We're all vermin: Tactical predation, interspecies media arts and perspectivism

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Abstract: This article considers 'perspectivism' as described by Viveiros de Castro and Willerslev as a lens for discussing interspecies media arts. In what way could we think about 'personhood' in order for the proposition of 'nonhuman persons' to make sense, while escaping the determinism of colloquial anthropomorphism, where humans simply project some idea of themselves onto others? How could this in turn inform our interpretation of interspecies art in urban spaces? The ethically controversial art of Japanese collective Chim↑Pom, who break into Fukushima 'no-go' zones, capture and kill rats, and lure flock of scavenger crows out of their hiding spots, creates situations where humans and animals relate to each other within a predatory loop of damage and toxicity; a perspectivism for the era of urban waste. The article further raises questions about the historical context of these artworks: post-nuclear spaces, alien and invasive species, and 'the Anthropocene.' Unlike stereotypical 'green art,' Chim↑Pom's work grasps human-animal relationships through the lens of animosity, where personalisation and ethics are rooted in conflict. Reading their art through an unusual parallel with animist hunting practices that form the basis of 'traditional' perspectivism, the article reflects on these asymmetrically related but proximate frameworks and the current revival of scholarly interest in animism.

Keywords: anthropocene, ontological turn, media arts, animal studies

> … a predatory animism: subjectivity is attributed to human and nonhuman entities, with whom some people are capable of interacting verbally and establishing relationships of adoption and alliance, which permit them to act upon the world in order to cure, to fertilize, to kill.[1]

In *Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History*, journalist Elizabeth Kolbert considers what might happen if half of currently extant species die out by 2050.[2] In her book, the environment is no longer best defined by its opposition to technology but rather its function as an accelerating graveyard filling up with threatened populations. As the horizon of existence seems to be rapidly receding, environmental debate throws itself head-first into moralising speculation: no longer pondering the mysteries of life, it increasingly asks, 'what right do we have to live'?[3] In this crisis that interpellated humanity itself – the anthropos – as its subject, we face 'the sensations of a definitive

1. Carlos Fausto, 'A Blend of Blood and Tobacco: Shamans and Jaguars among the Parakana of Eastern Amazonia', in N. L. Whitehead and R. Wright (eds), *The Anthropology of Assault Sorcery and Witchcraft in Amazonia*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2004, p502 [epub].

2. Elizabeth Kolbert, *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History*, Bloomsbury, New York, 2014, p167.

3. Claire Colebrook, *Death of the Posthuman: Essays on Extinction, vol. 1*, Open Humanities Press, London, p186.

return of a form of transcendence that we believed transcended', something beyond us that we used to call 'nature'.[4] Climate change and the inhuman intelligence of technologised capital, both seemingly created by humans but also curiously out of our control, redefine how we think about human agency and about the division between nature and culture. The proposed starting points of the Anthropocene – the invention of agriculture, the colonisation of the Americas, the invention of the steam engine, the Great Acceleration, the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki – delineate how human actions altered global climate and geological reality.[5] The Anthropocene denotes either that we 'are elevating ourselves by thinking that humans are making a geological epoch',[6] confusedly trying to take responsibility for our ontic sins,[7] such as, some argue, capitalism[8] or colonialism,[9] or that we are delusional about the importance of the short human era in the history of this planet.[10] Humanist thought seems to be in crisis and post-humanist thought is rapidly normalised as a form of ethical piety,[11] a way to pay for our perceived ethical failings with ontological and poetic re-definitions of the powerful Cartesian subject into a disempowered actant among many others.[12] What we once defined as realism – naturalistic portrayals of individual human consciousness – is increasingly perceived as ill-equipped to describe our reality.[13] We are witnessing an intellectual 'nonhuman turn',[14] where 'nature is not inert, the human/non-human divide is breaking down, events and actors are no longer confined to slices of place and time, and the seemingly enclosed and orderly world is interrupted by external, uncanny powers'.[15] As frameworks for studying the Anthropocene multiply before our eyes, one would be justified in asking: why should we pay attention to animism? Even outside of tense though necessary discussions around animism in anthropology, there are reasons to pay attention. From its complicated history to its current resurrection, animism can illuminate how the current techno-geological paradigm shift is changing our ideas about the relationship between humans, animals, and machines. In its understanding of nonhumans as social and anthropomorphic persons, animism goes against the grain of contemporary trends in American and Western European scholarship (such as defining nonhumans as vibrant matter)[16] while drawing on a complicated lineage of thought that encompasses ancient Greek philosophy, indigenous philosophy, Marxism, and colonial anthropology, to name but a few. In the incarnation I will be investigating here, which I take as distinct from vitalism, new animism asks, in what way could we think about 'personhood' in order for the proposition of 'nonhuman persons' to escape the determinism of colloquial anthropomorphism, where humans simply project some idea of themselves onto others?[17]

For the sake of intellectual history and our ongoing debates about (post) humanity, the current revival of interest in animism cannot be overlooked. But animism is a complicated framework. In the simplest possible terms, an 'old' approach to animism in anthropology was concerned with the idea of 'the soul',[18] placed within a religious context and defined as an unconscious

4. Eduardo Viveiros de Castro and Deborah Danowski, *Ends of the World*, Cambridge, Polity Press, p31.

5. Heather David and Etienne Turpin, 'Art and Death: Life Between the Fifth Assessment and the Sixth Extinction', in H. Davis and E. Turpin (eds), *Art in the Anthropocene: Encounters among Aesthetics, Politics, and Epistemologies*, London, Open Humanities Press, 2015, pp3-31.

6. Donna Haraway, Noboru Ishikawa, Gilbert Scott, Kenneth Olwig, Anna L. Tsing and Nils Bubandt, 'Anthropologists Are Talking – About the Anthropocene', *Ethnos*, 2015, p7.

7. Alexander Galloway, 'Warm Pride', 2014, http://cultureandcommunication.org/galloway/warm-pride, accessed 2 October 2019.

8. Jason Moore (ed), *Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History and the Crisis of Capitalism*, Kairos, Oakland, 2016.

9. Zoe Todd, 'Indigenizing the Anthropocene', in H. Davis and E. Turpin (eds), *Art in the Anthropocene: Encounters among*

and primitive projection of human qualities onto nonhumans.[19] A term coined by colonial anthropologists, who were at the time under the sway of vitalist philosophy in Europe and spirit seances they visited on the streets of London and Paris,[20] this pejorative idea of animism was later criticised for projecting the colonial dualism of 'body' and 'soul' onto the practices of non-modern peoples.[21] A new reading of animism instead argues that concepts in anthropology should stem from the imaginative power of the collectives it studies, rather than from a 'learned analysis' of these seemingly primitive practices.[22] No longer an epistemic fallacy, animism is now understood as a 'relational epistemology' that describes human-nonhuman relationships as social and materially situated rather than preoccupied with the idea of 'the soul' (*Animism Revisited*, pp79-80). One of the most influential contemporary studies is by Philippe Descola, a student of Claude Levi-Strauss. In *Beyond Nature and Culture*, he distinguishes four ontologies that map the general properties of social life throughout the history of human civilisations – animism, naturalism, totemism and analogism. Instead of relying on the concepts of 'nature' and 'culture', which are tied to the history of European thought, he proposes 'interiority' and 'physicality', arguing that each ontology distributes the two in a different manner between humans and nonhumans.[23] Interiority can include, 'intentionality, subjectivity, reflexivity, the aptitude to dream', and physicality, 'form, substance, physiological, perceptual, sensory-motor, and proprioceptive processes, or even temperament as an expression of the influence of bodily humors'.[24] Naturalism, the ontology that Descola defines as authoritative in European modernity, posits that humans are the only persons possessing an interiority, while nonhumans together create a purely physical outside. Animism, to which we could argue both totemism and analogism both actually belong,[25] invalidates this separation. Laura Rival notices on the basis of her fieldwork with the Huaorani,

> there are no words in huao terero … to say nature, ecology, religion, animals or plants. Abstract reified categories that separate the body from the mind, belief from perception, or human society from the nonhuman environment are absent from huao terero, as they are from most indigenous languages.[26]

Descola tells us that in animism, 'human and non-human persons have an integrally cultural view of their life sphere because they share the same kind of interiority, but the world that they apprehend and use is different, for their bodily equipment is distinct' (*Human Natures*, p19). Animist 'culture' means that human and nonhuman persons follow certain rules of conduct common to all, just as in naturalism 'a single, unifying nature [exists within] a multiplicity of cultures' (*Human Natures*, p21). In animism, our interiority unites us with plants, animals or machines, just as in naturalism our physicality does. Animism can thus describe all such situations, rather than a specific religious

Aesthetics, Politics, and Epistemologies, Open Humanities Press, London, 2015, pp241-255; Françoise Vergès, 'Racial Anthropocene', in G. T. Johnson and A. Lubin (eds), *Futures of Black Radicalism*, Verso, London, 2017 [epub].

10. Benjamin Bratton, 'Future Trace Effects of the Post-Anthropocene', *Architectural Design*, 89, 1, 2019, pp15-21.

11. Roisi Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2013.

12. Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 2012; Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2007.

13. Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2016; Timothy Clark, *Ecocriticism on the Edge: The Anthropocene as a Threshold Concept*, Bloomsbury, New York, 2015.

14. Richard Grusin (ed), *The Nonhuman Turn*, University of

belief. Catherine Degnan's study of British animism among gardeners and their plants criticises the oft-heard argument that in the modern world, because of the supposed dominance of the inert idea of nature, humans have lost the sense of continuity with nonhuman persons while 'non-modern' people 'live in a social and natural world that has a decidedly human shape and feel to it'.[27] When animism is approached broadly as a practice that treats nonhumans as persons, it invalidates such assumptions. Descola's ontologies do not map easily onto specific geographical and temporal spheres – they are 'spatially discontinuous archipelagos rather than rigorously delineated countries'.[28] Tim Ingold writes that animism 'is more typical in western societies who dream of finding life on other planets than of indigenous peoples to whom the label of animism has classically been applied'.[29] Manuel Vasquez tells us that we live inside 'a global polymorphous hyper-animism that is emerging out of the ruins of Western modernity', complete with ritual football ceremonies and towering mega-churches.[30] On the basis of her research in international robotics labs, Kathleen Richardson proposes a 'technological animism … a conceptual model of personhood that emerges in the interaction between fiction, robots, and culturally specific models of personhood, which may already include non-human persons'.[31]

Animism is also recuperated within the field of traditional indigenous knowledges, even though the term was coined by colonial scholars. Linda Hogan says that in addressing climate change 'we need the new animists' to intersect with traditional kinship ethics, where both humans and animals are considered as indigenous to a land because all animals are considered citizens.[32] Vanessa Watts writes that while modern theories focus on general nonhuman interconnectivity, in the Mohawk/Anishnaabe view 'habitats and ecosystems are better understood as societies' with ethical structures and inter-species agreements that must be understood in a located and social manner rather than as an abstracted life force.[33] There is little doubt that indigenous scholars have the authority to clarify the actual meaning of the practices that anthropology presumed to once define. Yet, outside of this colonial dynamic, 'animism' is a polyvocal term, with its 'western' lineage encompassing the work of early Greek philosopher Empedocles,[34] Italian philosophers who wrote about the *anima mundi* (the soul of the world), and the pantheism of Giordano Bruno, who described celestial bodies as persons with animal souls. Wolfgang Kapfhammer draws our attention to the history of 'Western animism; [an] alternative occidental tradition contesting the much-maligned Baconian and Cartesian dominance'.[35] The North American transcendentalists, for example, spoke of the soul of the land, and the biocentric land ethics of Aldo Leopold hold that we should '[enlarge] the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land'.[36] Graham Harvey, whose edited collection of essays on animism is the most versatile source on the concept, argues that we must let animism continue its hard work of 'referring to more than one thing or theory while also aiding our efforts to understand

Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2015.

15. Fa-ti Fan, 'Imagining Ourselves out of Modernity and Climate Crisis', in J. Thomas, P. Parthasarathi, R. Linrothe, F. Fan, K. Pomeranz and A. Ghosh, contributors, 'Round Table on Amitav Ghosh, The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 75, 4, 2016, p945.

16. Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2010.

17. Graham Harvey, *Animism: Respecting the Living World*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2005.

18. Marvin Harris, *Cultural Anthropology*, Harper and Row, New York, p186.

19. Jonathan Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, Macmillan, 1983; Edward Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 1958; Emile Durkheim, 'The Dualism of Human Nature and its Social Conditions', in R. Bellah (ed), *Durkheim on Morality and Society*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1973,

the meeting-points of shared interest and difference' (*Handbook*, p1). Marisol de le Cadena advocates a strategy of 'partial connections', such as reading Marilyn Strathern's rendition of Melanesian practices of dividual personhood alongside Donna Haraway's concept of the cyborg.[37] Juanita Sundberg also wants us to broaden the 'posthumanist' frame of reference, usually confined to American and European scholarship.[38] Boaventura de Sousa Santos writes that we need to engage an 'ecology of knowledges', cultivating 'an invitation to the promotion of non-relativistic dialogues among knowledges, granting equality of opportunities to the different kinds of knowledge engaged in ever broader epistemic disputes'.[39] Contrary to these arguments, Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang are against using these knowledges outside of context.[40] It remains to be seen whether 'animism' will finally be judged as a futile appropriation that extends colonial dynamics, or as a useful platform for a dialogue between diverse traditions, which were very often in an open conflict with one another, and an opportunity to disrupt the canon of posthumanist frameworks currently used.

I previously wrote about animism as a type of non-representational anthropomorphism, analysing inter-species biometric media artworks that operate across 'technology' and 'ecology'.[41] There, I argued that unlike in standard anthropomorphism, in animism the human remains radically underdetermined and generic – an 'x' that cannot be defined through any specific quality and therefore cannot be psychologically projected onto others. Because animism operates in multiple contexts, I want to clarify that in this paper I am interested in a particular operationalisation of this term found in perspectivism, especially as described by Rane Willerslev, who considers hunting, predation and antagonistic mimesis as a basis for personalisation.[42] In an admittedly unusual attempt to read ontological ethnography of post-Soviet Yukaghir hunting rituals alongside an example of contemporary media art practice in Japan, I want to show a surprising reverberance across these two settings, where animals are treated as persons not despite but because of the antagonistic and violent relationships they enter with humans. While I do agree with Bird-David's observation that scale and size matters when thinking anthropologically about animism, and human communities that hunt are very small compared to large urban human-animal groups,[43] I nevertheless am interested in whether the Anthropocene in its distinct post-Fukushima dimension can produce a parallel practice to predatory animism. Obviously, one practice cannot be transposed onto the other but does that mean we should ignore conceptualisations of human-animal relations that fall outside the lineage of our intellectual history? Zooming in on the hyper-cynical and ethically controversial practices of Japanese art collective Chim↑Pom, who break into Fukushima 'no-go' zones, capture and kill rats, and lure flock of scavenger crows out of their hiding spots in Tokyo, I also raise questions about alien and indigenous species, migrants and citizens, refuge and homelessness, empathy and predation. Rats, crows, or vermin of all kind do not usually

pp149-166.

20. Erhard Schüttpelz, 'Animism meets Spiritualism: Edward Tylor's "Spirit Attack", London 1872', in A. Franke (ed), *Animism Volume I*, Sternberg Press, Berlin, 2010, pp154-169.

21. Nurit Bird-David, 'Animism Revisited: Personhood, Environment, and Relational Epistemology', *Current Anthropology*, 40, 1999, pp79-80. (Hereafter *Animism Revisited*.)

22. Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2015, pp40-43. (Hereafter *Cannibal Metaphysics*).

23. Philippe Descola, *Beyond Nature and Culture*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2013.

24. Philippe Descola, 'Human Natures', *Quadrens*, 27, 2011, p18. (Hereafter *Human Natures*.)

25. Marshall Sahlins, 'On the Ontological Scheme of *Beyond nature and culture*', *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, 4, 1, pp281-290.

populate the stereotypical alleyways of environmentally-minded green art or the noble alleyways of eco-criticism. They instead emerge within a predatory loop of damage and toxicity: an animism for the era of urban waste.

WE'RE BOTH VERMIN: PREDATORY MIMESIS

In a meeting facilitated by the notorious Japanese artist, Makoto Aida, six Chim↑Pom members, Ellie, Yasutaka Hayashi, Okada Masataka, Inaoka Motomu, Ushiro Ryuta and Mizuno Toshinori formed the collective in 2005, when they were in their early twenties. They consider themselves as activists who respond immediately, intuitively and transgressively to the immediate concerns of our times. Labelled as neo-dadaists, *l'enfant terrible* of contemporary Japanese art or 'prank artists … with a mischievous punk attitude'[44] (the group's name sounds like 'penis' in Japanese, causing endless embarrassment to journalists), they perceive themselves as historians of the present, capturing the strange realism of the present for the benefit of future historians.[45] Describing the earthquake in Tokyo in 2011, they recall that it felt as if reality was 'reversed', a feeling that they consider to be the 'real of our times' (*The Influencers*). Exemplifying the immediacy of their practice, they organised an exhibition titled *Never Give Up* just twenty days after the earthquake, and just two months after the meltdown at the nuclear plants in Fukushima they travelled to Soma City, located 50 km away from the site, in order to make an uplifting improvised video-art *KI-AI 100* with the participation of a few local fishermen. Their methods could be considered extreme. They like transgression. They believe that art can only influence society if it 'can go to places other things can't. And we've always gone to the heart of things'.[46] Besides their most recent work *Don't Follow the Wind*, a simulated exhibition staged in the no-entry zones near the Fukushima power plant that materially exists only as a website, they are most known for their debut, *Super Rat*. This morally questionable work of taxidermy was an installation in Shibuya consisting of dead rats painted neon yellow to resemble the fictional character, Pikachu. In the early 2010s, the famously crowded hi-tech Shibuya district of central Tokyo dealt with a rat infestation. *The Japan Times* delivered sensationist headlines, such as 'Alien Invasion: Vexatious Foreign Species are Increasingly Taking up Residence in Japan' and 'Rodent Population Thrives on Tokyo's Misfortunes'.[47] Introducing this project at the 2013 *Influencers Festival* in Spain, Ellie, herself dressed in a Pikachu costume, explained that while a lot of Japanese teenagers in Shibuya wear this recognisable neon yellow outfit in tribute to the cute rodent in *Pokémon*, they have little respect or regard for 'real' super rats, whose powers include resistance to extermination. She added that she perceived *both* rats and teenagers as rodents – 'they are both rats' (*The Influencers*). She described how in the contemporary hyper-tech city like Tokyo, humans and rats are both vermin, locked in a territorial struggle in a world filled with waste:

26. Laura Rival, 'The Materiality of Life: Revisiting the Anthropology of Nature in Amazonia', in G. Harvey (ed), *The Handbook of Contemporary Animism*, Routledge, London, 2014, pp94-95. (Hereafter *Handbook*).

27. N. Scheper-Hughes and M. Lock quoted in Cathrine Degnen, 'On Vegetable Love: Gardening, Plants, and People in the North of England', *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 15, 1, 2009, p153.

28. Eduardo Kohn, 'A Conversation with Philippe Descola', *Tipiti: Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America*, 7, 2, 2009, p144.

29. Tim Ingold, 'Rethinking the Animate, Re-animating Thought', *Ethnos: Journal of Anthropology*, 71, 2006, p9.

30. Manuel Vasquez, 'De-provincializing Oprah', *The Immanent Frame*, 2011, https://tif.ssrc.org/2011/04/18/de-provincializing-oprah, accessed 2 October 2019.

31. Kathleen Richardson,

> One day I saw all these girls hanging out [by a MacDonald's in Shibuya] and there were rats everywhere, eating the leftover MacDonald's burgers too. There were so many rats in Shibuya, the pest control people have tried to kill them, but they're becoming resistant to poison and cleverer than the traps. Then one day I saw a girl wandering down this street, dressed up as Pikachu, it was so funny, to see this girl dressed up as this cartoon rat, surrounded by all these real, super rats (*The Influencers*).

She confessed that Chim↑Pom respect and admire the rats who adjust to toxic conditions through accelerated cultural evolution, outsmarting humans. Ellie's attitude is then much different from the alarmist rhetoric in the press warning of invasive, alien, foreign communities taking the place of righteous citizens. Rather than consolidating the borders of human identity, antagonistic territorial relationship between humans and rats allows for partial identification: 'We like wild animals living in the city because they are the same as us' (*The Influencers*). Describing themselves as vermin, Chim↑Pom write in a statement accompanying the artwork: 'We may be the recent young people/ as being frowned upon by adults/ feel sympathy for Super Rats/ emerging out of urban life and/ maintaining crooked coexistence with human beings'.[48] This contemporary urban ecology of human and rat vermin is a damned comradeship, delineated by paradoxical relations of sympathetic violence, more akin to hunting, predation or black magic that those typical of environmental restoration or green art that portrays animals as innocent and possessing a mythical, unchanging essence, impervious to technological acceleration. But these statements can easily be taken as metaphors – what does it mean, to be vermin? – or as 'old' animist projections of human traits onto animals. For Chim↑Pom, however, their relationship to urban vermin is far from metaphorical. They engage with these animals in a provocative and visceral manner. In another artwork, *Black of Death*, they want to engage with death, garbage and waste as a connective tissue between different species of vermin in Tokyo:

> Garbage always reflects the paradox of our society … At night, rats roam around in the garbage but, in the early morning, crows gather to pick at it as well, so this garbage bag becomes the symbolic medium that connects human beings to these animals; it is the link between mass consumerism and disposal (*Chim↑Pom*).

While crows are not usually considered to be pests, Tokyo has been struggling with particularly territorial and clever crow communities over the last years. *The New York Times* described the situation as 'straight out of Hitchcock … the growing abundance of garbage, a product of Japan's embrace of the more wasteful Western lifestyles. This has created an orgy of eating for the crows, which are scavengers.'[49] In admiration of Tokyo crows, the first time Chim↑Pom staged the *Black of Death* performance was in the Japanese capital. Video

'Technological Animism: The Uncanny Personhood of Humanoid Machines', *Social Analysis*, 60, 4, 2016, p111.

32. Linda Hogan, 'We Call it Tradition', in G. Harvey, *The Handbook of Contemporary Animism*, Routledge, London, 2015, pp19-21.

33. Vanessa Watts, 'Indigenous Place-Thought & Agency Amongst Humans and Non-humans (First Woman and Sky Woman go on a European World Tour!)', *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 2, 1, 2013, p2.

34. Albrecht von Haller, 'The Great Biological Problem: Vitalism, Materialism, and the Philosophy of Organism', *New York State Journal of Medicine*, 86, 2, 1986, pp81-88.

35. Ernst Halbmayer, 'Debating Animism, Perspectivism and the Construction of Ontologies', *Indiana*, 29, 2012, p18.

36. Wolfgang Kapfhammer, 'Amazonian Pain. Indigenous Ontologies and Western Eco-spirituality',

documentation shows the artists driving a scooter while carrying a decoy crow and a megaphone that emits local bird calls. Using this lure, they were able to get large numbers of crows to follow them around iconic city landmarks, to the confusion of the citizens of Tokyo, where they photographed the birds and created souvenir postcards, showing what they believe to be the real image of the city – a battleground between vermin species. This intervention amplifies the crows' visibility in the city: they are lured out of their usual life on the margins. Chim↑Pom admire the sense of community among Tokyo crows, they marvel at how living in a modern city strengthened their bonds and made them meaner. Unlike the crows in Lithuania, where the project was re-staged, '[Tokyo crows] didn't give up', Ellie said, 'they have an amazing sense of fellowship' (*The Influencers*). Humans and animals dwell together in this toxic, inhuman world, filled with garbage and e-waste. Rather than creating aesthetic representations of animals who share our urban lives with us, Chim↑Pom stage rituals and directly engage the animals. Their art is a platform of co-emergence, where human and animal personhood is co-constitutive: we are all vermin.

In broadly understood and simplified post-Enlightenment 'European metaphysics', 'nonhuman animals are assumed … to be above all else inferior to humans, having been constructed as passive, ahistorical, unfeeling, or unthinking'.[50] Against moralising calls to take care of our little brothers, it seems unintuitive that in predatory animism, respecting animals as persons means admitting that we are in relationships of animosity with them. This is, however, what Eduardo Viveiros de Castro identifies as one of the tenants of Amerindian perspectivism, which 'is rarely applied to all animals, instead it is applied to predators and scavengers' (*Cannibal Metaphysics*, p57). In perspectivism, personhood and cultural practices pervade the world of hunters rather than being specific to the *Homo sapiens*. Human culture is thus one variation of a larger supra-species culture: animals see themselves as humans and see humans as nonhumans, just like we see ourselves as human and them as animals. Rane Willerslev's book *Soul Hunters: Hunting, Animism, and Personhood Among the Siberian Yukaghirs*, an unorthodox work that wants to 'reverse the primacy of Western metaphysics' by cross-reading Yukaghir hunting practices and creation myths with perspectivism and European phenomenology, zooms in on the relationship between humans and the elk which they hunt (*Soul Hunters*, p3). While Viveiros de Castro writes that when humanity is the common denominator, inter-species kinship arises from a temporary suspension of predation (*Cannibal Metaphysics*, p59), Willerslev adds that animosity can *itself* be the kernel of personhood: when hunting, 'the hunter is forced to recognise himself as an animal, and is forced to see [the animal] as a person' (*Soul Hunters*, p135). Predation – the ability to harm and hunt each other – must be reversible: humans can fall prey to animals, or animal spirits, just like animals can fall prey to human hunters and shamans. This is why in perspectivism, predators and game are recognised as persons, while other animals may not be. Such reciprocal or unilateral violence does

Indiana, 29, 2012, p151.

37. Marisol de le Cadena, *Earth Beings: Ecologies of Practice across Andean Worlds*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2015, pp31-34.

38. Juanita Sundberg, 'Decolonizing Posthumanist Geographies', *Cultural Geographies*, 21, 1, 2013, pp33-47.

39. Boaventura de Sousa Santos (ed), *Beyond Northern Epistemologies*, Verso, London, 2008, p14.

40. Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, 'Decolonization is not a Metaphor', *Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 1, 1, pp1-40.

41. Bogna Konior, 'Generic Humanity: Interspecies Technologies, Climate Change, and Non-Standard Animism', *Transformations: Journal of Media, Culture, and Technology*, 30, 2017, pp109-126.

42. Rane Willerslev, *Soul Hunters: Hunting, Animism, and Personhood among the Yukaghirs*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2007. (Hereafter *Soul Hunters*).

43. Nurit Bird-David,

not fit easily into the colloquial misinterpretation of animism as a vitalist or joyous project. Kinship or camaraderie between species is instead about regulating acceptable ways to co-exist, kill or consume each other in specific social contexts. For example, anthropologist Axel Köhler describes how Baka hunters personalise or objectify animals. On the one hand, they explained that gorillas, chimpanzees, and elephants were persons because they behaved as such – 'when showing me the leafy beds of gorillas, Baka acquaintances commented, "Only a person makes a bed like that to sleep in"'.[51] As such, Baka hunters generally abstained from harming these animals. However, within the paradigm of capitalism and private ownership, personalisation often gives way to objectification – the Baka at times work for their Bantu patrons, who pay well for gorillas and elephants. Otherwise considered as ancestors and hunted very sparingly, the same animals are killed when perceived as a source of profit. Danny Navey and Nurit-Bird David sum it up thus: 'Once these animals are hunted on a large scale for money rather than for self-consumption shaped by immediate needs for meat, their perception as *vivid* persons is concealed by a utilitarian perspective'.[52] This tells us that naturalist or animist approaches to animals can be entertained within the same day, depending on the context, even with regards to the same animal.

If animism cannot be taken out of context, we need to ask, what is the context of Chim↑Pom's practices today, and why would they parallel perspectivism? Their case is not about predators and prey but rather vermin and scavengers. Chim↑Pom admire crows that stick together and learn to thrive in toxic conditions of contemporary urban life, characterised by the annihilation of refuge and multi-species homelessness.[53] Henry Sussman calls this moment of anthropogenic crisis 'post-globalism', where globalisation failed in its promises but the ecological crisis that it brought upon us is global, if not planetary. The 'post-global' is marked by the exhaustion of every resource, including human and nonhuman life:

> In place of promised global economic integration is the planet's largest landfill, a toxic multinational legacy erupting in the center of the Pacific Rim, invisibly proliferating outward across the biosphere, and bio-accumulating as we speak throughout planetary food-webs, conventional and organic alike. . . [a] carcinogenic breeding ground for future birth defects, genomic mutation, trophic cascades, species explosions, dead zones and other ecological no-nonhuman's land. More than merely contaminated food for thought, the silence, invisibility, and pervasiveness of these spills intertwines an ecological with a representational problem, since its detection eludes the eye and satellite image alike.[54]

'Ours is an epoch of squandered energy,' writes art critic Nicolas Bourriaud, 'nuclear waste that won't go away, hulking stockpiles of unused goods, and domino effects triggered by industrial emissions polluting the atmosphere

'Size Matters! The Scalability of Modern Hunter-Gatherer Animism', *Quaternary International*, 464, 2017, pp305-314.

44. Ellen de Wachter, 'Chim↑Pom', Frieze, 2015, https://ellenmaradewachter.com/2015/11/02/chim%E2%86%91pom, accessed 2 October, 2019. (Hereafter *Chim↑Pom*.).

45. Chim↑Pom, 'The Influencers', 2013, https://theinfluencers.org/en/festival/2013, accessed 2 October, 2019. (Hereafter *The Influencer*s).

46. Felix Petty, 'Chim↑Pom: The Subversive Collective Shaking Up Japan's Art Scene', *i-d*, 2015, https://i-d.vice.com/en_us/article/d3vxvk/chimpom-the-subversive-collective-shaking-up-japans-art-scene, accessed 2 October 2019.

47. Daisuke Kikuchi, 'Alien Invasion: Vexatious Foreign Species are Increasingly Taking up Residence in Japan', *The Japan Times*, 2015, www.japantimes.co.jp/life/2015/12/05/environment/space-invaders-vexatious-foreign-species-

and oceans'.[55] Bourriaud writes that criticism today must operate on the axes of waste and exclusion, where there is friction and conflict, because the spectres animating socio-cultural structures are the unproductive, the wasteful, the never-decomposing, those who have been uprooted and abandoned, extinct species: 'social energy produces waste; it generates zones of exclusion where the proletariat, popular culture, the squalid and the immoral pile up in a jumble – the devalued ensemble of what one cannot bear to see' (*Exform*, p15). In 2011, *Black of Death* was restaged in Fukushima. After the nuclear disaster, crows proliferated in the no-entry danger zones, feasting on decomposing carcass. Flocks of crows were spotted occupying abandoned human houses. Fukushima, a symbol of irradiated waste, became the stage of revival: while the robots that were sent there for research could not withstand radioactivity,[56] rumours had it that around the irradiated site grew a beautiful, mutated species of daisy.[57] Animal and plant life blossomed after human departure. 'All around the world,' writes Fred Pearce, 'alien species are on the march, often with human help. Mostly they are moving into places we have messed up'.[58] Chim↑Pom are interested in this ability to adapt and resist displacement, to co-evolve with our techno-environmental condition rather than decelerate and come back to the state of nature. Chim↑Pom shows us that interspecies culture is a battleground and that considering animals as cultural and social beings, which perspectivism invites us to do, includes recognising them as engineers of their urban environment, which they seek to modify to their liking, sometimes sabotaging human technologies in the process. 'Equality' and 'unity' within conditions of territorial animosity in the Anthropocene can be actually more conductive to objectification, a capitalist utopia of 'frictionless exchange: a universe where commodities – beings and objects alike – circulate without encountering the slightest obstacle'.[59] By acknowledging animosity and competition, perspectivism is a way out. In Fukushima, Chim↑Pom led the crows to decomposing cattle carcass so that they could feed on the remains, re-initiating a cycle of predation that was disturbed by the nuclear explosion. 'You cannot put nuclear waste anywhere', the artists say, 'the products enable us to move society ahead, but there is always some rubbish left behind', even in the form of persons, human and nonhuman, discarded in the process of industrial development (*Chim↑Pom*). When nowhere is free from human industrial history, other species learn to adapt to an unintentionally geo-engineered planet.

Such predatory animism challenges stereotypical and straightforward assumptions that 'personalisation' is ethical while 'objectification' is not. A healthy respect for the enemy aids in personalisation. The closer and fuller the relationship between predator and prey, the more possible is one's eventual demise. Anette Watson and Orville Huntington write:

> Non-natives most often employ the verb 'to take' to describe hunting; this is the verb employed in Federal subsistence legislation: 'fish and wildlife

increasingly-taking-residence-japan, accessed 2 October 2019; Rob Gilhooly, 'Rodent Population Thrives on Tokyo's Misfortunes', *The Japan Times*, 2000, www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2000/11/19/national/rodent-population-thrives-on-tokyos-misfortunes, accessed 2 October 2019.

48. Chim↑Pom, 'Super Rat', http://chimpom.jp/project/superrat.html, accessed 2 October 2019.

49. Martin Fackler, 'Japan Fights Crowds of Crows', *The New York Times*, 2008, www.nytimes.com/2008/05/07/world/asia/07crows.html, accessed 2 October 2019. (Hereafter *Crowds of Crowds*.)

50. Cynthia Willett, *Interspecies Ethics*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2014, p30.

51. Axel Köhler, 'On Apes and Men: Baka and Bantu Attitudes to Wildlife and the Making of Eco-Goodies and Baddies', *Conservation and Society*, vol. 3, 2, 2005, p417.

52. Danny Navey and Nurit Bird-David, 'Animism, Conservation, and

> resources taken for personal or family consumption' (US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) 2006). But the Koyukon believe that hunters do not 'take' anything; instead, animals choose to give themselves to the hunter. The 'gift' is made as a result of the 'luck' of the hunter, and a hunter has luck when he has been respectful.[60]

Because the animals offer their lives as gifts, their killing is regulated by elaborate moral codes: no one should hunt the calves, even if 'the moose population were so high that biologists and wildlife managers condoned the hunt'; no one should call the animals stupid or make fun of them (*They're Here*, p261). In the absence of such ritualised practices within western modernity, animist frameworks invoke absent and devalued labours, the painful construction of moral codes around necessary violence. As Deborah Bird-Rose writes about animist ethics, 'unethical killing is [that which is] undertaken outside the system of kin and accountability. It may be a case of killing an animal that is taboo and thus initiating an act of hostility. It may be a case of wanton killing – killing more than can be eaten, or killing and leaving dead bodies to rot'.[61] Admitting the full extent of other species' humanity in their interactions with us includes seeing them as enemies, friends, predators and prey. We might argue with these practices from an ethical standpoint but they certainly do not reduce animals to commodities. When Chim↑Pom carry a taxidermied crow on their motorcycle, they attempt to get the attention of the flock: a predatory invitation. This cycle is open-ended. Crows can vilify and attack humans in turn. Tokyo crows, for example, began building decoy nests in order to draw the attention of the Kyushu Electric Power Crow Patrol away from their actual homes. The patrol was established because crows had been sabotaging Japan's urban infrastructure, with almost 1400 reported cases of crows cutting fibre optic lines and closing down high-speed train services, or jamming their beaks into power lines. They were also spotted attacking humans in order to acquire food and are generally seen as disruptive. While some have proposed to build a sustainable habitat for crows outside of Tokyo, it is unlikely that the animals would move in light of the orgy of garbage available to them in the capital. They prefer living in accelerated technological modernity to the less opulent nature reservoir. They stay in the city: 'despite the twice-weekly patrols, which have removed 600 nests since they began three years ago, the number of nests keeps increasing, as have blackouts' (*Crowds of Crows*).

TACTICAL MEDIA, VERMIN MEDIA

> A young hunter who was somewhat annoyed at my perpetual questions about spirits [said], 'It is like the way you use your computer. You write on it, but you do not think about how it actually works' … Whether computers or spirits, they are employed to get something done, and so they manifest

Immediacy', in G. Harvey (ed), *Handbook*, p34.

53. Donna Haraway, 'Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin', *Environmental Humanities*, 6, 2015, pp159-165.

54. Henry Sussman and Jason Groves, 'Introduction', in H. Sussman (ed), *Impasses of the Post-Global: Theory in the Era of Climate Change, Volume 2*, Open Humanities Press, London, 2012, p12.

55. Nicolas Bourriaud, *The Exform*, Verso, London, 2016, p12. (Hereafter *Exform*).

56. Justin McCurry, 'Dying Robots and Failing Hope: Fukushima Clean-up Falters Six Years After Tsunami', the *Guardian*, 2017, www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/09/fukushima-nuclear-cleanup-falters-six-years-after-tsunami, accessed 2 October 2019.

57. Brian Howard, 'Are 'Mutated' Daisies Really Caused by Fukushima Radiation?' *National Geographic*, 2015, www.nationalgeographic.com/news/2015/07/150723-fukushima-

mutated-daisies-flowers-radiation-science, accessed 2 October 2019.

58. Fred Pearce, *The New Wild: Why Invasive Species Will Be Nature's Salvation*, Icon Books, London, 2015, p23.

59. Nicolas Bourriaud, *The Exform*, Verso, London, 2016, p12.

60. Annette Watson and Orville Huntington, 'They're Here—I can Feel Them: The Epistemic Spaces of Indigenous and Western Knowledge', *Social & Cultural Geography*, 9, 3, 2008, p261. (Hereafter *They're Here*).

61. Deborah Bird-Rose, 'Death and Grief in a World of Kin', in G. Harvey (ed), *op. cit.*, p143.

> themselves as 'tools' that are used in prosaic and matter-of-fact fashion in order to accomplish concrete objectives (*Soul Hunters,* p150).

Willerslav's study, informed as it is by phenomenology and the idea that we define things by their use, describes Yukaghir hunting as an embodied and pragmatic 'technique for manipulating the environment' by modulating the behaviour of other species (p136). This technique is not innocent, in fact, it is perceived as an explicitly seductive and erotic process in which the dance of attraction between hunter and prey culminates in the latter's death. The hunters refer to it as *pákostit*, 'playing dirty tricks': 'when transforming itself into the image of his prey … the hunter is attempting to seduce an animal into "giving itself up" by creating a performance that somehow resonates with the animal's mood, senses, and sensibilities' (p86). In addition, Viveiros de Castro and Willerslev stress that in perspectivism, humans and animals share the same culture but occupy different natures – our sociality with our conspecifics is the same as among other species, only our bodies are different. To cross-culturally communicate with animals requires a language that translates across bodies. Willerslev posits that nonhuman personalisation within predation operates through mimicry and mimesis. In hunting as described by the Yukaghir, mimesis is distinct from metamorphosis. Metamorphosis makes predation impossible because the prey would become ourselves, thus forcing us into cannibalism (p29). The goal is instead not to *become* the other but to take power over it using a strategy of partial identification. Such mimesis preserves difference, without which predation is impossible (p28). The key to achieving this state, as the Yukhagir explain, is to mimic the bodily behaviour of the animal: mimesis happens in body-to-body communication rather than through psychological projection.

In behavioural sync with crows, or identifying themselves with rats dwelling in a 'garbage town', Chim↑Pom's recognise that species are locked in a territorial battle and remain in hostility, which nevertheless allows them to admit the personhood of their opponents. *Black of Death* provokes flocking by mimicking flocking, and also by deploying a more direct tool of mimicry: a faux crow that emits crow calls through a megaphone. Given the tricksters they were dealing with, Chim↑Pom utilised deceptive techniques of decoy, detour and manipulation. Through coercion, they tricked crows into following them. When adjusting their driving speed so that the flock can keep up, or when imitating crow sounds, the collective engages in 'mimetic empathy', which Willerslev describes as the everyday, pragmatic dimension of perspectivism (p124), which is both aesthetic and embodied: 'mimesis involves both copying and sensual contact' (p26). Such mimicry is the only way for the hunter to empathise with the hunted animal (p123). 'This empathy functions even when there is an objective conflict of interest' (p121). While, unlike in hunting, Chim↑Pom's trickery does not involve 'erotic' manipulation, it also configures the animals as far from innocent. In an interview, Ushiro suggests

that the title *Black of Death* makes him think of the 'funeral of a mafia leader, or crows circling above a bad man about to die' (*The Influencers*). If animals are persons, they have vices. Kaeli Swift, a scientist who studies crow thanatology and mourning, undertook research into burial rituals in crows, describing how upon spotting one of their dead, they noisily flock to the deceased bird. Although crows can show appreciation for those who treat them well (mostly in the form of gifts), they can also be vengeful and remember the face of a person who harmed them, even teaching their young to recognise it.[62] For this reason, just like Chim↑Pom use a decoy in order to engage with the crows, researchers at the University of Washington who study crow mourning rites wear masks to hide their faces. When Swift's team brought a taxidermied crow to a site to observe how the animals mourn, they wore realistic facemasks with a neutral expression so that the crows would not associate any of the researchers with dead conspecifics.

62. Kaeli Swift and John Marzluff, 'Wild American Crows Gather Around Their Dead to Mourn', *Animal Behaviour*, 109, 2015, pp187-197.

While *Black of Death* finds most of its audience as a video uploaded to YouTube, the performance itself does not involve new media: there is only a scooter, a stuffed crow and a megaphone emitting local crow sounds. The low-tech quality of Chim↑Pom's interactions with these animals poses interesting questions about technology. What Willerslev calls hunting 'techniques', here would be more properly labelled 'tactical media', which Geert Lovink and David Garcia describe as:

> … what happens when the cheap 'do it yourself' media made possible by the revolution in consumer electronics and expanded forms of distribution … are exploited by groups and individuals who feel aggrieved by or excluded from the wider culture … Tactical media are media of crisis, criticism and opposition.[63]

63. Geert Lovink and David Garcia, 'The ABC of Tactical Media', 1997, www.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-l-9705/msg00096.html, accessed 2 October 2019.

Tactical media are 'hit and run' media, temporary, intense and often spectacular interventions, owing much to the Situationist method of détournement and the Surrealist tradition, which exposes reality as stranger than it seems. The term has been recently expanded to include bio-art and other environmental art interventions. Jacqueline Stevens writes that tactical interspecies art uses technology to reveal 'refreshing and astute reconceptions of the banal nature/nurture debate. If people are like other organisms, then that is only because the other creatures also have their own lively communities and cultures that shape their health and environments',[64] while others point out that governance today includes not only humans but also 'the circulation of disease, water, insects, weather patterns, fires and animals' to determine how 'life is reproduced'.[65] *Black of Death*, the video, gives us an insight into the confused, stunned and disturbed reactions of Japanese citizens to the performance. The artwork aimed to disrupt the rhythms of daily urban life by leading crows to major city landmarks, such as the parliament, creating surreal scenes and attracting attention of bewildered passers-by. The way

64. Jacqueline Stevens, 'Biotech Patronage and the Making of Homo DNA', in B. da Costa and K. Philip (eds), *Tactical Biopolitics: Art, Activism, and Technoscience*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 2008, p57.

65. Michael Dieter, 'The Becoming Environmental of Power: Tactical Media After Control', *The Fibreculture Journal*, 18, 2001, p197.

that Chim↑Pom plug into this everyday strangeness echoes the critique that animism advances the idea that the social (human) domain constitutes a fundamental reality from which all our representations of nature are drawn. In this Durkheimian model, culture produces representations of nature and nature is only passively described by them. Chim↑Pom's practice instead shows that crow cultures and communities are already pervasive in Tokyo, rather than a passive state of nature awaiting artful representation.

We can extend this predatory dynamic to the whole of Chim↑Pom's practice, which often brings attention to the status of human and nonhuman persons as disposable, with waste as the connective tissue between humans and animals. In Fukushima, they filmed themselves trespassing on land near the TEPCO nuclear plants in hazmat suits, climbing a nearby hill where they installed a white flag, which they then turned into a Japanese flag, which they then turned into the symbol of nuclear energy. 'Media is not allowed to go there,' they explain, 'but regular people still work there and no one minds' (*The Influencers*). For *I Want to Go to the Landfill*, their first project outside of Japan, they flew over Bali's waste dumps in the mountains, and had Ellie drop plastic bags off a tourist charter plane, while Inaoka stayed on the ground with local rubbish pickers to help them catch and monetise the bags. Some artefacts were then sold at a reverse charity action: with time, the prices drop, so that the donors are challenged to stop the countdown and pledge as much as possible to the charity. Chim↑Pom are interested in displacement; they reveal communities in a state of suspension. Human and nonhuman persons are equalised in their status as the disposed-of. At Fukushima, they installed several scarecrows dressed up to resemble factory workers on an empty field that no one will use anytime in the near future. A community of ghosts. On a global scale, the state of homelessness and precarity that defines the Anthropocene – 'ask any refugee, of any species'[66] – is upheld by erratic economy, growing displacement and destruction of the biodiversity from which life on Earth could be reconstructed. In this vulnerable time, the narrative of progress masks an unstable condition of forced nomadic life, unpredictable weather patterns, temporary labour and volatile markets. Chim↑Pom use personalisation tactically, posing questions about the relationship between human and animal vermin, us and other species, against or alongside whom we struggle for territory, whom we seek to preserve and displace, or who displace us.

66. Donna Haraway, 'Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin', *Environmental Humanities*, 6, 2015, p161.

67. Peter del Tredici, *Wild Urban Plants of the Northeast: A Field Guide*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 2010.

68. Fred Pearce, *The New Wild: Why Invasive Species Will Be Nature's Salvation*, Icon Books, London, 2015, p11.

CONCLUSION

Despite the collapse of social-ecological life, we are also witnessing a re-wilding of urban territories, rapid evolution of entire species and hybridisation of nature and technology.[67] Pearce argues that there is a certain xenophobia in how classic environmentalism, focused on preservation, vilifies 'rogue rats, predatory jellyfish, suffocating super-weeds'.[68] We need, he argues, a

new wild rather than a revived old, which is too far gone to be recovered. Perspectivism can become a suitable lens through which to view the accompanying change in the relationship between humans and animals. While indigenous frameworks cannot be directly transposed onto relationships in urban and post-nuclear spaces, if treated as philosophical systems rather than ethnographic descriptions of cultural traditions that cannot travel, they enrich the current canon of critical thought attuned to human-animal relationships in urban and technologised spaces. Maybe they are better suited to the task than 'mainstream' posthumanist scholarship, which is currently more preoccupied with minimising the ontological standing of the human than any other task. Rather than fixating on how to define the human, perspectivism takes humanity as an axiom, a unifying tendency across species. This allows it to grasp relationships with other species through the lens of animosity, where personalisation and ethics are rooted in conflict rather than 'care', or rather the boundary between 'conflict' and 'care' is not as strict. While there cannot be a simple equivalence between Chim↑Pom's 'vermin animism' and perspectivist predatory animism in Siberia or Latin America, reading the two together can perhaps aid in 'translating between lifeworlds that, although different and distinct, remain partially and asymmetrically connected'.[69]

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69. Marisol de le Cadena, *Earth Beings: Ecologies of Practice across Andean Worlds*, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2015, pxii.