km away. By further extrapolation, with our camera, we extended the symbolic journey of the initial shots into the very real domestic spaces of human/non-human animal cohabitation.

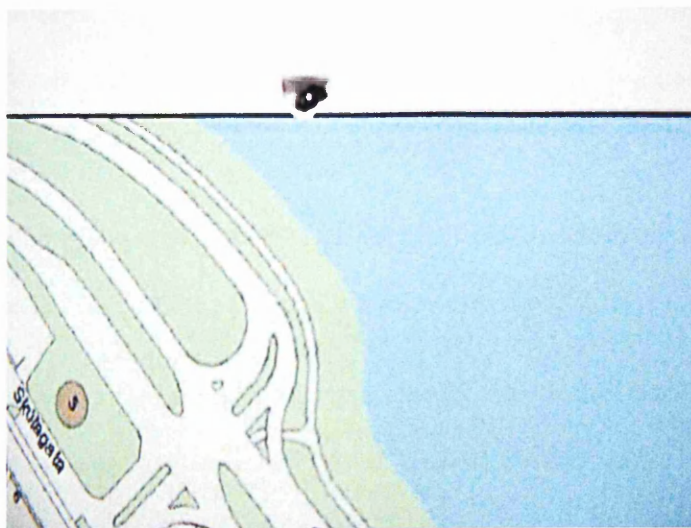


Figure 15

This set of maps, was a document of an event and became a tool for our subsequent inquiry – as both, it constituted one of the exhibits in the art work.

In the four photographic portraits we made, each hunter stands, legs apart and braced to absorb the recoil from the gun at his shoulder. At this time of year, from 15 October to 15 December using this type of gun and shot, the Icelandic hunter would be focusing his attention on the ptarmigan, the mountain bird whose plumage turns to white in winter. The bird is used for the traditional Icelandic Christmas meal. As he shoots, so we shot the shooter and the act was captured on film

This suite of photographs constituted the second part of the artwork exhibited together with the maps, in the National Museum of Iceland

The number of households hit was 273. Of these, 161 were special flats for the elderly where pets are not allowed. The survey therefore comprised 112 households. 91 households responded to a follow-up call. Of these, 25 had pets. 16 households had cats. 9 households had dogs. 2 households had birds and 1, a snake (a forbidden animal).

When in time, we entered into the respective homes, on our request, we were shown to the specific places where the animal chooses to reside or rest – the place where he or she sleeps and wakes up, to look out on the world about.

Here in this place, we set up the camera and shot again; this time the space made intimate by the implicit, recent presence of the animal.

We were interested in the question embedded in the images, that in the absence of the animal, what was it – there on the film and on the photograph?

A photograph can never capture the present; it always records the past but presents itself to us as the basis of some imagined future. Thus, as Barthes has it, it has the ability to blur the boundaries between life and death. (Barthes, 1981, p.96).

When looking at the somewhat forlorn images of the dwellings, one senses a departure or loss of a subject. The given name of the respective animal incorporated below the photographic element adds to this sense of loss in a way that invokes a haunting

presence. It is an unbalancing experience when we suddenly find ourselves in the presence of something which prompts us to thought beyond our terms of reference – even more so, when the mechanism for this seems to be constituted by the utterly familiar.

This unsettling is not about what we see but stems from the absence of what we expect to see. In compositional and affective terms this might be what we once referred to as a centre of interest, or as Roland Barthes puts it, the ‘punctum’ (Barthes, 1981, p.40). In this context into every disconcerting or disquieting gap we try instinctively to pour some sort of light or knowledge.

The audience may escape the cage of his/her own learned response by asking, if the animal is absent, as is the human, then whose home is this? We saw the process and the exhibited work as an instrument whereby momentarily we might visualize our own ‘othering’ in the world of the animal? Another way of looking at these images is to approach them as we would a forensic investigation. The photograph directs our attention in seeming to give importance to a context rather than a specific subject – is this not how we imagine a crime or investigation scene after some inauspicious event has taken place? If it is the scene of a crime, there is certainly no sign of any violence. Nothing is disturbed, overturned or in disarray. On the contrary the scene is more or less ordered and things seem in their place. When we encounter the scene of a police investigation, typically characterized by exclusion tapes and notices we are still compelled to look. Fleeting, surreptitiously as we pass, we search for clues to tell us who, what and how? Just as furtively we survey these interiors and here too we are made aware of our voyeuristic transgression when moving through the closets, the bedrooms, the cupboards, ledges and lounges of these essentially private spaces. What clues are there to be found here? What signs? What are the residual and tell tale traces left by animals and humans?

By some means, the apparent removal of physical subject leaves us in a quandary and since we cannot help but acknowledge that all occupancy is implicit only, there is a balancing effect where both possible presences, human and animal, existing as they do in the imagination of the viewer, are of equal value.

As to the investigation – in their equality are both parties under threat? Is their relationship what we thought it was? How does this relationship reflect our diminished sense of a relationship with the wider environment? How is the animal itself complicit in this? What effect does symbiosis have on the respective agents and their position in the world? Is there the possibility still, that the animal, even the domestic, detached animal, despite all the protestations of Deleuze (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988, p.265) can serve in some way to reconnect us to our own lost ‘animality’ and so beyond to the idea and practice of ‘cohabitation’ in a global sense? Derrida himself famously finds trouble in the gaze of his cat, suggesting that there is more to their residual otherness than can justifiably be dismissed as ‘human construct’ (Derrida, 2008, pp.3-15).

The project interrogates our disparate approaches to the animal – down the barrel of a gun we acknowledge the distance that is a part of our conception of wildness – without the sense of distance could there be so strong a desire to narrow the gap between ourselves and it, through hunting, through field study, and the absorption of the unfamiliarity of its nature – or indeed through its eradication and taming through agriculture?

If by looking at these habitat photographs and observing the approach, which is the animal’s approach, through the environment to the bed or to the nest or den within our homes and we are moved to imagine ourselves as animal without being sure necessarily, what animal – if by doing this, instead of furniture, clothes and window sills, we are able to see simply the likely places we might clean ourselves, scratch, curl up in or perch upon – then some slight transformation or shift has taken place and we may be reminded that our civilizing ways are really froth on a turbulence almost impossible to see from here.



Figure 16

Nevertheless it is present and altogether suddenly darker, more chthonian and ultimately and pressingly, just below the skin.

The Exhibition: For the purposes of the Reykjavík International Festival of the Arts for which the work was commissioned this comprised a brace of exhibits in two different Reykjavík venues. This strategy was intended to mobilise the faculty of memory in the audience and in so doing, command more consciously their active involvement in the issues embedded in the work. In the Gallery of the Central library we exhibited the animal dwellings opposite work by the children of Austurbjæjarskóli, the local school with which we collaborated. Their drawn images were of the imagined natural, 'wild' environments of their domestic pets. In the National Museum of Iceland we showed the maps and the shooting photographs.

REFLECTION

To some who saw the work (particularly the exhibits in the National Museum) it was seen as being provocative and even politically antagonistic – the Director of the Museum was away when we installed and previewed the show (we worked with the curator of the exhibition spaces) but on her return we received a frosty email indicating that she was considering closing the show declaring that she did not want her benefactors, her public, to be presented as being under fire. This was a reference to the display of shot-peppered maps of a nearby residential area juxtaposed with large images of rifle-toting men in camouflage. Whilst we hadn't intended to provoke alarmism, there is a direct correlation between the act of animal hunting and the practice of domestic space sharing with cohabitant others within the work and since this is an unlikely and culturally difficult or novel juxtaposition, there would always be those who simply took it literally on a solely human level rather than the cross-species framework intended.

One of the most significant dynamics of the project was indeed the strategic conflation of a number of notionally oppositional ideas – e.g. of the *wild* (the natural habitat of the ptarmigan) and the *domestic* (the habitats within homes of companion species) of *hunting for food* (the shooters) and *hunting* instead as the artists' search for subject, being the situated animal implicit in the photographs, coupled with an attendant and consequent *haunting*. Finally, of *killing* (of the game-bird, ptarmigan) and *care* (for the pet) – in order to reveal the mis-representational nature of such binaries and the complexity and irrationality not just of our inter-relational behaviour in respect of animal others, but also our limited and debilitating failure to perceive our concatenated worlds.

On Participation: The participation of others in this project was critical. We were dependent on the cooperation of a number of people from a variety of backgrounds. In addition to the hunters we enlisted for the photographic portraits we received the cooperation of the City Council in their provision of the large scale city residential maps,

the time of staff and pupils at the local school (Austurbjæjarskóli in Reykjavík 101) who engaged with us in workshops and through their writing and illustrations gave social feedback on ideas of 'habitat' both 'natural' and otherwise. This connection meant that the project was firmly and culturally anchored in this area, which, being home for a large number of mixed race immigrants, perhaps more than any other location in Reykjavík at the time was genuinely multi-cultural. This fact gave a breadth of contextual colour at the same time as allowing for broader notional projection in respect of other contexts and other cultures. In short however, it seemed to highlight the universally particularizing effects of local conditioning. Most significantly we were dependent on the people whose homes we accessed and whose private domestic spaces we photographed, albeit whilst making it quite clear that the space was as much belonging to their cohabitant as it was to them. Consistent with other projects, this trust in a specific group as being significant, underpinned our work – it is a confirmation of the importance to us of specificity and how such aspects of specificity may indeed be portable, transferable yes, but in its relocation the application of such structure must always anticipate and will always deliver newly-specific findings. To our thinking, these are stories of time, place, being and concomitant relationality which can expose tensions between what is unthinkingly thought and more widely perhaps, culturally accepted and what is actually happening and therefore in a condition of becoming.

On Publication and invited contributors:

The publication was the third we had made and to some extent corresponded in its ambition and its structuring of content with its forerunners. Like them the idea was that the project was introduced by the artists and documented in this format to include printed reproductions of the respective works. In this case this meant the archive of domestic interiors together with the given names of each associated animal, the damaged maps and the shooter images. In the reproductions of the maps, each displayed opposite the respective shooter, the pellet holes are clearly visible. In addition to our

own introduction we invited three other commentators to reflect on the ideas within the project.

These were Dr Karl Benediktsson, then Associate Professor in the Department of Geography at the University of Iceland, Dr Ron Broglio, then Associate Professor in the School of Literature, Communication and Culture at Georgia Institute of Technology, Atlanta, USA and Dr Mika Hannula, Professor of Art in Public Spaces at the Helsinki Art Academy, Finland.

As a geographer, with a particular interest in human/non-human animal interrelations, Benediktsson focused on the complexities and contradictions in our cultural dealings and enfoldings with animal life. He puts emphasis on the issue of binary opposition and the artifice of historically enforced divisions between nature and culture and puts more detail on the specific history of Reykjavík's difficulty with domestic animals:

Perhaps this ban was related to the opinion, firmly entrenched in the rural past, that living in cities was not in the nature of dogs. [...] But a tempting alternative would be to see the dog ban as an attempt by an immature and insecure urban society to establish a clear difference between itself and rurality, with its barking dogs and bleating sheep. (Benediktsson, 2006, p.17)

We have since worked with Benediktsson on further projects, notably in relation to *Conversations With Landscape* (he was co-editor) in which the chapter *The Empty Wilderness: Seals and Animal Representation* (Ashgate, 2010), (also submitted here) appears and again more recently, as a research collaborator on one of our current projects, *Feral Encounter*.

Dr Ron Broglio approached the project as an instrument by which to think through the writings of Jakob Von Uexküll and in particular, his notion of 'umwelt'. Uexküll's work established biosemiotics as a field of research. Heading the acknowledgements for his

recent book *Surface Encounters: Thinking with Animals and Art*, Broglio wrote:

The concepts for this book grew from an initial invitation by Bryndís Snæbjörnsdóttir and Mark Wilson to write for the catalogue of their *(a)fly* exhibition. I am thankful for the invitation that became the impetus for further writing (Broglio, 2011, p.xi)

In this later publication he devotes most of one chapter, (*Making Space for Animal Dwelling: Worlding with Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson*) to a reflective analysis of *(a)fly*. He has gone on to use the project and our publication as a teaching tool in his Animals and Art workshops both at Georgia Tech, Atlanta and latterly in his new position as Professor at Arizona State University, USA.

Mika Hannula, with a PhD in Political Science, is a curator, teacher and art critic. His contribution to the publication *(a)fly* was to flesh out its quiet and effective complexity as art. He describes the work as being *cruel* in its effect of disorientating the viewer:

All of a sudden our attention is no longer on the animals. The lens is on us. We still might be discussing the household pets, and we still might be imagining them in front of us, but they are not what this is about. The relationship between humans and animals – for better or worse – always tells much more about the people 'keeping them' than about the animals themselves.

It is a story of hidden agendas, camouflaged wishes and fears. Stories that shock because they so very precisely relay our values and priorities in such a circuitous and coded way, it goes beyond mere statement. This enforced detour makes us lose our balance. The act becomes symbolic of who and how we are, ultimately as human beings... (Hannula, 2006, p.67)

Post project:

The project has subsequently been put to further use in papers for example by Rikke Hansen (various, including *The Animal Gaze*, 2009, the Sorbonne 2012, UCL 2011) in keynote addresses by Steve Baker, e.g. *Animal Humanities*, University of Texas at Austin, April 2006 and *Animals & Society II: Considering Animals*, Hobart, Tasmania, July 2007 and many others.

We presented this project ourselves in papers at a number of venues in the US in 2007 (see Appendix 5)

In 2011 the US English and Animal Studies scholar Susan McHugh (Associate Professor at University of New England) published her *Animal Stories: Narrating Across Species Lines* in which she references the projects of Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson and specifically *(a)fly*:

(a)fly presents a collective snapshot of many lives converging in the capital of a country experiencing rapid rural depopulation throughout the second half of the 20th century. There is much more to say about how Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson's visualisation of human animality complicates the urban-animals-are-disappearing problematic that [...] for many defines modernist aesthetics. However I focus here on just one image, from the *Dwellings* section titled *Gátta & Scotti*. It is not unique so much as exemplary of how the project directly and critically engages with the ways in which domesticates of different species not only meet some of one another's (intersubjective) needs but also necessarily live around one another's (intercorporeal) desires. (McHugh, 2011, p.123).

In referencing the unmistakable intimacy of some of these spaces, McHugh recognizes the genuine interfolding of lives, which seems to belie most clear blue water we would customarily put between ourselves and our non-human cohabitants.



Figure 17

The Empty Wilderness: Seals and Animal Representation (reflections based on the art project by Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson, *between you and me*) For the purposes of this submission the 'published work' includes the project, the exhibition and published chapter.

The incapacity to name is a good symptom of disturbance

(Barthes, 1981, p.51)

The essay, *The Empty Wilderness*, was published in the collection *Conversations with Landscape* in Iceland in the autumn of 2010 by Ashgate (UK). The series editor was the anthropologist Professor Tim Ingold from the University of Aberdeen. The editors of this volume were Karl Benediktsson and Katrín Lund.

QUESTIONS addressed by the project:

To explore further the effects of representation and the consequent depletion of the referent and therefore to investigate the relationships between naming and taming, the functionality and consequences of animal image appropriation and depletion.

To test ideas concerning the perception of 'environment' and 'wilderness' in relation to human usage and non-human occupancy and usage

To test ideas of environmental ontology in the context of historically incremental detachment from 'wild' landscape

To test new interspecific relationality predicated on respect and inquisitiveness

This chapter and the art project upon which it draws, recognizes the presence of non-human-animals as *co-partners* in any human-animal dialogue with landscape. In the light of this, it focuses on the seal, a non-human-animal, widely appropriated in Western culture, for a variety of human-animal representations. In this specific regard it was our ambition to explore the logical indeterminacy of the seal within this cultural context and to use this complexity and variance in perception, usage and instrumentalisation as a way of extrapolation in respect of human/non-human animal relations more widely. The specific geographical context of Iceland, offers access to a multiplicity of human attitudes towards non-human-animals and so to different conceptions of cultural value attributed to them, which lead in turn to discrete modes of consumerist engagement through food industries, tourism, hunting, clothing and so on. The chapter uses our own research for the project *between you and me* in tandem with historical exemplars to track changing manners and approaches towards other species.

For our research a number of people from all corners of Iceland were interviewed on camera, each with significant and sustained experience of contact with seals, by means variously of observation, caring and hunting. From the interviews a variety of impressions emerged, about living with nature, in the past and in the present, but quite commonly resulting in animal death, both physically and metaphorically. Conscious as we were that the space of encounter between humans and animals is haunted by this

eclipse or obliteration, this practical research, conducted as visual art, explores the consequential splitting of the 'representational' animal from the 'living' animal and how this rupture is manifested as a series of new and seamless constructs.

The exhibition *Mellan Dig och Mig (between you and me)*, components of which are described in some detail in the essay *The Empty Wilderness*, took place in Kalmar Konstmuseum in Sweden, August – October 2009). Featuring key works *the naming of things* and *Three Attempts*, the exhibition centres on the *representations and intrinsic value of things* and calls into question the myriad bases upon which we construct such representations.

The installation was interspersed throughout the Kalmar Museum building – on the ground floor, the library, the upper stairwell and the main gallery on the top floor – in order to achieve both a serial and an immersive experience of the work as a whole. In the entrance to the building, a taxidermic seal was displayed, unannounced by any sign or label, in a clear glass vitrine. On the next floor in the reading room, five video monitors showed the five interview films we'd made. In the dimmed, upper main gallery space, we installed a large (3m tall) free-standing projection of the work *the naming of things* strategically in direct dialogue with selected and spot lit works from the art collection at Kalmar including drawings, prints, paintings and textiles, all chosen by the artists on the basis that in their various ways, they were representations of non-human animals.

Beyond that in a small chamber opening off this large space, and lit by a small window to one side, we screened *Three Attempts* on a large monitor. In brief this work is a recording of an encounter between a seated human interlocutor, sitting on a beach with her back to



Figure 18

the camera and a colony of seals in the sea beyond. The seals bob in and out of sight in response to the human vocalizations³⁸

In his invitation for us to exhibit, the director of Kalmar Museum, Bengt Olof Johansson suggested we might like to interact in some way with the collection there and it was as a consequence of this opportunity that we set up the quietly interrogative juxtaposition on the top floor. Because most representations are constructed to perform some agenda of our own – in the case of animals, to entertain, to inform, to provide food, to provide a reciprocity of affection, to stand for all others of its species, to symbolize human behavioural characteristics etc. – in this process, the animal itself is occluded – eclipsed by its avatar or likeness. Such representations are necessarily always a simplification and therefore must accordingly signify a loss. With this acknowledgement of inadequacy in the face of unthinking cultural reliance on signs, symbols and our representations generally, the video work *the naming of things* foregrounds difficulty, struggle, awkwardness and presumption in our dealings with what is not human; and in the film's

³⁸ For a full description of the work see *The Empty Wilderness, A Proposed Meeting of Human and Animal* p..223-224

insistence on not concluding, not offering the expected resolution in the form of an object, ultimately invites a reappraisal of this subject and this relationship.

The final work, *Three Attempts* also described in some detail in the chapter, offers a way out, which acknowledges an environmental respect for the significant conflation of denizens and worlding – a situated ontology not solely of being, but constitutionally, of being-in.

REFLECTION

On Participation:

The art project *between you and me*, involved the close participation of many individuals including the respective interviewees, the seal pup at Husey, the seal colony and the taxidermist whose role and cooperation were pivotal in the film we made for *the naming of things*. As part of the exhibition *Mellan Dig och Mig (between you and me)* at Kalmar Konstmuseet a public seminar took place in August (2009) with an open audience and invited speakers.³⁹

These individuals were spokespersons respectively for hunting, for conservation, for farming and for animal rights, amongst other interests. The mix of approaches was a strategic initiative, the intention being that the seminar provide a forum for stakeholders from disparate disciplines to speak with each other in a way not usually possible and therefore to test ideologies and perspectives in juxtaposition. The event began with a conducted tour of the exhibition by Museum Director Bengt Olof Johansson, during

³⁹ *Talking Animals, Mellan Dig och Mig* Kalmar konstmuseum 9th September 2009. In attendance were: Bengt Andersson, Swedish Association of Hunters, Per Petersson, Farmers National Association, Hans Sabelström, farmer, South Öland, Roger Pettersson, Animal Rights Sweden, Lars-Åke Hjertström Lappalainen, philosopher/art critic, Stockholm University, Bryndis Snæbjörnsdóttir & Mark Wilson, artists. The Moderator was Bengt Olof Johansson. The representative from the Öland Zoo regretfully could not attend.



Figure 19

which the artists answered questions from the visitors. The seminar then proceeded with a series of short presentations by the speakers and an open session lasting over 2 hours. Inevitably there was heated discussion at times, which served further to underline significant intra-cultural dissonance, schisms and contradictions.

As I have indicated, we see the discourse arising from these works to be a component intrinsic to the work itself. In *Relational Aesthetics* Nicolas Bourriaud describes how artists like Rirkrit Tiravanija for instance provided an exhibition format within which a participating public would effectively constitute the work; Liam Gillick is quoted (somewhat unremarkably perhaps) as saying that his work is not only completed by his audience but that it would simply not exist without this participation (Bourriaud, 2000, p.61). Whilst sharing this view of course, that the active involvement of the public is important and indeed crucial to the work, we go further in believing in the function of art as an instrument capable of targeting areas and issues of contention and precipitating open discussion and the possibilities for change that such attention provides. There is no doubt that for a balance to be struck successfully in this enterprise in such a way that art

itself should be the beginning and a prevailing effect of the audience' experience, despite its embedded discursive functionality, is one of the most difficult and testing equations to achieve. A perceived struggle concerning activism versus the aesthetic, is the subject of much of Grant Kester's writing; he is an advocate for socially-engaged and discursive practice but places the responsibility for the lack of critical receptivity to such work, based as he believes, on their application of outmoded aesthetically-driven faculties, with the critics themselves. 'The general discomfort of mainstream art critics and institutions with politically engaged art is long standing...' and in a testy correspondence with Claire Bishop in *Artforum*⁴⁰, Kester goes on to say that Bishop herself seems 'determined to enforce a fixed and rigid boundary between "aesthetic" projects ("provocative," "uncomfortable," and "multilayered") and activist works ("predictable," "benevolent," and "ineffectual")'.

In her latest book, *Artificial Hells* (2012, pp.23-26) and in response to Kester's *Conversation Pieces* (2004), Bishop checks his 'aversion to disruption', the upshot of which she maintains is a tendency for 'idiosyncratic or controversial ideas' to be 'subdued and normalized in favour of a consensual behaviour upon whose irreproachable sensitivity we can all rationally agree'. Before going on herself to rehearse the difficulties that face socially-engaged art's apparent 'disavowed relationship to the aesthetic' she argues, more crucially perhaps, that unease, discomfort and frustration – along with fear, contradiction, exhilaration and absurdity – can be crucial to any work's artistic impact.' For Bishop, ethics have their place in art but should not be worn sanctimoniously on its sleeve. By challenging the assumptions and exposing the flaws of representation in a work such as *between you and me* – by setting human reductiveness against human receptiveness and by providing a forum for contradiction and the possibility of destabilising independently-established and long held views – we are consciously enacting a kind of cultural subversion – but one which invests absolutely, in a belief in aesthetic affect.

⁴⁰ Response to Claire Bishop's 'Another turn' *Artforum*, May 2006

Context of the book and its content:

Since they sit so fundamentally in correspondence with our own approach to art and its functions and potentialities it is worth quoting from the stated aims of the series in which our essay appeared, as laid out by Series Editor Professor Tim Ingold, University of Aberdeen, UK:

Anthropological Studies of Creativity and perception:

The books in this series explore the relations in human social and cultural life, between perception, creativity and skill. Their common aim is to move beyond established approaches in anthropology and material culture studies that treat the inhabited world as a repository of complete objects, already present and available for analysis. Instead these works focus on the creative processes that continually bring these objects into being, along with the persons in whose lives they are entangled. [...] The books in the series will be interdisciplinary in orientation, their concern being always with the practice of interdisciplinarity: on ways of doing anthropology *with* other disciplines rather than doing an anthropology *of* these subjects. Through this anthropology *with*, they aim to achieve an understanding that is at once holistic and processual, dedicated not so much to the achievement of a final synthesis as to opening up lines of enquiry.

There is no doubt that in privileging process over product, artists continue to fly in the face of the material conservatism of an 'art market', which Nikos Papastergiadis has identified above (p.47). The results of this shift in emphasis however, such as they are, are nevertheless irresistibly exciting and reflect a broader radical willingness, evident in many other fields, to transgress across disciplinary borders in order to enrich knowledge bases and ultimately to give greater credence and coherence to our understanding of the world's complexity and inter-relatedness.

So in the publication our writing sat alongside that of archaeologists, social anthropologists, geographers, human geographers, philosophers, scholars of literature as well as one other artist/theorist.

Moreover, in examining the 'landscape' and its constitution from a number of perspectives, the volume set out to challenge the bases of assumptions we have inherited regarding this phenomenon and the degrees to which such assumptions continue to stultify creative thinking when it comes to our attitudes towards the environment and our responsibilities therein.

To accompany the re-presentation in London in 2013 of a recent work *Vanishing Point* (commissioned by and exhibited in the 2011 Gothenburg Biennial) we are planning a new publication, which will document the research and ideas in this project as a development of *between you and me*. For the exhibition and the publication we are in partnership with the London-based agency, 'Difference Exchange'⁴¹ and in addition to screening *Vanishing Point* within an ecclesiastical building, we will host an event where attempts will be made to examine theological and anthropocentric culpability in relation to a historic detachment from and instrumentalisation of the environment⁴²

On post exhibition and publication resonance or impact:

Since 2009 the installation *between you and me* has been shown in various guises in venues across the world – twice in Australia – in Newcastle, NSW (in association with the international *Minding Animals 2* conference and in Tasmania (as part of the international arts festival, *Ten Days on the Island*). It was shown in Vancouver in 2011 as part of the international conference *Interactive Futures 11*. More recently we included the film *the naming of things* in the exhibition *Animal Matters* (Oslo University, 2012) in strategic

⁴¹ *Difference Exchange* is a partnership working internationally to locate art in critical contexts facilitating different worldviews in consideration of flux, disruption and emergence.

⁴² The venue for this exhibition and event will be the Chapel of King's College in London. The publishers of the book will be The Green Box in Berlin.

juxtaposition to a bust of a monkey, in correspondence with the similar pairing we had made earlier between the film and the works from the Kalmar collection.



Figure 20

Uncertainty in the City

The published works in *Uncertainty in the City*, for the purposes of this submission combine the project, the exhibition and publication.

To balance our accounts of society, we simply have to turn our exclusive attention away from humans and look also at nonhumans. Here they are, the hidden and despised social masses who make up our morality. They knock at the door of sociology, requesting a place in the accounts of society as stubbornly as the human masses did in the nineteenth century. What our ancestors, the founders of sociology, did a century ago to house the human masses in the fabric of social theory, we should do now to find a place in a new social theory for the nonhuman masses that beg us for understanding. (Latour, 1992, pp.152-153)⁴³

⁴³ Although in this quotation Latour was speaking in the context of our relationship with technology, there is a vivid correspondence nevertheless between the exclusivity suggested here in our perceptual framing of 'society' and that exercised similarly in regard to non-human animals in our midst – one which Latour would comfortably accommodate.

QUESTIONS addressed by the project:

How can art bring insight to variable human conceptions of pests?

What is the relationship in the context of proximate animals between fear, discomfort and 'a lack of control'?

At the outset of the project we wondered how much of the discomfort at the encroachment of 'nature' in the form of animal others is learned (culturally informed) and how much is intuitive (or genetic). What is the nature of the apparent inconsistencies in our responses and how would it be possible to present a plurality of views to encompass multi-special perspectives, or interests, in order also to accommodate the sense that Homo sapiens and its inconsistent approach to environment and ecology, is the most successful and damaging pest of all?

How is this dynamic mirrored in the relationship between disparate approaches to knowledge and research?

Uncertainty in the City was a four-year project, the initial research component for which was commissioned in 2007 by the Storey Gallery in Lancaster as part of their *Inside Out* programme of events during the refurbishment of the Storey Institute in Meeting House Lane. In this project we moved from the heart of the home (as in the project *(a)fly*), to the periphery – the wall cavities, the roof spaces, the broken mortar and to the gardens, to examine other hidden societies, living in our midst – and to consider these societies simultaneously in two ways – one, as unselfconscious communities of fauna going about their disparate business in and around our homes – and on the other hand, as an incongruous and contradictory human construct, commanding and combining *in tension*, as wide and disparate a range of responses as there may be species.

In this research we explored questions such as: What is a pest? What is the relationship between fear or discomfort in this context and 'a lack of control'? What are the

inconsistencies in our responses to 'nature' in our locality and the reasons behind such contradictions?

"...outside of the security checkpoint of bright reason, outside the apparatuses of reproduction of the sacred image of the same, these 'others' have a remarkable capacity to induce panic in the centres of power and self-certainty..." (Haraway, 2008, p.10)

In fact for *Uncertainty in the City* we not only looked at pests but by implication, a much wider spectrum of human animal/non human animal relations. But the indeterminate condition of pests is of particular interest and provided an important focus for this project. Because we're interested in ideas of intrusion and tolerance, attraction and repulsion and most importantly of all, the margins where encounters occur, we find the concept of pest – as an embodiment of something *out of place* – tantalising and compelling. A sense of strategic mischief in us is stimulated by the unease of some 'human hosts' to look more closely at those whose homes *some* animals just want to make *their* home. One prevailing interest we have and to which we periodically return in our work is that of human fear. In the presence of the pest, a register of fearful or anxious responses is uncovered, in some cases to do with health, but often to do with seemingly irrational and unjustifiable neuroses which one must assume is in part at least, a consequence of cultural conditioning. And what was abundantly clear through our research for this project was that when the anthropologist Mary Douglas claimed that dirt is simply *matter out of place* she might just as effectively have been referring to our responses to bestial imponderables in the borderlands. (Douglas, 1966).

During the course of *Uncertainty* we worked with the Pest Control Department for Lancaster and Morecambe District Council as well as individuals who are working, living or dealing with non-human animal species on a regular basis.



Figure 21

Our research took us to many parts of the district and as far afield as London during our participation in the exhibition and conference *Interspecies* organized by London-based sci-art organization *Arts Catalyst*. Most of our research visits were conducted under the banner *Radio Animal*, a mobile radio unit and website we designed to gather and disseminate information about the subject. The website⁴⁴ continued to develop and function as a repository up to and beyond the opening of the exhibition in the newly refurbished Storey Gallery on September 18th 2010. Following the exhibition and indeed to date, the site continues to be a public resource and hosts a 360^o virtual tour of the Storey Gallery installation.

Radio Animal was the mechanism we devised to conduct the audio interviews, which later became a pivotal and physically central component in the exhibition. It was based in a caravan, which we'd bought for the purpose. The interior of the unit was stripped

⁴⁴ www.radioanimal.org The opening page of the site deposits the viewer into a virtual suburban garden space around which she/he is able to navigate panoramically using a torch. On passing over the image of a fox the animal is further highlighted and upon selection darts off across the lawn and under the garden shed. Once inside the shed and upon clicking on the radio, the home page is revealed. (There is the option to skip this introductory experience).

out, the woodwork painted a uniform, matt, blue-grey and then fitted back with urban camouflage seating. The walls were used as a kind of pin board upon which images and text clippings were serially attached as we progressed, tracking our respective visits and making visible for those interested enough, newspaper stories pertinent to the themes of the project. There was also a selection of books for public perusal. This focused but comfortable environment worked to put visitors at their ease when entering and even more so when they sat down to engage in conversation. The exterior was treated to a new paint job and embellished with vinyl text and large vinyl images. These photographic prints comprised on one side, a wasp and a wasp's nest and on the other a mole and mole catcher.



Figure 22

Across the front of the van was a reproduction of a set of toxic-chemical and device-laden shelves taken at the Pest Control headquarters and on the back, a truncated (the heads coincided with the rear window) 1930's line drawing of a boy and a girl offering a rabbit a lettuce. Our names and the *Radio Animal* website and logo were also on the back. The

Radio Animal logo, also featured on the sides, was a bold line drawing of a snail with a radio antennae protruding rakishly from the back of its shell.

We used the mobile unit in order to target places and events where there was likely to be a preponderance of people with an interest in animals. The first site we visited was the world famous Appleby Horse Fair. Others were county and garden fairs.⁴⁵ Typically we overnighted at each site and talked to as many people as we could interest in talking to us.



Figure 23

The stories that most empower people are the stories they are able to tell of their own experience. The establishment of a forum for their story is a hospitable act giving empowerment to those taking part. Without an appropriate forum it seems possible that in a cultural context where individual encounters with animals are valued little, if at all, some people will not know they even have a story to tell. Many visitors to the unit remarked that they had never before told anyone of this or that encounter. Yet these stories were clearly of meaning to each person, were intensely held and intensely retold.

⁴⁵ For the full list of venues, see Appendix 3.

We were intrigued as to the reasons for this eagerness. The invitation provided an opportunity to air and dwell on an encounter with another being and this seemed to resonate intuitively in ways that were not necessarily understood in a rational sense. Was the attraction simply the invitation to place and retell a private experience centre-stage, to all intents and purposes anonymously?

Astonishingly, each story was delivered as a discrete parcel, remarkably complete with its cast of people and animals and their settings of domestic interiors, backyards and gardens. Secreted amongst these necessary components was the other more abstract but usually most significant element; the ripple of fear, of joy, disgust, bewilderment or awe.

This is the seam that we were keen to tap into, recognizing that for all we imagine ourselves culturally to cohere around a set of ideas concerning our identity, in relation to our domestic and social spaces, we respond unreliably and chaotically when our view of that relationship is challenged by those non-human others, with whom we inevitably share space.

The mechanism of the mobile unit itself was extremely successful. People entered the caravan, sat down and immediately relaxed, very often remarking how comfortable it was. This sense of comfort and intimacy was constructively disarming and such a commitment would always yield at least one if not several stories.

By these two means – our excursions with Pest Control operatives and the *Radio Animal* interviews we acquainted ourselves with a substantial number of instances of animal/human encounters, and by so doing, a picture began to emerge of local human behaviour towards animals and the environment—of tolerance and intolerance, of fear and loathing, affection, conflict, pathos, admiration, longing and so on.

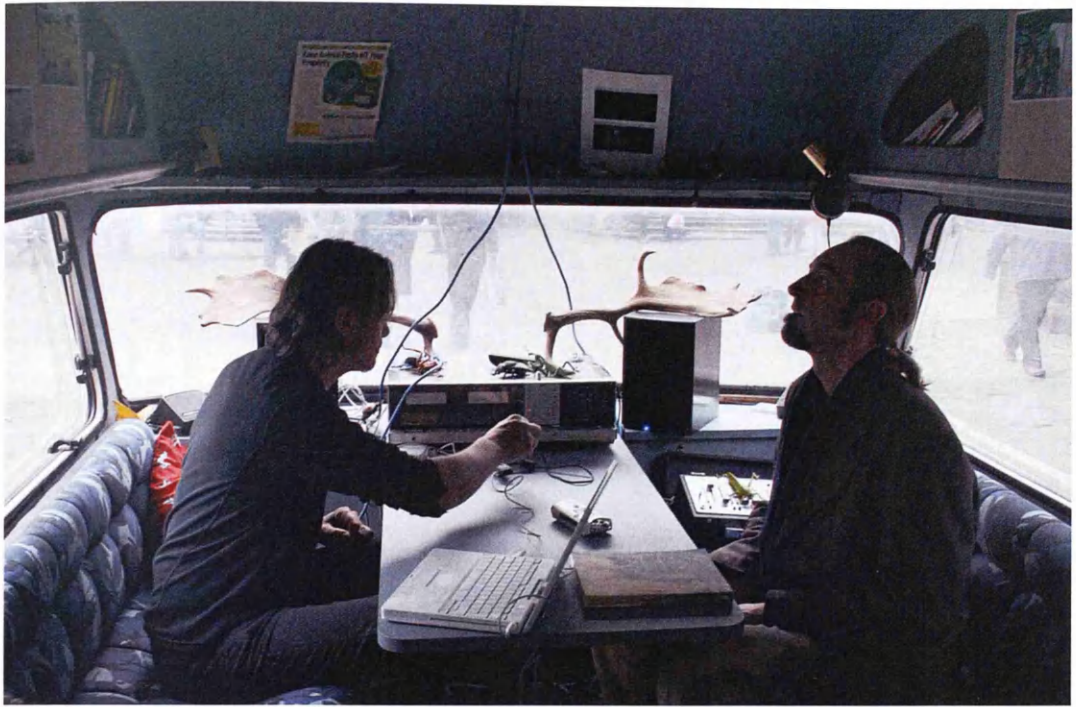


Figure 24

We were particularly keen that individuals with no particular expertise in this subject should have a platform of their own on which to set their own discrete accounts alongside those of the municipal agents whose job it is to enact the will of citizens more institutionally. This juxtaposition was engineered both in audio form in the Storey Gallery installation and latterly, as transcriptions within the publication.

The Exhibition:

The exhibition *Uncertainty in the City* is described in some detail within the publication (pp.14-16) and again Rikke Hansen discusses the audio wall (p.110) so there is no need for further elaboration here. On the *Radio Animal* website there are audio grabs available from the speaker wall accompanying the virtual tour of the show and there are individual stories also available in audio form on the web pages associated with the respective sites we visited.

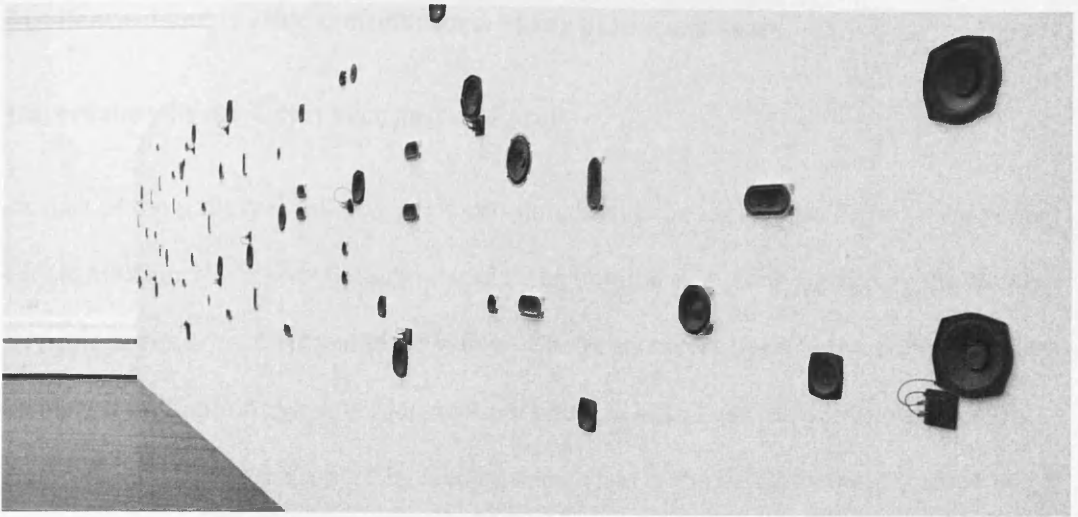


Figure 25

REFLECTION

On Participation:

As I have indicated, in addition to seeking out the help of the Pest Control experts whom we believed to be in a key position when considering unwanted or problematic animal encounters, another significant dynamic within our research for *Uncertainty* was to foreground the experiences and opinions of non-professionals – amateur observers or witnesses to the quasi-domestic peregrinations of wild species. Set up in this way, the project gave us the opportunity to assemble and hold such accounts in one place. In fact, this siting occurred strategically and serially – as an audio component of the Gallery installation, on the Radio Animal website and eventually as transcripts in the publication for the project. In providing these platforms we consciously attempted to give credence to these singular and unmediated accounts and to allow them to exist side by side with one another, in order more than anything, that the absence of any unifying coherence should be realized and acknowledged.

Publication and invited contributors: Three public seminars

Uncertainty in the City: *pests, pets and prey*

As part of the Gallery's Talks on Art series and during the time of the *Uncertainty in the City* exhibition, the Storey Gallery hosted three one-day events organized by the artists Bryndís Snæbjörnsdóttir and Mark Wilson. The events were open to the public and live-streamed on Radio Animal to audiences we know to have been as far flung as London, Australia and the USA. Fronted by leading specialists in the field of animal studies and together with the artists, local hunters, amateur enthusiasts, and animal contact specialists, the discussions explored a variety of human and non-human animal relations, encounters and their consequences. The public was encouraged to attend and participate, with questions from the floor.

The series was spread across three weekends at two-weekly intervals and each day explored a different theme from within the context of the exhibition.

The dates were: 16 October, 30 October and 13 November 2010, at 2.00 – 4.30 pm

Sat 16 October - *Animals in proximity and the broken skin: mice, rats, moles, bats and bugs:*

Led by Erica Fudge

Dr Erica Fudge was at the time a Reader and lecturer at the School of Humanities and Cultural Studies, University of Middlesex, London, UK. Erica is an author of seminal works on human/animal relationships including *Animal, Reaktion, 2002* and is leader of the once London-, now Glasgow-based *British Animal Studies Network*. Speaking from personal experience as well as from extensive historical and contemporary research, Fudge investigated the fragility of our perceived separation from other species and led the discussion in respect of the contradictions and anxieties that are fostered when such insulation is threatened or breached.



Figure 26

Sat 30 October - *The wild and the cultivated: schisms in paradise-imaging*⁴⁶: raptors, pigeons, the real and the fancied: Led by Chris Wilbert

Dr Chris Wilbert is a senior lecturer in Tourism and Geography at Anglia Ruskin University. He is the co-editor of the seminal collection, *Animal Spaces, Beastly Places*, Routledge, London and New York, 2000. As an environmental geographer, Wilbert has a particular interest in how places are used and how the sharing and entanglements of spaces with 'others' is perceived and managed. The discussion cut to the heart of issues embedded in the *Uncertainty* exhibition and allowed the audience to explore not only the difficulties and opportunities arising from the idea of contested space but how our responses shift in relation to context and location.

⁴⁶ The term *Paradise Imaging* referenced (albeit ironically) our often unrealistic and unconsidered individual ideals of what and whom we would like (or are prepared) to share space with and the consequent incongruous nature of these individual 'imagings' when seen collectively – in turn, the potential they have for sparking conflict and unrest between ourselves and other species and concerning other species.

Sat 13 November - *The desirable neighbour and the threat of the new: red squirrel, grey squirrel and Pandora's box* Led by Peter Lurz

Dr Peter Lurz is a Research Associate at the School of Biology, Newcastle University, and during the last two decades has specialized in the observation of and relationship between red and grey squirrel populations in the UK. Using his experience in this field as a basis, the discussion drew on ideas of the alien, the indigenous, ideas of nationhood and sustainability in relation to human and non-human cohabitation

These events were part of an established and successful Artists' Talks programme and were held in one of the Exhibition rooms. As artists and hosts for the events we also sat on this small panel and opened the proceedings of each session with a talk from our perspective about each respective theme as diffracted through the project. Following this, the main speaker delivered her/his paper and the other panelists responded from a locally informed position. Finally, the discussion was opened up to the audience.

Publication:

The publication *Uncertainty in the City* is a collation and new representation of the fieldwork from the project including photographs, transcribed interviews, the lead speakers' papers and further essays from the artists and the independent critic and academic Rikke Hansen (Tate, London Metropolitan University, etc.). The book was designed by Anja Lutz, in close consultation with the artists.⁴⁷ Our aim was to mimic, in feel at least, the model of the field guide – something essentially portable packed with information about the subject. This design stratagem was intended as an act of diffraction whereby a convention is simultaneously evoked and disrupted. The book is divided into six parts, beginning with a foreword by Gallery manager Suzy Jones followed by an introductory essay by the artists. The next section (printed on

⁴⁷ Lutz is the chief designer at *The Green Box*, Berlin.

conspicuously different stock) is one of two similarly presented sections in the book, featuring transcripts of the audio recordings we'd made as part of the Radio Animal initiative. In this first section, 'Anecdotes', are the stories – the more anecdotal and personal accounts of encounters with animal others within or around the home. Each story (as is also the case in the later 'Analysis' section) is prefaced with a tiny silhouette of the animal or animals referenced in the interview. The silhouette motifs were significant to us both in the exhibition and within the book as a graphic reminder of how we are inclined to trust without questioning, our abbreviated representations. They were however, neither exaggerations nor caricatures and in that sense we allowed them to be as neutral as possible. At the end of each account is a simple line of attribution indicating first name and gender of the interviewee and the place and date of the interview.

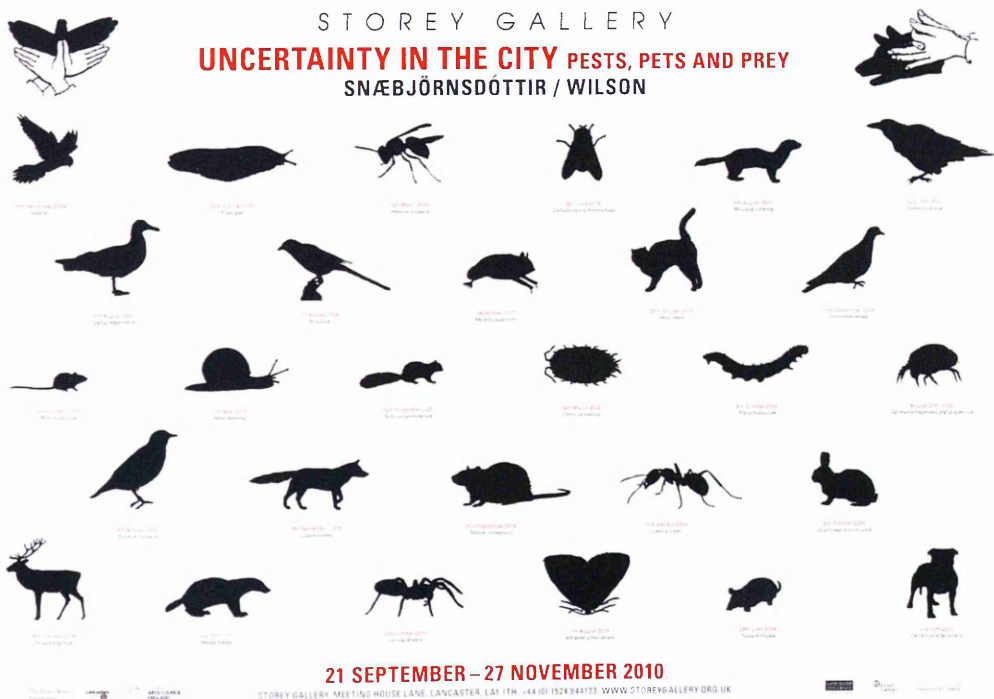


Figure 27

The third section is a series of essays from the invited contributors Erica Fudge, Chris Wilbert and Peter Lurz (each of whom had led one of the *Uncertainty* public Gallery events) concluding with an analysis by Rikke Hansen, of the project, its contextual place

and its meaning as art. Hansen had also participated in one of the main Radio Animal events, *A Lamb Baste*, at Grizedale Arts in November 2009. This essay places the project and the exhibition within a critical context making reference to the writings of Bourriaud, Derrida, Kester and Morton amongst others. Hansen's essay makes a conscious point of examining the project within the context of contemporary art and the 'animal turn', whilst drawing attention to its strategic foregrounding of dialogue and conversation. With the exception of this last piece, the essay pages are interleaved with photographs taken during the research stages of the project, the animal fairs and meets where we had conducted the majority of the interviews as well as the art events (*Interspecies*, Arts Catalyst, Shoreditch and *A Lamb Baste*, Grizedale Arts) in which *Radio Animal* had participated. The arrangement of photographs varies from full-page single image bleeds, to assemblages of up to four per page. Their regular, right-hand page position opposite the texts again was intended to mirror the conventions of a field guide but the oblique or seemingly opaque connections between specific text and specific image/s were designed to undermine any instructional, didactic reading one would expect from such a guide. Whilst reinforcing for the reader a zoning, broadly of human-non-human animal interface this non-correspondence of text and image privileges instead and perpetuates notions of uncertainty and reappraisal.

The fourth section, like the second, comprises the more analytical interview transcripts – these include many of the observations of the chief pest control officer with whom we'd had most contact and other individuals, amateur naturalists, conservationists and hunters. Again, each extract was prefaced with a silhouette/s of the animals involved.

The fifth section is a transcript of a conversation between the artists and a colleague, Professor Robert Williams, conducted in the Radio Animal mobile unit at the end of a day of interviews. The three of us watched from our cover as schoolchildren spilled onto the market square in Lancaster and we observed the interactions, courtship and play behaviours as we might have observed wildlife from the cover of a hide. The

conversation was quipping and spontaneous, but we segued on through discussions on the changing styles in media representations of animals and environments by wildlife documentary teams, to the ethics of intervention and empathy. The inclusion of this conversation was a nod not only to the ghost of humour which had stalked the project throughout, but to the basis of that humour which is the tension of our uncertainty and the myriad contradictions concerning animals-in-proximity.

The final section of the book is an unexpurgated (save specific addresses) table of complaints as reported to Glasgow City Council Pest Control Office over a period of two years, all concerning incidences of foxes in urban gardens. It was from one of these reports that we drew the text for the neon work in the exhibition (p.120):

'coming into garden from woods behind house'

The fox reports were also included in the exhibition itself, presented simply as a row of printed A4 sheets in a sloping, glass topped, Victorian display case. We included this (appendix-like) as the last word in the book, because it is an authentic document of fear expressed as a response to the presence of nomadic agency within the domain of the domestic. In its simple presentation of data and as a record of public disquiet, it is immediately both blankly factual and emotionally eloquent.



Figure 28

Current Projects:

Feral Attraction

Current projects, as touched upon in the preceding text include *Feral Attraction* which may be seen as related to the works *(a)fly* and *Uncertainty in the City*. For 30 years, on the rugged and largely inaccessible peninsular of Tálkni, a flock of sheep lived beyond human reach in self-determined isolation. Their continued independent existence transgressed Icelandic farming laws (which require of farmers that sheep are brought down from the mountains each autumn until the spring). During this time they were the focus respectively of frustration, fascination (and occasionally sport) to Icelanders and foreign visitors. This sporadic attention however was insufficiently concentrated to pose any challenge to the liberty of the animals until in October 2009, local authorities of two municipalities in the area, embarked on a controversial project to round them up.

Not all the sheep were retrieved on the initial roundup and there was National news screening of what appeared to many to be a bungled job – a number of animals were driven off the cliffs to their death. The captured majority however were summarily slaughtered the following day and thus was lost the opportunity to examine any behavioural and physiological consequences of their time in isolation, despite the fact that some observers of the animals prior to their capture had noted and reported such physical changes which suggested that adaptations had occurred as a consequence of their time in isolation. In order to avoid any repetition of public outrage, the remainder were discreetly gathered in and destroyed in January of the following year.

At the heart of this story is a prevailing and compelling image of a community of domestic animals, which despite climatic inclemency and the seeming impenetrability of the landscape, survived without human care for three decades and indeed showed every sign that they might have continued to live there in perpetuity.

The project draws on numerous conflicting attitudes and presumptions exposed by these events, about landscape, its construction and its denizens. Using interviews we conducted with several individuals involved in the roundup, we examine these perspectives, amongst others, to unpack the tensions, contradictions and opportunities in what reflects a broader reappraisal of the 'proper order' of our relationship to animals and to environment.

Vanishing Point:

In 2010 we were commissioned by the Gothenburg Biennial to make a site-specific work, initially along the lines of what we had undertaken in *Uncertainty in the City*. In practical terms there was insufficient time to do the necessary research and fieldwork for this and instead we proposed a work as a development of *Three Attempts* but to take place on the roof of Roda Sten, the main Biennial building on the River Gota waterfront. The performance-based work which in short documents a meeting between a human and various species of gull around a specially built table at which food is prepared and shared, resulted in a three-channel video entitled *Vanishing Point*, exhibited within the building alongside works by Francis Alys and Ernesto Netto. An interview between ourselves and the independent critic Andreas Hagstrøm, going into some depth regarding the intentions and motivations behind the work, is available at:

http://goteborg.biennial.org/en/conversation_snaebjornsdottir_wilson/

In some small but significant way, the work makes reference to a biblical narrative in which ideas of generosity are key, but it carries the idea strategically across and between species rather than situating it entirely in human terms. To some extent therefore, *Vanishing Point* can be seen as a critique on the legacy of how Christian values have been interpreted, placing human interests at the heart of our conceptions of the world. Such viewpoints have contributed to a dislocation between human beings and the wider environment rendering it largely a series of resources and a site for exploitation.

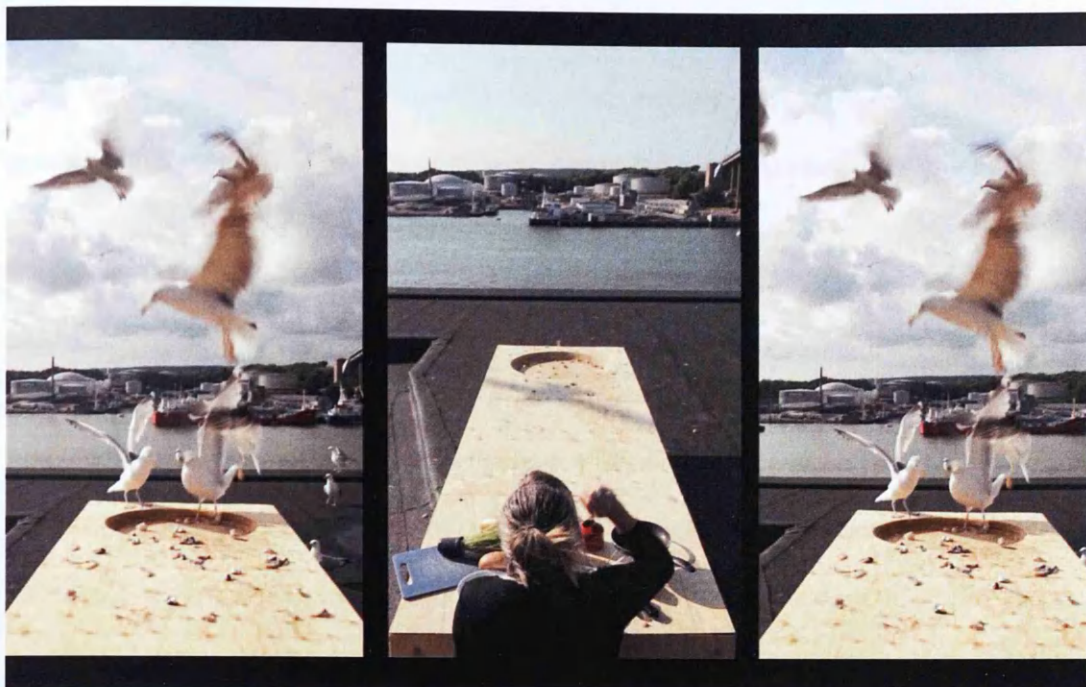


Figure 29

It is our plan, in collaboration with the arts agency *Difference Exchange*, to bring this work to London next year where the showing of *Vanishing Point* in an ecclesiastical space will be central to a discursive event, providing a springboard for discussion regarding hospitality and the significance of others and other species in our understanding of environment, habitat, sustainability and interspecificity.

Matrix

The third project we are developing, we regard as a sequel to *nanoq: flat out and bluesome*. In 2010 we undertook a residency in Longyearbyen, Svalbard as field research for the project *Matrix*.

In the years since 2006 (the completion of *nanoq*) the polar bear's iconic status as a symbol of environmental deterioration is already tired and has mutated into a cliché. The resultant vacuum remains unfilled – the image depleted and not yet replaced. As an environmental icon, the polar bear occupied a hitherto unchallenged position at the top of the arctic food chain. Because of increasingly shorter winters it is nevertheless struggling to maintain its livelihood. We find it interesting that even before the animal

represented, (itself a symbol of a habitat) has become truly endangered and certainly made extinct, the potency of the *representation* has already expired. Even in matters of pressing importance, our representations it seems, have limited shelf lives, the duration of which is determined by sometimes-fickle twists of fad and fortune.⁴⁸

We propose that the ultimate representation – the symbol that may yet prove to be most durable, might therefore be a void – albeit a qualified void – into which we pour our knowledge and imagination. The polar bear den has no exterior shape. In its interiority it is quintessentially female – it is a space – a void. It declares, in very loaded terms, an absence. The absence suggests the recent departure of the maternal family. Before too long, vacated dens are liable to melt or collapse. But the den – this space, also embodies the idea of maternity and birth. How final or complete that loss may be – in the absence of an occupant, can be presented as a trigger for philosophical meditation and conjecture.

It is a white space in a white field. Its presence is announced discreetly as a darkening in the snow. Even experts in the field, find polar bear dens remarkably hard to spot. It is a secret portal.

The word *Matrix* signifies a substance, situation, or environment in which something has its origin, takes form, or is enclosed. The importance of Matrix here, and its focus on a specific den as an agent of potential and a locus for imagining and projection, is key to this work. For its constitution we will draw on data and artefacts, from the field and from polar and biological collections. But it is by the deployment of lateral strategies that we intend a) to avoid any sense of evangelizing and instead b) to re-sensitise individuals to

⁴⁸ Recently for instance in the world of representation, some minor cultural tremors have occurred. In 2007, video footage was screened depicting a polar bear 'clinging' to a tiny iceberg. The footage was to become controversial when its meaning was called into question but for a moment it captured the imagination and pricked the conscience of a watching world who saw in this struggle the embodiment of environmental decline. In 2011 the legendary wildlife documentary filmmaker, Sir David Attenborough, unreasonably became the target of unprecedented hostility when it 'came to light' that during his latest epic *The Frozen Planet*, the birthing of a polar bear had been filmed, not in the Arctic at all, but in a zoo.

ideas of the north, the simultaneously inexorable and precarious condition of life itself and reinvigorate debates and discourse surrounding material agency and environmental causality.

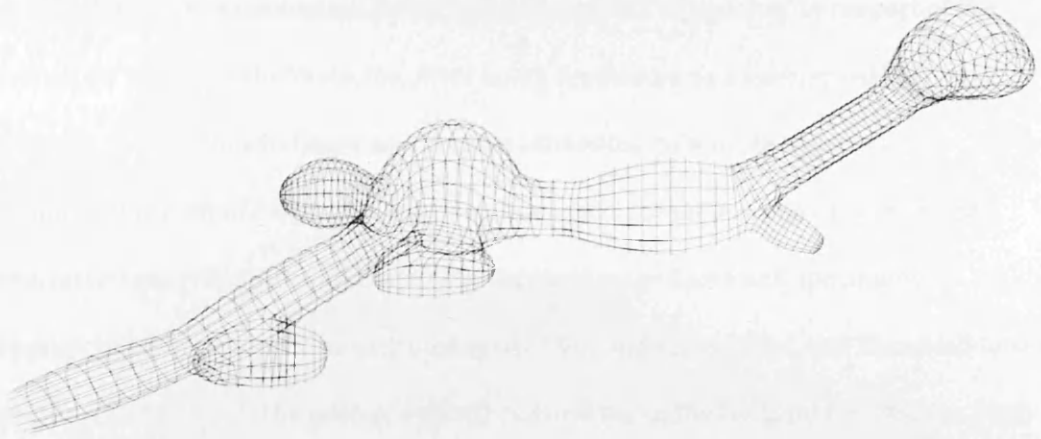


Figure 30



Figure 31

Conclusion

In the course of preparing this document I have endeavoured to make clear the intentions of a series of projects, each of which has involved the examination of a specific interface between human animals and non-human animal species or classifications.

In *Big Mouth*, the examination focused on the fatal act of 'naming' in respect of the marsupial mammal, the thylacine. After being eradicated as a species within living memory, it continues to haunt and fascinate the same colonial population who committed the act of extinction. In *nanoq*, the examination was constituted by the protracted geographical and temporal journey of polar bears and specimens appropriated in the Arctic mostly during the 19th and early 20thC and absorbed into a second, (and through the project a third) cultural life in the UK (and beyond). In *(a)fly* the interface was one of shared habitat between companion species and humans but was complicated by the introduction of game hunting methodologies in order to select the respective participants. In *between you and me* and its examination of human and seal interface by means of the chapter *The Empty Wilderness*, I focused on the ways other beings are depleted by human acts of representation and instrumentalisation, contrasting this with an encounter between one human and a colony of seals in which a parity of meeting was proposed. Finally in *Uncertainty in the City* I have explained the processes by which we brought a multitude of voices together to articulate a clamour of unease and indeterminacy in relation to the uninvited species that occupy our wall cavities and gardens.

The material, aesthetic and philosophical scope of my practice is necessarily broad. I have indicated how the methodology and media deployed are intrinsically bound up with the conceptual constitution and direction of each project – from video to photography, from neon to museological display, from audio work to performance, from text to context, each component is considered and honed in respect of its intended functionality – both individually and as elements within installations.

The models constituted by the exhibitions and publications submitted here are in themselves problematizing, complicating tools – as I have stated elsewhere, they do not seek to be exemplary as destinations of thought. As processual models they function as a means to provoke alternative ways of thinking and behaviour

I have explained what the respective works set out to achieve, in relation to contemporary art, artistic research and animal studies (which as I maintain, together constitute the core and key related fields within which my practice resonates) and in relation more widely to other named and unnamed disciplines or behaviours.

I introduced the idea of ‘uncertainty’ as a positive, conditional mechanism as explored and deployed in my practice, whereby a tear is created in the fabric of some cultural trope thereby destabilising established institutional methods and leaving audiences themselves to effect some conceptual projected repair.

The eponymous *ecology of uncertainty* I have shown to reference an interdependency of agents, both human and non-human, animate and inanimate. ‘Things’ are of importance and are intrinsically and relationally significant beyond what we can account for in human terms. The assemblage of things in the *nanoq* installation was a disorientating experience (even for the artists) and without the familiar parameters afforded by signage or the context of a museum, the experience of being in a space with multiple bear specimens demanded some rational or other response to be drawn internally from the viewer.

I wrote about the role of interdisciplinarity and the interaction we foster between contemporary art methodologies and those of other disciplines. I referenced the practice of *détournement* and demonstrated its application within our work (e.g. in *nanoq* and in *between you and me*) of constructive scepticism in tandem and dialogue with established contexts, approaches and tools pertaining to discrete specialisms. I have shown how constructively disruptive mechanisms are mobilised in reframing cultural tropes (in

(a)fly). In this questioning, the point is to remain receptive to alternative observations, phenomena and behaviours that would otherwise go undetected. The deductions and applications of new knowledge arising from this practice stand a greater chance of reflecting a sensitivity in response to *what is there* rather than what we want or allow to be there – to serve the needs of an ecology of which we are a part rather than to take what we can plunder from an ecology from which we have notionally, damagingly and ultimately *suicidally* divorced ourselves. Thus in its most significant effect, it is a way of de-centring our inquiry and of finding responses to and ways of being that are not solely the product of perceived human need.

I have made many references to our reliance upon language and semiotics and to some of the consequences of these tools as demonstrated in the exhibited and published work. In this respect I have pointed to our uncertainty and enforced relativism concerning the phenomenology and ontology of other animal species and the condition of being embodied in the world without these instruments. By way of introduction, with reference to our essay in *Big Mouth* I suggested that in being lost, by being cut adrift from the parameters or signs upon which we are accustomed to rely, our own intuitive and instinctive faculties are triggered and our encounter with environment is thus enriched. If we are unfamiliar with this as a process or condition then uncertainty will make us anxious, causing us to flounder and probably at least temporarily to become ineffective. But to continue this analogy I have suggested that being lost or uncertain may instead potentially be instrumental in allowing us to access new ways of seeing and accessing knowledge. As a strategy of art, to be comfortable with the relinquishment of control, with not knowing and as a consequence, being periodically reliant on instinctual responses is an asset for this very reason. I would suggest that in relation to artistic research and (as a counter to possible claims regarding the over-academicisation of art education), there should continue to be a resistance to an overbearing insistence towards the purely rational and sensible, particularly as part of a developmental process. So in this supporting paper I have sought to convey a different process of conjecture and

speculation through inquiry, combining effects and affects and involving knowing (intuiting), not knowing (suspension of disbelief) in concert with the application of intellect.

Further to this, I have made reference to knowledge being determined by the mechanisms we use to find and articulate it. I have proposed that art practices and artistic research offer alternative methodologies and diffracted approaches to knowledge acquisition and understanding and as such I consider that these (submitted) projects (and my practice as a whole) provide an articulate and coherent argument in support of such alternatives.

Implicit to the enterprise of this writing has been the problem of conceptualizing and accounting for research questions. As I have tried to make clear, my art practice is, in one way or another, an indeterminate activity and any achievements tend to be as a consequence of spending at least part of the time in a condition of not-knowing and of uncertainty, involving quite often, a protracted suspension of disbelief. It is in thinking through and making the work itself and by implementing a blend of the rational and the irrational, of experience and ignorance, that by a series of inquisitive and speculative steps, ideas will crystallize and be made manifest in whatever means are appropriate. Research questions indeed do arise in the course of this work and may well be posed and addressed through the work concurrently, but since its objective is neither the formulation of an equation nor the establishment of a dependable theorem, the work is likely to remain the dynamic and managed embodiment of an enquiry.

Site specificity too has been shown in these works to have a significant role. In our practice we endeavour wherever possible to be responsive to the site at which the work is to be shown. This is as true of the constant adjustments and subtle meaning shifts that the *nanoq* archive underwent in its (so far) twenty sitings in zoological collections, polar

collections and maritime museums, as it is for instance of the conceptual incorporation of the statue of Victoria and Albert in the Storey Gallery exhibition of *Uncertainty in the City*. (Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson, 2010, p.15-16)

To complicate and enrich the process of making work still further, the dynamic of collaboration has brought experiential, cultural and gender variance to our practice. These factors which are brought to bear alternately through discussion, through sketches and other forms of visualization, continue to influence how the work is developed at all stages. I explained how the very nature of collaboration involving as it does the sourcing and developing of ideas beyond the singular self, lends itself readily to wider consultation and participatory input which is at the heart of our essentially relational and socially-engaged practice. It is in this participatory aspect of our work at the developmental and exposition stages that I feel we extend its effect and meaning most actively.

Despite warnings of global warming and impending environmental crisis, the evidence of which is palpable, even in what is termed a post-human epoch, the human projects of capitalism and national interests drive us all closer each day to its threshold or tipping point. Many argue that it has gone beyond any prospect of recovery. Either way, threats to the environment and issues of sustainability are still couched in anthropocentric terms on a more than regular basis, indicating that either the case for concatenated worlding is not trusted as an argument-winner or simply that the detached human perspective is still paramount – beyond any imperative to qualify it in ecological terms. In a western dominated global economy, new approaches to thinking are hard won if they are ever to be achieved at all.

In the light of what can only be described as the international inability to respond imaginatively and ecologically, the ambition for recalibrating our cognitive equipment towards constructive environmental uncertainty and deference is unlikely to be realized

across the board any time soon. The imperative therefore must be to introduce shifts in our cultural approach by increment.

As artists we see our work, in its project-based and serial manifestations as a way towards that end. The nature and implementation of the work as critique and discourse, both short term and longer term, quite naturally sit as components of and in extension to the work itself, functioning as tools to increase the visibility and impact of embedded ideas, to extend the resonance of the work across multiple fields and as a means by which to test its effects.

Mark Wilson, October 2012

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Images to the text

Abstract

Fig.1 p.vii Hornstrandír. Photograph taken on a nine-day walk in mist in uninhabited terrain. Mark Wilson. (1999)

Introduction

Critical Field

Fig. p.12 *Manchester*. (2004) Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson. Photograph taken during installation at Spike Island, Bristol

Fig.3 p.30 *nanoq*. Press reviews of the exhibition *nanoq: flat out and bluesome* at the Horniman Museum, London. (2006)

Projects

Big Mouth

Fig.4 p.41 *Big Mouth* interviewees (l to r), Ned Terry, Nick Mooney, Kathryn Medlock, Buck Emberg, Joan Emberg, Karen Firestone, Elsie Cupitt, Robert Paddle. (2002)

Fig.5 p.47 *Zoomorphic bench* during installation at Tramway, Glasgow. (2004)

Fig.6 p.47 *Zoomorphic bench* and *Big Mouth* Installation still from *Big Mouth* at Tramway, Glasgow. (2004)

Fig.7 p.54 *Bad Mouth*. (2004) Tramway, Glasgow & *I'm Not There*. (2011) Beaumaris Zoo, Hobart. Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson

nanoq: flat out and bluesome

- Fig.8. p.55 *nanoq: flat out and bluesome* (2010) Snæbjörnsdóttir/ Wilson.
The photographic archive at the exhibition, Sediton, Tullie House
Museum, Carlisle
- Fig.9. p.59 *nanoq.* photograph taken during the shoot at Blair Atholl Castle.
(2004)
- Fig.10. p.60 *nanoq: flat out and bluesome* (2004) Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson.
Spike Island, Bristol. Installation.
- Fig. 11. p.64 *White Out.* (2004) Conference event at the exhibition, *nanoq: flat
out and bluesome*, Spike Island, Bristol.
- Fig. 12. p.66 *Polar Shift* (2012) Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson. Detail from the
international exhibition, *HEAT: Art and Climate Change*, RMIT,
Melbourne.
- Fig. 13. p.70 *Animal Matters* (2012) Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson. Detail. Galleri
Sverdrup, University of Oslo.

(a)fly

- Fig.14. p.74 *(a)fly* (2006) Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson. Photograph and shot map.
National Museum of Iceland, Reykjavík.
- Fig.15. p.77 *(a)fly.* Shot map (detail)
- Fig.16. p.81 *Gátta & Skotti* (2006) Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson. Lambda print

between you and me

- Fig.17. p.88 In the studio of the Taxidermist, Reykjavík
- Fig.18. p.91 *the naming of things* (2009) Detail including single channel video projection (3m x 1.5m) from the installation *between you and me*.
- Fig 19. p.93 Public seminar – *Mellan Dig och Mig (between you and me)* at Kalmar Konstmuseet, Sweden. August (2009)

Uncertainty in the City

- Fig.20. p.98 *Columba livia*. (2010) Morecambe.
- Fig.21. p.101 Pest Control Department office. Lancaster and Morecambe District Council. (2007)
- Fig.22. p.102 *Radio Animal* (2009) Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson. Mobile interview and live-stream unit.
- Fig.23. p.103 *Radio Animal* (2009) Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson. At Market Square, Lancaster City-centre.
- Fig.24. p.105 *Radio Animal* (2010) Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson. Interview and interior of unit.
- Fig.25. p.106 *Uncertainty in the City* (2010) Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson. Audio wall, detail from installation
- Fig.26. p.108 *The wild and the cultivated: schisms in paradise-imaging* (2010) Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson. Conference event at the exhibition *Uncertainty in the City*.
- Fig.27. p.110 *Uncertainty in the City* (2010) Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson. Poster/leaflet accompaniment to the exhibition

Fig.28. p.113 *Uncertainty in the City: The Fox Reports* (2010) Snæbjörnsdóttir/
Wilson. Installation photograph.

Current projects

Fig.29. p.116 *Vanishing Point* (2011) Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson. 3-channel video

Fig.30. p.118 *Matrix* (2012) Developmental drawing – 3D visualisation

Fig.31. p.118 *Matrix* (2012) Developmental drawing – 3D visualisation

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Appendices 1 & 2

1998 (*GPS from Magnetic*)

2000 (*BorderAXIS*)

(Appendix 1)

Global Positioning System

We are all in transit – You are here... (Catalogue foreword, *Magnetic*, 1998)

MAGNETIC was an exhibition (1998) curated by Mark Wilson featuring the work of eight artists (including Wilson) working in the north of Britain – other artists included Bryndís Snæbjörnsdóttir. The exhibition toured to St Louis and Baltimore in the USA, Vardy Galley, Sunderland, Beacon Gallery and Barrow Dock Museum, Cumbria, 1998-1999. An illustrated 76 page catalogue was published by the University of Sunderland with a foreword (here below) by Mark Wilson and an essay by critic Peter Suchin.

In this pre collaborative work, I presented images of what were effectively three [actant] representatives – a large and battered tree trunk, a tern in flight and a stone cairn resembling a submarine, in mist... The accompanying text to each read as follows:

The timber, a huge Siberian tree trunk lies mutely, at rest on the beach. The sea, the agent of its delivery washes benignly behind it. The trunk tells the story of its journey – its entire surface is bashed, splintered and raw. It is 'drift' wood and has been transported by the elements of tides and winds.

The arctic tern is aggressive, migratory. It is loud, efficient in flight. Its movements and inclinations are governed by genetic information and magnetic influence but it has the genuine faculty of short-term self-determination, based on local conditions and unexpected opportunity.

The stone needle points. Its shape is suggestive of a boat. It will not itself move, but it is a sign to assist the intelligent transit of others. But to me it was a chess piece after the game is over. What we couldn't determine in the mist, without a path, is whether it was on or off the board.

The three images taken by the artist during a nine-day hike in northern Iceland, offer a triangulation system by which viewers are invited to locate themselves psychologically using chance, intellect and instinct.

For several days, myself and artist Bryndís Snæbjörnsdóttir, undertook a coastal route by foot in an uninhabited area of northern Iceland, (Hornstrandír). The weather conditions were consistently misty and for the entire time, visibility was down to 10 metres. The largest scale map of the area in existence is 1:100,000. We were dependent on a compass and upon a rudimentary GPS system but ultimately we had to rely on a combination of instinct and experience in order to read the conditions and the land. The experience also prompted the following short catalogue essay, which served as an introduction to the exhibition *Magnetic*

Do not trust your instincts July 19-28 A nine-day cliff and mountain walking expedition in the north of Iceland – weather conditions consistently misty, visibility 10 m except in the fjords – the largest scale map of the area in existence is 1 to 100,000. In such conditions reliance on a compass is imperative. Inevitably, at times, we would need to rely on something else

We are governed psychologically perhaps more than we daily acknowledge by unseen forces of which magnetism is only one. We use the term casually to describe attraction of all kinds, but implicit within any such application is the notion of movement, either potential or actual. Also implicit is the capacity to gauge direction of movement...

Magnetism is the force, which guides us within the parameters of a domestic arena, even a relationship. It is the attraction to our immediate environment, its nature determining the nature of our response to a sense of location.

It is a motivating force which provokes travel and in turn may return our thoughts to our point of departure giving fresh insight into both our understanding of home and of the places we visit or stay.

Magnetism, when it is experienced, drives our curiosity

It is both factual and intuitive and like intuition can show itself simultaneously as immensely strong and yet quite insubstantial.

It is the binding energy of polarities, constituted by the inquisitive mind whose purpose it is to seek out connections within disparate data.

It has become our custom increasingly to question our conditioning and for example to contemplate the vacuum left by abandoned notions of polarity. This leaves us simultaneously exhilarated and nervous. We will find connections and associations where casually we might never have dreamt of finding them. This calls into question the desire to create such patterns or identify them or indeed ask, "which is it, creation or identification?"

Individually we seek the familiar within the unknown and surprise within the everyday. We delight in the overlapping of words in related languages and in consistencies in facial or body language between our own and distant cultures. To shrink the world and to make simple that which is complex, may be our intention but the world is under no obligation to conform to our models of it.

We perpetuate tried and tested systems of thinking by lending them to new applications – psychology was developed in the 19C as a science using methodologies of physics. Computer applications still conveniently and constantly refer us to our experience of books. New ways of seeing are shaped inevitably by such concessions to familiarity.

But the act of creating is an act of movement. In orienteering, the magnetic needle monitors our progress in conjunction with the (actual) land and the (construct) map providing evidence of where we're pointing and information of where we need to go. Then the fog may descend. We have no such needle to keep a check on the advisability or worth of our desires, nor the consistency or proposed outcomes of our particular fascinations. We use what methods, tools, guidance and experience we can in pursuit of a variety of ends - to make it easy, informative, quick, provocative, entertaining, significant - to fulfill or surpass our expectations.

Everyone finds his or her own way of walking over the same path. We are motivated by desire – to question, to achieve, to know more.

I remember seeing a sign once at the start of a popular mountain route - in many ways it could have been anywhere - advising climbers of weather conditions on the summits. The footnote to the sign written rather emphatically, warned 'Do not trust your instincts'.

Everyday we make myriad decisions based on gut feelings albeit most of which may not be potentially life endangering or changing. It is nevertheless one of the most rewarding feelings to discover that our instincts have served us well and delivered us to a place or condition which might, without them, have otherwise remained beyond us. It would be refreshing (to many no doubt frivolously subversive) to find posted in public places [or for that matter in institutions of research] the maxim - 'Develop your instincts – inform your intuition'.

Mark Wilson 1998

(Appendix 2)

BorderAXIS (a catalogue introduction) The following text first appeared as my introduction to the catalogue of the exhibition *BorderAXIS* which I curated and in which I also exhibited work. The exhibition took place in the Thomas K Lang Gallery in Vienna in September/October 2000

Out on the border, we can be – anything we want to be

Two adjoining rooms - a radio in one, a television in the next, both turned on and both at medium volume. Moving between the rooms the speech from one, alternately crashes and dovetails with speech or music from the other, creating a river of unexpected associations and cross-references, without direction, without responsibility, without any accountability but curiously and significantly, not without meaning...

we provide the meaning – or are we simply there to recognize it?

Imagine a conversation - each person harbours the idea that *his* or *her* words will be understood by others present - that the accumulation of abstract terms will coalesce in the minds of the rest, pretty much in the shape it left the speaker's mouth.

In reality, communication is a concessionary affair where allowances are imperative and the momentum of conversation is reliant upon an acceptance of approximation in language.

In this space between what is meant and what is understood, there is a wealth of interpretative potential, never to be explored during the course of the average chat. Even here we are lost in translation – the discrepancies for sure being populated with desire (what we want to hear) and paranoia (what we hear that is threatening), and everything in between.

It is a no-man's land, full of possibilities, where to misunderstand even in nuance is simultaneously an opportunity to connect and relate another's experience to one's own. Even in one language conversation is a tricky, building kind of process, fraught with

imported inflexion and unpredictable associations, all destined to hijack and divert intended meaning.

The border is the membrane we subconsciously acknowledge at the outset of any dialogue and which we attempt to penetrate each from our own side, throughout the course of the discussion. Just how fluid or rigid it remains or becomes is determined by our propensity or willingness to collude. We love to fall in love because in its reciprocity, the membrane between lovers is breath-like, in flux: in that (nomadic) process we feel the thrill of expansion simultaneously, with the assurance that we have a companion in the journey and in the risk-taking – another who is equally implicated and committed.

Alternatively, this is also why falling in love, for some, is so alarming – we hold back, reluctant for our edges to dissolve, fearing that these edges define our being – they are our composed interface and signal to others - not that, but this...

But where do we really exist?

Is it out on the edges of our being or at the core - the axis?

The border - where we drop parcels of provocation, where we test our theories, where we seek to gain advantage without tilting the machine.

The edge reaches mystical status - here in this linear territory we find all the action - tolerance, conflict, hate, fear, love, compromise, suspicion, disappointment, compassion...where understanding dawns and luck runs out - where liberalism is tested and the heat's turned up on time - where 'now' becomes 'then', indefinitely and the space between moments is sub-atomic - each separate, each with no substance, each defined only by events holding momentary occupation - serving to remind us that 'events' indeed define our sense of space and time.

We map our world significantly by thought, surprise, reaction, reflex, revelation and sensory experience. We flag the map accordingly, distinguishing oases of events in an otherwise featureless desert. In turn we demarcate the space between what's known and what's unknown. In this highly personalised universe, a dream is as tangible as a memory and as such, has equal power to shape our thoughts and mental landscape. As abstracts these fragments match in weight, our most honest, careful thoughts. All are nothing – and yet all can be written down or projected on this wall, that sky – into that flagging conversation...

ideas, words, images, bombs...

The answer to the question - are we at the edges or at the core? is complex – we move between them, and our understanding of, or access to each, determines our ability to relate the edges to the centre. Undoubtedly, for most of us, the centre is more established, more stable and less susceptible to 'disruption' - on the borders therefore we can safely be more open to 'difference' and the possibility of change.

Mark Wilson 2000

(Appendix 3)

This appendix is a list of the publications (in chronological order of their publication) in which we have authored chapters and/or where our work is referenced and analysed by other critics and scholars (2004-12)

Mark Wilson and Bryndís Snæbjörnsdóttir

Baker, S. (2013) *Artist/Animal*, Minnesota, University of Minnesota Press.

(Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson's work is discussed in three sections in the final chapter: *Animals, Locations and Dislocations, The Animal-Object-in-Art and Animal as Medium.*

Poliquin, R. (2012) *The Breathless Zoo: Taxidermy and the Cultures of Longing*. Penn State, Penn State Press.

(Introductory chapter on Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson, *nanoq* pp. 2-11)

Snæbjörnsdóttir, B., & Wilson, M. (2012) 'Art methodologies/Parities in Meeting' in Shakespeare, S., Molloy, C. Blake, C. (eds.) *Beyond Human: From Animality to Transhumanism*. London, Continuum. pp.77-96

Arons, W. & May, T.J. (eds.) (2012) *Readings in Performance and Ecology*. New York, Palgrave and Macmillan.

(Chapter 4, *Silence of the Polar Bears: Performing (Climate) Change in the Theater of Species* by Una Chaudhuri on the work of Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson, pp. 45-59)

Aloi, G. (2012) *Art & Animals*. London, I.B.Tauris

(*Matter of Time and Place*, pp. 37-40 on the work of Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson)

Aloi, G. (2012b) 'Deconstructing the Animal in Search of the Real' *Anthrozoös*. Vol.25, pp. s73-s90

(Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson's work discussed, pp. s74-s76)

Maharaj, S. (curator) (2011) *Pandemonium*. (catalogue). Gothenburg, Gothenburg Biennial

(Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson, pp. 80-81)

Broglio, R. (2011) *Surface Encounters*. Minnesota, University of Minnesota Press.

(*Making Space for Animal Dwelling – Worlding with Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson*, on the work of Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson, pp.57-80)

McHugh, S. (2011) *Animal Stories, Narrating Across Species Lines*. Minnesota, University of Minnesota Press

(Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson's work discussed on pp.122-124 and referenced on pp. 142, 148, 161)

Freeman, C. (2011) *Reconstructing the Animal*. Hobart, University of Tasmania.

(Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson's work discussed on pp. 4, 5, 10-11, 22 & 26)

Snæbjörnsdóttir, B., & Wilson, M. (2010) 'The Empty Wilderness, Seals and Animal Representation' in Benediktsson, K and Lund, K. *Conversations with Landscape*.

Reykjavik, University of Iceland. pp.211-226

McKinley, R. (2010) *The Borderlands Edition*. Corridor8 2, (Contemporary Art Annual).

Manchester, Corridor8. (Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson, *Carlisle, Reykjavík, Gotheburg* an interview by Axel Lapp, pp.112-119)

Society Animals and Gender (2010) *Confrontations with the wild: unpacking the animal through an art practice*, (article by Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson) Berlin, Springer.

Broglio, R. (2010) *A Left-handed Primer for Approaching Animal Art*, for the Journal of Visual Art Practice

(Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson's work discussed on pp.36-39)

Farrell, R. *et al* (eds.) (2010) *A Safe Passage*. (book-artwork pp.58-63 by Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson) Centrifuge Art Prize. Manchester, Salford University.

Ellis, R. (2009) *On Thin Ice, The Changing World of the Polar Bear*. New York, Random House.

(Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson's work discussed on pp. 259, 270-3, 271 and 272)

Brown, C., Snæbjörnsdóttir, B., & Wilson, M. (2009) bookwork. Sheffield, *Transmission: HOST*

Davies, Suzanne. (2008) *HEAT, Art and Climate Change*, (exhibition catalogue), Melbourne, RMIT

(Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson's work referenced and represented on pp. 14, 48-49, 56 and 60)

Yusoff, K. (2008) *BIPOLAR*, London, The Arts Catalyst.

(Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson's work represented on pp.72-75)

Papastergiadis, N. (2004) *Freefall* London, Arts Council England

(Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson's work discussed in the essay on the artists, entitled *Temporary Migration*, pp.6-9 and represented pp.78-9)

Selection of published reviews/articles and interviews

Snæbjörnsdóttir, B., & Wilson, M. (2012) 'On Animal Terms'. *Antennae*. Issue 21. pp.97-105 [Online] Available at:

<http://www.antennae.org.uk/ANTENNAE%20ISSUE%2021.pdf>

Fung, A. (2012) 'Interactive Future Conference on "Animal Influence"' *Black Flash*. Issue 29.2 Winter. pp.22-26)

(Interview with Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson pp. 24-26)

Snæbjörnsdóttir, B., & Wilson, M. (2011) 'A Conversation with Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson' by Haagstrom, A. for *Gothenburg International Biennial of Contemporary Art*. [Online] Available at: http://goteborg.biennial.org/en/conversation_snaebjornsdottir_wilson

Snæbjörnsdóttir, B., & Wilson, M. (2011) Interview by Bolin, G. for Kulturradioen Kosmo: Sveriges Radio. 12th February

Snæbjörnsdóttir, B., & Wilson, M. (2010) 'Uncertainty in the City'. *Art Lies The Back Forty*, Issue: no. 65, Spring. pp.50-53

Snæbjörnsdóttir, B., & Wilson, M. (2010) 'Radio Animal at Interspecies'. Interview by Aloï, G. and Hansen, R. for *Antennae*. Issue 13. pp.10-14 [Online] Available at:

<http://www.antennae.org.uk/ANTENNAE%20ISSUE%2013.pdf>

Snæbjörnsdóttir, B., & Wilson, M. (2010) Interview by Ulrika Flink (ed.) for *Brainstorm*, *Konst och djur*. Issue 102-103. pp.12-19

Robin, L (2010) 'nanoq – the Great White Bear'. *reCollections* – Journal of the National Museum of Australia

Foster, Kate (2010) 'The Animal Question' Interview by Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson for *Art and Research*. [Online] Available at: www.artandresearch.org.uk

O'Reilly, K. (2010), 'Falling Asleep with a Pig' Interview by Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson for *Antennae*. Issue 13. pp.30-38 [Online] Available at: <http://www.antennae.org.uk/ANTENNAE%20ISSUE%2013.pdf>

Snæbjörnsdóttir, B., & Wilson, M. (2009) 'Spaces of Encounter: Art and Revision in Human – Animal Relations' Interview by Birrell, Ross for *Art and Research, A Journal of Ideas, Contexts and Methods*. Volume 3. [Online] Available at: www.artandresearch.org.uk

Snæbjörnsdóttir, B., & Wilson, M. (2009) 'Animales Con Doble Vida: Individualidad de los Osos Polares' Interview with Wilson, M. by Domingo, J.P. for *Suplemento Cultural de Reforma*. Issue 791, 16 Agosto, Mexico

Snæbjörnsdóttir, B., & Wilson, M. (2009) 'Interview with Wilson, M. by Hansen, R. for "Festival"' *Resonance FM*, (London based radio station)

2009 Animals and Society (Australia) Study Group News Bulletin, June

Parzymies, M. (2009) 'nanoq' in *Opinia (Polish Cultural Magazine)*[Online] was available at: <http://www.opinia.co.uk> February (currently inoperative)

Russell, R. (2009) 'nanoq: flat out and bluesome, A Cultural Life of Polar Bears' *Foto8* [Online] was available at: <http://www.foto8.com/home/content/view/790/77/> (currently inoperative)

Connor, S. (2009) 'The Right Stuff'. *Modern Painters*, March 2009, p.62. pp.58-63

Snæbjörnsdóttir, B., & Wilson, M. (2008) 'Flat Out and Bluesome' and 'Nanoq: in Conversation'. Interview by Alois, G. for *Antennae*. Issue 6. pp.21-34 [Online] Available at: <http://www.antennae.org.uk/ANTENNAE%20ISSUE%206.doc.pdf>

Bennett, S. (2008) 'Get Polarized', *Herald Sun* (Melbourne) 24 September

Nelson, R. (2008) 'Artists turn up the Heat on climate change and culpability', *The Age*. 24th September

Stephens, A. (2008) 'Changing the artistic climate' *The Critics*, 6 September

Climate Change Art (2008) ABC TV Sunday Arts. accessed 13 October

Snæbjörnsdóttir, B., & Wilson, M. (2007) in conversation with Bob Cheatham and Ron Broglio, *Delayed: Life from Edge City*, pod-cast
<http://noel.pd.org/~jdemmers/pdblog/index.html>

Snæbjörnsdóttir, B., & Wilson, M. (2007) 'In Conversation with Steve Baker and Ross Birrell' *Art and Research, [Journal of Ideas, Contexts and Methods]*. Volume 1, 2. Summer. [Online] Available at: <http://www.artandresearch.org.uk/v1n2/baker.html>

Polar Bear: Lost and Found. (2007) Current TV broadcast and [Online] Available at: http://current.com/items/77339021_polar_bear_lost_and_found

Matless, D. (2007) 'nanoq' review. *Cultural Geographies in Practice*

Editorial (2007) 'Stuffed and Mounted: are polar bears finished in the Arctic?' (review of *nanoq* at the Horniman Museum, London). *New Scientist*. February 17, p.48. and [Online] Available at: <http://www.newscientist.com/article/mg19325912.200-stuffed-and-mounted-are-polar-bears-finished-in-the-arctic.html>

Dodds, A. (2007) 'Great White Bear'. *frieze* magazine: June/July/August, p.263. [Online] Available at: <file:///Users/markw/Desktop/AAAA%20MacBook%20Pro/AAA%20MW:BS/Publications%2010/frieze%20Dodds.webarchive>

Stead, S. (2007) 'Rhapsody in Blue - nanoq: flat out and bluesome, A Cultural Life of Polar Bears'. *Art and Research*. Vol 1, 2. Summer. [Online] Available at: <http://www.artandresearch.org.uk/v1n2/pdfs/bluesome.pdf>

Mullen, L. (2006) 'Bear Essentials'. *Time Out*. London. 18 – 25 October, p.38.

Campbell-Johnston, R. (2006) 'Bear Facts about the Naked Ape'. (review) *The Times*. 25 October

Secher, B. (2006) 'Great White Bear' *The Daily Telegraph*, 14 October

Hanlon, M. (2006) 'Great White Bear' *The Daily Mail*. 20 October

Land, D (2007) 'Flat Out and Bluesome' (review) *The Royal Photographic Society Journal*,
December/January Vol.146, Issue 10

Snæbjörnsdóttir, B., & Wilson, M. (2003) 'nanaq: flat out and bluesome'. *NatSCAN*
(*Natural Sciences Collections Association*) issue 1

(Appendix 4)

Exhibitions Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson (collaborative) 2003 – 2012

Solo Exhibitions/Installations/Events

2012 ***Animal Matters***: Sverdrup Gallery, University of Oslo. 11 May to 24 August 2012.

2011 ***I'm Not There***: installation at the site of Beaumaris Zoo, Hobart for *Ten Days on the Island* Festival, Hobart, Tasmania. 18 March to 15 April

2010 ***Uncertainty in the City: Pets, Pests and Prey***, Storey Gallery, Lancaster, UK. 18 September to 27 November 2010

Events:

The Broken Skin (16 Oct) public talk event as part of exhibition (live-streamed)

The Wild and the Cultivated (30 Oct) public talk event as part of exhibition (live-streamed)

The Desirable Neighbour (13 November) public talk event as part of exhibition (live-streamed)

2009/10

Radio Animal: touring radio station: www.radioanimal.org

Lanercost Priory, 10 July.

Grizedale Arts, Cumbria, 13 November.

Lancaster, Market Square, 23 October.

Interspecies, A-Foundation, London 3 to 6 October.

Egremont Crab Fair, 19 September.

Broughton Game Fair 28 June.

Lancaster Garden and Country Fair 7 June.

Appleby Horse Fair 4-6 June.

2009 ***between you and me:*** (installation including video works ***the naming of things*** and ***Three Attempts***)

Kalmar Museum, Exhibition, Kalmar Sweden 29 August to 24 October.

Pod Space Gallery Newcastle, Sydney Australia 12 July to 2 August.

Glashuset, Gothenburg 27 March to 12 April.

nanoq: flat out and bluesome. Site-responsive photographic Installations

2011 Tromsø Polar Museum, Tromsø, Norway, 1 June to 30 March.

2010 Svalbard Museum, Longyearbyen, Spitzbergen, Oct to March.

2010 Manchester Metropolitan Museum (exhibition) 13 February to 11 July.

2009 Worcester Art Galleries and Museum, Worcester, 27 November to 10 January.
2010

2009 *nanuk*, Grenna Museum, Sweden 13 June to 13 September.

2009 New Walk Museum, Leicester 24 January to 5 April.

2008 Scott Polar Research Institute, 13 May to 20 August.

2007/8 Fram Museum, Oslo, Norway, 30 November to 1 of Sept. 08

2007 Nordic House, Faroe Islands, 14 March to 30 April.

2006/7 Horniman Museum, London October 6 to March.

2006/7 Nordatlantens Brygge, Copenhagen, 6 Sept to 14 Feb.

2006 *nanoq*, installation and book launch, Valand School of Art, Gothenburg.

2006 *Sensi(a)ble Spaces*, Askja, The Centre for Natural Sciences, University of Iceland.

2006 Bristol Museum and Art Gallery, Bristol.

2004 University Museum of Natural History, Oxford.

2004 ***nanoq: flat out and bluesome*** (installation including 10 stuffed polar bears)
in Spike Island, Bristol.

- 2006 *(a)fly*
- 2007 Konstmuseum, Gothenburg, Sweden. 28 April - 4 June.
- 2006 National Museum of Iceland, & Reykjavik City Library, for Reykjavik International Art Festival. May – June.
- 2004 *Big Mouth* Tramway, Glasgow, Scotland. April- May.
- 2004 *There are some things you have to know*, 300m3, Göteborg, Sweden. November – December.
- 2003 *Lullabies (vogguvisur)*, Hafnarhusid, Reykjavik City Museum. Iceland. 20 September – 2 November.

Selected group exhibitions

- 2011 *Animal Gaze Returned*, John Cass Gallery, Metropolitan University, London. curated by Rosemarie McGoldrick, 24 October – 11 November 2011.
- 2011 *Interactive Futures'11: Animal Influence*, Gallery Gachet. Exhibition and Conference, Vancouver, B.C. Canada. November 17–19.
- 2011 *Inbetween: Cabinet of Curiosities*, Hafnarborg, Reykjavik, Iceland. Curated by Ólöf Gerður Sigfúsdóttir. 27 August – 29 October 2011.
- 2011 *Gothenburg Biennale*, (Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson–*Vanishing Point: Where Species Meet*) Gothenburg, Sweden, curated by Sarat Maharaj. (exhibition includes work by Liam Gillick, Francis Alys, Isaac Julien, Jimmie Durham, and Ernesto Netto *et al*) 10 Sept – 17 November 2011
- 2011 *Seminário Internacional Arte e Natureza*. Mathilha Cultural, Rua Rêgo Freitas, 542 São Paulo - curated by Jessica Ullrich and Hugo Fortes. 10 – 15 June
- 2011 *Hunter Gatherer*, 6 artists respond to the Artemis Collection in Leeds. PSL Project Space Leeds, curated by Pippa Hale. (Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson–*Cities of Cliffs and Ledges*) installation by Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson. 28 April - 6 August

- 2011 **Reconstructing the Animal**, *between you and me*, Plimsoll Gallery, University of Tasmania, Ten Days on the Island Festival, Hobart, Tasmania. Curated by Dr Yvette Watt (see also solo exhibitions/installations) 18 March – 15 April
- 2010 **Sedition**, Tullie House Museum, Carlisle 18 September - 28 November.
- 2009 **Interspecies**, Arts Catalyst at the A-Foundation London. 2-4 October
- 2008 **HEAT, Art and Climate Change**, (Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson–*Polar Shift*), RMIT Gallery, Melbourne, Australia curated by Linda Williams. 12 September – 18 October
- 2008 **Animal Gaze**, London Metropolitan University, London, curated by Rosemarie McGoldrick. 18 November - 12 December
- 2008 **Bye, Bye, Iceland**, (Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson–*Islenskir Fuglar*), Akureyri Art Museum. July - August
- 2007 **Blubber**, Icelandic Seal Museum, Iceland.
- 2006 **Sequences**, International real time festival, video screening, SÍM House, Hafnarstræti, Reykjavík
- 2005 **animal**, Lowood Gallery, England

Forthcoming Events and Exhibitions.

- 2013 **Vanishing Point: me=not me**, Exhibition and conference organized in collaboration with *Difference Exchange*, at Kings Chapel, Strand, London
- 2014 **Matrix** – exhibition venue tbc

(Appendix 5)

Conferences

Conferences and Symposia organised by Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson

2012 'Contemporary Representations within the Context of Historical Collections'.
Symposium organized by Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson in collaboration with Naturhistoriska
Göteborg. Speakers: Mark Dion (keynote), Bergit Arends, Petra Lange Bernt *et al.* 28
September

Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson. (2010) 'The Broken Skin'. *Uncertainty in the City*. Storey
Gallery, Lancaster. 16 October. (a public talk event (live streamed) as part of exhibition,
with Dr Erica Fudge)

Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson. (2010) 'The Wild and the Cultivated'. *Uncertainty in the City*.
Storey Gallery, Lancaster. 30 October. (a public talk event (live streamed) as part of
exhibition, with Dr Chris Wilbert)

Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson. (2010) 'The Desirable Neighbour'. *Uncertainty in the City*.
Storey Gallery, Lancaster. 13 November. (a public talk event (live streamed) as part of
exhibition, with Dr Peter Lurz)

Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson. (2009) 'Mellan Dig och Mig'. *between you and me*. Kalmar
Konstmuseet, Kalmar. 31 August

Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson. (2004) 'White Out' *nanoq: flat out and bluesome*. Spike Island.
Presentations by Ivars Silis, Rd. Steve Baker, Rd. Garry Marvin and Michelle Henning.
March 13

Conference Papers delivered by Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson at public lectures and conferences, 2004-2012

Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson (2012) 'Feral Attraction'. *3rd European Congress of
Conservation Biology*, Glasgow, 31 August

- Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson. (2012) 'The Significant Unreliability of Things'. *Texts, Art and Materiality conference*, University of Oslo, 20 August
- Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson. (2012) 'Feral Attraction' *Minding Animals Conference 3*. Utrecht. 4 July
- Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson. (2012) 'Bryndís Snæbjörnsdóttir Mark Wilson'. *Doing Research, Symposium on Artistic Research*. EARN and dOCUMENTA13. Kassel. 8 September
- Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson. (2012) 'Feral Attraction'. *Wild*, BASN – British Animal Studies Network. Strathclyde University. Glasgow, 25-26 May
- Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson. (2011) 'Vanishing Point: Where Species Meet'. *Animal Gaze Returned Conference*. 27-28 October
- Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson. (2011) 'What We Can Do: Art Methodologies & Parities in Meeting' *Interactive Futures'11: Animal Influence*. Vancouver, Canada. November 17-19
- Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson. (2011) 'What We Can Do: Art Methodologies' *Representing Animals*. University of Rennes, France. 20-21 October
- Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson. (2011) 'Uncertainty'. *People, Places, Stories*. Linnaeus University, Kalmar, Sweden. 28 - 30 September
- Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson. (2011) 'between you, *nanoq* and me: the ambition and inadequacies of representation in the prepared skins of animals', *Cultures of Preservation: Taxidermy – Animal Skin and Colonial Practice*, Natural History Museum London, 12-14 May. with Petra Lange Bernt, Bergit Arends, Mark Dion, Robert Williams, Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson, Tessa Farmer, Richard Sabin, Sam Alberti
- Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson. (2010) 'Bryndís Snæbjörnsdóttir Mark Wilson'. Department of Culture and Oriental Studies, University of Oslo
- Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson. (2009) 'Animal Movements – Moving Animals', Keynote Lecture. *Meet Animal Meat*. Uppsala University.

- Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson. (2009) 'Uncertainty in the City/Radio Animal'. *INTERSPECIES*. Art Catalyt. A Foundation, London. 3 October.
- Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson. (2009) 'Bryndís Snæbjörnsdóttir Mark Wilson'. *Transmission* lecture series. Sheffield Hallam University. 11 February.
- Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson. (2009) 'Uncertainty in the City'. *Tier Werden/Mensch Werden*. NGBK and Georg-Koleb-Museum, Berlin. 8-11 May
- Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson. (2009) 'Uncertainty in the City'. *Minding Animals 2*. Newcastle University, NSW, Australia. 16 & 18 July.
- Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson. (2008) 'Radio Animal & Uncertainty in the City'. *Animal Gaze*. London Metropolitan University. 20-21 November.
- Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson. (2008) 'Art & Research'. Icelandic Art Academy. Reykjavík.
- Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson. (2008) 'Pests, Pets and Prey', *Annual International Conference*. Royal Geographical Society, London. 29 August.
- Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson. (2008) 'Polar Shift'. *Culture of Sustainability*, Melbourne, Australia. 27 September
- Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson. (2007) 'nanoq'. **Cornerhouse** Manchester. 30 January
- Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson. (2007) 'nanoq: Great White Bear'. Horniman Museum, London. 1 March
- Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson. (2007) 'The Projects of Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson'. *Visualizing Animals*. State College, Penn State. US. 1-2 April
- Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson. (2007) 'The Projects of Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson'. Georgia Tech, Atlanta. US. 5 April
- Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson. (2007) 'The Projects of Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson'. Georgia State University, Atlanta, US. 6 April

- Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson. (2007) 'The Projects of Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson'. California College of Arts, San Francisco, US, 11 April
- Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson. (2007) 'The Projects of Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson'. *Annual Meeting – US Cultural Studies Association*, Portland, Oregon. 18-22 April
- Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson. (2007) 'Confrontations with the Wild: Unpacking the Animal through an Art Practice'. *Society Animals & Gender*. Uppsala, August 26-29
- Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson. (2006) 'Images of nanoq'. *Images of the North*, Reykjavík Academy, 24-26 February
- Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson. (2006) 'nanoq: an intervention'. Bristol Museum and Art Gallery - 11 March
- Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson. (2006) '(a)fly & nanoq'. *Ecology and Landscape*. University of Iceland. 25 October
- Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson. (2006) '(a)fly & nanoq'. *Animal Afterlives*. Glasgow University. 22 November.
- Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson. (2005) 'Nature of Spaces, Art & Environment, Institute of Philosophy, University of Iceland. 9 June
- Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson. (2005) 'Spaces of Encounter'. *9th Istanbul Biennale, Artistic Research Seminar*. 17-18 September.
- Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson. (2005) KUNO Conference Reykjavik. 7 - 8 October
- Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson. (2005) 'nanoq: flat out and bluesome'. Oxford Natural History Museum. 14 September.
- Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson. (2005) *Sensuous Knowledge*, Bergen, Norway 26 - 28 October.