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Animals of X (including Humanz)

The following text is a research result from Animals of Manchester listed under projects.

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A project by Sibylle Peters/Theatre of Research and Lois Keidan/ Live Art Development Agency, commissioned and first produced by Manchester International Festival 2019.

Never work with children or animals.

W. C. Fields

Animals of X (including humanz) is a collective research project that is based in Live Art and takes the form of a heterotopian zone in which members of all species, including humanz, are meant to have equal rights. Through interspecies and transgenerational approaches and practices, *Animals of X (including humanz)* ties two false binaries (adults/children, humans/animals) together to undo one through the other. Using strategies and methodologies of Live Art, *Animals of* teams up with small humans, members of their co-species and other animals to host encounters which question given power relations between species. To make *Animals of ...* come alive, artists, children, local activists and animal experts, researchers, cultural and educational institutions and networks have to collaborate and undertake research. Together they prepare the alternative zone of animal equality, that is then opened to the public for a designated period of time.

The first version of this project, *Animals of Manchester (including humanz)* in July 2019 was visited by thousands of families and people of all ages and from hugely diverse backgrounds. Together they explored how species could live in companionship in the future. The temporary alternative zone we created was an open and accessible space that allowed for all kinds of engagement and invited audiences to simply witness or to be directly involved in an alternative order of things.

This concept/script is meant to enable other versions of *Animals of X (including humanz)* in other places on this planet, thereby reaching out to include a wide range of species (both domestic and free) and a wide range of questions regarding interspecies relationships and how to improve them.

All future versions are to be based on our **Transgenerational Mission Statement:**

„For ages human beings thought they were entirely different from all the other animals. Human philosophers were keen to find fundamental differences between humans and other animals. They said, for example, that only humans have free will, while animals are just governed by instinct. They said that only humans have language while animals don't. And if humans call each other animals, or treat each other like animals, it's usually not meant well. Children have always had their doubts about this, and lately there are more and more adults who question this order of things too. Not only do we know that animals have language and free will, it also doesn't seem smart to think about the many species of this planet in terms of humans being so much better than everything else. Instead it becomes clear, that we are in this together for better or for worse. We are not one species winning the food chain game over all the others. Instead we are companion species depending on one another. However, the relationships between humans and other animals are organized in certain, often difficult and hierarchical ways and to change them into relations based more on companionship isn't easy. Sometimes we don't even know what it means. With *Animals of X (Including humanZ)* we provide a space and the methodologies of Live Art to find out more and create an experience of companionship for everyone.

We will improve the relationship humans and other animals traditionally have in the performing arts through Live Art.

We will acknowledge children's leadership and invite them to guide us in exploring how humans and other animals live together in our local area.

We will celebrate given forms of companionship between humans and other animals.

We will take our place within the animal kingdom, instead of looking at it from the outside. As a sign of that commitment we will call ourselves humanz, not humans.”

Challenges and inspirations

Animals of X (including humanz) responds to a set of challenges and relies on a series of insights and inspirations:

The UN report on Biodiversity 2019 has shown the devastating effect human activity has on the survival and well being of other species on this planet. One of the revelations of

the report was the statistics about mammals: 36 percent of mammals on planet earth are humans, 60 percent are the animals owned and bred by humans and only four percent are the so called “wild animals”. FOUR percent!

Moreover, it is not only the four percent that we don't see much of anymore. The sixty percent, the animals we own, are almost as invisible to us as the wild ones. While more and more animals are industrially bred and consumed, industries and societies keep humans and other animals more and more apart from each other, thereby encouraging humans to block out the realities and consequences of animal based food production. Relationships between species are at an all time low, they are so bad that they are devastating the planet.

With organisations like *Extinction Rebellion* and *Fridays for Future* young people and kids are in the lead to mobilize for change and respect towards our co-species. More than adults, kids all over the world miss their co-species, dream of pets and are surrounding themselves with animal heroes, animal avatars, plush toys and animal stories. Did you know, that there are more fake flamingos on this planet than real ones?

For us as artists and arts workers this comes as a challenge: Instead of providing kids with more and more fake and fictional animals, it is time to recognize that their longing for animals is actually the planet trying to tell us something. It is time to use the means of art and the resources of culture to look at, and work on, our relationship with real other animals and our own animalship.

From our work at Theatre of Research we know for a fact, that encounters with other animals are on the very top of the list when it comes to children's wishes for public programming. Meanwhile traditional forms of presenting and organizing encounters between humans and non humans, like the circus and the zoo, are subject to severe criticism for showcasing mainly the power humans have over animals. But until now there was no other format to host encounters between humans and other animals. *Animals of X (including humanz)* is meant to change that. It is an alternative concept, ready to challenge the zoo and the circus as the main public format of interspecies encounter.

To do that *Animals of* is relying on the methods and traditions of Live Art, as well as on recent findings of Animal Studies. Live Art from its beginnings has been interested in

encounters between humans and non humans – partly for the same reason that animals have widely been banned from theatre stages, as they disturb the production of meaning by ‘keeping their realness’. In recent years Animal Studies has developed a discourse around a new understanding of relationships between humans and non humans, which is based on companionship, questioning, analyzing and crossing the binary between humans and non humans in many different ways. Within the alternative zone of *Animals of Live Art* is renamed Life Art: the art of devising encounters between living beings and finding new ways to interact. The *Animals of Life Art Library* gives account of how human artists have worked with, and for, other animals within the history of Live Art, as well as of recent developments in Animal Studies. It is completed by an Index, that allows audiences to search activities of non human participants and the Pantheon of Performing Animals, which is adding a more than human perspective to art history.

Elements on site

Animals of X (including humanz) is based on the concept of the heterotopian zone. It is a heterotopia, a space that differs fundamentally from its surroundings and creates its own world - a real, not a fictional world.

The zone has to be situated within a park or other outdoors area that is a habitat to animals other than humans. The limits of the zone have to be clearly marked, and there should be an entrance and an exit.

Throughout the zone there are sites and institutions as you might find in any other city or region. The sites and institutions of *Animals of X* are conceived and ‘performed’ by artists with a Live Art background working together with local activists and researchers and serve to -

enable interspecies encounters,

question the human / animal binary

turn given power relations between human and non human animals around.

At *Animals of Manchester* the following sites and institutions made the alternative city of animals come alive:

the Human School, a school in which dogs were teaching humans how to play together and how to behave.

the BeetleFilmTheatre starring insects, which appear on the set on their own account, are filmed and commented on by an insect expert.

the Hedgehog Hospital

the Interspecies Family Portrait Studio

the Mouse Palace

the Bestiary Beauty Salon

the Aquarium

the Nuts House

the Pet Workshop (where humans perform for their pets)

the Memorial for Extinct Species.

This list of sites and institutions may differ widely in each new version of *Animals of X* according to the non human animals in the designated location, the participating artists, the children and their ideas. For future versions of *Animals of X* it might be interesting to include food related sites into the zone. It would also be interesting to offer visitors, who claim animalship, opportunities to co-create new sites in the zone whilst it is open to the public. At *Animals of Manchester* artist Marcus Coates and the kids from the home education network created a memorial for extinct species. After that it is difficult to imagine a version of *Animals of* that does not include a site and a practice of mourning.

In addition, the following sites must be essential elements in every version of *Animals of X*:

- the Life Art Library, that provides material (books and videos) on Live Art & Animals with an accessible Index to find references by animal.
- the Pantheon of Performing Animals with Lecture Theatre (see below)
- Animalship Registration (see below) and the town hall

All sites and institutions are situated around the town hall, a central assembly space in which open town hall meetings are hosted and collective research is presented. At the first town hall meeting a non human animal is appointed as the mayor of the alternative city and will subsequently preside over all proceedings at the town hall in one way or another. At the *Animals of Manchester* the cows Pandora and Petal from a local city farm were the mayors of the zone.

Proceedings at the town hall should be documented, for example by a scribe.

Around the zone signs mark the sites, the walkways and locations. Names for the walkways might reflect the alternative city of animal equality in relation to urban surroundings. In Manchester for example the walkways were called Dogs Gate, or Piggadilly in reference to the well known Manchester streets Deansgate and Piccadilly.

Banners with slogans such as „Be He(a)rd“ invite visitors and inhabitants to take an active part in the city’s life. The different ways that non human animals form collectives and move together should be reflected in the way the sites and movements are devised: Hybrid forms of herds and packs and swarms are encouraged, but cows should not be positioned next to dogs.

Ways of working with non human animals

There are fairs, theatres, cinemas and other opportunities in abundance for humans to indulge in animal fiction. In contrast, *Animals of X* is only working with **real** animals.

Animals of ... preferably focusses on relationships with those animals who are already on site or might come to the site on their own account. For *Animals of Manchester* our site was Whitworth Park where there were squirrels, insects, pigeons and microbes alongside dogs and their human companions.

As well as dogs and other domestic ‚pets‘ who attend with their human companions, the only other kinds of non human animals that can/should be transported to the site are those owned and produced by humans for consumption. It is important to include these kinds of animals to counteract humans‘ forgetfulness towards their relationship with these animals. To raise awareness non human animals should be taken out of the cycle of food production and appointed as mayors of the alternative zone. The cows Pandora and Petal were the mayors for *Animals of Manchester*, but pigs or chicken might also make good mayors.

When working with non human animals their agency has to be strengthened and prioritized. For example: The town hall is only in session when the non human mayors are attending a meeting, instead of going to their sheds for some rest. The filming of

insects in the BeetleFilmTheatre at *Animals of Manchester* only took place when those insects showed up on set by themselves.

Animals of X acknowledges and respects given relationships between human and non human animals as co-species. Inspired by Donna Haraway's principle of „staying with the trouble“ and questioning the binary, *Animals of X* does not take sides, not for humans, and not for non human animals either. Instead the project celebrates companionship between species wherever it can be found. This includes the links between human and non human animals usually referred to as pets. *Animals of X* celebrates families which include members of different species. One of the interspecies families we found in Manchester was Barbara Roberts and her friends, who take care of hundreds of tiny abandoned hedgehogs in her Withington home. At *Animals of Manchester* their unique relationship was present with the Hedgehog Hospital & Manifesto. Other interspecies families were welcomed at the Interspecies Family Portrait Studio and Pet Workshop.

In general, *Animals of X* aims to discourage narratives showing the animal kingdom as governed by competition and the survival of the fittest. Instead *Animals of X* supports the prevalence of mutual benefit, cohabitation, symbiosis and recycling as basic principles of eco systems.

Being a part of cultural production *Animals of x* acknowledges that both human and non human animals are potential performers and colleagues in performance. Obviously, human and non human animals have a history of performing together for human audiences, with the non humans often working under even harsher conditions than the humans. It can also be argued that as pets non human animals are performing for their owners. However, non human animals also perform for non human audiences in mating, hunting or in play. For *Animals of Manchester* the Live Art Development Agency invited artists and thinkers to nominate non human animals to be honoured as performing artists. These nominations form The Pantheon of Performing Animals. For *Animals of Manchester* a jury of kids from a local school selected seven of these nominations to be presented as lecture performances within a lecture program partially hosted by the kids. For new versions of *Animals of X* a new call may ask artists to add to the Pantheon.

Ways of working with children's leadership

As in all projects by Theatre of Research, *Animals of X* acknowledges and encourages children's leadership: Children initially wished for real encounters with non human animals and often have a more immediate and more empathic relationship with their co-species, plus: children have the chance to actually change the relationship between human and non human animals in the future. Also, working with children is key in including all parts of human society into the project and the collective research setup.

When preparing a new version of *Animals of X* children become a part of the team as early as possible. Children should be invited to claim their animalship first, i.e. become first citizens of the alternative city, and perform as Ambassadors for the project. Their engagement is crucial to get the message out and communicate the project in a way that all members of society will be able to relate to. Ambassador kids should also be involved in curatorial decision making. For example, at *Animals of Manchester* they selected the animals from the Pantheon to be honoured with a lecture performance about them. When the event is open to the public, Ambassador kids can act as co-hosts of different parts of the program, they can support other kids to take an active part in townhall meetings and perform as guides for visitors, if they like.

Also, kids are a crucial part of the research process that informs *Animals of X*. For this, several groups of kids team up with artists to investigate and explore relationships between human and other animals in their region. Each group, consisting of a group of kids and one or more artists, focusses on their relationship with one other species. Their tasks are:

to find out about that relationship,

to team up with the other animals in question one way or another,

to come up with suggestions how this specific relationship could be improved towards companionship

During the public days of the project the results of this research are presented at the town hall. For *Animals of Manchester* research teams focussed on cows & humans, pigeons & humans, microbes & humans, and the extinct. Suggestions for improving relations included the demand to build a memorial for extinct species in the centre of Manchester and the idea to form an organisation of cowgirls and cowboys of a new kind, who are friends of cows and visit dairy farms to check on their well being.

As proceedings at the town hall will be documented, research results will become part of this documentation. Suggestions for improving relationships between human and non human animals in the region can also be addressed to political representatives. In Manchester the Lord Mayor was present at the final town hall meeting to listen to the suggestions of children researchers.

In an next version of *Animals of X* a special budget should be allocated to the realization of at least one of these suggestions. The final town hall meeting then could decide which of the suggestions should be realized first.

Visitors' Experience

As the first version of *Animals of X (including humanz)* showed, the project can attract thousands of visitors during the public days. But instead of just showing them the alternative zone of animal equality, visitors are asked to take an active part in the new community.

At the entrance they are provided with a map of the alternative zone and with a warning: No human privilege beyond this point. Visitors are invited to explore the zone and take an active part in many of the different setups on site. They, for example, can add their own sign and poem to the memorial for the extinct, they can take part in workshops to be taught by dogs or perform for pets, they can create banners to fight for hedgehog rights, they can operate cameras at the BeetleFilmTheatre, or have their interspecies family portrait taken. At *Animals of Manchester* people had the chance to document their participation in the different sites of the zone by collecting stamps in their program leaflet.

When visitors reach Animalship Registration at the end of their journey through the zone, the stamps present an opportunity for a conversation about what visitors have experienced so far. Then they are asked to make a decision: Would they like to claim their animalship and commit to being human animals - humanz'? Would they like to say goodbye to the binary that allegedly makes them different and better than all the other animals?

If they claim their animalship they are invited to share their ideas about how to improve interspecies relationships at the next open town hall meeting AND they are invited to create a visible mark of their decision. At *Animals of Manchester* this happened in the Bestiary Beauty Salon which allowed visitors to create a token for their animalship, a 'clawfinger' for example.

Dimensions of Research

In addition to the research undertaken by the kids researchers there are more dimensions to *Animals of X* as a collective research setup.

The makers and producers of *Animals of X* do lots of research too, especially in regard to legislation and logistics. To claim an alternative zone in which all animals are equal, does obviously not mean, that given laws and rules do not apply. Therefore, producers of the project have to identify those rules which will create conflict between the claim of animal equality and the given order of things. In this context research orientation means to make these conflicts visible instead of hiding them: If it is impossible to overcome rules which – for example – restrict movement of certain animals on site, then human animals also have to be submitted to these rules, thus achieving equal rights AND visibility of given rules and legislation.

Feedback shows that visitors and participants of *Animals of X* are also engaging in research, often on a more personal level. Heterotopian zones are inviting everybody not only to think about an alternative concept of living, but to embody it for a certain time frame: How does it feel, to be an animal amongst animals? How does it feel to be surrounded by co-species, to be part of a hybrid herd, to wave your human privilege?

Mostly, questions of sustainability and the well being of animals, seem connected to saying 'no' to something, to refrain from consumption in some form. An alternative zone like *Animals of X*, in which an alternative concept of living comes true in an experimental way, allows us focus on the yes, on what is there to look forward to, when it comes to living in companionship with our co-species.

Feedback shows that after this collective embodiment visitors found it difficult to fully go back to their old habits. After *Animals of Manchester* whole families became vegan and vowed never to mow their lawn again.

Working with kids groups in Manchester it also became clear that we all have a massive lack of education when it comes to our connections with other animals and the consequences of our consumption. Zoos traditionally legitimize the imprisonment of animals with the educational benefit people have from looking at them in their cages. *Animals of X* instead aims at an interspecies education that is rooted in a collective experiment of companionship.